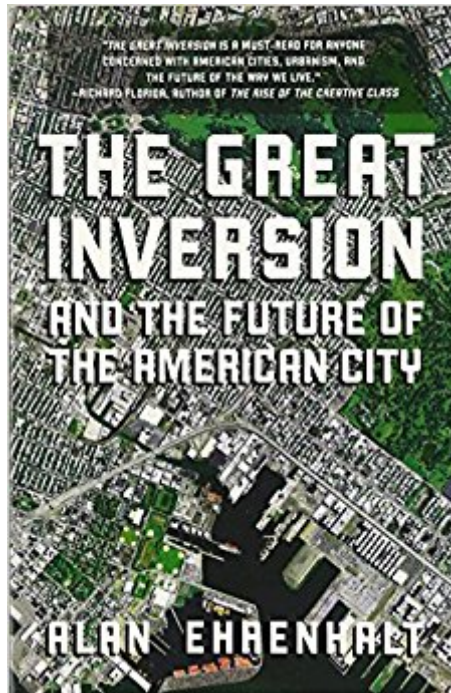


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# The Great Inversion And The Future Of The American City



## Synopsis

Eye-opening and thoroughly engaging, this is an indispensable look at American urban/suburban society and its future. In *The Great Inversion*, Alan Ehrenhalt, one of our leading urbanologists, reveals how the roles of America's cities and suburbs are changing places—young adults and affluent retirees moving in, while immigrants and the less affluent are moving out—and addresses the implications of these shifts for the future of our society. Ehrenhalt shows us how the commercial canyons of lower Manhattan are becoming residential neighborhoods, and how mass transit has revitalized inner-city communities in Chicago and Brooklyn. He explains why car-dominated cities like Phoenix and Charlotte have sought to build twenty-first-century downtowns from scratch, while sprawling postwar suburbs are seeking to attract young people with their own form of urbanized experience.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the future, American cities could look like late-nineteenth-century Vienna, with lively, affluent metropolitan core areas and the lower classes consigned to life in peripheral suburbs. Such cities will go well beyond gentrification and involve the displacement of the poor in inner-city areas by the wealthy, according to urbanologist Ehrenhalt. He details how the trend toward such cities is already apparent in Chicago, Atlanta, Washington, Houston, and other metropolitan areas. Drawing on census data and economic research, he examines the factors behind the trend, including mass

transit, retail and housing development in downtown locations, and the declining appeal of long commutes to distant suburbs. Ehrenhalt also offers detailed portraits of the future of suburban sprawl in areas struggling to re-create the appeal of cities by developing more accessible commercial zones. This is an engaging look at demographic changes that promise a very different future for cities and suburbs. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“The Great Inversion is a must read for anyone concerned with American cities, urbanism, and the future of the way we live. . . . The future of the city is the future of America and the world. Alan Ehrenhalt shows us how a desire for urbanism is bringing people back to America’s downtowns, and what suburbs and communities of all sorts must do to thrive in the future.”

•Richard Florida, author of *Who’s Your City?*

“[Ehrenhalt’s] provocative, nuanced examination of the dynamics of change encourages the reader to apply his insights to cities closer to home. . . . Alan Ehrenhalt’s fascinating new book, *The Great Inversion* . . . finds that American cities are doing a very un-American thing: reshaping themselves in the mold of European capitals, where the privileged live in the city center, orbited by rings of immigrants and other strivers in the poorer suburbs.”

•Commentary

“Fascinating. . . . A convincing case. . . . Mr. Ehrenhalt’s travels have given him a front-row view of ÆœThe Great Inversion. . . . Alan Ehrenhalt has traveled to towns and cities across the land and witnessed firsthand the early stages of what surely will be nothing short of a social transformation.”

•The Washington Times

“[A] mix of sharp-eyed observation and analysis. . . . Weaving census and public-opinion data throughout, Ehrenhalt displays the same narrative and reporting skills he put to good use in Æ The Lost City.”

•City Journal

“Ehrenhalt takes his reader on a tour of the changing American cityscape . . . An enjoyable and engaging read, especially for those considering a move back to the city . . . Solidly researched with great questions asked and plenty of hard facts and anecdotal answers provided.”

•Christian Science Monitor

“Books about cities tend to be polemics. An author decides what’s right and wrong about how we live, then marshals anecdotes and rhetoric to buttress the case. There’s another way to approach the topic: in person and on foot, following one’s instincts but open to nuance along the way. Alan Ehrenhalt follows that path, to our benefit, in his new book *The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City*. . . . Ehrenhalt’s sympathies are with movements like new urbanism and smart growth, but these sympathies

don't blur his sharp eye for details or the wry clarity of his prose. — San Francisco Chronicle — "The Great Inversion and the United Nations agree; the world is becoming more urban by the day . . . To Ehrenhalt's credit, he does not pass moral judgment on the process. With clear prose that is both informative and entertaining, he objectively states the facts (and presents a great number of voices from immigrant businessmen and local civil servants to politicians from Elite African-American families and developers), leaving his readers free to render their own verdict. — Joshua Bloodworth, Dominion of New York — "Most writers on cities are either cheerleaders or naysayers. Ehrenhalt is neither, and he has written a balanced, hard-hitting book that is a persuasive forecast of our complex urban future. — Witold Rybczynski, author of *Makeshift Metropolis* — "[The Great Inversion] is a serious, provocative, and gracefully written, and consistently interesting look at how the urban-suburban balance is shifting. — Better! Cities & Towns — "The author's historical perspective helps shape his provocative view. — Kirkus Reviews

I bought this book about five or six days ago and uploaded it to my Android, thinking I would read a few pages here and there over the next few months. I couldn't stop reading it, and finished it in days. The dilemmas confronting cities over how to attract people to an urban core as well as how to urbanize suburban areas are very interesting, and as the other reviewer noted, the author is very even-handed in his treatment of life-style preferences regarding cars, density, etc. (In this sense he is unlike the suburban advocate Joel Kotkin, who often writes with a sneer about the urbanists he disagrees with.) I currently live in urban San Francisco with two small children, so the issues discussed here were very relevant. We can't afford to buy a house here, or at least one we would want in a neighborhood we would like. I'm going to be moving to Los Angeles soon, and this book helped me think about what I value in a future house, neighborhood, and commute down in that area. Highly recommended!

Alan Ehrenhalt has written a fascinating account what he calls a recent "demographic inversion" - not, thank you, "gentrification" - in which immigrants now tend to enter American society via the suburbs rather than the core city, the poor abandon or are driven from the core city into the suburbs via loss of livelihood, taxes, and buyouts, and those who can afford it take up residence in the urban core for entertainment, social amenities, and quicker commutes. Ehrenhalt provides a variety of different takes on the ways in which this process is unfolding, to varying degrees of success, in

exemplary urban neighborhoods - Chicago's Sheffield, Brooklyn's Bushwick, Cleveland Heights, Gwinnett County northeast of Atlanta, and many more, all related in clear, felicitous prose. Among my favorite chapters were those in which Ehrenhalt chronicled and assessed the fall and rise of the Clarendon section of Arlington, brought about by the arrival of Vietnamese shop and restaurant owners to properties emptied out by the disorder and loss of business due to Metro construction, and the continuing death spiral of the urban shipwreck that is Philadelphia, or, as some locals call it, "Bostroit," for its unique 18th-century core in close proximity to areas of utter blight, drug dens, and boarded up row houses, all a result of the rapid post-industrial loss of manufacturing and port services. And yes, sports fans, Ehrenhalt lingers for a while on an aspect of Philly most of you will recognize, as "the only large American city in which no one is surprised when parade watchers boo Santa Claus, where fans boo their sports teams for failing to win a second consecutive championship, or where grandmothers at the stadium insult spectators who happen to be wearing the wrong jersey." In Ehrenhalt's account, the cities that are gaining ground in the postindustrial world are cosmopolitan and diverse, and for the most part tolerant; Philadelphia, on the other hand, strikes the author and his Philly sources as provincial, parochial, and hyperlocally intolerant - for good and explicable historical reasons. Although the numbers don't quite line up exactly as Ehrenhalt might wish - between the last two censuses, more people still migrated to the suburbs than to the cities, and in many urban areas that are repopulating, the downtown contingents are still relatively small - the trends he describes nevertheless seem well underway. And some of what he discusses is wondrous strange and surprising, including the populating of the NY financial district, where, following 9/11 and then in the aftermath of the 2008 financial meltdown, developers repurposed as condos hundreds of office buildings, their occupants having fled to New Jersey and elsewhere in NY and Connecticut. Now, in the area south of Chambers Street, where the 1970 census recorded only 833 residents and which every NY urbanist viewed as the neighborhood least likely to EVER be viewed as residential - Jane Jacobs devoted several pages of "Death and Life" to mocking the very notion - more than 60,000 people, drawn in part by post-9/11 and post-meltdown incentives, are now living. And on Sunday there are couples with strollers! Our contemporary Zeitgeist is urban - just look at the numbers of city books now cluttering the book reviews and (remaining) bookstore shelves - and, lured by entertainment, nightlife, and the hum of the city, an entire generation is going to the towns we boomers evacuated for the suburbs. The question, of course, is, "will the Millennials raise their children there?" I think so. I would. (How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm, etc.?) And what about the suburbs? When I look around the suburban neighborhoods of northern Virginia, from which evidence Ehrenhalt supports his case, I see

confirmation: the urban spaces are repopulating with people having more disposable income, the DC metro inner suburbs are hyperethnic, the suburban spaces are building urban amenities ("town-centers"). Meanwhile, the tract-home New Jersey neighborhood I grew up in, which contained NO - count them, NO - persons of color, is now fully international and delightfully diverse (and, in support of Ehrenhalt's major argument, crumbling as well). My home borough has growing South Asian, East Asian, and Hispanic populations, all of whom are reflected in the multi-lingual signage of local main streets. The book's brief final chapter is, sadly, weak on informed prognostication, apart from the crowning observation that we should expect more of the same. For me, however, that doesn't undermine the brilliance of the foregoing text or the empirical validity of the case studies. In short, the main lines of *The Great Inversion* ring true to me, and I found Ehrenhalt's monograph essential reading as I seek to get my arms around city dynamics, trendlines, issues, politics, and constituencies.

Loved this book! Great read about the evolution of cities. Easy to read but educational also. I live in Chicago and was fascinated by the description of how our city is changing. Just one city of many that are focused on in this book.

I'm always suspicious of books that tell me what I want to hear -- in this case that central cities are becoming more popular than distant suburbs in metropolitan areas across the country. Ehrenhalt makes his case effectively but also qualifies his position with opposing arguments and acknowledgment of the uncertainty that surrounds any predictions. The author uses a diverse array of cities as case studies, and he deserves praise for being one of the few urbanist authors to write about Phoenix in a way that is balanced and accurate. He rightly identifies the city's strengths (e.g. its extraordinarily successful light rail line) and its weaknesses (e.g. the unreasonable expectation of ubiquitous free parking) and blends them to reach an informed conclusion free of the smug condescension and gratuitous derision that mars many other writings about Phoenix.

I can't recommend this book highly enough. Each chapter explores a different city or suburb to illustrate trends in urban development and population migration. *The Great Inversion* focuses on the shift from the sprawling suburb-centric model of development to citizens' more recent demands for walkable, mixed-use, transit adjacent communities. The author admits that this is a rather new phenomenon, but is convincing, thoughtful, and rather objective (using both anecdotal and empirical data as evidence) in his assessment of its importance and staying power. It's well written, well

researched, and generally a fun and interesting read. Any urbanist or transit enthusiast will thoroughly enjoy it.

How we all embrace the changes our communities undergo will depend upon our ability to get involved in the process of making our city better. This book gives everyone a vision into the future of how American cities are going to change and develop and even in the worst case die. We all need to be involved in the process of how cities grow and develop and be that example for our future generations as they take over the cities that we live behind.

If you're into non-fiction and love reading about cities, people, and even a bit of sociology, this read is for you. I enjoyed the book being broken down by city and how each movement of people groups occurred. The book discusses multiple time periods with the most recent occurring during the great recession. The author's points are well-articulated and though provoking. A truly enjoyable read.

Excellent, thoughtful book about the current transition going on in metro areas across the country. Not a booster for the phenomenon nor an opponent, the author is rather a clear-eyed observer of the remarkable shifts in living patterns. Read this book and you will understand so much more about the future of our cities and suburbs.

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