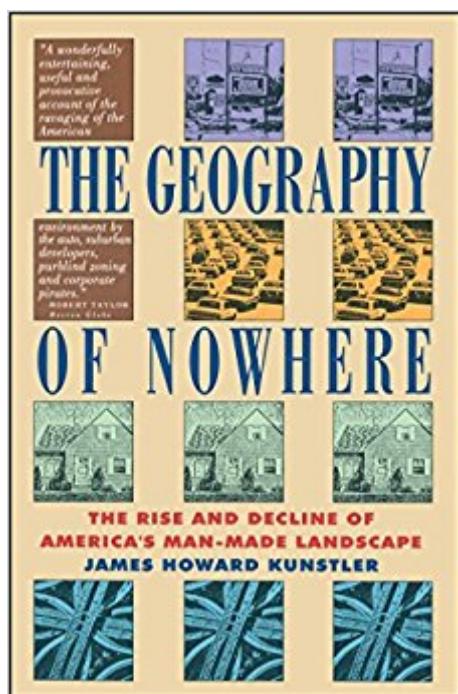


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# The Geography Of Nowhere: The Rise And Decline Of America's Man-Made Landscape



## **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**

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## **Customer Reviews**

In this inconsistent but provocative analysis, Kunstler (Blood Solstice), a novelist and journalist, mixes memoir, historical essay and reporting to condemn the car-dependent suburbanization of America. Kunstler, who writes ably, casts a very wide net: he finds the roots of American individualism in pre-colonial property ownership, decries the abstracting influence of modernism on city architecture and slams road-builder Robert Moses to support his contention that suburbia is a social environment without soul. He offers an intriguing history of the decline of Saratoga Springs, N.Y., his hometown, describes trips to failing Detroit and well-planned Portland, Ore., and dissects

"capitals of unreality" like Disney World and Atlantic City. His worthy but sketchily described solutions--a sustainable economy, better neighborhood development and preservation of the countryside--could, however, each merit a book. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.  
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In this spirited, irreverent critique, Kunstler spares none of the culprits that have conspired in the name of the American Dream to turn the U.S. landscape from a haven of the civic ideal into a nightmare of crass commercial production and consumption. Kunstler strips the bark off the utopian social engineering promoted by the machine-worshiping Modern movement of Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Frank Lloyd Wright and skewers the intellectual camps (e.g., Venturi) that have thrived on making academic glory of the consumer wasteland. With the fervor of an investigative reporter and in the vernacular of a tabloid journalist, Kunstler exposes the insidious "car lobby" and gives case studies of landscapes as diverse as Detroit, Atlantic City, and Seaside, Florida, to illustrate both the woes and hopeful notes. The ideas in this book are not new (Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte Jr. were bemoaning the loss of civic life a quarter-century ago), but Kunstler gives their case an urgent, popular voice. An eminently relevant and important book; highly recommended.- Thomas P.R. Nugent, New YorkCopyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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My first intro to Kunstler was watching his equally informative speech on Americas urban design nightmares on You.Tube TED talks. He made a strong case as to why the suburbs are so pat ethic and American architecture can be cruel to the people it's supposed to serve.This book was a marvel to read also because it was written over twenty years ago and is still dead on in its analysis. Post 2008 recession who could argue credibly otherwise? My hope is that millennials will wake up and break the cycle of suburban home buying.My awakening began in the early 2000 when I got a job working housing construction then later landscaping and later again installing storm doors and windows. Entire suburban neighbourhoods throughout the Midwest are essentially empty and lack any character or soul. There is no community, and no one is around except on weekends. It,s a social and economic disaster. Everyone just works or stays inside getting fatter, more diabetic, and watching their TVs endlessly.It,s time for an overhaul. Washington, D.C., NY, and Portland hopefully are leading the way. The future of urban design will about creating the framework for organically grown towns, cities, and communities. The suburbs are death and dying.

I'm really glad I read this book! The part that I loved, first of all, is that there is a new forward in here from 2013-2014. This book was written over 20 years ago, and though a lot of stuff has changed since then, the author took the effort to write about how this book compares to now. A lot of the main concepts in here are definitely still relevant and still seen today in suburbs and urban areas, so it was an interesting read. The only problem I had, which is the same problem that I have with all nonfiction books (about all sorts of subjects) is the dreaded "second chapter." This is the part of the book where the author describes the history of \*insert subject of book\* in order for the reader to understand the background. While immensely helpful and even slightly interesting at times, this part of the book seemed to ramble on a bit about things that I really am not going to remember later. That is the only reason I took off a star. I would really give it about 4 1/2 stars. Other than that, this book was so interesting! The author writes in a style that is informative yet not pretentious. He is definitely knowledgeable regarding the field.

Did you know that the town center was originally a communal place to raise cattle? That America had a public transportation system powered by electricity in the the form of trolleys as early as the 1880s? These are just a few of the facts unearthed in 'The Geography of Nowhere,' by James Kunstler. More pertinent today than when it was first written in 1993, 'The Geography of Nowhere,' is an indictment of the automobile and how it has transformed the sense of community in America. Starting out slow but building momentum with each page turned, topics in 'The Geography of Nowhere' range from architectural history to city planning as it chronicles the growth of suburbs and urban sprawl, as well as the decline of small towns and the family farms replaced by industrial agri-business. All of these changes to the American landscape are a result of our dependence on petroleum fuels. Mr. Kunstler demonstrates that a public policy dominated by the automobile makers as early as the 1920's dictated the growth of our current infrastructure. Public forms of transportation such as the trolley system were edged out as suburbs began to spread, and our over-reliance on the personal automobile commenced. White flight from urban to suburban areas in the 1950's and 1960's continued the trend, creating the problems that confront urban areas today as they struggle with ways to renovate down town areas. In these pages a student of community planning will find out more about topics shunned from public discourse such as redlining — the spurning of investment in some of America's most needy areas. For those seeking out histories of the development of specific communities; they can find them here as Mr. Kunstler provides case studies of the communities of Portland Oregon, Los Angeles, Atlantic City, Saratoga New York, among others. Furthermore, readers seeking answers to that all-pervading

sense of same-ville everywhere that they travel will find them in Mr. Kunstler's history of building design. Besides illustrating the growth of our dependence on oil, and the economic problems that are its result, 'The Geography of Nowhere,' also documents how we have spoiled America's greatest treasure, its landscape. Instead, we have turned it into a toon-scape, creating the sense of disconnection and alienation that is prevalent in America today. It is Mr. Kunstler's wit and sarcasm that keeps the reader turning the pages even as we become more horrified at the picture that he draws, and the looming catastrophe that he predicts if we don't change our strategies toward development; or our assumptions about how to use our resources. Readers who follow him to the end are provided with his remedy for our current crises. Mr. Kunstler advocates urban planning that emphasizes relationship, and connection. He would like to see cities that are individualized in design, providing those that reside within a sense of place. He advocates communities with a renewed sense of purpose. Furthermore, he seeks to promote development that builds on instead of destroying local economies. He pursues development that is sustainable, ending our dependence on fossil fuels. For me, the movie 'Detropia,' was a graphic portrayal of the message that Mr. Kunstler seeks to convey. 'Detropia,' illustrates the decline of Detroit after the slump of its auto industry. Its fortunes linked to the auto industry, the city had its heyday in the 1940's through the 1960's before beginning its slow descent due to competition with foreign made cars. The viewer is confronted with images of a ghost town and the anomie experienced by those who remain. Experts were already predicting the end of cheap oil in 1973. Now, it is over forty years later and our culture has yet to make the systemic changes necessary. In addition, we have exported our oil dependency overseas through our international development practices. Readers reaching the end of 'Geography of Nowhere,' and reflecting on it will be compelled to ask whether our future is to be like 'Detropia?' Or can we still find a cure for our common problems before it is too late?

Kunstler is the Kerouac of the anti-sprawl set - the writer of this wonderful book that thoroughly indicts those non-places we all deal with every day. As every traveler can attest, sometimes you wake up in your Hampton Inn across from the Chili's, in the parking lot of the Wal-Mart/Target/Perkins, and wonder, "Just what city am I in today, anyway, and more importantly, do I care?" This book is more about the unbearable sameness of everything and how it doesn't create places people want to live, but places they're forced to live. The book is light on data, heavy on rhetoric, but hammers its point home through anecdotes, allegory, and turns of phrase that make the reader analyze what, exactly, they see in these suburban (and some urban) same places. While he doesn't add to the field from a research perspective, he's the muse that should inspire others to add

to the existing literature.

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