OTHER BOOKS BY JAMES HOWARD KUNSTLER

THUNDER ISLAND

THE HUNT

THE HALLOWEEN BALL

BLOOD SOLSTICE

AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES

THE LIFE OF BYRON JAYNES

A CLOWN IN THE MOONLIGHT

THE WAMPANAKI TALES

the Geography of NOWHERE

The Rise and Decline of America's Man - Made Landscape

JAMES HOWARD KUNSTLER

A Touchstone Book

Published by Simon & Schuster

NEW YORK

LONDON

TORONTO

TOUCHSTONE
Rockefeller Center
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10020

First Touchstone Edition 1994

Designed by SONGHEE KIM
Manufactured in the United States of America

20 19 18 17 16

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Kunstler, James Howard.
The geography of nowhere: the rise and decline of
America's man-made landscape/James Howard
Kunstler.
p. cm.
Includes index.
1. Architecture—Environmental aspects—United States.
2. Architecture and society—United States. I. Title.
NA2542.35.K86 1993
720'.47—dc20 93–20373
CIP

ISBN: 0-671-70774-4
0-671-88825-0 (Pbk.)

For Amy—
wife, muse, 'possum

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Chapter One

SCARY PLACES

There is a marvelous moment in the hit movie *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* that sums up our present national predicament very nicely. The story is set in Los Angeles in 1947. The scene is a dreary warehouse, headquarters of the villain, Judge Doom, a cartoon character masquerading as a human being. The hallucinatory plot hinges on Judge Doom's evil scheme to sell off the city's streetcar system and to create just such a futuristic car-crazed society as Americans actually live and work in today.

"It's a construction plan of epic proportions," he intones. "They're calling it [portentous pause] a freeway! Eight lanes of shimmering cement running from here to Pasadena! I see a place where people get on and off the freeway, off and on, off and on, all day and all night. . . . I see a street of gas stations, inexpensive motels, restaurants that serve rapidly prepared food, tire salons, automobile dealerships, and wonderful, wonderful billboards as far as the eye can see. My god, it'll be beautiful!"

In short order, Judge Doom is unmasked for the nonhuman scoundrel he is, dissolved by a blast of caustic chemical, and flushed into the Los Angeles sewer system, while the rest of the cute little cartoon creatures hippity-hop happily into the artificial sunset.

"That lamebrain freeway idea could only be cooked up by a 'toon," comments the movie's gumshoe hero, Eddie Valiant, afterward.

The audience sadly knows better. In the real world, Judge Doom's vision has prevailed and we are stuck with it. Yet the movie's central

metaphor—that our civilization has been undone by an evil cartoon ethos—could not be more pertinent, for more and more we appear to be a nation of overfed clowns living in a hostile cartoon environment.

Thirty years ago, Lewis Mumford said of post-World II development, "the end product is an encapsulated life, spent more and more either in a motor car or within the cabin of darkness before a television set." The whole wicked, sprawling, megalopolitan mess, he gloomily predicted, would completely demoralize mankind and lead to nuclear holocaust.

It hasn't come to that, but what Mumford deplored was just the beginning of a process that, instead of blowing up the world, has nearly wrecked the human habitat in America. Ever-busy, ever-building, ever-in-motion, ever-throwing-out the old for the new, we have hardly paused to think about what we are so busy building, and what we have thrown away. Meanwhile, the everyday landscape becomes more nightmarish and unmanageable each year. For many, the word *development* itself has become a dirty word.

Eighty percent of everything ever built in America has been built in the last fifty years, and most of it is depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy, and spiritually degrading—the jive-plastic commuter tract home wastelands, the Potemkin village shopping plazas with their vast parking lagoons, the Lego-block hotel complexes, the "gourmet mansardic" junk-food joints, the Orwellian office "parks" featuring buildings sheathed in the same reflective glass as the sunglasses worn by chain-gang guards, the particle-board garden apartments rising up in every meadow and cornfield, the freeway loops around every big and little city with their clusters of discount merchandise marts, the whole destructive, wasteful, toxic, agoraphobia-inducing spectacle that politicians proudly call "growth."

The newspaper headlines may shout about global warming, extinctions of living species, the devastation of rain forests, and other worldwide catastrophes, but Americans evince a striking complacency when it comes to their everyday environment and the growing calamity that it represents.

I had a hunch that many other people find their surroundings as distressing as I do my own, yet I sensed too that they lack the vocabulary to understand what is wrong with the places they ought to know best. That is why I wrote this book.

The sentimental view of anything is apt to be ridiculous, but I feel that I have been unusually sensitive to the issue of place since I was a little boy. Before I was old enough to vote, I had lived in a classic postwar suburb, in the nation's greatest city, and in several classic small towns, and along the way I acquired strong impressions about each of these places.

One September day in 1954 my father and mother and I drove twenty miles east out of New York City in our Studebaker on the Northern State Parkway to meet the movers at our new house "in the country," as my mother would refer forever to any place where you cannot walk out your front door and hail a taxi. Until that time, Long Island had been one of the most beautiful places in the United States, and our house was one small reason it would not remain that way much longer.

It was in a "development" called Northwood. The name had only a casual relation to geography. Indeed, it was *north* of many things—the parkway, the land of Dixie, the Tropic of Capricorn—but the *wood* part was spurious since the tract occupied a set of former farm fields, and among the spanking new houses not a tree stood over ten feet tall or as thick around as my father's thumb. The houses, with a few exceptions, were identical boxy split-levels, clad in asphalt shingles of various colors, with two windows above a gaping garage door, affording the facades an aspect of slack-jawed cretinism. Our house was an exception. The developers, I'm told, had started out with different models before they settled on the split-levels, which were absolutely the latest thing and sold like hotcakes.

Our house was a ranch clad in natural cedar shingles. It had a front porch too narrow to put furniture on and shutters that didn't close or conform to the dimensions of the windows. It sported no other decorative elaborations beside an iron carriage lamp on the front lawn that was intended to evoke ye olde post road days, or something like that. What it lacked in exterior grandeur, it made up in comfort inside. The three bedrooms were ample. We had baths galore for a family of three,

a kitchen loaded with electric wonders, wall-to-wall carpeting throughout, and a real fireplace in the living room. The place cost about $25,000.

Our quarter-acre lot lay at the edge of the development. Behind our treeless back yard stood what appeared to my six-year-old eyes to be an endless forest like the wilderness where Davey Crockett slew bears. In fact, it was the 480-acre estate of Clarence Hungerford Mackay, president and major stockholder of the Postal Telegraph Cable Company—the precursor of Western Union. Mackay was long gone by the 1950s, his heirs and assigns scattered to the winds, and "Harbor Hill," as his property had been named, was in a sad state of abandonment and decay. It took me and my little friends some time to penetrate its glades and dells, for there was much news on the airwaves that fall about the exploits of George Metesky, New York City's "Mad Bomber," and we had a notion that the old estate was his hideout.

A lacework of gravel carriage drives overgrown by dogwood and rhododendron criss-crossed the property. At its heart stood the old mansion. I don't recall its style—Shingle? Queen Anne? Railroad Romanesque? But it was much larger than any Northwood house. Juvenile delinquents had lit fires inside, and not necessarily in the fireplaces. Yet for its shattered glass, musty odors, and bird droppings, the mansion projected tremendous charm and mystery. Even in ruin, it felt much more authentic than our own snug, carpeted homes, and I know we regarded it as a sort of sacred place, as palpably a place apart from our familiar world. We certainly spent a lot of time there.

One week in the spring of 1956, the bulldozers appeared in the great woods behind our house. Soon they had dug a storm sump the size of Lake Ronkonkoma back there, a big ocher gash surrounded by chain-link fencing. In the months that followed, the trees crashed down, the mansion was demolished, new houses went up, and Clarence Hungerford Mackay's 480 acres was turned into another development called—what else?—Country Estates!

A year later my parents landed in divorce court, and I moved into Manhattan with my mother. On the whole I did not like the city at first. My mother enrolled me in an organized after-school play group to keep me out of trouble. Our group made its headquarters in a little meadow near the Ramble in Central Park where we played softball and "kick the can." Unlike the wilderness of Clarence Mackay's estate, the park

seemed cluttered with bothersome adults, strolling lovers, nannies pushing prams, winos—everyone *but* George Metesky. By and by, I made city friends. We played in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, because it was a block away from my elementary school at 82nd and Madison. This was in the days before art became just another form of show biz, and on weekday afternoons the great halls of the Met were practically deserted. My other chief recreation was throwing objects off the terrace of a friend's fifteenth-story penthouse apartment—snowballs, water balloons, cantaloupes—but the less said about this the better.

Summers I was sent away to a boys' camp in New Hampshire, where I got my first glimpse of what real American towns were like. From age twelve up, we were trucked one night a week into the town of Lebanon (pop. 8000) where we had the choice of attending a teen street dance or going to see a movie at the old opera house. There was a third, unofficial, option, which was to just wander around town.

Lebanon had a traditional New England layout. A two-acre square occupied the center of town. Within it stood a bandshell and a great many towering elms. Around the square stood various civic buildings of agreeable scale—the library, the town hall, the opera house—whose dignified facades lent Lebanon an aura of stability and consequence. At the west end of the square lay a commercial district of narrow shop-lined streets wending downhill to a mill district. Here I bought fishing lures and the latest baseball magazines.

Off the square's east end stood the town's best residential streets, lined with substantial-looking houses mainly of nineteenth-century vintage. They were set rather close together, and lacked front lawns, but they seemed the better for that. Instead, the capacious porches nearly met the sidewalks. Big trees lined the streets and their branches made a graceful canopy over it like the vaults inside a church. In the soft purple twilight with the porch lamps glowing, and the sights and sounds of family life within, these quiet residential streets made quite an impression on me.

I was charmed and amazed to discover that life could be physically arranged the way it was in Lebanon, New Hampshire. As I thought about it, I realized that a town like Lebanon was what a place like Northwood could only pretend to be: that Northwood, lacking any

center, lacking any shops or public buildings, lacking places of work or of play, lacking anything except the treeless streets of nearly identical houses set on the useless front lawns, was in some essential way a mockery of what Lebanon really was.

As a teenager I visited my old suburban chums back on Long Island from time to time and I did not envy their lot in life. By puberty, they had entered a kind of coma. There was so little for them to do in Northwood, and hardly any worthwhile destination reachable by bike or foot, for now all the surrounding territory was composed of similar one-dimensional housing developments punctuated at intervals by equally boring shopping plazas. Since they had no public gathering places, teens congregated in furtive little holes—bedrooms and basements—to smoke pot and imitate the rock and roll bands who played on the radio. Otherwise, teen life there was reduced to waiting for that transforming moment of becoming a licensed driver.

The state college I went off to in 1966 was located in a small town of 5000 in remote western New York state. To a city kid, Brockport was deeply provincial, the kind of place where the best restaurant served red wine on the rocks. Yet I enjoyed it hugely. At a time when small towns all over America were dying, little Brockport remained relatively robust. Its little Main Street had a full complement of shops, eating places, and, of course, drinking establishments, for this was back in the days when eighteen-year-olds could buy liquor. There was an old single-screen movie theater downtown with an Art Deco facade and a marquee edged in neon lights.

The reason for the town's healthy condition was obvious: the college. It furnished jobs and a huge volume of customers for Main Street's businesses. It gave the place some intellectual life—totally absent in neighboring burgs where all the lesser institutions of culture had been replaced by television. The students enlivened the town by their sheer numbers. Many of them had come from boring one-dimensional suburbs like Northwood, and they appreciated what life in a real town had to offer. It was scaled to people, not cars. It had the variety that comes from a mixed-use community. Its amenities lay close at hand. It offered ready access to genuine countryside, mostly farms and apple orchards.

We loved our off-campus apartments in the nineteenth-century houses on tree-lined streets or above the shops in the business blocks

downtown. We loved rubbing elbows on the streets, meeting friends as we walked or biked to class. We loved the peace and quiet of a small town at night. The campus itself—a miserable island of androidal modernistic brick boxes set in an ocean of parking—was quite secondary to the experience of life in the town.

I suppose that my experiences in suburb, city, and town left me biased in favor of town life—at least insofar as what America had to offer in my time. That bias is probably apparent in the chapters ahead. But all places in America suffered terribly from the way we chose to arrange things in our postwar world. Cities, towns, and countryside were ravaged equally, as were the lesser orders of things within them—neighborhoods, buildings, streets, farms—and there is scant refuge from the disorders that ensued.

The process of destruction that is the subject of this book is so poorly understood that there are few words to even describe it. Suburbia. Sprawl. Overdevelopment. Conurbation (Mumford's term). Megalopolis. A professor at Penn State dubbed it the "galactic metropolis." It is where most American children grow up. It is where most economic activity takes place. Indeed, I will make the argument that this process of destruction, and the realm that it spawned, largely *became* our economy. Much of it occupies what was until recently rural land—destroying, incidentally, such age-old social arrangements as the distinction between city life and country life. To me, it is a landscape of scary places, the geography of nowhere, that has simply ceased to be a credible human habitat. This book is an attempt to discover how and why it happened, and what we might do about it.

Chapter Two

AMERICAN SPACE

The settlement of the New World was a transforming event in human history. For Christian Europe, already burdened by its past, the New World was a vast stage upon which to act out, at the scale of nations, the romance of redemption, of a second chance at life. In the first two centuries of the settlement saga, this state of mind was as significant as the vast new supply of virgin land.

The Puritan pilgrims who came to the wild coast of North America in 1620 must have wondered, from one moment to the next, whether they had landed in the Garden of Eden or on Monster Island. The Biblical scripture that formed the bulk of their intellectual cargo was full of confusing notions. The wilderness of Hebrew folklore had been the abode of evil presided over by the arch-demon Azazel.[1] Yet the wilderness was also a place where the Hebrew prophets went to commune with God, to be tested by him, and purify themselves.

The Bible describes the Garden of Eden only sketchily, sidestepping many particulars. It was "well-watered." It contained "every tree that is pleasant to sight and good for food." The climate is not avouched. Regarding animal life the text is vague. The "beasts of the field" and "fowls of the air" were present, but there is no mention of wolves, lions, bears, crocodiles, rats, tarantulas, and other less tractable creatures. One snake is reported. Man was put into the garden "to dress it and to keep it," as a sort of custodian, one who works for a very tough landlord. The Garden of Eden was never a place to which Adam and Eve

ever held any proprietary rights, and the first time they misbehaved, the landlord evicted them.

America in the minds of the earliest settlers was therefore a place fraught with paradox. Viewed as a wilderness, it was possibly wicked, possibly holy. If it was the Garden of Eden, then it was a place to which sinful man really had no rightful claim. There was a third point of view consistent with scripture: like other persecuted people, the Puritans identified with the Israelites, with their sojourn in the wilderness and their arrival in the Promised Land of Canaan. This was finally the myth they embraced to understand themselves, though it took some strenuous intellectual stretching to pull together all these ideas.

In 1607 a group of Puritans from Scrooby, a village not far from York, fled the Babylon of England for Holland. There they were exploited in the cloth industry, as foreign workers are apt to be, while their children became Dutchified. After ten years of this they decided to make a fresh start in the wild country of America, with the hopes of establishing a profitable fishing and trading settlement in the Virginia Company's grant under English Protection. It took them several more years to make the arrangements. The enterprise was eventually financed by Thomas Weston, a Puritan merchant of London. History is not clear as to who may have been using whom. As a practical matter, the Puritans needed financial backing to get to America; and the Virginia Company needed colonists to begin the commercial exploitation of the New World.

Weston engaged two ships, the *Speedwell* and the *Mayflower*, and drew up terms for a joint stock venture which the Holland group accepted. They soon quarreled with Weston over the details. He withdrew his support, but the fully provisioned ships sailed anyway. The *Speedwell* was abandoned in Devon as unseaworthy and the *Mayflower* continued alone across the Atlantic with as many as it could hold. Once Cape Cod was sighted, a rash of impromptu changes were made in the plan. The pilgrims understood from their navigational instruments that the region lay north of the Virginia Company's patent, but decided to settle in Massachusetts anyway, without legal rights—Virginia's only existing settlement at Jamestown was inhabited by non-Puritans and the pilgrims may have wanted to keep a distance. Since quarreling with

their backers, the spiritual purpose of the voyage had come to override the commercial considerations.

The eighty-seven pilgrims—plus fourteen servants and workmen, and the forty-eight-man crew of the hired *Mayflower*—who landed at Plymouth Harbor faced a chilling prospect. It was December and the fathomless forest they confronted must have looked like anything but a Promised Land. They had believed in the literal reenactment of Biblical events. William Bradford, one of their leaders, was deeply disappointed when a search around the vicinity of Massachusetts Bay failed to turn up Mount Pisgah, the prospect from which Moses had first sighted the land of Canaan.

Under the circumstances, they made an astonishing mental leap. They stepped outside their myth-clogged mental lives to grasp something essential about the real world: that the wilderness could become a land of milk and honey, that one was the raw material of the other, and that a land of milk and honey was a fair approximation of Eden. In fact, they might all be one and the same thing. This insight didn't dispose them to fear the wilderness any less, but it spawned the utilitarian hope that something could be done with it, that it could be conquered, vanquished, and ultimately redeemed by godly men. They immediately went to work building a settlement, their "city on a hill." Before spring came, forty-four of their number had died.

Though the Puritans had exiled themselves spiritually and geographically from England, they still thought of themselves as English, carrying with them English laws and customs. Within a year of their fateful landing they came to terms with the London financiers and received a charter that gave legal birth to Plymouth Plantation. The Puritan foothold in the New World was greatly fortified by the creation of the Massachusetts Bay Company in 1629. It began as a commercial venture but almost immediately shifted its focus from trade to religion. A large number of its stockholders, Puritans disgusted with the libertine regime of Charles I, sailed off to America. The company's organizational structure became the colonial government with a governor at the top, and the General Court of stockholders became the legislature. Now they set about building real towns.

Despite the cultishness of the enterprise, as well as the need for communal labor, a system of private property ownership prevailed from very near the start. The first towns naturally enough were modified versions of the late medieval English towns—though the supply of land was enormous by English standards. In England, farmers lived neatly clustered together in villages with their fields located all around on the outskirts. Typically, an early Massachusetts town was organized with individually owned home lots around a fenced common used to pen livestock. Townships were granted to whole congregations who crossed the ocean as a group, bringing with them highly localized customs and farming practices. Where a minority couldn't abide the way a town was run, they could resolve their problem by "hiving out" to some unsettled area—always in a group—and creating a way of life with which they were at ease.[2]

The founding families of a town formed a covenanted corporation that held title to all the land and then dealt out home lots based on family needs and social standing. The land was not paid for per se with money, but each signatory to the covenant was obliged to erect a house within two or three years, to pay taxes, and to help support a church. A family with many children got a larger lot, bachelors got smaller ones, men with desirable skills, such as blacksmiths, millers, and ministers, were attracted by offering double and triple allocations.[3] The Puritans were not egalitarian. The idea of a social order based on hierarchy of position was natural to them. Wealthy or exalted persons got bigger allocations. Even so, the distribution of home lots in this early phase of settlement was most equitable by later standards. For in laying out the physical plan of their towns they were also laying the foundation of an economic system that they hoped would be stable and enduring.

The home lot in a Puritan village held the family's house and barn, kitchen gardens, and fruit trees. A family normally received 120 acres of land outside the village, often scattered around the township so that no one could consolidate his holdings on a single parcel. Much of the acreage was left in rough pasture and woodlot. Wheat and rye were grown in one or two common fields in which each family was given a strip proportionate in size with its home lot. Since tools were scarce,

plowing was often a community project, but after plowing, each farmer was expected to work his own fields.[4]

The object of this way of life was not to grow surplus crops for market, but to achieve a sort of drowsing medieval stability based on self-sufficiency and a dour preoccupation with getting to heaven. The church, or meeting house as they called it, was the center of civic as well as spiritual life, the adhesive that held the town together. At times it was even used as a granary or a warehouse. Everyone had to belong to the congregation and attend its services. Massachusetts passed a law in 1635 forbidding settlers to establish homes more than a half mile from the meeting house. (Five years later the General Court repealed the much-flouted law.)

Roads were practically nonexistent between towns. Towns were generally sited near water, and goods and people moved by boat when they moved at all. For a couple of generations, the pattern held. In contrast to today's heedless lust for "growth" at any price, the Puritan towns observed agreed-upon limits. A consensus emerged within each town when it had reached optimum size and then no more lots were granted. Of course, this did not stop settlers from coming to Massachusetts. Through the first two generations, the General Court solved the problem by simply chartering new towns as required.

This too eventually reached a limit. The medieval pattern, the model of changelessness itself, based on an ever-stable population with births equaling deaths, could not survive the relentless pressure of immigration. At any distance from the seacoast it was more difficult to establish viable towns, and the resident Indian tribes were not easily dislodged. Instead, new villages began to form within larger existing coastal townships, each with its own church congregation. This led to conflicts in town management. During this period, the mid-1600s, a theological uproar gripped England and exotic new sects, Quakers and Baptists, began to arrive in America seeking the same kind of religious liberty that the Puritans enjoyed. But their presence irritated the Puritan theocracy and challenged their authority, and not a few of the newcomers were hanged.

During the Cromwellian usurpation, England had left Massachusetts to its own devices. But with the monarchy restored in 1660, agents of the Crown finally came to inspect their neglected Puritan colonies in

America. Having only recently disposed of an obnoxious Puritan dictatorship at home, the royal commissioners were not pleased by the church's stranglehold on the colony's civil affairs. And certain colonial practices, like coining their own money, smacked of rather too much independence from the mother country. The Puritan colonists, for their part, proved uninterested in reform.

In 1684, after twenty years of bootless negotiation, the Crown revoked the Massachusetts Bay Company's charter. In the future it would be run by the King of England and parliament. This shattered the integrity of the Puritan townships. Future settlement would happen under a new set of rules, in a far more random, less deliberate fashion. Connections between towns improved, trade increased, the standard of living rose, and the way of life in New England began to steadily creep up from the medieval murk. Settlers now advanced into the wilderness on single-family farms, making for a very sparse, scattered, individualistic settlement pattern. These farms were necessarily small because each family did its own labor with a few hand tools.

The other colonies along the Atlantic seaboard evolved in strikingly different patterns. Four years after the English Puritans landed at Plymouth Harbor, the Dutch West India Company founded New Netherland without the adhesive of a cultish religion. Theirs was a much more unalloyed commercial venture, looking mainly to the lucrative trade in beaver furs. They set up their first trading post, Fort Orange, near the place where the Mohawk and Hudson rivers converge—today called Albany, New York—because these were the main highways of the Indians, who procured the masses of beaver pelts in exchange for European goods. The Dutch were bedeviled by Indian trouble, a geographical misfortune, since the Hudson marked the boundary between the Iroquois and their Algonquin enemies. In 1626, a series of incidents prompted Peter Minuit to move most of the Fort Orange families to Manhattan, recently purchased from the Wampanoags for sixty guilders in trinkets.

Colonists who wished to farm were allotted free land on isolated parcels up and down the Hudson Valley, but they were obliged to stay there for six years, and the Dutch West India Company took a large

share of their crops. A yet more lowly caste of indentured serfs worked company farms under harsher restrictions. In 1629, the company began granting vast estates called patroonships to members who could found settlements of fifty persons within four years. A patroon might claim as much land as he wanted, in one case twenty-four miles along the bank of the Hudson. But it was an impractical system. All the patroonships failed with the exception of Rensselaerwyck, located near Fort Orange. They lacked skilled managers and able tenants. The colony as a whole sorely lacked recruits, for why should men and women leave Holland with its stable republican government, its religious tolerance, and its robust economy, to struggle for existence in the wilderness?[5]

The seaport of New Amsterdam at the tip of Manhattan island fared better. A solid burgher aristocracy built large brick houses with tiled roofs and spacious tulip gardens, and a middle class of merchants, sailmakers, carpenters, and tavern-keepers lent the town stability and verve. New Amsterdam's focus lay outward to coastal trading, not inland to the struggle for settlement. But Charles II, the newly restored English king, had made up his mind to monopolize shipping along the Atlantic coast. Massachusetts and now Connecticut—which had received the overspill of settlers from Massachusetts—were pressing claims beyond the Hudson Valley. New Netherland was something of a foreign carbuncle on what was becoming a solid body of English colonies lining the North American coast. So in 1664 the king elected to remove it by sending four warships into the upper bay. Persuaded that his situation was hopeless, Governor Peter Stuyvesant surrendered without a shot.

In 1681, William Penn accepted a grant for territory along the Delaware River in place of a 16,000 pounds cash debt owed to his father by the crown. Penn was a youthful and enthusiastic convert to Quakerism, and in his fertile eponymous patent, he undertook to create a settlement of fellow Quakers who were being persecuted more cruelly in Massachusetts than they had been in England. In Penn's tolerant colony, the welcome mat was out for other European sects. German Mennonites, who came to Pennsylvania as early as 1683, established settlements

built better wagons, and produced firearms with rifled barrels. Barn-raising was a Mennonite social innovation. Their axes were better-designed, allowing them to clear forests faster. David Hawke says, "Within a few years of settlement, the [Pennsylvania] Germans were plowing cleared fields while colonists elsewhere were still grubbing out tree stumps and turning up the soil with hoes."[6]

Initially, William Penn had hoped to settle the countryside in a tidy pattern of hamlets, each approximately 5000 acres, with farms divided into pie-shaped wedges. The settlers, he hoped, would erect their homesteads where the wedges converged, so as to form nuclear villages. But the idea fizzled. Instead, farmers scattered around the countryside, in family units, and the towns that soon sprang up were from the very beginning strictly market towns.

In the south, the individual, not the group or even the family, became the primary unit of settlement, bound neither by religion, kinship, nor community. The Virginia Colony, from Jamestown on, was an enterprise of freebooting egoists. Single young men outnumbered females nearly twenty to one. Many expected to get rich, return to England, and live out the rest of their lives in leisure and luxury. Hawke calls it "an abnormal society," in which "manners and morals collapsed."[7] Looking to make their quick fortune, men carved tobacco plantations along the shores of Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac, York, James, and Rappahannock estuaries. Their agricultural practices were ruinous and after exhausting one piece of land in five or six years' time, they would move to another. With so much coastline available—2000 miles of indented shore along immense Chesapeake Bay alone—anyone could start his tobacco plantation near the water's edge, and ship out a crop—packed into half-ton hogsheads—from his own landing. This obviated the need for trading centers. Two notable exceptions we will discuss ahead were the ports of Savannah and Charleston.

The Virginians had started the tradition of importing African slaves at Jamestown in 1619. By the time settlement spread inland through the 1700s, the slavery system had reached a level of refinement that allowed many plantations to operate as little worlds unto themselves, complete with a workforce of slave artisans who did the very things that free men

increasingly carried on as gainful occupations in northern towns: carpenters, coopers, wheelwrights, millers, blacksmiths, tinsmiths.

In prerevolutionary America, land was plentiful and the colonies were so eager to have it settled that almost anyone who wanted land could get some. However, in this age before industrial manufacturing, land was also one of the few outlets for capital investment. Stock ventures of that time were mainly schemes cooked up to promote large-scale trade in natural resources, and raw land was the ultimate resource. As soon as the Revolutionary War was over, companies like the Georgiana, the Wabash, the Vandalia, the Loyal, the Ohio, and the Indiana were organized to speculate in vast tracts of interior land that had been claimed by the seaboard states. Leading citizens engaged in speculation. For instance, George Washington owned land in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and the Ohio country. Banker Robert Morris, who almost single-handedly financed the war, acquired enormous tracts in western New York.

The Revolution swept away the prerogatives of the Crown associated with English land tenure in America. In America, ownership meant freedom from the meddling of nobles, the right to freely dispose of land by sale at a profit, the ability to move from one place to another without hindrance, to enjoy the social respect of other small holders, and to have a voice in matters of community interest. The Revolution also got rid of such obnoxious English traditions of inheritance as primogeniture, the law that awarded all of a man's estate to his eldest son, and the right of entail, which allowed a landowner to forbid by will the future sale of his property by his descendants.

After the Revolution, Americans adopted what came to be called *fee simple* land ownership. The term derives from feudal times, when all land ultimately belonged to the Crown. Those who lived on it, from lord to churl, were obliged to perform services (e.g., fight in the crusades) and pay fees (in crops or money) as a condition of their occupancy. Land held with the fewest strings attached came to be known as fee simple—the fee being simple cash payment.[8] But in England, fee simple ownership would remain relatively uncommon until the rise of

American land law was predicated on the paramount principle that land was first and foremost a commodity for capital gain. Speculation became the primary basis for land distribution—indeed, the commercial transfer of property would become the basis of American land-use planning, which is to say hardly any planning at all. Somebody would buy a large tract of land and subdivide it into smaller parcels at a profit—a process that continues in our time.

Other Old World values toppled before this novel system—for example, the idea of land as the physical container for community values. Nearly eradicated in the rush to profit was the concept of stewardship, of land as a public trust: that we who are alive now are responsible for taking proper care of the landscape so that future generations can dwell in it in safety and happiness. As historian Sam Bass Warner put it, the genius of American land law and the fanatical support it engendered "lay in its identification of land as a civil liberty instead of as a social resource."[9]

This is embodied today in the popular phrase, "You can't tell me what to do with my land." The "you" here might be a neighbor, the community, or the government. The government's power to regulate land use was limited under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution. The Fifth states that private property cannot be taken for public use without due process of law and just compensation—the right to public hearings and payment at market value—and the Fourteenth reiterates the due process clause. All subsequent land-use law in America has hinged on whether it might deprive somebody of the economic value of their land.

America's were the most liberal property laws on earth when they were established. The chief benefits were rapid development of the wilderness, equal opportunity for those with cash and/or ambition, simplicity of acquisition, and the right to exploitation—such as chopping down all the virgin white pine forests of Michigan (they called it "mining trees"). Our laws gave the individual clear title to make his own decisions, but they also deprived him of the support of community and custom and of the presence of sacred places.

The identification of this extreme individualism of property ownership with all that is sacred in American life has been the source of many of the problems I shall describe in the pages that follow. Above all, it

tends to degrade the idea of the public realm, and hence of the landscape tissue that ties together the thousands of pieces of private property that make up a town, a suburb, a state. It also degrades the notion that the private individual has a responsibility to this public realm—or, to put it another way, that the public realm is the physical manifestation of the common good.

Tocqueville observed this when he toured America in 1831. "Individualism," he wrote, "at first, only saps the virtues of public life; but in the long run it attacks and destroys all others and is at length absorbed in selfishness."