

Reinventing the American Post-Industrial City

Journal of Urban History

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A special issue of Journal of Urban History (JUH)

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Now recognized through such terms as the “Rust Belt” or the “Gateway City,” the urban centers of the Midwest and Northeast were powerhouses in the US economy from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. However, beginning in the early 1980s these cities struggled to adapt to a host of challenges that included outsourcing decreases in local tax revenue and high unemployment. These developments, which were intimately tied to the removal of industrialized modes of production and the shift in foreign trade policy, eventually led to depopulation and abandonment (a phenomenon that is best captured in Michael Moore’s 1989 documentary *Roger and Me*, regarding the city of Flint, Michigan).

Many of these industrial cities are known for their unique architectural legacy from the economic boom eras of the past two centuries. But the last three decades have seen such treasures sit unused, waiting for economic revival. Abandoned homes, vacant lots, empty streets, unused factories, and dilapidated mills have characterized these cities for some time now. In recent years, this image has gradually started to shift. While many of these cities are still struggling, some have been successful in microscale economic revival, especially as it relates to preserving, repurposing, and reinventing vacant spaces. Of course it is debatable whether or not these microscale economic forces will lead to robust and long-term success. But these developments are certainly helpful in the near term and they may even be the nuclei of larger economic improvements in a steady state. In *Reimagining Detroit: Opportunities for Redefining an American City* (2010), John Gallagher describes how organizations such as Earthworks Urban Farm and other small-scale community-run projects

have contributed to the revival of Detroit. Likewise, as a once-thriving industrial center which has struggled to regain its position in the twentieth-century economy, the post-industrial urban centers of Massachusetts, or what the independent think tank MassINC has termed Gateway Cities, offer inexpensive commercial real estate, an eager workforce, and an existing infrastructure with a unique potential for growth. As Richard Florida—author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002)—has pointed out, a primary conduit for realizing this potential is the creative class. In a recent study by the US Census Bureau, the Gateway City of New Bedford in the south coast region of Massachusetts was ranked the seventh “Most Artistic City in the Nation” due to its high concentration of artists and galleries.

This special volume of *Journal of Urban History* hopes to bring together prominent scholars to chronicle the recent history of the American post-industrial city and to offer solutions for its sustained growth and expansion. In particular, we aim to focus on the recent past, present, and future of landmarks and architectural heritage of these cities, illuminating the importance of the history and continued survival of these built environments.

Possible topics for this special issue of JUH include:

1. Architectural and urban planning solutions for conservation and sustainable growth of the American post-industrial city.
2. Redesigning and repurposing of old factories and manufacturing zones for the post-industrial era.
3. The role of individuals, local communities, and the creative class in (informal) reuse of vacant buildings and public urban spaces.
4. Effective organizational approaches to maintaining and reclaiming abandoned properties.
5. Opportunities for urban agriculture, forestry, and wildlife habitats.
6. Scholarly approaches to recent artistic activities, such as public artistic practices and creative performances that energize lifeless urban zones.
7. The role of documentary filmmakers and photographers in bringing awareness of the importance of the architectural legacy of these cities.
8. Lessons from successful redevelopment plans in post-industrial cities elsewhere in the world (particularly Canada and Europe).

Please send abstracts of 300 words to both Pamela Karimi Pamela.karimi@umassd.edu and Thomas Stubblefield tstubblefield@umassd.edu by May 01, 2013. If accepted, full articles

must be submitted by August 01, 2013. The volume will include up to a total of eleven articles and all are subject to the standard of the Journal's peer-review process. The special issue will be published in late 2014.

Journal of Urban History (JUH) is a bi-monthly peer-reviewed publication. Since 1974 it has presented original research by eminent scholars from various fields whose works address urban issues. For more information about the journal, see: <http://juh.sagepub.com/>.

Reference:

CFP: Reinventing the American Post-Industrial City. In: Arthist.net, Mar 14, 2013 (accessed Aug 31, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/4859>>.