

Framing Your Paper

Plot changes: chronology is useful as an organizational tool.

Look for themes: what stands out as the predominant sources of forces shaping change over time?

Make choices before you start to write: focus on the most significant changes to your site.

Be selective in deciding which visual evidence to use in making an argument

Investigate hypotheses: plot your site's changes against the explanatory sources from required readings.

Elements of Structure

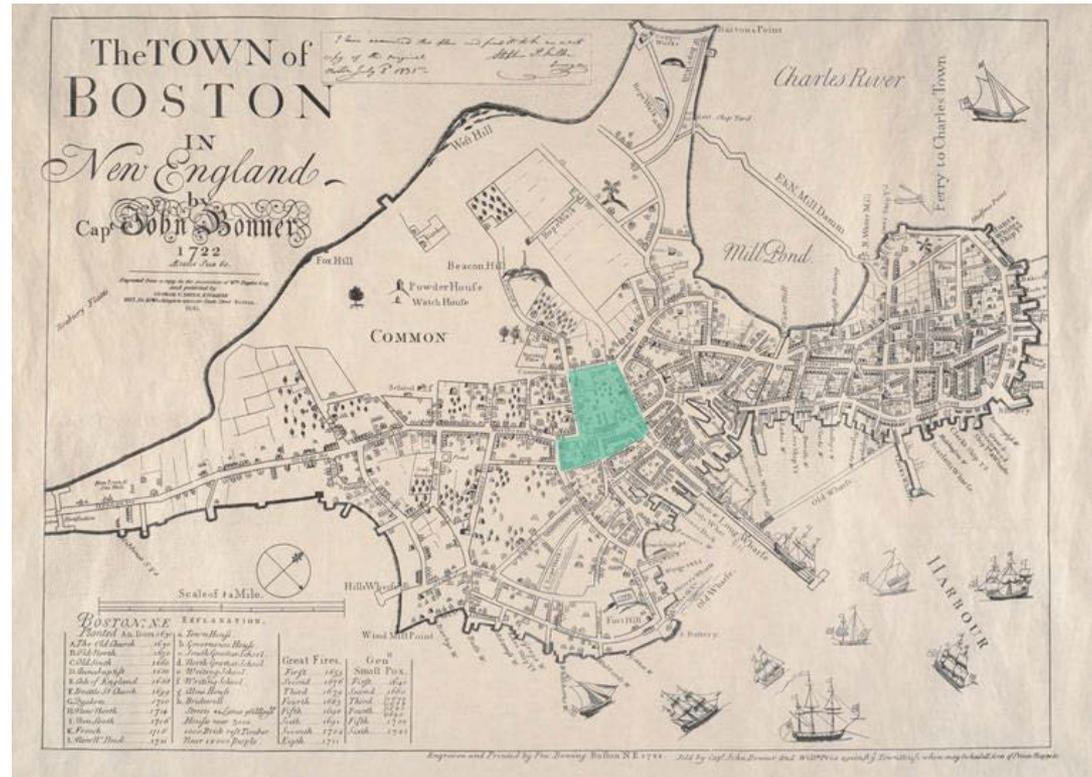
- Organize your paper around visual evidence.
- Choose maps that tell the story and refer to them closely for what they reveal.
- Consider choosing the maps first, then writing.
- Craft subheadings to help you plot the dynamics of the change (useful graphically and argumentatively).

Ways of using visual evidence

- To establish the foundational dynamics of a site (single map in time)
- To provide a detailed illustration of an element you want to consider in depth or closely.
- As a comparison, to show change over time (productive comparison)
- To show causal change (how one change might have produced another, i.e., how did the Mass. Pike change the South End?)
- To support a detailed analysis of an important change at a moment in time

Downtown/Midtown: Map as Foundational Evidence

The story of downtown Boston is an example of the rise and fall of the great American cities during the 20th century. The advent of the automobile and the increasing suburbanization of the United States have proved to be a true test to the power and command of the downtown as changes in technology, socioeconomics, and travel behavior have changed the way the middle-class American viewed central cities. The presence of the Great Spring initiated the settlement of Boston and the concentration of activities to make my site a central nucleus for business, learning, service, and government administration. The dispersion of residential and business activities has been endogenous in the changing land uses of downtown Boston as a declining downtown has struggled with maintaining its dominance as the center of a larger metropolitan area.

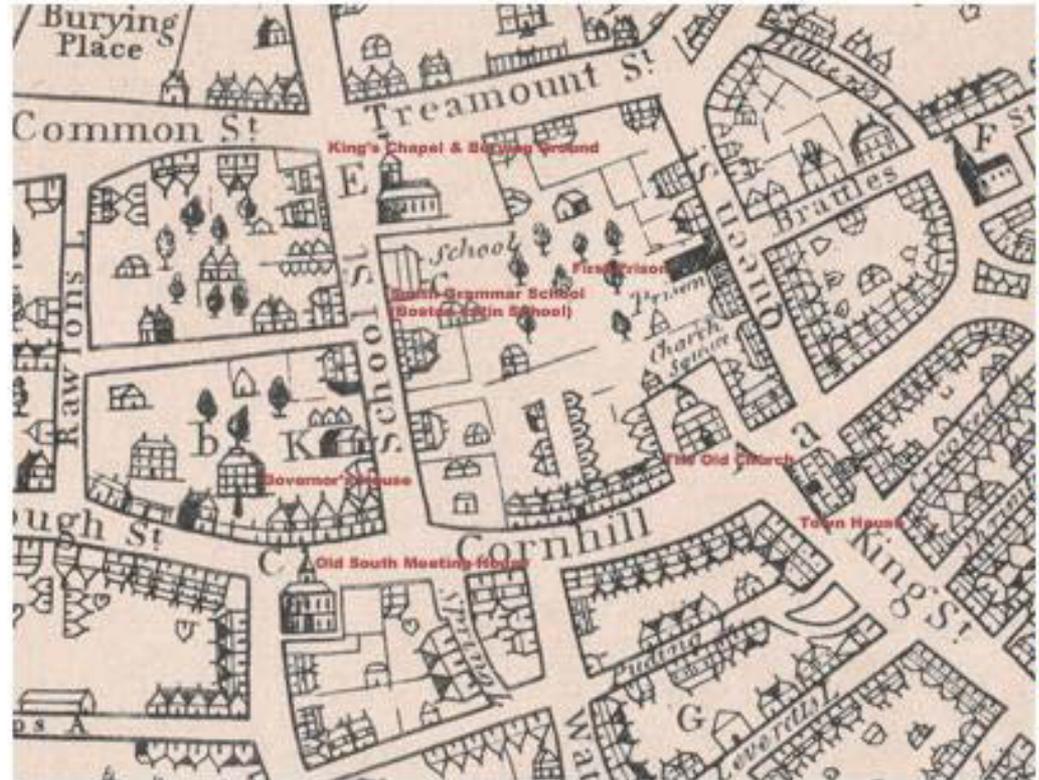


"The Town of Boston in New England" by John Bonner, 1722 via Library of Congress. This image is in the public domain.

Figure 1. Plan of Boston in 1722 (site in green). The site is bounded by Court Street and State Street on the north, Devonshire Street on the east, Milk and School streets on the south, and Tremont Street on the west.

Downtown/Midtown: The Detail

Although the Old State House was not constructed until 1713, since its settlement in 1630 the site and its immediate periphery have been concentrated with many central activities, namely the first school house, first prison, meeting house, churches, burying grounds, and the homes to the early governors of the Commonwealth. As Sam Bass Warner writes in Mapping Boston, after the construction of the Long Wharf in 1711, “the center of the city became fixed in the form that we now know. The Old State House (1713), the town market, stood in a straight street on the high ground above the wharf. Later named State Street, it became the business spine of the city” (Warner, 3). The placement of the State House (referred to as the “Town House” in 1722) offered the governor a commanding view of the Long Wharf, and just as the placement of the State House must have been a function of the activities already concentrated in this area, new opportunities continued to emerge that made the site a central location for all types of activity.



"The Town of Boston in New England" by John Bonner, 1722
via Library of Congress. This image is in the public domain.

Figure 2. Close up of site in 1722. Major institutions are labeled.

Downtown/Midtown: Detail to Show Change

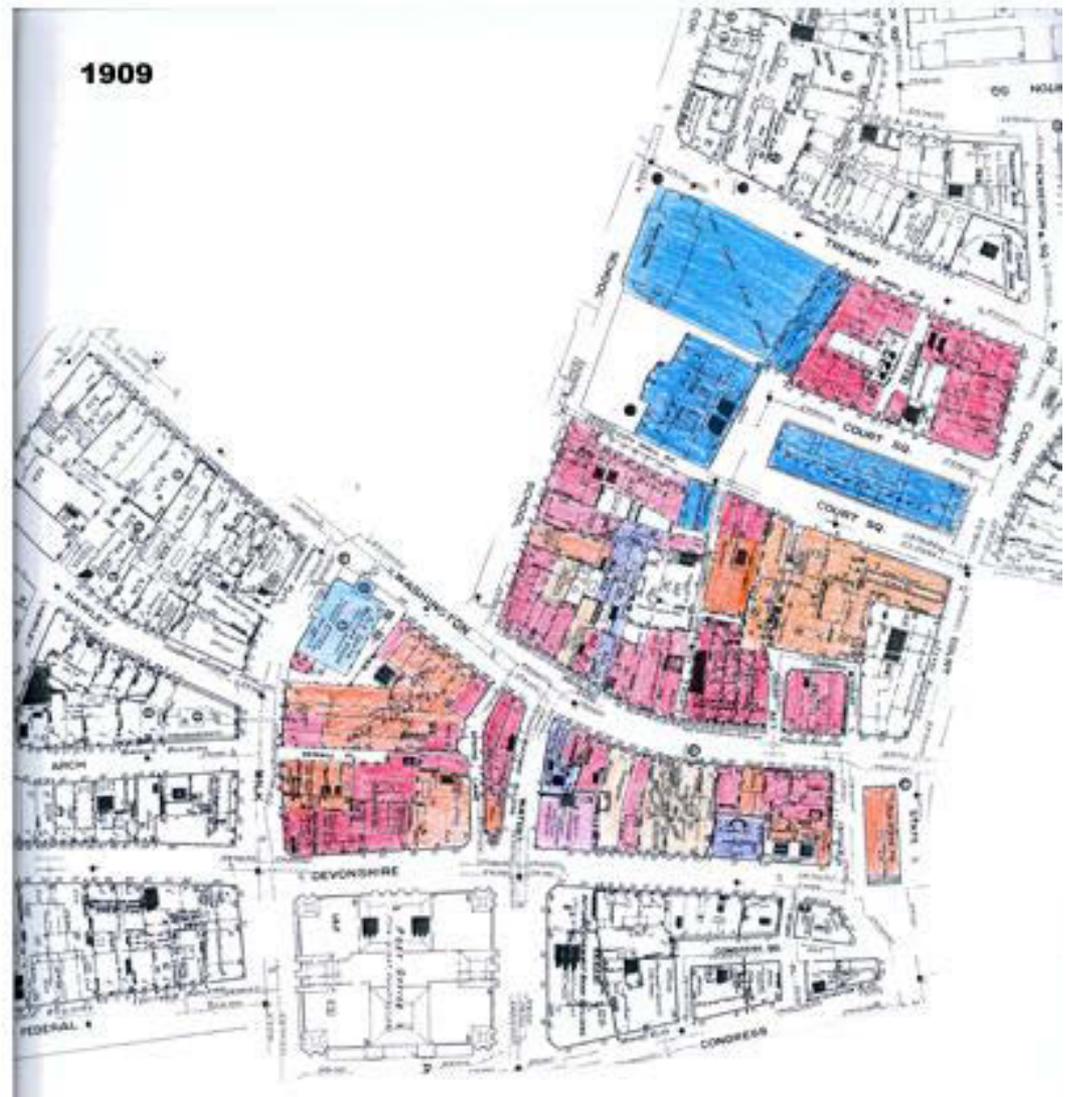
As early as the turn of the 20th century there have been signs of institutions moving out of the downtown in response to a growing population. Kenneth Jackson writes in Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States that “enormous growth to metropolitan size was accompanied by rapid population growth on the periphery by a leveling of the density curve, [...] as well as by a rise in the socioeconomic status of suburban residents” (Jackson, 20). As the boundaries of the city of Boston were expanding and the population growing, the Boston Latin School and the State House left downtown for sites that offered more space sometime between 1769 and 1814 (see 1814 map). However, in Boston just as they did in New York City, “the ‘genteel’ population” moved out of the downtown and “brought their elite institutions [...] with them to the edge of the city” (Jackson, 21). Although the 1814 map shows a number of buildings and activities on the site, as the elite moved out of downtown it only seems likely that less attractive industries and businesses moved in.



"Map of Boston in the state of Massachusetts: 1814" by John Groves Hales and Thomas Wightman, via Library of Congress. This image is in the public domain.

Punctuating a Change

By 1909 the subway, steel-frame construction, and the elevator have allowed for an even greater intensity of uses within the central business district. Stores continue to dominate the first-floor levels of each building, with some buildings dedicated exclusively to retail and others including office space. A number of buildings have been demolished to make way for newer steel-frame construction – skyscrapers – that, with the aid of the elevator, has allowed more uses to occupy the same area of land. As buildings grew in height more and more offices and retail were located in the downtown. More extensive and faster transit lines increased the accessibility of the downtown business and thereby drove up the land values of those downtown parcels.



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Framing change: Downtown/Midtown

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Subheads as Spine: Downtown

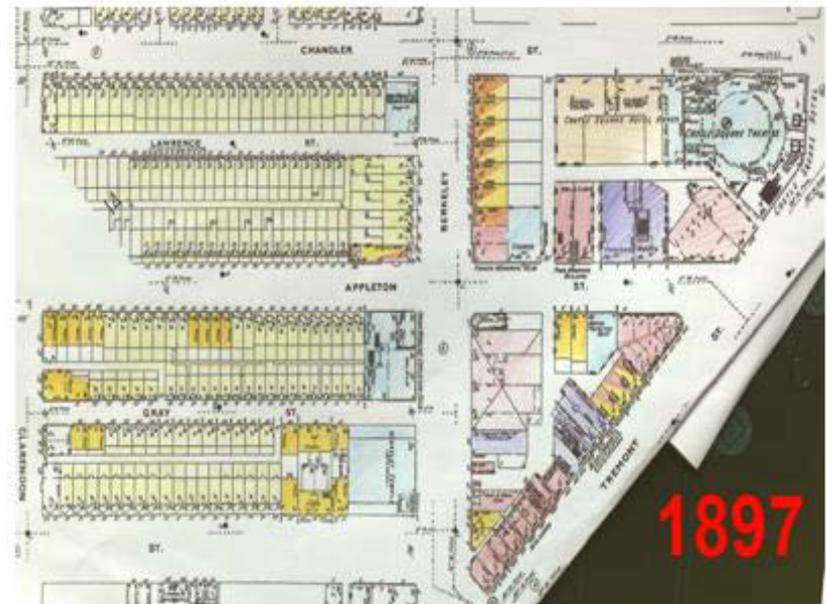
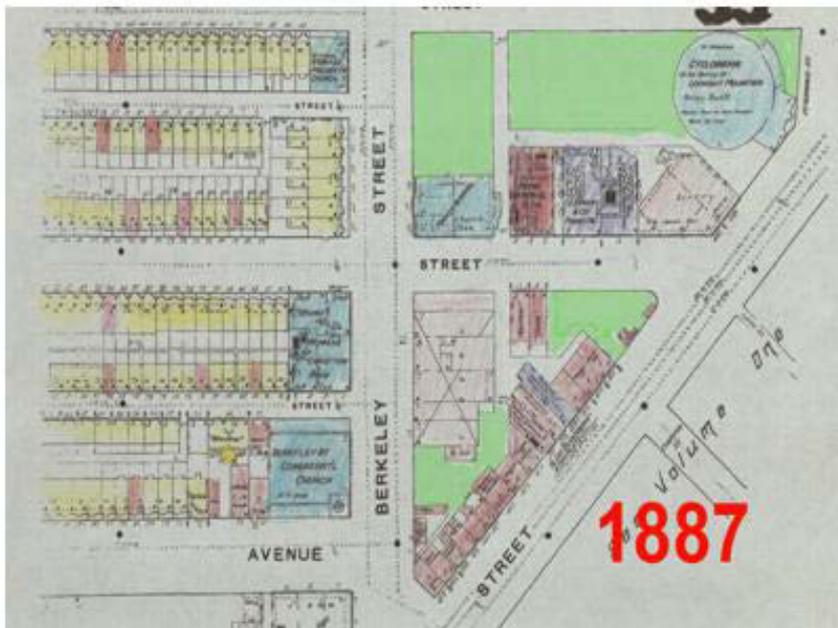
- Early Signs of Change
- Transportation and the Skyscraper
- A Vicious or Virtuous Cycle?
- All Roads Lead to Downtown

Images and Words

- Captions can play an analytical role or they can only provide basic identification and prose does the analytical work.
- Close reading: the close description of elements in the visual evidence. Can be in captions or in text
- Annotating maps versus prose description

1887 to 1897: (1) Subdivision of single family dwellings into flats
(2) Addition of hotel on formerly open space (3) Cyclorama becomes Castle Square Theater (4) Increasing commerce and heavier industry (5) Addition of Boston Protection Department
Source: "Boston, Mass." Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970.

<http://sanborn.umi.com>



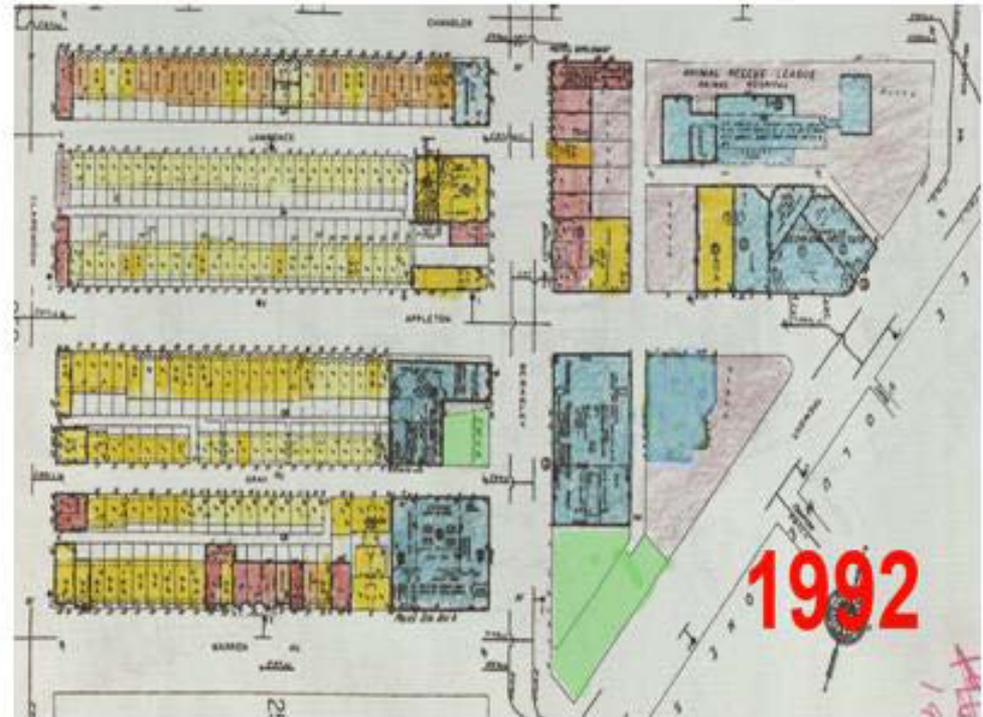
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South End: Caption as Analysis

1992:Population density finally begins to decrease on site by 1992, as several rooming houses become 4-family and 5-family apartments. Urban renewal seems to arrived late on my site.

Source:Sanborn Map Company.

Boston, Mass. Pelham, N.Y. : Sanborn Map Company. 1962, 1974, 1981, 1992.



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Linking broad themes to site specific dynamics

Diverse working class replaces middle and wealthy class

The changes that occurred on my site during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are clues to the long process of the wealthy mercantile class being replaced by the lower class, including immigrants. This story, while shared by the rest of the South End, took its own specific flavor in my site.

Subheadings as Spine: South End

- Diverse working class replaces middle and wealthy class
- Recessions (including Great Depression)
- Transportation Trends and the Automobile Age
- Economic depression in the South End until 1970s
- Institutional Expansion

Framing change: South End

Each neighborhood has its own story, woven at the intersections of historical trends, economic, social, and technological threads spun by influential individuals, whole societies, and world events. For my site, local peculiarities as well as the national forces of suburbanization, discriminatory loan policies, a rising automobile age and institutional expansion have come together to form a dynamic and never-ending evolution of physical form.

Read the Assignment Guide!

MIT OpenCourseWare
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