

sprawl. Today, the harbor area is identified as a historic district. Civil War remnants endure, like a house that once served as the last station on the “underground railroad” from which slaves were secretly moved to Canada by small boat.

The change from town to city seems less clear than the change from village to town. In some ways, a city is very much like a town, only bigger. It is still a discrete element in the landscape. Primarily a commercial center, the city has a major business district at its core. There are also smaller shopping and service centers spread to serve local neighborhoods, but people still go “down town.”

Perhaps the major difference is in the magnitude and diversity of the “outer challenge” that Lewis Mumford has spoken of as essential to change. A city serves a wide region that often includes several towns. It offers special services not available in towns. Among them are major medical and educational facilities; sports and entertainment venues; regional headquarters for businesses; convention and meeting halls; certain industries, both large and small; warehouses; and transfer points for shipping goods. Growth begets growth and when the city reaches a certain size threshold, it tends to become self-sustaining, circulating money within itself.¹⁴

It is the change now going on in the world from city to something still bigger that is more dramatic, having greater influence on our lives. The “something bigger” has variously been called “megalopolis” or “conurbation,” an aggregation or continuous network of urban communities. To understand some of the consequences of this change, and what might be needed to bring us back into balance with nature, we can look at Greater Los Angeles.