Introduction

Perhaps the most distinguishing social feature of the American Far West during the twentieth century has been the nature of its population growth. In 1900 the region had barely 5 percent of the nation's population; by 1970 it had almost 17 percent. In every decade the percentage growth in the West far exceeded both the national average and the percentage increase of every other region. Furthermore, this population was increasingly headed toward metropolitan areas, again at a pace that no other section of the country could match.

Cities had been important to the Far West since the first onrush of Anglo-Americans during the mid-nineteenth century, yet its proportion of urbanites as late as 1920 remained near the national average. After 1930, however, while urban growth in other regions slackened, in the Far West it maintained its rapid pace. By the time of the 1970 census the West had become the most highly urbanized of the four American sections, with 83 percent of its population dwelling in urban areas. Ten years later, when the figure for the West reached 84 percent, its closest competitor, the Northeast, was at only 74 percent.

Paradoxically, as the population of the West grew larger and became more concentrated, historians supposed that the region's impact upon the rest of the country had diminished, though few of them doubted that the relatively lightly settled and largely rural West had been a crucial factor in the development of the nineteenth-century United States. Perhaps they believed that demographic and urban growth, along with other changes, had made the modern region too much like the rest of the country to be able to affect American culture in any significant way.

This book takes a different view. It argues that the ability of the West to influence the nation grew with its population and its urbanization. The West during the twentieth century remained a distinctive part of the United States, and it continued to exert a regional effect on American civilization. In fact, a primary source of its separate identity and influence was its expanding cities. The Far West stood apart from other sections not only because it had a higher percentage of urbanites, but also because its cities assumed a clearly regional form and then transmitted that form to the rest of the country.

Despite their obvious significance, cities have seldom been viewed as integral to the meaning of the West. Leading historians of the region, beginning with Frederick Jackson Turner, have emphasized wide open spaces, and especially their potential as farmland, as the key to the identity of the West. In 1950 Henry Nash Smith summarized this enduring sense of the region in the phrase "virgin land." This notion was primarily a product of the imagination, Smith explained, but the myths and symbols that defined the West as virgin land nonetheless exerted "a decided influence on practical affairs."[1]

By the mid-twentieth century, if not sooner, virgin cities had begun to replace virgin land in the minds of many Westerners as the key image in defining the region. People imagined that the urban West (that is, the western metropolis with its central city, suburbs, and nearby countryside) offered Americans a unique opportunity to live according to their preferences. In contrast to other sections of the country, the region seemed less troubled by urban problems and more open to improvements in metropolitan design, social relations, and styles of living.

The urban West, of course, was by no means virgin in fact. If its cities seemed newer, purer, or more malleable than other towns, they nonetheless had their own share of social and environmental problems, all of which were exacerbated by rapid growth after 1940. Yet their virgin image exerted a powerful influence on practical affairs, especially among Westerners who were seeking to fulfill hopes for a better life in the region and at the same time to protect the freshness of western cities.

These goals helped Westerners to create carefully planned metropolitan districts that attempted to preserve the promise the urban region had held after World War II. Virgin cities on a reduced scale, these urban landscapes represented a physical manifestation of the ideas and opportunities associated with the Far West after 1940. Perhaps because Americans continued to identify the West with wide open spaces rather

than with a distinctive urban experience, the significance of virgin cities in the mind and on the ground emerged only slowly. However, historical perspective identifies the years 1953–55 as the time when these new landscapes began to emerge in metropolitan areas of the Pacific slope.

In 1953 Walt Disney commissioned a study to find a suitable site in southern California for a new kind of amusement park. The study recommended the town of Anaheim in Orange County as a good place to build, and in 1954 the Disney Company began construction there. The subsequent opening of Disneyland on July 17, 1955, marked a new era of western land development that affected the culture of the entire nation. The world's first theme park applied Hollywood's movie-making techniques to a three-dimensional setting for fun-seekers in the Los Angeles area. Its impact, however, traveled far beyond the world of entertainment, and far beyond southern California, to influence urban design and architecture across the United States.

It has been said that Walt Disney did not want "to change people's lives . . . only the environment in which they lived."[2] In fact, by attempting the latter he accomplished the former. One basis for Disneyland's impact resided in the absolute control its designers had over the grounds, which permitted them to organize the environs around a few selected themes. Disney and his associates laid out the park so that the whole and its constituent parts—Adventureland, Fantasyland, Frontierland, Tomorrowland, and Main Street U.S.A.—conveyed carefully selected messages. Success inside Disneyland's walls encouraged imitation outside. Both in the immediate vicinity of Orange County and in urban areas across the country, the theme park exerted a powerful influence on urban form.

The creators of Stanford Industrial Park in Palo Alto, California, arrived more hesitantly than Walt Disney at the notion of an environment organized conceptually. The land development began in 1951 as an undistinguished district intended to increase Stanford University's income through leases to light-industrial tenants. In 1954 and 1955, the park's purpose changed. Frederick E. Terman, Stanford's dean of engineering, incorporated the park into his program to transform Stanford into a great research university by creating a "community of technical scholars."[3] The university began to restrict tenancy in the industrial park to research-based companies that would benefit Stanford academically as well as financially.

The university orientation of the industrial park gave it a high-

technology theme as well as an innovative appearance that merged the images of campus and suburb into a new setting for industry. By the 1960s, Stanford Industrial Park had become both the nation's prototypical research park and the intellectual downtown for that high-technology landscape that came to be known as Silicon Valley. Like Disneyland, Stanford Industrial Park not only set an example for other American landscapes but also had a considerable impact on its own metropolitan area.

While Stanford Industrial Park was becoming known as an exclusive setting for research-oriented manufacturing, another type of exclusive community appeared in the desert on the outskirts of Phoenix. In 1954 a realtor named Ben Schleifer laid out the village of Youngtown as a place where the elderly could retire. Youngtown never really prospered, but it did inspire the Del E. Webb Corporation of Phoenix to build another, much more successful retirement community right next door. Del Webb's Sun City, opening on January 1, 1960, became the largest and most influential retirement community in the United States.

Sun City was carefully tailored to senior citizens' tastes and needs, as identified by market research. Capitalizing on the growing financial independence and lengthening lifespan of the elderly, Sun City evolved from a population of strangers with relatively modest means into a cohesive community of self-selected migrants from among the more affluent retirees in American society. In the process Sun City became typical of much urbanization in greater Phoenix. Throughout its growth, the new town for old folks retained its identity as a retirement resort, contributing not only to the region's reputation for amenities and leisure, but also to new ways of thinking about the elderly.

As private developers laid out carefully planned enclaves in suburban Anaheim, Palo Alto, and Youngtown in 1955, businessmen conceived of a public project in downtown Seattle which would produce another innovative western cityscape. Their proposal to host a world's fair ultimately led to the Century 21 Exposition of 1962. Their chief motive was to stimulate growth and renewal in the city's central business district in order to help it compete against expanding suburbs. And, indeed, the 1962 fairgrounds exerted lasting influence after the exposition by becoming the Seattle Center, perhaps the most successful civic complex of its kind in the country.[4] Contrary to the expectations of its planners, however, the Seattle Center contributed less to renewing downtown than to dramatizing the increasing impact of suburban patterns on central cities.

As the nation's first major international exposition since 1940, Century 21 helped to redefine American world's fairs. More than earlier expositions, it was modeled on such suburban forms as theme parks and shopping malls, and it attracted a crowd that was rather suburban in outlook and orientation. The cold war encouraged Century 21 to emphasize those economic and technological forces responsible for the prosperous and futuristic character of Seattle and other western metropolitan areas after World War II.

Disneyland, Stanford Industrial Park, Sun City, and the Seattle World's Fair, like their respective urban areas, differed from one another in significant ways. Yet, from the perspectives of local, regional, and national history, the four places shared many features that permit them to be grouped together conceptually. At the level of local, urban history, each was conceived and built as an enclave within a metropolis, between 1951 and 1962, and each incorporated relatively careful and high-quality design. Each enclave was organized according to a conceptual theme of particular relevance to its designers and users. The four cityscapes were by no means typical American metropolitan districts, yet they constituted influential landmarks that acted both as exemplars of the idea of virgin cities and as antidotes to the apparent chaos of their respective urban milieus.

Upholding a new urban tradition by following the example of Disneyland, I have for the purposes of this book labeled the four places "magic kingdoms" and "magic lands." These planned districts tended to remain lands or kingdoms unto themselves; in fact, central authorities planned and operated them as if in reaction against the largely unmanaged urban growth nearby. Each land was set off from its surroundings, and each was peopled by a more or less distinct and homogeneous crowd. Disneyland, Stanford Industrial Park, Sun City, and Century 21 can be called magical because each district helped to transform the surrounding urban landscape as well as the nation's metropolitan areas. The four districts were also magical because of their thematic designs, which both gave them greater spatial coherence and invested them with distinctly western meanings.

As regional phenomena, these four magic lands confirmed and strengthened people's identity as Westerners by helping them come to terms with unwieldy cities. They imparted a sense of community and stability to an urban region characterized by explosive growth and rapid change. By making the metropolis seem more manageable, magic kingdoms upheld the image of virgin cities that attracted and attached

so many people to the West. They spoke to the pervasive belief that western urban environs should not resemble those back East.

Westerners tried—with considerable success—to set their cities and their region apart from the East. But because trends and people flowed readily across the country, the West was not simply the antithesis to the East. As national institutions, magic lands both mirrored and affected trends at work across the United States. The urban and regional growth that fueled Disneyland, Stanford Industrial Park, Sun City, and the Seattle World's Fair stemmed in large part from the nation's mobilization for world war and cold war, from federal policies and federal spending, from the decisions of national and international corporations, and from the entire country's changing attitudes toward suburbs and the environment. But western cities, and particularly their magic kingdoms, also helped to reshape Americans' urban forms and urban attitudes. Across today's United States, numerous copies of the four original landmarks attest their success in enhancing the spatial order of cities, in conveying selected messages, and in making money. They also attest the influence of the West on American culture during the twentieth century.

Studying the urban West encourages reconsideration of prevailing views of American culture after 1940, which characterize postwar American society, particularly in the 1950s, as culturally and politically and morally sterile. There is some evidence to support the view that the mid-twentieth-century United States, and urban America in particular, was in many ways a stagnant and complacent culture. But despite the country's adherence to certain arguably unprogressive attitudes after World War II, it experienced tremendous convulsions in the realms of material and popular culture that boldly challenged traditional ways, and in some instances offered creative or liberating alternatives. During the years 1940–70, inventions ranging in size from the birth-control pill and the microprocessor to the Saturn rocket and Apollo spaceship helped to usher in attitudes that sometimes differed radically from their predecessors. The American landscape experienced dramatic changes, too, facilitated by such innovations as Levittowns and fast-food franchises and a national interstate highway system.[5]

Cities were affected by the same, ofttimes liberating forces that were at work throughout American material culture. Almost inevitably, however, urban change was viewed as an unfortunate event, and the language used to describe it frequently implied some sort of decline from previous standards. The new American metropolis was depicted as "chaotic" and "formless," "sprawling" and "fragmented," a landscape in

"disequilibrium" and a society infected with "anomie." Historians have often concurred with contemporary observers who assailed the reshaping of the cityscape as detrimental to the ideals of urban life. They have portrayed the recent American inner city as an economic and social wasteland, the outer city or suburb as a cultural and moral wasteland, and the entire unmanageable entity as a political wasteland.[6]

Although critics pointed to real and severe problems—environmental degradation, racial tension, urban poverty, a weakening sense of community—many of them clung inflexibly to an increasingly obsolete ideal of city life, rooted in the urban experience of the Northeast, in which strong central cities with vital downtowns dominated metropolitan areas. As the metropolis steadily diverged from this pattern, many experts viewed the change as deviation from a norm rather than as historical progression from one urban type to another.[7] In the context of the traditional understanding of the city, the new urban shape indeed looked formless and sprawling and chaotic. But in historical perspective it is easier to see changes in the city not as declension from a single ideal but as movement away from an eastern model, based on nineteenth-century technologies, toward a western model, shaped more by twentieth-century culture and by a distinctly different natural setting.

Judged in the latter terms, urban America was not so disorderly and atomistic. Critics made the changed city sound like such a miserable place that nobody would want to live there. Yet the new metropolis not only held its own but expanded, and it did so with particular speed in those western cities regarded by critics as especially disordered and rootless and atomistic. People moving to and residing in the expanding western metropolis clearly did not agree that all urban America was one kind of wasteland or another. Indeed, one historian claims to have found America's "*most* comprehensible cities" in the Southwest.[8]

The ability to perceive coherence in cities depends at least in part upon viewpoint. Sociologist Peter Orleans warns, in this regard, that the perceptions of urban "analysts" should not be taken "as representative of the population at large. Urban life has the reputation of being essentially alienating and disorganized, even though . . . upon close examination, order often emerges from chaos."[9] Critics have tended to approach the new metropolis from the perspective of either spatial organization or political management. As a result, much of the literature has adopted the dissatisfied viewpoint of either the planner or the reformer. These avenues of investigation have proven rewarding, but a third path has received less attention. This approach attempts to learn

how average individuals have come to terms with their city.[10] It begins with the assumption, to employ Amos Rapaport's terms, that "users" and "designers" of the built environment frequently derive different "meanings" from the same setting.[11] In other words, the views of those who planned, or who would plan, the urban environment did not always correspond with the views of those who lived, worked, commuted, or played in it.

In contrast to what might be called the macro view of planners and reformers, this study relies heavily on a micro view of the western city in an attempt to understand how average people created, and were affected by, a mid-twentieth-century urban culture. It relies especially on two types of information. First, it seeks to understand how specific controlled environments were planned, built, managed, and used. Instead of looking at cities as wholes, the following pages focus primarily on smaller parts of cities to see how designers created them and to see how people experienced them—which was often in ways their designers had not anticipated. Because of their smaller scale, to average citizens these special environments seemed more comprehensible than entire cities. They may also seem more comprehensible to historians who examine them inductively as evolving artifacts that provide clues about the urban culture of region and nation.

The second level of micro analysis requires an examination of how inhabitants may have made sense of the cities in their minds. Westerners embraced magic kingdoms not only because they were high-quality environments but also because they made the surrounding metropolis seem more legible and more congruent with regional ideals. Carefully planned districts stood out boldly in the urban images developed by citizens as tools for comprehending, and finding their way through, a city. Average people proved adept at drawing mental maps that found coherence in urban settings which struck others as chaotic.[12]

Looking at the frames of reference of both the users and the designers of magic kingdoms may help to explain how residents of the urban West came to terms with the disorder that seemingly characterized not only cities in their own region but also urban America as a whole during the mid-twentieth century. Historical evidence of how western urbanites came to terms with the city around them is, however, elusive. There are no archival collections of mental maps, and few reliable firsthand accounts of what urban settings meant to people. Users have almost invariably left little record of their experiences with the built environment. Designers, planners, and critics of the larger urban scene

have left more records of their activities and their intentions. The designers of magic kingdoms did survey their customers frequently in order to find out how to keep them happy; such market research provides a glimpse of how people responded to certain settings.

There are other forms of indirect or circumstantial evidence that offer traces of the meaning of certain cities and city districts for Westerners. Significance can be inferred, using a variety of rather crude measures, from how, and how frequently, people incorporated a particular setting into the routine of their lives. Another kind of circumstantial evidence pertains to the backgrounds and mindsets of the users of magic lands. By asking what the inhabitants of the urban West expected of the region, we may gain a better sense of the mentality that guided their interactions with the built environment.

In trying to explain how Westerners made sense of metropolitan areas, I do not mean to suggest that cities seemed equally coherent to all people. To assert that the designers and users of special environments were able to come to some terms with the explosive city is not to claim that most urban problems had been solved. In fact, something like the opposite may have occurred. Many Westerners arrived at some sort of understanding of the metropolis only by simplifying it through mental maps, by designing away contradictions in the cultural landscape, and by walling themselves off from the complications of city life. Magic kingdoms attempted to exclude diversity and misery from their idealized settings, substituting in their stead a world indexed to the middle-class standards of an affluent society. An understanding of these special environments, and of their respective urban contexts, requires recognition of their implications for those minority and working-class groups who made up a large part of the population of the western metropolis.

Westerners also often excluded from their magic kingdoms much awareness of the escalating costs of the region's pattern of urban growth. They tended to treat carefully planned districts as refuges from the aesthetic and ecological realities of cities. Only belatedly did they begin to perceive the detrimental implications of rapid expansion, and even of magic kingdoms, for the special regional environment. Cities that had seemed virgin in 1950 or 1960 were by 1980 struggling to overcome severe, unforeseen problems. Planned districts that had seemed almost utopian in the years 1953–62 offered much less room for optimism after the mid–1960s.

If the cities of the American West did not get exactly what had been

planned and hoped for, the future of Disneyland, Stanford Industrial Park, Sun City, and the Seattle Center nonetheless seemed assured. Magic kingdoms of the urban West helped to define a new standard for what was normal on the American cityscape, and their proliferation sustained at least some of the thinking that had helped to create them during the postwar years. To analyze them is to heighten our understanding of the development of mid-twentieth-century American culture, and to increase our appreciation for the role of western cities in that culture.

In the pages that follow, the West is defined as a place, a process, and a state of mind. First, it is understood to include the eleven Mountain and Pacific states as defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, but not Alaska and Hawaii. When considered for its economic, demographic, and cultural trends, the region is often contrasted to either the United States as a whole or to the northeast, north central, and southern sections of the country, again as defined by the Census Bureau. The region has also been conceptualized here as a place where the experience of moving to and living in its cities and suburbs contributed significantly to regional identity.

Finally, the West is understood to be the place that its inhabitants *thought* it was. This place of the mind was defined in large part by the efforts of Westerners to contrast their region to a pervasive but rather ill-defined perception of the East. Seattle and Phoenix and Denver were all different from one another, yet they shared not only their far western location and certain processes of growth and change, but also their inhabitants' tendency to identify with one region by explaining their presence there as the rejection of another. The West's reputation for virgin cities depended heavily upon negative images of cities elsewhere.

The urban West may have diverged from other sections of the country, but it was not itself uniform throughout. The present study relies on evidence from four metropolitan areas (or five Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, as identified by the Census Bureau) for most of its information about the region: Los Angeles and Orange counties in southern California (the Los Angeles and Anaheim SMSAs); Santa Clara County in northern California (the San Jose SMSA); Maricopa County, Arizona (the Phoenix SMSA); and King and Snohomish counties, Washington (the Seattle SMSA). These cities were neither entirely representative of the urban West nor exactly alike.

The Orange County, San Jose, and Phoenix metropolitan areas were

the most similar. Growing with extraordinary speed after 1940, and recognized as emblematic of the new urban pattern of the Pacific coast, each of these metropolitan areas belonged to a distinctive subregion of the West that might be called "Greater California." Although many in the region were reluctant to admit it, Greater California dominated the Far West demographically, economically, and culturally. This warm, arid, and exceptionally creative corner of the country produced, besides Disneyland, Stanford Industrial Park, and Sun City, such other magic kingdoms as the Las Vegas Strip, Dodger Stadium, the Los Angeles freeway system, the planned community of Irvine, and the San Diego Zoo.[13]

Seattle had much in common with urban California, yet its residents flatly denied any similarity between the damp, green Northwest coast and the dry Southwest. Their city changed in less obvious and less influential ways than California towns. Confined by its relative isolation and its hilly and watery terrain, it grew more slowly. Consequently, like Portland or San Francisco, it was better able to retain the traditional downtown focus that it had acquired in the pre-automobile age. In fact, unlike the other controlled environments under consideration here, the Seattle World's Fair appeared not on the fringes of the urban area but adjacent to the central business district.

Yet Seattle was affected by the same processes that reshaped other cities throughout the West after 1940, and the changes were nowhere better illustrated than in the creation and impact of the Century 21 Exposition. The 1962 World's Fair not only highlighted in Seattle the same aerospace and suburban orientations that were guiding development throughout the metropolitan West, but also brought to bear upon the Northwest the direct influence of southern California by recruiting veteran workers from Disneyland to help lay out the fairgrounds. A variation on the postwar pattern in the urban West, Seattle provided evidence of the influence of magic kingdom design on cities not just in California but across the country.

More perhaps than any other factor, rapid demographic and economic expansion unified the postwar West. Chapter 1 explores how this growth led to both a sense of fulfillment and a perception of chaos. Westerners initially planned for and celebrated expansion because it seemed to imply the realization of long-standing hopes for their cities and region. Ultimately, however, growth became so explosive that the city appeared out of control: populations increased dramatically; municipal boundaries changed incessantly; people and autos moved about

ceaselessly. In such a milieu, many doubted that a shared sense of community and culture could be achieved.

The success of magic lands, however, suggested that, for many, culture and community in western cities were not as elusive as the critics had feared. Chapters 2 through 5 present a history of Disneyland, Stanford Industrial Park, Sun City, and the Seattle World's Fair. They trace the origins and evolution of each planned cityscape, and they place each in its specific urban setting in order to assess its significance for the surrounding metropolis. To explore the extent of innovation in the urban West, each chapter also reviews the institutional context for a particular cityscape: Stanford Industrial Park is considered against the backdrop of postwar industrial land use, for example, whereas Sun City is considered in terms of the evolution of retirement and retirement communities in America.

Chapter 6 closes the book with the argument that magic kingdoms epitomized the process by which people came to terms with their ever-changing cities in a manner that contributed to their identity as Westerners. Magic kingdoms played a key role in reconciling city-dwellers to fluid settings. They acted as landmarks that heightened the legibility of the urban scene, and they accelerated the growth of a feeling of maturity in relatively new cities by strengthening the sense of cultural attainment. In addition, designers and operators of controlled environments touted their contributions to the formation of community in new settings. They claimed that the carefully planned districts both enhanced the appearance of the urban surroundings and evoked better behavior from residents and guests of the western city. By making both the cityscape and its inhabitants seem more manageable and by celebrating the economic and cultural underpinnings of expansion, magic kingdoms offered reassurance that the urban West could live up to the hopes that both newcomers and old-timers had for the region.

People frequently contrasted magic kingdoms, like their respective cities, with less satisfactory eastern counterparts. The comparison usually suggested that the urban West could continue to grow and at the same time retain those virtues that distinguished it from the metropolitan East. Magic kingdoms indicated that growth need not always imply disorder. They held out hope that if the *quality* of urban development on a small scale could be raised significantly, then its *quantity* would not matter so much on the larger scale. Support for this proposition diminished after the mid–1960s, as advocates of "limited" or "managed" growth came to the political forefront in western cities and

began to address urban problems that had once been associated only with the East.

By 1970 the optimistic and creative milieu that had produced magic kingdoms had begun to change. Yet heightened awareness of urban ills only enhanced the importance of controlled enclaves. Each magic land increasingly served less as a natural extension of the city and more as a refuge from it. Even as their meaning changed, then, special western cityscapes continued to exert substantial influence over both the surrounding metropolis and the nation. And although they are presented in these pages in the past tense, their influence persists today.