

Exam 1

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"I pledge my honor that I have abided by the Stevens Honor System."

Section 1.

Q: "To study the city is, therefore, to study ourselves." What does it mean? Do you agree with the comment or not?

A: The statement "to study the city is, therefore, to study ourselves" can be interpreted in a few different ways. As the textbook explains, the percentage of people who live in urban areas and cities has grown tremendously within just the last few decades. Now, a large majority of Americans live within an urban area. In this way, studying the average city-dweller is much the same as studying any average person, and likely, ourselves, given the statistical likelihood that any one "self" is living there. In this sense, it is hard to disagree with the quote.

Another, and perhaps the more interesting way to interpret this is that cities and urban areas are the penultimate macrocosm of living, breathing human lifeforms. They exemplify and extremify some of our species most innate and underlying characteristics and desires. A great example of this is the tremendous wealth gap that exists within cities. – they house both the poorest of the poor and those who are rich beyond the average man's comprehension. It could be argued that, in this way, cities exaggerate and display in full form the human being's tendency to be greedy, jealous, and always long for more even when they've had their needs met. Similarly, in much the same way that human beings are culturally and ethnically diverse, cities tend to have neighborhoods and boroughs that draw on those cultural diversities, like New York City's Chinatown or Little Italy.

Section 2.

Q: What are the characteristics of city-states and urban empires (Mesopotamia and North Africa, The Indus Region, China, and The Americas)?

A: City-states were a sort of first-look at what many of the great Empires in history would become. The "state" referred to both a social construct – a governing body responsible for executive social, economic, and militant decisions – as well as the overall geographic area which the same body commanded over. The "city" was generally the urban area which was the center for such an operation: Rome, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, are all examples. The cities would grow their state either by gobbling up surrounding towns and villages through military action, or through strategic partnerships and the lure of economic opportunity to their neighbors. This allowed them to grow a "sphere of influence" based around a central city, resembling modern-day cities and their surrounding edge-cities and suburbs. Urban empires were similar in organization and character, though they emerged more recently in history and were subsequently larger and more complex.

There were some key characteristics which really tied all of these historical city-states and urban empires like Mesopotamia and the Indus Region together. One such trait was an area with an abundance of resources like food, water, or livestock, which encouraged people to group in markets for trading. Another notable feature was some form of social structure or power dynamic, like the emergence of specialized laborers, merchants, and land owners. Generally, much of the power within these structures were derived from a sense of divinity or holiness, with those in power being favored by their gods or deities. Lastly, though they offered great economic opportunity to their inhabitants, these early urban regions tended to keep lifespans short and days grueling, with vicinity to livestock and constant contact giving rise to some of the first pathogens and viruses.

Section 3.

Q: What are the significant characteristics of the postindustrial city?

A: Postindustrial cities emerged from the significant change in social and economic structure resulting from the decline of more traditional manufacturing industries like steel, automobiles, and chemical plants and the shift towards skill and service-based economies. Their workforces tend to be very well educated, participate in a wide range of industries and economic sectors, and have specialized skills, experience, or knowledge which make them valuable assets as human capital. These cities tend to have a vibrant sense of culture and artistic appreciation, with successful and involved creative industries as well as professional ones, which drives urban development and infrastructure projects.

Postindustrial cities represent the culmination of the advancements made during the Industrial Revolution. While the Industrial Revolution brought significant economic growth, it also came with significant social and environmental costs. The changes in urban areas post-Industrial Revolution demonstrate how society has learned to mitigate these negative impacts and improve the quality of life for its citizens. For example, many modern cities now focus on sustainability and ecological impact, encouraging use of public transport, reducing energy-inefficient lighting on skyscrapers, and building more green areas throughout the city. They also highlight the increase in overall education and creativity, with the shift to new service, creative, and skill-based industries.

Section 4.

Q: What is sprawl, why do we have sprawl, and what are its consequences?

A: When cities expand beyond the limits of their vertical real estate, and require more land area, the surrounding land – which is often rural – is generally developed quickly and without proper planning or foresight. That process of expansions into low-density, car-dependent suburbs without regard for sustainability or further expansion needs is referred to as sprawl. As mentioned, it is caused by rapid growth of the urban population, and also the wide availability of automobiles, and the lack of reliable public transportation.

The consequences of sprawl, while beneficial for those who are looking to live near the city for work and social life, can be devastating. First, the great reliance on cars for everyday travel means many more emissions and drilling for fossil fuels contributing to the warming of the global temperature. The car-dependence also affects individual health, promoting a sedentary lifestyle devoid of walking to run daily errands, contributing to obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Lastly, sprawl tends to generate new housing in a low-density fashion, which tends to be expensive. This leaves the new housing open to only middle and upper-class families, leading to a lack of new, clean, affordable housing and further exaggerates the existing wealth gap that cities have brought about.