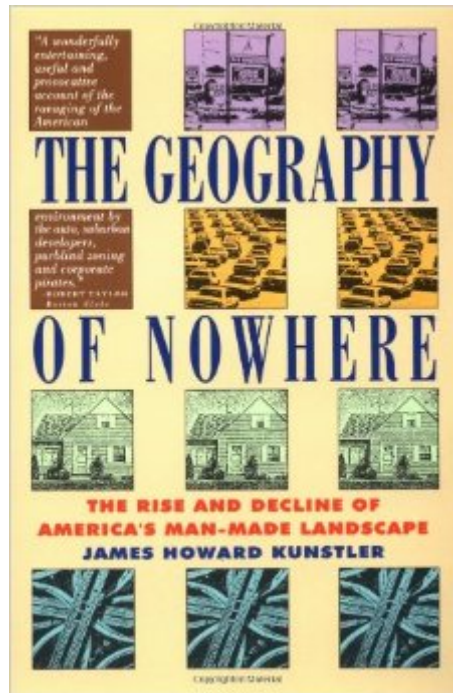


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The Geography Of Nowhere: The Rise And Decline Of America's Man-Made Landscape



Synopsis

The Geography of Nowhere traces America's evolution from a nation of Main Streets and coherent communities to a land where every place is like no place in particular, where the cities are dead zones and the countryside is a wasteland of cartoon architecture and parking lots. In elegant and often hilarious prose, Kunstler depicts our nation's evolution from the Pilgrim settlements to the modern auto suburb in all its ghastliness. The Geography of Nowhere tallies up the huge economic, social, and spiritual costs that America is paying for its car-crazed lifestyle. It is also a wake-up call for citizens to reinvent the places where we live and work, to build communities that are once again worthy of our affection. Kunstler proposes that by reviving civic art and civic life, we will rediscover public virtue and a new vision of the common good. "The future will require us to build better places," Kunstler says, "or the future will belong to other people in other societies."

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Free Press (July 26, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0671888250

ISBN-13: 978-0671888251

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Kunstler is not too happy with how we've built our cities, our suburbs, and our society. And I can't blame him. This is an important consideration of how the landscapes of America have changed, and not for the best. The decline of American cities, the rise of the never-ending suburban sprawls, the addiction to cars and to oil and highways, all contribute to the decay of social fabric. It all sounds deep, but Kunstler is clearly onto something. Himself transplanted to the suburbs of Long Island, Kunstler is angry at what he sees as an America that is less and less concerned with maintaining any lasting community, anywhere. All you have to do in this country is go to a few different cities and

look around. First off, you can hardly distinguish most big cities from each other in the US--you have a downtown (in some cases among the worst part of a particular city, and often deserted and bland) and you have the endless suburban sprawl. What you find is isolation, isolation, isolation. Pick a big city, and you see the problems still being faced decades after population shifts, demographic changes, cultural changes etc: Detroit, Atlanta, St Louis, Miami, etc, etc. Architecture is in the dumps, as short-term profit is the motivating factor behind flat, faceless and featureless buildings. Suburbia has long been the answer for many: miles of designed streets with identical houses, cut off from undesirables by miles of highway, encouraging an inefficient life where everything is separated, the car has replaced the PERSON as the unit we build for, to say nothing of the cultural wasteland half of America becomes with the influx of 100 fast food chains, a Walmart, a mall, an 'entertainment complex', etc, destroying anything that once gave a place character.

Last night in his State of the Union speech, G. W. Bush pointed out the obvious fact that America depends far too heavily on oil to support its lifestyle. Whoever programmed him to say that must have been reacting to the mounting unrest over the crises associated with big oil: war, pollution, corruption, and extreme flabbiness. Most of the problems associated with oil are problems associated with cars, and cars are the focus of J. H. Kunstler's book. Published in the early 90s, *The Geography of Nowhere* describes the impact of automobiles on the development of the U.S. Apparently, things started to go south during the Depression, when people were driven out of cities by poverty and the diminishing quality of life in the tenements. Fueling the flight to the suburbs were New Deal programs to build roads and cheap houses. In the ensuing decades the American landscape was built to serve cars rather than people, and that is what Kunstler is angry about. His main criticisms are: 1) A lot of the architecture, both residential and commercial, is very ugly. Buildings are constructed quickly and cheaply, and without regard to their surroundings. After all, what's the point of worrying about your surroundings if people are just going to drive directly to their destination? On this point, Kunstler is angry and sarcastic, though often funny. However, his tone is unfortunate, because ugliness is ultimately a matter of opinion, and I would bet that most people would say they are quite happy living in their suburban boxes. Kunstler argues that people are happy this way because they don't know any better, and he's probably right, but as far as I know there is no good way to force people to appreciate beauty.

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