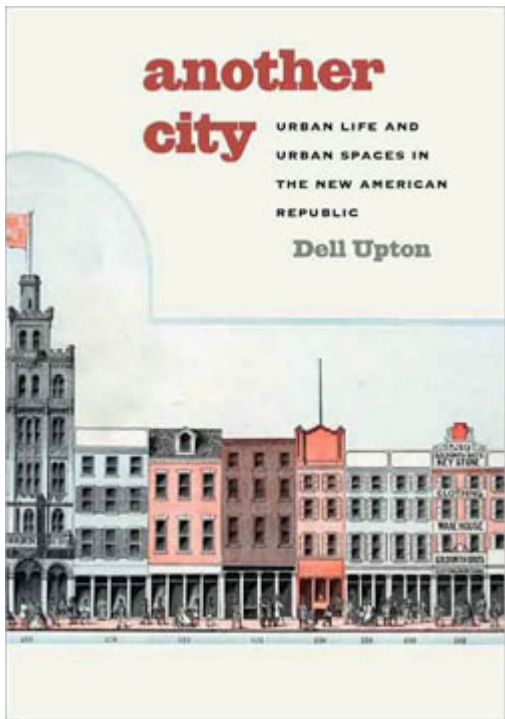


The City as Lived



American cities in the early nineteenth century were burgeoning, noisy, odorous, and often chaotic places. Dell Upton's *Another City* captures the texture of city life in the new republic by exploring Americans' attitudes toward their changing cities during that time. Throughout his study, Upton maintains that it was their actual encounter with the city that permitted American urbanites to develop their sense of themselves as individuals and as republican citizens. In doing so, they also created new kinds of urban spaces that helped to foster these new roles (1).

This is a different kind of urban history. Occasionally challenging and often complicating prevailing interpretations, Upton aims to bridge existing studies of urban life that have tended to emphasize socioeconomic structure, political ideology, physical and demographic growth, changing urban and aesthetic ideologies, or changing economic practices. Instead, he attempts to capture something of the messiness and multidimensionality of historical change by focusing on how the actual experience of inhabiting and making cities shaped people's sense of selfhood and their notions of republican citizenship. *Another City* builds upon previous studies by Billy G. Smith, Gary Nash, Shane White, Mary Ryan, Thomas Doerflinger, and Sam Bass Warner, but it also aims to offer what Upton calls an intellectual history of the urban environment that is neither a linear narrative nor a comprehensive survey of urban or architectural history. Instead, Upton employs a series of case studies to reveal the ways in which the antebellum city was lived by its inhabitants.

Antebellum Philadelphia and New Orleans constitute the book's primary geographic foci, although Upton also turns to evidence from other cities such

as New York to round out the story. His sources range widely, and include architectural drawings, maps, contemporary travel accounts, diaries, trade cards, advertisements, letters, local ordinances, legal proceedings, and contemporary prints and paintings. While Upton includes architecture in his analysis, he draws from the entirety of the city environment: the buildings, the streets and infrastructure, and even the urban atmosphere. Because appropriate self-presentation was especially important to many nineteenth-century urban Americans, and appearance and action were thought to constitute accurate indexes of character, Upton also explores the experiences and responses of antebellum city dwellers to one another. "We are part of the cultural landscape," the author reminds us, and any history of the urban landscape must also consider the bodies as well as the habits of mind of its builders and inhabitants (14).

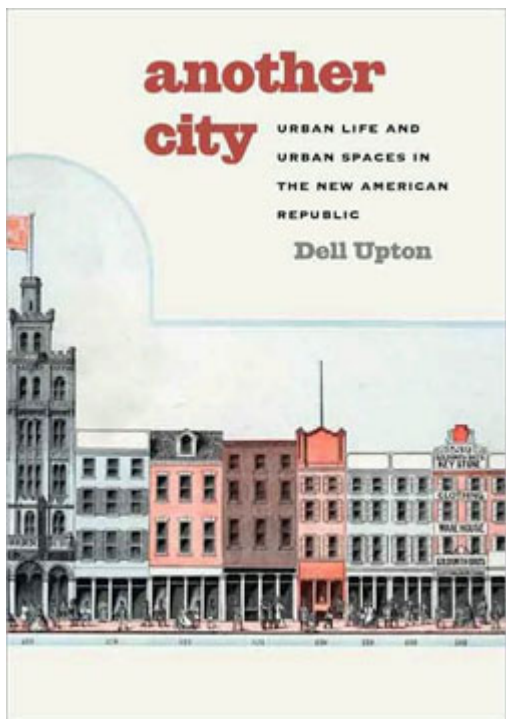
Another City includes three main parts plus an introduction and conclusion. Part I examines the sensory encounter with early nineteenth-century cities. Part II explores the various large-scale projects for developing, embellishing, and reordering American cities. The final section analyzes the legal and political battles over the use of the public domain for private economic purposes, and the cultural conflicts over the political and social use of streets and urban open spaces. The book is well illustrated with wonderful images, some in color and most drawn from contemporary sources.

Antebellum American cities changed constantly, and were scenes of "perpetual ruin and repair" (20). As these cities mushroomed in size and population, they tended to grow in a bell or T-shape, with a more expansively developed section along the waterfront. These were "walking cities" that one could navigate easily on foot. Earlier American cities were not rigidly segregated by socioeconomic status or function, but by the end of the eighteenth century some neighborhoods in larger cities already demonstrated distinctive social characteristics. By the early 1800s, some occupational, social, and economic sorting had already begun to occur, and wealthier people started moving away from their workplaces. While developers erected hundreds of new houses, poorer people continued to endure crowded conditions in smaller dwellings, just as they always had. As cities like Philadelphia and New Orleans grew larger and more complex, urban leaders sought to regulate noise, address issues of waste, relocate cemeteries from more developed urban areas, and build new kinds of buildings set within street arrangements that would promote civilized and urbane forms of interaction. In doing so, they affected both the form of antebellum cities and the attitudes that Americans held toward them (3).

Upton highlights the ways that antebellum cities spawned complex sensory experiences. These odors, sights, and sounds constituted the often unintentional byproducts of human activity that were nonetheless part of everyday urban life: roaming animals and their excrement, rotting refuse, soot from industrial smoke, the stench from privies, and the general urban cacophony created by cries from street vendors, wooden and metal wheels rattling on stone-paved streets, and the noises from widespread small-scale shop

manufacturing. The sensory intrusions that other people created were the ones that annoyed antebellum city dwellers the most. Intrusions that threatened individual comfort prompted many urban inhabitants to scrutinize their neighbors more closely; such intrusions were perceived as encroachments upon spatial order as well as disruptions of social relations (53).

This sensory overload fueled efforts by urban leaders to map, systematize, and regulate many aspects of city life. Periodic outbreaks of yellow fever and cholera, coupled with early ideas about disease such as miasma theory, which linked illness to atmospheric corruptions, prompted civic leaders to search for those environmental qualities that might foster such epidemic conditions. They eventually linked disease outbreaks with particular parts of the city where certain kinds of people were concentrated (61). Urban leaders also sought to regulate noise. Many more refined city dwellers found some urban noises to be “wicked and vulgar,” often associating them with crime, danger, and the “inept or misplaced speech” that characterized the lower rungs of society (75).



Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 416 pp., hardcover, \$45.00.

The clamor of changing American cities also made elite urban dwellers acutely conscious of the way they and others comported themselves. Social power in antebellum America depended on how one carried oneself in space as well as how well one spoke. A genteel bearing enabled elite urbanites to define their own identities while also setting themselves apart from the rest of the population. Although the fear of crime drove many to concern themselves with determining exactly who the individuals on crowded urban streets were, and categorizing where these strangers may have fit into the broader socioeconomic universe, elite urbanites were just as concerned about where *they* stood within the social hierarchy.

Along with the efforts to regulate noise and behavior, there also arose a powerful desire to create a regularized city, fueled by what Upton terms the republican spatial imagination—a way of thinking about the city that was undergirded by the drive toward scientific classification and systematic thinking—and that ultimately helped to reshape the American city by 1820. The republican spatial imagination was adopted most fervently by the mercantile elite, who seized on the notion of the grid as the basis for comprehending the spatial qualities of social, political, and economic order. Those who shared in this new urban vision “were impelled to reform and reorganize both cityscape and society into a single, centralized, rational order—a systematic landscape” that valued the maintenance of vistas, equal access, and open lines of sight (124, 134). Upton explores the way this republican spatial imagination played out in various realms: through the development of commercial arcades and changing business practices, in the emergence of new types of cemeteries that articulated selfhood and personhood, and with the development of new therapeutic reform institutions such as penitentiaries.

Legal battles and cultural conflicts over the use of public domain threw this republican spatial imagination into stark relief. Differing attitudes toward the use and development of the waterfront clashed in New Orleans, where a lengthy legal battle raised questions about who owned this area, what constituted public space, and who had the rights to it. Similar conflicts over the private appropriation of public space erupted in Philadelphia and elsewhere in the antebellum years. The control of public space was also contested in everyday life. While the street was the primary arena for public processions and celebrations, it was also a masculine realm. In the early 1800s, cities began to outfit some of their public squares as promenading grounds for the genteel. By the mid-nineteenth century, antebellum cities offered “a dual, gendered urban landscape. The masculinized world of the streets, the docks, and the financial district was opposed to the feminized world of the respectable home and the gentrified public space” (333).

By mid-century, a significant change had occurred, and most urban elites who had imagined a systematized republican city “had begun to abandon their project of optimistic repression. Occasionally they questioned their right even to conduct it” (336). In a brief conclusion, Upton notes that vestiges of the republican spatial imagination still resonate today, for we still debate who has the right to do what in public, and who should decide.

This is a marvelous book—imaginative, engaging, and deeply researched. *Another City* not only brings the antebellum American city to life with bold immediacy and thoughtful analysis, but its author’s original approach also forces us to reconsider the many ways in which individuals relate to their urban environments.