

Taming the City Wilderness

By

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Abstract

This thesis uses several cross-disciplinary methods to interrogate the first American social survey, *The City Wilderness* (1898), a settlement study conducted in Boston's South End neighborhood. The study was greatly influenced by European values of settler colonialism, and subsequently shaped traditional methods of early planning efforts. This process is now ingrained in the institutional knowledge of the field and built into the foundations of the former industrialized city center of the South End. By overlaying resident narratives on expert city plans, I reveal new spatial patterns of oppression to unearth the voices of those who the history of our profession once silenced and erased. In response to a statement recently released by the American Planning Association (APA) asking planners to address the structural disadvantages inflicted on the Black community by the profession and in support of our efforts to "raise the voice of the voiceless," the APA claims to provide new tools. In response, I argue that instead of wasting time, money and resources to create new tools, practitioners and the APA should work to apply a historic lens to existing tools and planning efforts to ensure we understand where the roots of structural racism grew to divide our communities. To achieve this goal, I will focus on pivotal decades between 1880 and 1910 that provided the foundation and framework for contemporary planning practices and settlement efforts. I predict that in doing so, planners and practitioners will gain a clearer understanding of where traditional methods and studies may have built the racial divides felt deep in the hearts of our communities still to this day.

Thesis Supervisor

Dr. Karilyn Crockett, Assistant Professor of Urban History, Public Policy & Planning

Thesis Reader

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Your spirits live on each day in my heart and through my work.

¹ In the first few pages of *The City Wilderness* study, Robert Woods writes the following dedication, “Mr. M.A. de Wolfe Howe supplied what may be little to give but is much to receive, the title”. It seems only fitting to begin the acknowledgement section in the same vein.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Acronyms

AEMP – Anti-eviction Mapping Project
APA – American Planning Association
APD – A Planner’s Dictionary
BPDA – Boston Planning and Development Agency
HUD – Department of Housing and Urban Development
SEHS – South End Historical Society

Key Terms

Blight - a characteristic of *urban decay*; a status declared by cities; the “unsightly condition including the accumulation of debris, litter, rubbish, or rubble; landscaping, characterized by uncontrolled growth or lack of maintenance; and any other similar conditions of disrepair and deterioration regardless of the condition of other properties in the neighborhood” - *Lincoln, Nebraska [Davidson, 2004]*

Blighted Area - also known as *urban decay*; “an area which: (a) has been proposed for HUD funding; (b) has met rehabilitation area criteria; An area within a municipal corporation, which area by reason of the presence of a substantial number of slums, deteriorated or deteriorating structures, predominance of defective or inadequate street layout, faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness, unsanitary or unsafe conditions, deterioration of site or other improvements, diversity of ownership.... ” - *State of Ohio [Davidson, 2004]*

Community - a “subarea of the city consisting of residential, institutional, and commercial uses sharing a common identity”- *Renton, Washington [Davidson, 2004]*

Displacement - is the “removal that refers to the physical presence of the person, but also to the cultural, linguistic, relational presence that exists outside of communities of people. It is a movement that results from a lack of economic and social power” [*AEMP, 2018*]

Diversity - “differences among otherwise similar elements that give them unique forms and qualities (e.g., housing diversity can be achieved by differences in unit size, tenure, or cost)” - *California Planning Roundtable [Davidson, 2004]*

Gentrification - “the rehabilitation and resettlement of low- and moderate-income urban neighborhoods by middle- and high-income professionals” [*APA, 2020*]

Planning - is “the process of creating long-term visions for places and communities as small as an intersection and as large as a region. Planning takes advantage of, and seeks to influence, the social, economic, physical, and natural factors affecting a community” [BPDA, 2020]

Root - the structure of a seedling that remains hidden underground and “functions as a means of anchorage and support”; “something that is an origin or source (as of a condition or quality)” [New Merriam-Webster, 2020]

Root Shock - “the traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one’s emotional ecosystem” [Fullilove, 2004]

Settler - “a person who arrives, especially from another country, in a new place in order to live there and use the land”; a resident living or studying at the South End House [Cambridge, 2020]

Settlement - “in the context of the US, refers to the process of outside residents “settling” in poor neighborhoods that they seek to fix, study, and serve” [Berry, 1986]

Settler Colonialism - an “ongoing structure rather than a past historical event serves as the basis for an historically grounded and inclusive analysis of U.S. race and gender formation; goal of settler to seize and establish property rights over land and resources required the removal of indigenous; framework can encompass the specificities of racisms and sexism affecting different racialized groups—especially Native Americans, blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans—while also highlighting structural and cultural factors that undergird and link these racisms and sexism” [Glenn, 2015]

Social Survey - a systematic collection of mostly quantitative data about people

Social Reform - a “spasmodic rather than continuous movement”; a “series of concrete valuable attempts to define and redefine the rights of man. The result may be called a social reform, but the series of efforts constitutes the social reform movement.” [Elmer, 1951]

Urban Decay - a process by which a city or part of a city exhibits a decaying or deteriorating built environment; often associated with 19th century industrialized cities; see *blight*, *blighted area*, and *urban renewal*

Urban Renewal - effort to remove *urban decay*; “dates back to the American Housing Act of 1949; efforts attempted to tackle widespread blight by assembling land to develop massive infrastructure and public facilities, usually at the expense of displacing poor and marginalized residents. Today, urban renewal is used in a much more nuanced manner to help create vibrant neighborhoods” [BPDA, 2020]

Wilderness - [physical] “uncultivated and unimproved areas that are not readily accessible” - *California Planning Roundtable* [Davidson, 2004]

INTRODUCTION

Racism for Black people is the denial of their humanity by White people. Racism is a matter of power. Racism is dehumanizing, devaluing, and focused on the controlling and exploiting of one race of people by another.

-Mel King writes in Chain of Change [1981]



Figure 01
The 'Roxbury Love Mural' in the process of being torn down [2020]

A Planner's Response Pt. 1

As residents took to the streets in cities across the United States to voice their response to the senseless killing of George Floyd on May 25th, 2020, the experts on cities, the American Planning Association (APA), released a written statement. The statement, appropriately titled *Righting the Wrongs of Racial Inequality*, calls for planners to reexamine the grave injustices and structural disadvantages inflicted on the Black community by our profession. In support of the “tens of thousands of planners across the nation who strive daily — despite setbacks and frustrations — to raise the voice of the voiceless”, the APA offers to provide new tools and techniques to combat the structural racism that continues to divide our communities. Meanwhile, the voices of the voiceless can be heard reverberating their community’s history off the very same buildings that cemented the racial divides the APA speaks of.

In the months following early protests, Boston residents can be heard publicly reciting narratives of their community history to combat the false narratives being voiced by real estate developers. The echoing plea at most demonstrations calls for an end to gentrification and planning practices that have historically displaced their communities, reminiscent of the 1950’s and 1960s urban renewal efforts that erased entire communities of immigrants and Black residents. A recent rally held in Roxbury on July 27th in response to a developer destroying yet another piece of cherished community history had one speaker calling for the complete dismantling of the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA), or in his own words, “an end to the Black Planned Displacement Agency” shown in Figure 01. And in a sense, one could argue the act of tearing down the mural and placing it in a dumpster did just that as the crumbled silhouette of Malcolm X now lay to rest in a metal bin with no physical trace of his existence left behind in the community.

We, the planners, on behalf of the voices we work to uplift, must ask ourselves: in a profession operating on the core principle of planning with and not for, why is it that the community we plan with is not for us? The short answer may be found by carefully examining the structural roots of racism established in the South End because of *The City Wilderness* study’s influence on the development of traditional planning practices in Boston. I will begin by defining the key terms and concepts central to this argument.

A Rooted Structure

The term *root* commonly refers to the structure of a seedling that remains hidden underground and “functions as a means of anchorage and support”². Another common use of the term *root*, equally as important in the context of my thesis, refers to “something that is an origin or source (as of a condition or quality)”³. Consider the importance of how the physical environment can provide support and a means for “anchorage” as it relates to both living species, such as plants, people, and communities and inanimate objects such as bricks, benches, and buildings. The point of this passage is to convey the relationship between place and its ability to provide space for support, connection, anchorage and in some cases, even a home.

The first time I moved away from my childhood home, and each subsequent time I have been uprooted from a place called home, my body experiences an emotional response that can only be described by Social Psychiatrist Mindi Fullilove’s (2004) theory of “root shock”. Root shock, according to Fullilove, is “the traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one’s emotional ecosystem”⁴. The core concept behind the development of the theory is framed in the context of one’s relationship to the built environment. For example, when a building is torn down or a community is displaced by planning tools such as urban renewal, the body’s nervous system immediately goes into root shock in response to the traumatic loss of attachment to that place. Low (2017) defines the concept of place attachment as “the basic idea that people are always embodied and embedded in place”⁵. Fullilove asks the reader to consider how Black populations have been disproportionately impacted by the process of “uprooting” or displacement as a direct result of historic planning efforts.

Building on the foundational understanding of place attachment provided by Fullilove and Low, I will further explore how place informs identity. The concept of place identity was first conceived in 1978 by a founder of environmental psychology, Harold M. Proshansky. Proshansky wanted to shift the lens of place identity from social context to include physical context. He

² Definition of the term “root” provided by the New Merriam-Webster dictionary

³ Ibid.

⁴ Fullilove, M. T. (2004). *Root shock*. (p.11)

⁵ Low, Setha. (2017). *Spatializing culture*. (p.27)

describes the intimate relationship that evolves between humans and the built environment as the experiences gained through continued interaction begin to “shape and influence the behavior” of the human over time⁶. I suggest this concept relates to each chapter in my thesis to explain why social workers and planners in the late 19th century were concerned with how the poor living conditions of industrial cities would adversely impact moral behaviors of the population.

Historic Roots of Social Mapping

At first the well-to-do and the poor live near together, the poor having their abode on the back streets. This is no absolute line of demarcation between the interests of the two classes. Both share, to a degree, in common. But as time goes on, the poor increase to such an extent, through industrial change at home and immigration from abroad, that they become overcrowded where they are, and begin to emerge into some of the front streets, dislodging and pushing along their more prosperous neighbors⁷.

-William Cole writes about the crowded tenement district of the South End [1898]

The dramatic alteration of city landscapes throughout the 19th century due to industrialization and waves of immigration were met with progressive era social reform movements that originated from the most unlikely of places. In response, the British government published an initial report detailing how the physical decay of East London was a threat to traditional English and Christian strongholds of moral society. Fed up with the sensationalism of media attention and falsehood of the report findings used to profile the poor living conditions of the crowded tenement district, a shipbuilder by the name of Charles Booth took matters into his own hands⁸. With the help of a few colleagues, Booth began to record real observations of the living conditions of the district; a method that was later adopted by city planners and still performed today. The result was a stunning color-coded survey, *the Descriptive Map of London Poverty* (1886), as shown in Figure 02. The map depicted how the actual levels of poverty along each street and the associated social class of the street’s residents were being misrepresented by the government’s descriptive findings and statistical data. The survey confirmed Booth’s original hypothesis of the report to be true.

⁶ Proshansky, H. M. (1978). *The city and self-identity*.

⁷ Woods, R. A. (1898). *The city wilderness: A settlement study*.

⁸ LSE. (2020).

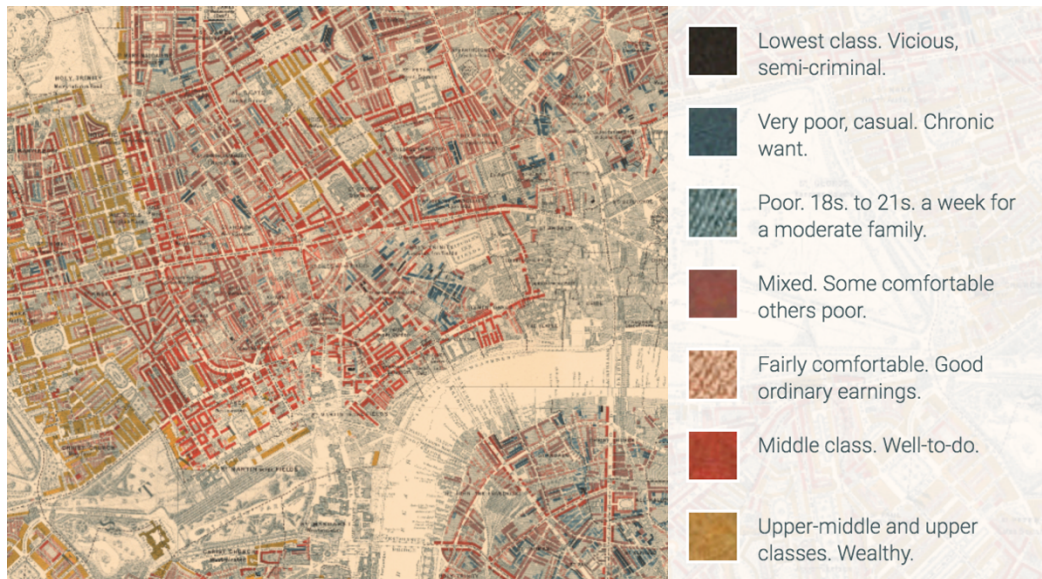


Figure 02

The Descriptive Map of London Poverty by Charles Booth [1886]

Historic Roots of the Settlement Movement

Following in his footsteps, a British sociologist and close colleague of Booth's, Canon Barnett, emerged as the new leader the social reform movement. Barnett believed the answer to the city's urban decay would result from the introduction of highly educated, predominantly Anglo-Saxon men to mixed ethnic populations residing in the heavily congested, working-class districts of East London. The men employed education and professed values of Christianity as tools to "socially cleanse"⁹ the growing immorality of modern society. The Settlement Movement was established with the opening of Toynbee Hall in 1884. The hall would serve as a "practical tool for remedying the cruelty, exploitation and bleakness found in city life"¹⁰ which resulted the structural collapse of traditional community life¹¹. In the first year serving as the Head of House at Toynbee Hall, Barnett gained international attention for his progressive work and in response to the global demand for education on the topic, he introduced a residency program for university

⁹ Woods, R. A. (1895). *The poor in great cities: Their problems and what is doing to solve them.*

¹⁰ Berry, M. E. (1986). *The settlement movement: 1886-1986.*

¹¹ Kellogg, P. U. (1930). *Social settlements.*

graduates and early practitioners to gain hands on experience. Social reformers from all over the world, particularly America, sought answers from Barnett to address the rapid decline of the physical and moral landscape of their cities.

The settlement movement quickly spread to the United States shortly after but took a subtler approach in response to its new geographic location. According to Margaret Berry¹², former head of the Federation of Settlements, the term “settlement” in the context of the US refers to the process of outside residents “settling” in poor neighborhoods that they seek to fix, study, and serve¹³. The process of “settling in” demands outside social workers conduct their studies as friendly neighbors, not outside experts, to gain the trust and support of the local community. This demand was stated to ensure the settlers’ relationship to residents would not hinder the future progress of their work after the motivation behind their studies were made public. As a result of a successful settling in process in the South End, the settlement house became a municipal tool used to identify where populations of the “wilderness” were located in order to diagnose problem areas in desperate need of beautification and social recovery. After just two short decades, the new approach to social work and planning expanded to over 400 houses in thirty-four different states.

Historic Roots of the City Beautiful Movement

Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once rewarded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.

-Daniel Burnham writes about The Plan of Chicago [1909]

The emergence of the City Beautiful movement coincides with time period when the first social surveys were published by settlement houses on the state of urban decay in industrial cities, yet few historic planning texts mention the two in relation to one another; or even dare speculate if it’s mere coincidence or not. The movement was inspired by architect Daniel Burnham’s “White City” featured in his hometown of Chicago at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. The stark contrast between the cleanliness of Burnham’s monumental white buildings and the luscious

¹² Margaret Berry is a prominent voice in the US movement and former head of the Federation of Settlements.

¹³ Berry, M. E. (1986). *The settlement movement: 1886-1986*

landscapes of Frederick Law Olmsted's boulevard and the dirty, crowded tenement conditions of working-class districts had fairgoers up in arms. Tensions reached an insurmountable point between residents and municipalities over the sanitary conditions which catalyzed the movement and established the start of planning profession. The growing demand for social reform and the physical cleansing of America's industrial cities became planning's first frontier. The similarity between the motivation of the planning and settlement movements appear almost too obvious to ignore. How is it that experts fail to mention the parallels in the approach to moral behavior and methods of study between the two movements? Could this be the moment in which the roots of systemic racism began to establish in cities?

The critical discourse in planning the built environment and its complex social history is intertwined with ethics of race, class, gender, and perceptive 'othering' with little evidence of its existence. This is likely a result of how planning recorded observations of populations in well-known narratives, maps, monuments, and city plans as a reflection of the narrow, often biased political and social views held by planners at the time in which they were developed. An occurrence that can be understood with the anti-thesis of W.E.B. Du Bois's theory of "double-consciousness". The theory of "double-consciousness" explains how Black residents are able to view the world through an intersectional lens, or viewpoints other than their own bestowed upon them in the form of a "cursed gift" from the nature of Black visibility¹⁴. The antithesis of Bu Bois's theory might explain the historic erasure of Black residents by settlers in their narrow choice of categories for racial groupings represented by district maps and written in the descriptions explaining each grouping's moral behavior. In Chapter 3, I will argue the settler's inability to accurately voice the needs of South End residents with traditional investigative methods of social work is likely due to the inability of the white male investigators to imagine needs outside of their own, or lack of "double-consciousness". As a result, planning efforts and reform movements aimed to fix the social conditions of industrial tenement districts have developed with little consideration for the vital role played by the built environment and its ability to shape diverse identities until recently. My thesis will address the following research question: *How can we apply a historic lens to early social surveys to expose how they influence current planning practices?*

¹⁴ B. D. B. W. E., Battle-Baptiste, W., & Rusert, B. (2018).

A Planner's Response Pt. 2

As defined by the APA, the role of the professional planner is to provide a better future for all our diverse social identities of residents. To achieve this, planners must go beyond false promises of inclusion and diversity to ensure their words hold true as bond. The bond that is currently broken in Boston as exhibited in the narrative above. In response, my thesis argues that a thorough historic analysis reveals the errors of planning's past ways before any future engagement is to occur between planners and residents. While it is out of the current scope to answer what tools or policies specifically perpetuate the structural racism experienced and voiced by the community today, I provide a mixed-methods approach to suggest where planners can start, which is the root of the problem. To investigate this answer, I will analyze the first American social survey that paved the way for the emergence of the planning profession and its' fundamental tools for study. For the profession to understand how structures of oppression were initially established by city plans, then planners must expose where the roots of structural racism have been buried deep in the landscape by the historic studies and efforts.

FRAMING THE ROOTS

The following questions were asked to provide a framework for my interrogation of *The City Wilderness* study and are listed below to highlight where evidence can be found in each chapter:

Root #1: When analyzing a social survey of this nature, it is important to first consider *who* the intended audience was and *who* was the subject of study. Even though the investigator approached the social problems of the South End with the best of intentions, the results of their efforts were concluded to be far from "good" as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. This is often the case with planning studies as residents that were meant to be planned for are eventually planned out of their neighborhood by future real estate development.

Root #2: Key observations and findings about the moral and physical nature or “wilderness” of the South End district were documented by the settlers and compiled into the 300-page social survey; the same way planners conduct neighborhood studies today. But *what* social or physical characteristics does the qualitative data attempt to describe? The methods and approach of the study are revealed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

Root #3: The strategic location in the South End and as outlined by district boundary of the study clearly define *where* the House wanted to conduct its work. What are implications for populations of the South End *where* the social workers chose to conduct their study? The answers will be discussed in Chapters 2, 4, and 5

Root #4: When analyzing what questions were being asked by settlers, how the study identified problems, who was asking the questions and why they were in the South End, it is important to consider the historical context of when the study took place. Attitudes and descriptions of populations shift over time and often reflect the social and political views of the geographic location. The context as it pertains to the moral wilderness is provided in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. The context as it pertains to the physical wilderness is provided in Chapters 2 and 4.

Root #5: *Why* might a sociologist and his fellow academic colleagues want to move into what outsiders considered to be a “dangerous, decaying, evil” neighborhood to observe and record the behaviors of unfamiliar populations? Aside from the initial fascination with the neighborhood, what were the key motivations behind *why* the settlers chose to conduct their study in South End? The answers as to *why* will be discussed in Chapter 3, 4 and 5.

CHAPTER ONE: METHODS

“Think about where you are at this very moment, reading these words. Think about the land beneath your feet, under your seat, and right outside your window. Chances are that your current location is like much of the rest of our planet today - dramatically altered and under the direct control of human beings (see Figure 02), utterly unrecognizable in terms of its prehistoric qualities. These changes might have improved your current comfort, but something valuable and increasingly rare has been lost in the taming of where you are now.”

What is a wilderness? - U.S. Forest Service [2020]



Figure 03

The result of decades of human control of the wilderness in the South End [BRA ,1940]

In Plain “Site”

I believe there is no lack in documentation of the popular urban history of American cities, rather a lack in documentation and accessibility of diverse urban histories that might challenge them. My passion to uncover hidden community narratives of the past and place them in dialogue with the present moment has kept me typing throughout the longwinded saga that became the writing of this thesis in a global pandemic. The current state of social and political injustices faced by cities and residents may feel overwhelming to those who are meant to respond with design interventions, however I strongly believe it is the responsibility and duty of planners to provide answers. We must lower our expert voices in order to raise those of the residents who our profession failed to listen to in the past if we are to divorce planning values of today from those of our past which were built on settler colonial and imperialist ideals. To frame my thesis, I used the following methods:

Archival Methods

The bulk of my initial research was conducted in both digital and physical archives. The evidence acquired in my last visit to Northeastern Special Collections significantly informs my findings and greatly influenced the direction of my analysis framed in this thesis. Unfortunately, due to the unforeseen limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic, I could not conduct any additional research in the physical archives after March 10th therefore several narrative gaps may remain that I will hopefully address in the future.

Content and Contextual Analysis

For the contextual analysis of my thesis, the institutional knowledge provided is heavily influenced by information provided in *The City Wilderness* study and the planning efforts of the City Beautiful movement. The social study was written by resident settlement workers of the South End House based on their field observations and personal values of morality. The content analysis is applied to resident and expert narratives from within and outside of the neighborhood. Theories and findings from leading experts in the field such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Jane Jacobs are similarly applied.

Discourse Analysis

One of the primary methods of my thesis is discourse analysis, or the study of how language is used between different people. Early observations and written texts describing the population and geographic distribution by race and ethnic group of South End residents are crucial to understanding the analysis in relation to the future trajectory of planning efforts in Boston. Many narratives about populations of the South End neighborhood and *The City Wilderness* study exist, however they exist separately. My key arguments are established by engaging multiple narratives, materials, and voices in dialogue to analyze a given topic and gain a clear perspective of what was factual at the time. This approach allows the reader to determine the true history after considering diverse points of view.

Personal Experience and “Expertise”

Due to several limitations out of my control, the original mixed-method approach for conducting this thesis were no longer possible. My diverse background and knowledge acquired from studying and practicing as a landscape architect, carpenter, and urban planner informed my arguments. My critique of the field of planning and the inability for planners to uplift the voices of the community stem from years of facilitating community engagement workshops only to reveal the cognitive dissonance between resident and the expert voices. My approach to center urban history and archives stems from the inaccessibility and erasure of community history inherent in traditional methods of historic preservation (e.g. city archives, institutional archives, landmark preservation, academia, etc.). The research methods I applied were informed by the wide range of experiences I had in community over the past two years when collaborating with colleagues, community organizers and activists, youth researchers, and Dr. Karilyn Crockett on the Hacking the Archive research project. I sought to develop a mixed-methods approach that allowed for resident narratives to be in dialogue with expert narratives to incorporate their voices as told by them, into what history determines to be “fact” or “popular” or “diverse”.

LIMITATIONS

As mentioned in the Methods section, March 10th, 2020 was the last day I had access to the United South End Settlement archive folders at Northeastern before all Boston institutions including universities, public libraries, archives, and businesses shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given these constraints and the untimely manner of contracting the COVID virus in April, all timelines and milestones for the project had to shift to the summer rendering most of the project's research and mixed- methods approach obsolete, and institutional resources to aid with my efforts non-existent. This meant a significant pivot which I believe ultimately benefited the scope of the research and allowed for my thesis to draw more from personal experiences as an “academic” researcher and my professional “expertise” obtained while practicing as a landscape architect and urban planner.

Another major limitation was my inability to interview community members and those who wrote the historic narratives I reference throughout my thesis. As a result, I had to rely on my personal interpretation of existing community narratives and histories which, by nature, goes against my thesis statement. I believe my argument would have been strengthened by actively engaging with the voices of today including community organizers, archivists, and authors of the narratives beyond my previous interactions or those experienced at recent demonstrations. The inability to interview folks only further highlights and reaffirms the need to incorporate and overlay community voices with expert narratives. This especially holds true when speaking on behalf of diverse voices and identities which I unfortunately could not entirely avoid in my approach given the circumstances.

While I never could have imagined when I began researching in January that my entire thesis would be written in the quiet isolation of my studio apartment, I am grateful for the close proximity to my bed for the occasional restorative nap, limited only by my busy Zoom schedule and frequent overwatering of my houseplant “wilderness”.

CHAPTER TWO: THE NEW FRONTIER

The peculiarity of American institutions is, the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people—to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life.

- Frederick J. Turner, 1921

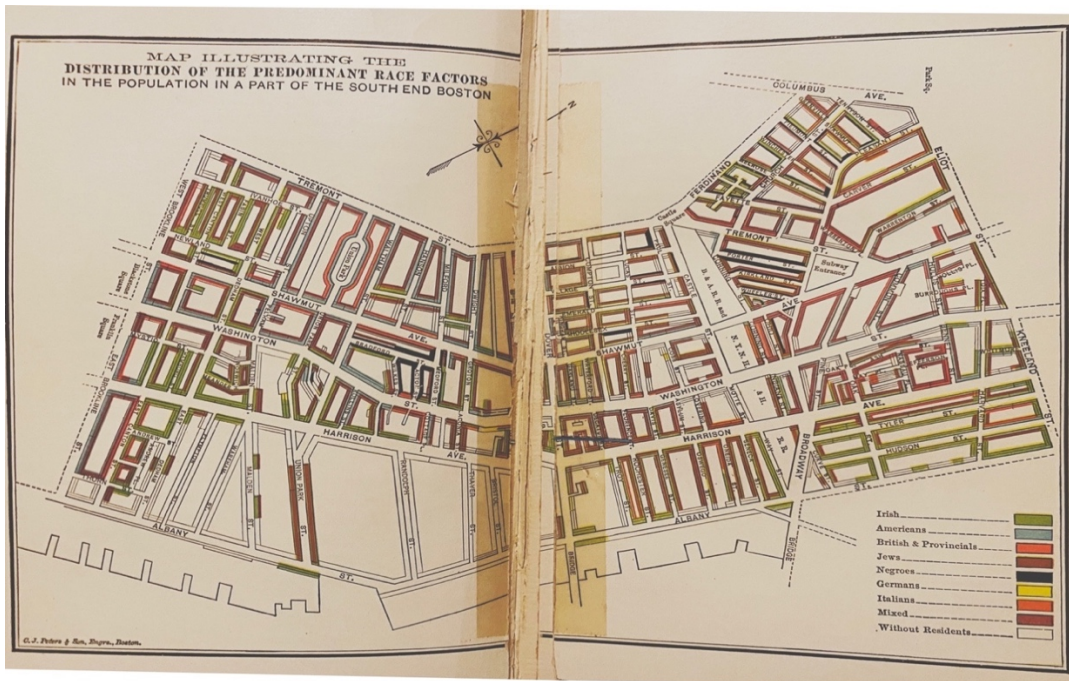


Figure 04

Distribution of Predominant Race Factors District Map in *The City Wilderness* [1898]

Locating the Annex

My first encounter with *The City Wilderness* study was accidental, yet profound. A colorful map of the district caught my eye as I was scrolling down the South End Historical Society's blog post detailing the history of *Boston's "melting pot"* or diverse populations, as shown in Figure 04. In response to the headline, "*Who was living in the South End?*", the author included the district map showing race factors of the population. What piqued my initial interest was the simple graphic layout of the streets and buildings on the base map and how the cartographer overlaid thick colored lines to highlight where the immigrant and Black populations or "wilderness" were living on each block (which I will further discuss in Chapter 4). The pixelated photo of the map on the SEHS website left much to be desired providing little detail about the study. And so, began my yearlong research endeavor.

It appeared a fated victory when I was finally able to locate an original copy of *The City Wilderness* after weeks of searching far and wide. There was only one copy available in the region and it happened to be in MIT's Library Storage Annex. The book arrived several weeks later in what can only be described as a Pandora's box¹⁵. After carefully unwinding the two tightly wrapped strings, I began unfolding the multiple layers of cardboard that stood between me and the musty smell of the tattered pages of history. The title, *The City Wilderness*, appears handwritten on the green leather-bound side, almost as if it was inscribed with a whiteout pen. As I gently pulled back the cover and opened the first few pages, tiny pieces of paper fell out of the fray; an allegory I suppose for what I would later discover.

The Urban Wilderness

The complex history of the South End neighborhood is a tale of two cities. One told by famed urban historians and scholars, written on the shiny plaques of the historic landmark district. The other's history largely inaccessible, only to be found in the annexes of institutional archives or erased and buried beneath the foundations of planning's oppressive past renewal efforts. Why is it that marginalized community narratives are often silenced by the often-subjective urban histories in the institutional knowledge of the profession? Is it a simple matter of Americans not knowing

¹⁵ For a picture of the original *City Wilderness* book in 'Pandora's box', see Appendix A.

their urban histories or is it a result of the monumental efforts made by city beautiful era planners to cleanse the streets and morals of society at the start of the 20th century?

The answer according to famed urban historian Sam Warner Bass in his appropriately titled book *The Urban Wilderness*, is a mixture of both. This thesis embraces Bass's perspective in hopes of explaining how the seemingly apparent connection between city planning and the settlement movement may have previously been overlooked by residents and experts alike. Bass provides a theoretical explanation for the urban phenomena that is central to consider in the framing of this thesis:

They (meaning residents and experts) live in one of the world's most urbanized countries as if it were a wilderness in both time and space. Beyond some civic and ethnic myths and a few family and neighborhood memories, Americans are not conscious that they have a past and that by their actions they participate in making a future"¹⁶.

I will discuss in Chapter 4 how the observation made by Bass speaks to the lived reality of many immigrant and Black families of Boston whose history was erased or "whitewashed" by the common narratives of how the South End neighborhood developed¹⁷. Dolores Hayden's explanation of this occurrence states that prior to the 1970s, the ethnic diversity of populations read more like a "city biography" listing key dates, facts, and figures as proof of their existence instead of the proving how factors of identity and race greatly impacted their lived experience. Not to mention how the decentralized nature of institutional archives and community histories that offer a different perspective make it nearly impossible for residents to piece together a "common" history of their relatives who came before them. My thesis will argue why Bass's theories of known and unknown history might explain when the visibility of the diverse resident populations of the South End may have "subconsciously" been erased by social mapping techniques the American settlers used to conduct *The City Wilderness* study. While many Americans may not be fully aware of their common urban history, I argue that many displaced residents of the South End are well

¹⁶ Warner, S. B. (1972). *The urban wilderness*.

¹⁷ See Appendix D for resident narratives and diverse perspectives of the neighborhood in development.

aware of the historic planning efforts that uprooted their community, particularly as told by those who lived in the thickets of the historic South End wilderness.

The Study Overview

In 1891, American sociologist Robert Archey Woods opened the Andover House¹⁸ in the South End neighborhood of Boston to serve as an extension of his theological studies at Andover College. After completing a brief residency at Toynbee Hall and witnessing how English sociologist approached issues of urban decay, Woods was determined to apply his new learnings to voice the needs of residents living in the poor working-class district of the surrounding neighborhood. After several years of operating with little to no profit, he came up with a novel idea inspired by Booth's social survey maps he saw on display at the Hall. To garner support from local institutions and financial funding to afford his future endeavors, Woods along with several resident scholars and associates of the House began a two-year long, systematic social study. The results were published in *The City Wilderness* (1898), and primarily focused on the physical conditions and moral behaviors of the residents because of the recent influx of "newcomer"¹⁹ populations into the tenement district. Interestingly enough, the study rarely acknowledged or referenced to the field of planning studies yet is of extreme relevance as the first American social survey to document the state of tenement and industrial decay.

Written evidence of *The City Wilderness* (1898) study and the South End House's early prominence during the late 19th century is scattered throughout the field of sociology, yet seemingly absent from field of planning²⁰. Only after I had read a significant amount of literature from a wide range of disciplines did I come to realize the study's influential role in establishing the profession of city planning in Boston. My thesis aims to address the narrative gap in the institutional knowledge of planning and the study by overlaying a wide range of narratives provided by residents and experts living in the neighborhood at the time. My goal is to contextualize and trace how the attitudes and methods of *The City Wilderness* may have influenced today's planning tools which I later argue might reveal where the problematic systems of oppression were rooted in the South End community. I conclude if practitioners are address the historic reality of planning's role in perpetuating structural racism in Boston, then planners must first expose what moral attitudes or

¹⁸ Renamed the South End House in 1895. See Chapter Four for more information.

¹⁹ The term "newcomer" was used to describe immigrant and Black residents that recently moved to Boston.

²⁰ See Appendix B for global book reviews.

values of settler colonialism may have been planted in the soil by early settlers, as shown in Figure 05. In other words, if planning hopes to get to the root of its systemic issues, planners should begin with the roots of early settlers and settlements.



Figure 05
A map of New-England as evidence of the violent erasure of Boston’s wilderness by settlers [Foster, 1677]

Settlers in the City

Robert Woods states in the subtle yet telling opening pages of the preface to *The City Wilderness*, “Mr. M.A. de Wolfe Howe supplied what may be little to give but is much to receive, the title”²¹. But what exactly is Woods alluding to? Let us begin with what we know. According to Woods, the phrase ‘city wilderness’ first appeared in an 1896 Atlantic Monthly article *Settlers in the City Wilderness* written by journalist and former settler of the South End House, M.A. de Wolfe

²¹ Woods, R. A. (1898). *The city wilderness: A settlement study*. New York: Garrett Press.

Howe. In the article, Howe writes about the spatial divide that exists in many industrialized American cities between a “cultivated half” of the population and “the other half”. The “other”, emphasized with quotations in Howe’s remark, is in reference to what he later describes as the “poor, crowded, vicious half” of the district population identified as being “in desperate need of a civilizing influence from settlement residents”²². The term “wilderness” used by Howe to signal the need for social reform was oddly reminiscent of how he described its early use by settlers in 1688 as God’s “choice grain” selected to colonize the native wilderness of Boston²³.

English Puritan and John Winthrop, as with most settlers at the time, left his motherland of England to answer the lord’s prayer to civilize a new nation. He believed the Church “hath no place left to fly into but the wilderness”²⁴ and this fight for social reform required his presence abroad. The taming of city wilderness began the moment Winthrop, Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and eleven other men in the colony set foot on a plantation in Cambridge. The men were on a colonizing mission, set to explore and conquer the latest frontier, hidden behind wild thickets of Boston’s famed peninsula. Although Howe coined the phrase “*settlers in the city wilderness*”, I argue the notion of the phrase is rooted in the founding of Harvard College in 1636. In a diary entry dated 1642, Winthrop tells the story of how nine Christian men commenced at Harvard College as they began sowing the seeds of the settler colonial mindset in teaching Christian values to the native American Indians whose land they once stole. Little did Winthrop know that nearly 250 years later, the seeds he planted would grow to be “flowers of the wilderness” in the form of settlement houses²⁵. Houses of enlightened Harvard men were strewn throughout the neighborhoods of Boston on a mission to expand the vast territories of community knowledge as an extension of the city’s “state of mind”²⁶.

²² Howe, M. A. D. W. (1896). *Settlers in the city wilderness*.

²³ From “Boston, The Place and The People” written by Howe in 1903, (p.4.)

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SETTLERS

The pith of our undertaking lies in the accumulation of personal influences brought to bear from within upon the entire life of a given neighborhood. The settlement has thus far made shift with rather rudimentary appliances; but this has made it certain that all the keen first impressions would be associated with persons, kept as free as possible from the restraints of institution, organization, or method”

- Robert A. Woods wrote in the Sixth Edition of the SEHA Report (1898)

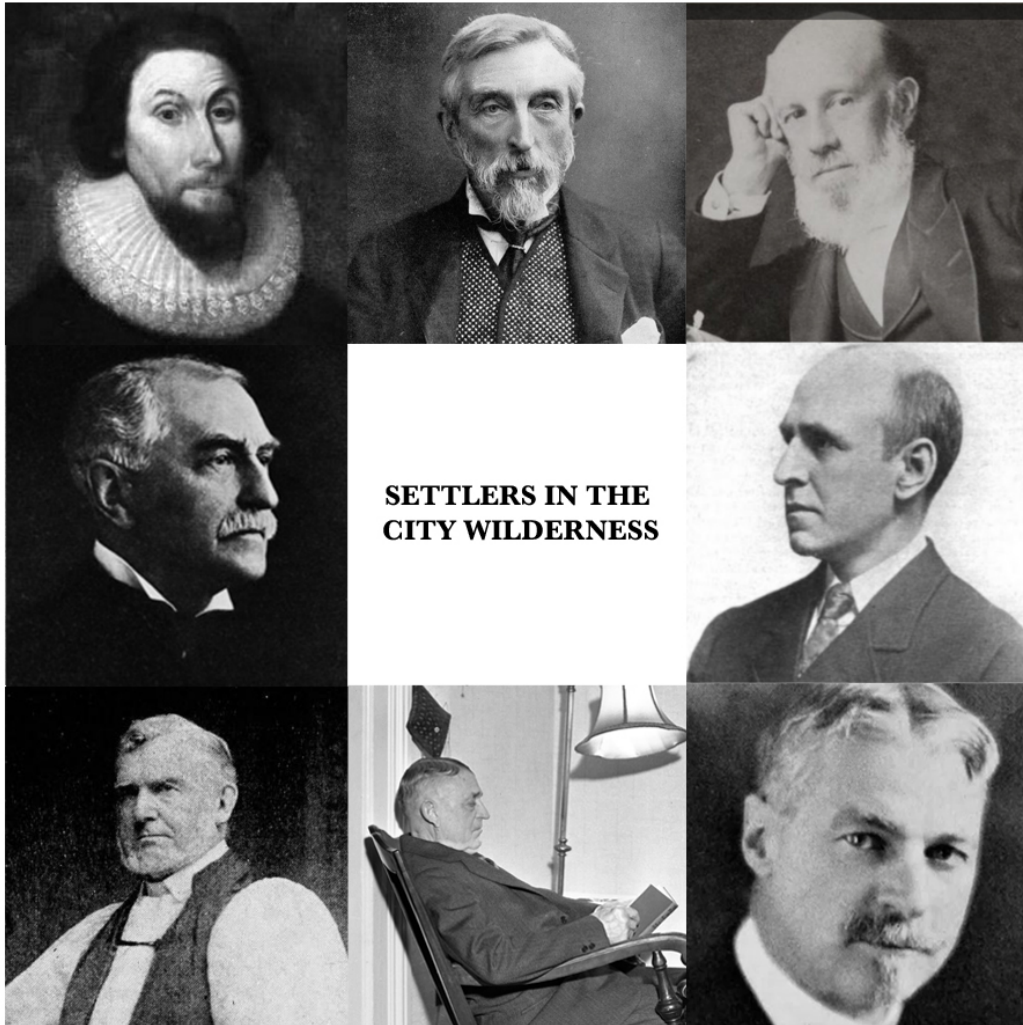


Figure 06

Settlers in the City Wilderness. [Photos listed in order from left to right]

[Top] John Winthrop, Charles Booth, Samuel 'Canon' Barnett

[Middle] William J. Tucker, Robert Archey Woods

[Bottom] M.A. de Wolfe Howe, Edward H. Chandler, Frederick A. Bushée

The Pioneer

Robert Archey Woods was the first resident settler²⁷ and Head of the South End House from 1891 until his sudden death in 1925. Woods was born in the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1865 and at the young age of sixteen began his undergraduate studies at Amherst College with a special interest in theology and social science. He graduated in 1886 and began a period of travel and investigation abroad which led him to a 6-month residency at Toynbee Hall. At the beginning of his studies, Woods immersed himself in learning about the phases of social awakening that inspired the settlement movement. He about how the core principles of socialism, particularly Christian Socialism, could be adopted by enlightened settlement men that enabled them to apply their academic interest soon after graduation and restore the living conditions of those who suffered in modernity. Furthermore, Woods was inspired by how one man could gain the loyalty of hundreds of followers when led by values Christian values to unionize the state and restore the order to traditional society once again²⁸.

As a university man himself, the concept of opening a settlement house as a mechanism for carrying out study and social work fascinated Woods. In 1891, after completing the residency program at Toynbee, Woods returned to the East Coast of America an enlightened man. Under his newfound passion for leadership, Woods and in partnership with his Theological Seminary Professor William J. Tucker opened a settlement house at 6 Rollins Street in the South End neighborhood of Boston. The university men and scholars that would later become the residents of the South End House had much in common pioneers of the movement. As shown in Figure 06, the face of the new frontier was that only of white, highly educated, English and American men.

The Settlement House

The singular idea of starting the house was to operate as a resident work and study program for university students to perform social research experiments; a neighborhood laboratory of sorts

²⁷ The Settlement Movement uses the term resident to describe the people living in the settlement house. I have adopted Margaret Berry's term "settlers" in reference to the residents of the South End House to avoid confusion between House residents and the residents of the South End neighborhood. Residents living in the South End district will also be referred to as citizens, neighbors, and community members throughout this thesis.

²⁸ Woods, R. A. (1895). *The poor in great cities: Their problems and what is doing to solve them.*

like what Woods had experienced back in London²⁹. In the first year of operation, the house had a total of five settlers and over one hundred members consisting of local South End residents, Boston residents, community supporters, political leaders, and donors. The strategic location of the house in the South End was selected due to its proximity to most of the city's immigrant population and was where Woods and Tucker thought the most complicated social conditions might exist. Woods selected an area to conduct his work that was highly reminiscent of the successful criteria of social reform leaders he writes about in his first published work, the *English Social Movements* in 1892, just one year after opening the South End House. The neighborhood presented a vast opportunity for future expansion of his enlightened moral territories and the only thing he determined was left was to establish a following.

“The settlement's desire to establish personal relationship was in order to concentrate efforts of moral influence upon specific groups in the neighborhood”³⁰. According to Woods, it was extremely important that the settlement's work be carried out in the immediate vicinity of the settlement to foster an intimate social relationship with the community. This principle of operation proved effective by translating their expertise into neighborliness and gaining the support from the community. When Woods proclaimed how work of the settlers would be carried out, he recited the phrase “the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation”³¹ often. For only religious values could guide them along the path towards achieving moral progress. The idea of progress, I argue, is central to understanding the actions carried out by Robert Woods, beginning with his choice of where to locate the South End House and the careful selection process used to select residents to be a part of his mission.

²⁹ Woods, R. A. (1898). *The city wilderness: A settlement study*.

³⁰ Woods, R. A. (1898). *p. 270*

³¹ SEHA. (1907) *South end house association: Sixth annual report (1898)*.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WILDERNESS

Cities are an immense laboratory of trial and error, failure and success, in city building and city design. This is the laboratory in which city planning should have been learning and forming and testing its theories. Instead, practitioners of this discipline [if such it can be called] have ignored the study of success and failure in real life, and are instead guided by principles derived from the behavior and appearance of towns, suburbs, tuberculosis sanatoria, fairs and the imaginary dream cities from anything but cities themselves.

- Jane Jacobs wrote in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961)



Figure 07

A rendering of the settlers of the South End discussing race factors of the “wilderness”

The State of Decay

The transition of Boston's South End in the 1820s from a narrow strip of land connecting the city center to Roxbury to a small colonial neighborhood built atop a vacant landfill to a bustling metropolis with the growth of new industries and railroads left divisions in the landscape. By the late 19th century, the crowded and deteriorating conditions of the South End had wealthy residents fleeing to the suburbs. Their aging single-family homes, now left behind, were quickly converted to tenements and lodging houses in response to the recent influx of poor immigrants and working-class residents seeking steady employment and affordable accommodation. According to residents of the South End House, as the racial and ethnic diversity of the district steadily increased, social conditions and morality rapidly decreased. This chapter describes how the settler's approach to various aspects of the wilderness were informed by their diagnosis of the living conditions in *The City Wilderness* study; likely a result of their biased perceptions used to describe the social behaviors of residents in the district.

The South End district had several charitable and philanthropic organizations working to eradicate poverty at the same time as the South End House, however very few of these organizations were effective by the nature of their relationship to the built environment. There is a basic assumption amongst social scientists that space is merely a social construct. Without the presence of culture, a significant tie to history or material connection to the land it occupies, a space will become a non-place over time. Low (2017) explains how spatializing culture can provide planners with a powerful tool for uncovering where built forms of exclusion or division exist. If we are to apply this theory to the evolution of the South End neighborhood after the study was published, one might begin to understand how the erasure of the diverse community occurred. The observations recorded by the settlers of the study presumed the residents on the streets were actors of the built environment whereby their actions, social relations, presence, and often non-presence were explained their race or ethnicity³². Woods spoke of the potential success of the university settlement model in the South End in terms of its ability to elevate the moral sense of the poor by operating as a laboratory of social science rather than a charitable establishment.

³² These observations are further analyzed in the Approach to the Wilderness section.



Figure 08

The urban decay of the New York Street as result of neglect of the wilderness. [BRA ,1957]

Mapping the Decay

One of the methods deployed by the settlers for communicating the decay of the living conditions beyond written description was the use of social maps. To render the wilderness legible to outsiders, the settlers recorded personal observations of each individual building typology, presence of dominant race or ethnic group, and industrial character of the population. Unfortunately, the maps failed to apply an intersectional lens which could have been more effective in explaining, by color, how diversity contributed to moral behavior of the population as different groups in the South End often socialized with one another.

The study placed a strong emphasis on locality and which streets were associated with certain groups to define which type of municipal services were needed in each area to address the physical conditions. While operating as what might appear to the outside observer as a small local charity, the greater mission of the House was to influence municipal reform by collaborating with private developers, trade organizations, and municipal services as they relate to zoning and public infrastructure. As elaborated by Woods (1902),

In the matter of municipal reform this settlement has followed a unique method where residents took their share in general movements of improvement of the administration of the municipal departments and felt very strongly that municipal reform is a matter of aim rather than of methods. The house has therefore stood for active propaganda and energetic political work toward have the city government enter into well-considered enterprise for the elevation of the electorate by making them healthy and more intelligent, happier.³³

In the case of the social survey, the physical wilderness according to Woods consists of tenement and lodging houses. The moral wilderness consists mainly of the Irish and Black residents. I have combined both the physical and moral wilderness of these two groups in the district maps to follow and performed a spatial analysis of their key factors as seen in Figure 10. In the areas marked by a symbol social recovery, such as the South End House, Denison House, and Lincoln House, the strategic locations of the settlement houses were chosen in proximity to existence of “the wilderness”. The wilderness map (Figure 10) highlights how Woods attempted to maintain spatial control of the district as shown in their recorded observations and written documentation³⁴.

The results of their study were later adopted and used by municipal agencies and the planning board to inform their future efforts³⁵. Despite the best efforts of the settlement house and Woods, the South End’s urban decay continued into the 1930s as aging infrastructure and disinvestment from city services left the overcrowded district to fend for itself. Large-scale public housing projects were proposed by the city to replace the tenement and lodging house concentrations shown on district maps and approved by most White citizens as witnessed in the crowd being shown in Figure 09. In the words of the City Planning Board, the time had come to introduce a new strategy to save the “diseased heart of the metropolitan region”³⁶.

³³ SEHA. (1907) *South end house association: Tenth annual report (1902)*.

³⁴ Evidence of this strategy can be found in the SEHA. (1907) *South End House Report 1892-1907*.

³⁵ Read Wood’s (1902) *Americans in Process* to trace the legacy of how *The City Wilderness* informed similar studies conducted in the Boston neighborhoods of the North End, West End, Charlestown, Roxbury, etc.

³⁶ Lopez, R. (2015). *Boston's south end: the clash of ideas in a historic neighborhood*.



Figure 09

Residents of the South End discuss the fate of the “wilderness”. [BRA, 1957]

Mapping the Wilderness

The South End House’s approach to the populations of the district were similar to those of Arthur Van Gennep (1972). Gennep was the first anthropologist to infer that individuals and groups acquire access and privilege to certain societal attributes by birth; the primary factor Woods used to categorize residents in the South End. More recent scholarship on topics of racism and settler colonialism might agree with Gennep’s concept of identity privilege at birth but disagree with the oversimplification of how different identities are lumped together as “other” as seen in the *Settlers in the Wilderness* text. Howe describes the “other” as the populations on the “other” side of the industrial city, what Woods and Howe both referred to as the “wilderness”. With this in mind, let us consider how the concept of the wilderness informed the settler’s approach to mapping their observations of the “other” South End population in 1896 by first analyzing the city of Boston and BPDA planners historic use grouping populations by race, or what Glenn (2015) describes as “racial clustering”.

The method of clustering different racial groups to show the relative shifts in neighborhood demographics was used by the BPDA up until the 1970s when they added three additional categories. The use of only three categories or what Glenn considers to be “umbrella terms” i.e. White, Black or African American, and Other Race by planners inherently leads to the erasure of

the community's cultural values, individual experiences, and moral behaviors.³⁷ And if one were to trace the BPDA's use of umbrella terms to the early descriptions and categories used by the settlers in *The City Wilderness*; a key inference can be made. Both the settler's and the planner's approach to study and categorization of the diverse populations of the South End may be rooted in the early efforts of the colonial settlers described in Chapter 2 that sought to expand Europe's frontier by tempering the mind of the "other"³⁸.

Another theory for understanding the South End House's approach to the describing the wilderness is revealed when looking at how the field of sociology explained issues of morality. In fact, the settler's approach to categorizing racial and ethnic groups, particularly when reading how the moral behaviors of Irish and Black residents were perceived, is highly reflective of the widespread colonial agendas of White social workers at that time. In the powerful words of W.E.B. Du Bois, this commonly held belief that the innate moral failings of African Americans were responsible for the racial and social inequalities in poor industrial cities, is ultimately what motivated White settlers to conduct settlement work in the first place³⁹. According to the study, it was the innate moral failings of the Irish and Black residents of the South End that led to Woods and his fellow settlers labelling the entire South End district a moral wilderness. Russ Lopez (2015) points out "the chauvinistic ideology used to justify European colonization in Africa, imperialism in South America and exploitation in Asia as it framed how non-white and immigrant populations should be treated"⁴⁰, an attitude also confirmed by Glenn⁴¹.

The determination of Woods and his colleagues to civilize the moral behavior of citizens in their approach can be observed in the same determination held by planners when they attempt to improve the existing character of local communities. In the study, the local character or what they referred to as "wilderness", is the shorthand term used to reference the negative moral characteristics of the racially and ethnically diverse population. To locate the "racial types" in order to address this problem, the South End house used a color-coded system inspired by the early Booth poverty maps Woods had seen on display in Toyne Hall. The major difference, which speaks to the racial nature of the settlement work in the United States at the time, is the clear

³⁷ Blauner. (1972). *Racial oppression in America*.

³⁸ From "Boston, The Place and The People" written by Howe in 1903, p.36.

³⁹ B. D. B. W. E., Battle-Baptiste, W., & Rusert, B. (2018). *W.E.B. du bois's data portraits: Visualizing Black America: The color line at the turn of the twentieth century*.

⁴⁰ Lopez, R. (2015). *Boston's south end: the clash of ideas in a historic neighborhood*.

⁴¹ Glenn, E. (2015). *Settler colonialism as structure*.

categorization not by poverty or labor class but by racial delineation. This likely is due to the struggle of the settlement houses in the South End to understand and confront the morality of the Black population⁴². The following maps and analyses provided for “newcomer” populations aim to show where “the wilderness” thrived throughout the South End district based on the written descriptions in the study and readily available municipal datasets.

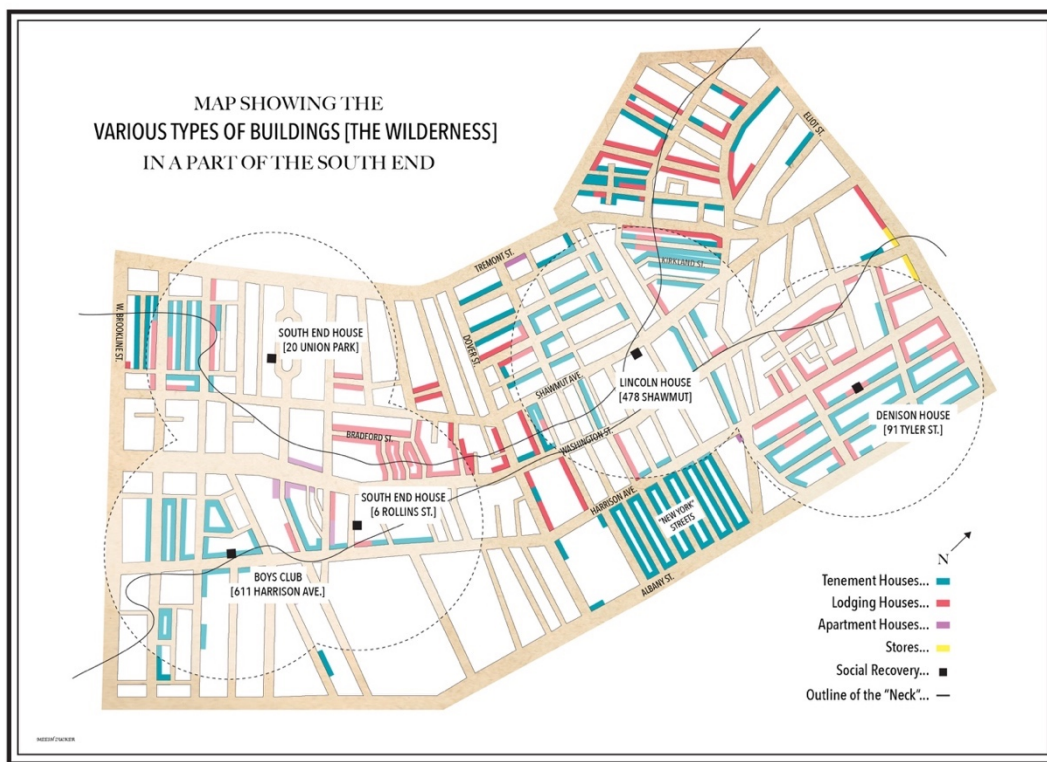


Figure 10

A new district map created to show the overlay of both the “wilderness” populations and their buildings, based on the original District Maps of *The City Wilderness* study. [2020]

⁴² Lopez, R. (2015). *Boston's south end: the clash of ideas in a historic neighborhood*.

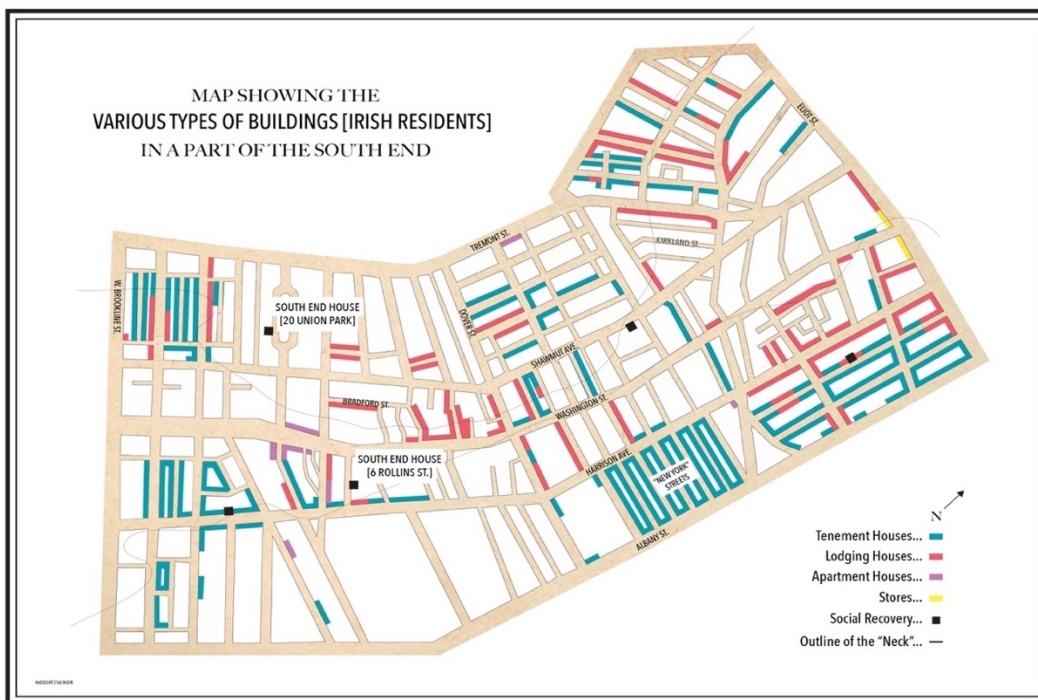


Figure 11

A new district map created to show the overlay of the Irish “wilderness” populations and their buildings, based on the original District Maps of *The City Wilderness* study. [2020]



New York Streets [1895]



New York Streets [1995]



Dedham St. [1895]



Dedham St. [1995]

Figure 12

Taming the City Wilderness: Irish Population [1895 Bromley Atlas + 1995 BWSC Aerial]



Figure 13

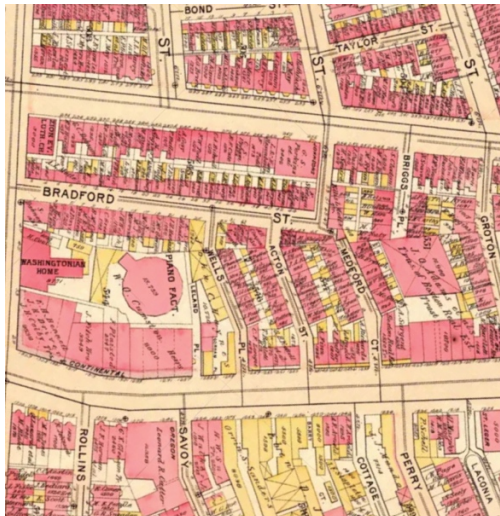
A new district map created to show the overlay of the Black “wilderness” populations and their buildings, based on the original District Maps of *The City Wilderness* study. [2020]



Kirkland St. [1895]



Kirkland St. [1995]



Bradford St. [1895]



Bradford St. [1995]

Figure 14

Taming the City Wilderness: Black Population [1895 Bromley Atlas + 1995 BWSC Aerial]

The “Newcomer” Population

Rather than seeing the United States as a nation of immigrants, we must see it as a nation of settler-colonialism, genocide, white nationalism, racial slavery, and legal torture. Since the inception of this country, laws and legal practices systematically favored whites economically, politically and socially.

-Dr. Crystal Fleming in her book *How to Be Less Stupid About Race* (2018, p. 29)

Many services were provided by the settlement houses to extend values of American heritage and sentiments of patriotism to the “newcomer” population living in the neighborhood. One way of welcoming “newcomers” or immigrants to the neighborhood was by providing activities and classes at various locations scattered throughout the district. The South End House, Denison House, and Lincoln House had a “local constituency of mainly Irish” and each house represented a “different point of attack” upon the Irish community. The South End House for instance was located near where the unskilled laborers lived and primarily dealt with poverty, alcoholism, and crowded street corners. The opportunity the settlers saw in this vicinity was the “constant access to larger problems of the great working-class district.”

Much of the language used throughout the study about immigrants and foreign populations speaks to the ability of the house to Americanize them and ensure they gain an education about the democratic processes that would allow the population to get involved in municipal politics to concentrate local power. Woods was also concerned with how ethnic and racial groups would isolate and keep to themselves. One of the key strategies to correct this behavior was through the House’s friendly endeavors to incorporate each national heritage in community event to show the power in combined patriotism.

‘In the district map showing race factors, the main concentrations of Black residents were identified as “forming two considerably sized groups” on Bradford Street near the South End House and on Kirkland Street near the railroad. The Bradford St. residents primarily lived in lodging houses and the Kirkland St. residents primarily lived in tenement houses. The residents on Kirkland St. were said to have been “living in the worst conditions in the whole of Boston”. Upon further investigation, I found out just a couple years after *The City Wilderness* study was published,

several of the houses along the street were demolished to make way for the future elevated train. Eventually, the whole Kirkland St. area was demolished as part of the South Cove Area Renewal Plans. The problem with the district, as Woods writes in the final chapter of the study, “to a considerable extent has to do with the racial types adapting themselves to a new and strange environment”.

Lastly, if we zoom out from the study for a moment and consider the how the city’s political history informed the broader goals for planning the South End neighborhood, the path of the settlement’s actions become clear. The Brahmins, or Boston’s social elite, maintained control of the city until the election of Boston’s first Irish Mayor Hugh O’Brien. While O’Brien’s politics remained neutral throughout his term, the Irish population was steadily growing and becoming a threat to the native Protestant majority whom the expanded neighborhood was built for in the first place. When Josiah Quincy was elected to office in 1895, the same year as the study began, the settlement workers began counteracting Irish politics as they saw them as a major “contributor to the neighborhood’s moral poverty”⁴³. One can immediately see how in response to areas with high concentrations of Irish residents, a settlement house or “point of attack” exists nearby as Woods had mentioned. When looking ahead to the post-renewal aerial images and Bromley maps shown in Figures 12 and 14, the areas such as the New York Streets and South Cove with large Irish and Black populations were later demolished in the mid-1900s, significantly reducing the political power of the neighborhood’s “newcomers” through their planned displacement. In conclusion, my spatial analysis of the neighborhood, when overlaid with district politics, proves the importance of pulling expert narratives out of the archives and placing residents’ narratives into the streets, as evidenced by South End’s new district maps.

⁴³ Lopez, R. (2015). *Boston's south end: the clash of ideas in a historic neighborhood*.

CHAPTER FIVE: TAMING THE CITY WILDERNESS

In the early days of the Settlement, Mr. Woods through the pages of *The City Wilderness* voiced the needs of the South End. Ever since then the activities of city and state planning boards have followed the lines of the first survey. The major decision has been made namely, that most of the South End shall be developed as a residential area. Now, this year, there is a master plan which reflects the results of many years of study and discussion as to the manner of providing the housing, traffic, educational, recreational and business facilities which such a residential area should have.

-Charles F. Ernst stated in a speech on February 18, 1952 to SEHA

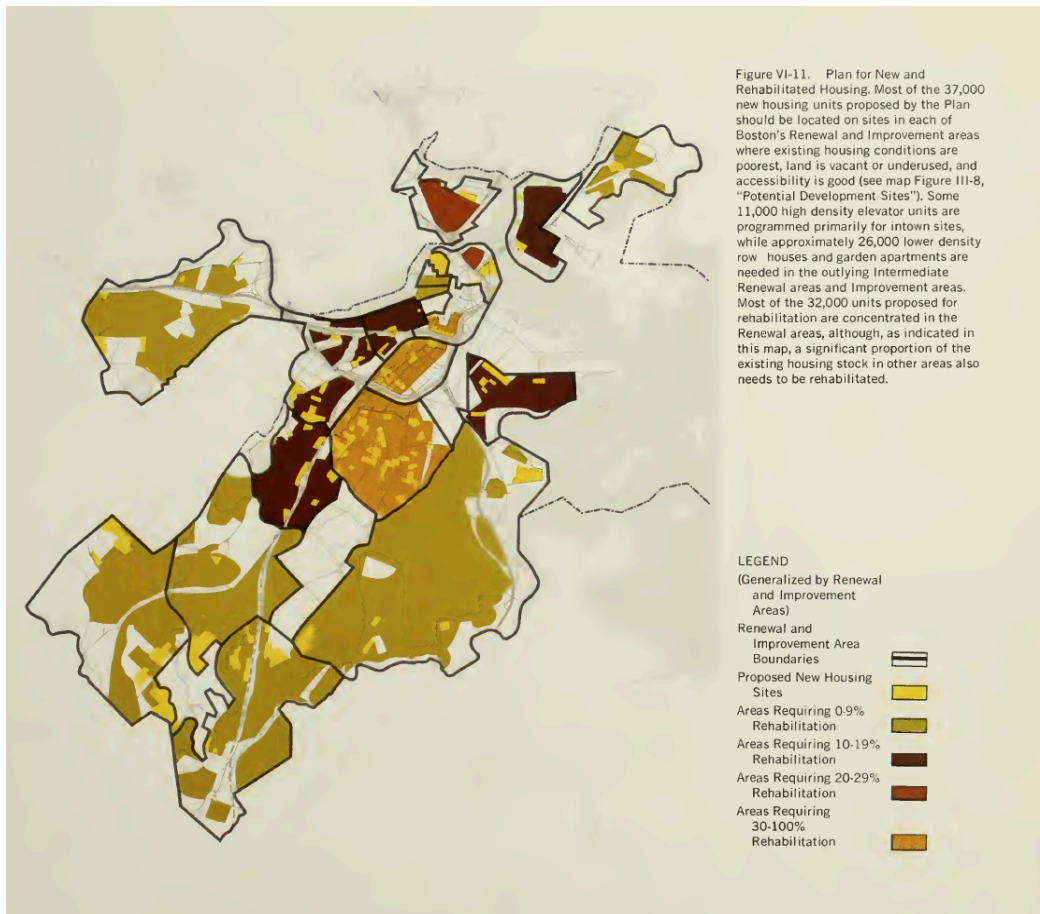


Figure 15

Taming the City Wilderness: Boston Master Plan of 1965 [BRA, 1965]

KEY FINDINGS

Until planners are able to recognize the significant role of how the identity of social workers and planners historically shaped and continue to shape the built environment, the same problems and structures of racism will remain. This is evidenced by the fact that contemporary planners, after over a century of studying the local community's behavior, in response to the physical environment, claim that real estate development and modern practices of urban renewal are appropriate solutions to eliminate urban decay for the benefit of all. It is important for contemporary planners to consider how findings from the past might be evidence of where to begin efforts of the future, in order for systemic change to occur in planning. The following are some of my key findings after conducting a historic analysis of a past study:

1. There is direct evidence of the field of planning's relationship to *The City Wilderness* study, as revealed in the Northeastern archives. While I cannot assume the South End House's publications were the only foundation for planning in Boston, the evidence proves how planning was greatly influenced by their methods and observations.
2. The negative implications of value-based assessments by human observation, as exhibited by the individual descriptions written in *The City Wilderness*, imply a false assumption that all residents will act in accordance with the South End House's framing of their personal attributes by racial or ethnic group bias.
3. The level of detail (block by block) provided by the varying colored lines in each district map, particularly the race factors map, significantly decreases the accuracy of information being conveyed and ensured the erasure of diversity and inherent bias by category.
4. My arguments aim to highlight the fundamental issue of how academics and professionals have historically conducted studies and produced maps to spatialize the moral behaviors of certain marginalized populations, based on methods of perception rather than lived reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

What would the South End look like today if *The City Wilderness* study had focused on “taming” the physicality or the living conditions of residents to support diversity rather than “taming” the morality of residents that resulted in the erasure of diversity? Traditional planning tools, studies and practices have their limitations but when overlaid with community narratives and archival materials, “progress” can be made towards the collective goal of eradicating structural racism that divide our cities today. In the past, spatial conflict arose from (un)intentional value systems made to leverage dissimilar or foreign identities via future planning efforts such as urban renewal, redlining, and redevelopment which only further segregated individuals. By applying a mixed-methods approach to community research and fundamentally restructuring the ways in which planners access history, the profession can ensure future studies represent all residents, regardless of socio-economic, racial, or ethnic divides, a seemingly just response to colonial era social value systems. I strongly believe planners must address the historic use of oppressive tools before we can promise to create more diverse, equitable communities for all. I suggest the profession starts by applying a historic lens to planning’s institutional knowledge which could be achieved in the following ways:

1. Neighborhood groups could create open-source archives that are rooted in the unique urban history of the entire community rather than continuing to develop isolated archives often based on unique social identities. While it is important for both to exist, an intersectional approach to archiving community history is needed.
2. By overlaying diverse community narratives with historic city planning, we might begin to reveal how colonial attitudes and misperceptions of the South End residents resulted in the spatial divisions seen today.
3. Demographic data should be captured at a granular, human scale to ensure statistics being used by planners are more representational of reality. There is much to be gained from analyzing historic social surveys that took this approach such as W.E.B. Du Bois’s *Philadelphia study*.
4. By creating accessible, post-custodial archives or databases for obtaining community histories should be developed to preserve the history of a community.

CONCLUSION

Survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.

- Audre Lorde wrote in her 1979 essay

The South End neighborhood was first described in *The City Wilderness* study as an isolated, congested working-class district, dangerous to the moral and material well-being of all due to the complex mix of diverse populations. In response, Woods treated the neighborhood and its vulnerable population as a testing ground for advancing his moral hypotheses in hopes of achieving a natural balance of wilderness and civilization⁴⁴. Today, the BPDA boasts the very same neighborhood is an elegant mix of historic brick town homes and publicly funded housing, home to a diverse population of immigrants and the gay community. To the untrained eyes and ears of the outsider, it would appear Woods was a visionary and led a successful path towards social rehabilitation. The reality of the South End, as my thesis argues, is quite the opposite as this approach enacted by planners resulted in the actual erasure of the diverse populations that once called the area home. As city populations continue to grow at unprecedented rates, it is imperative planners today address our divisive history and respond to current politics of spatial and social governance with the intention to build and leverage new forms of equity.

In city planning, one of the core principles is to create an equitable built environment for all. A key method for approaching this principle, as shown in *The City Wilderness*, is for planners to conduct a study of local history and perform a diagnosis of social conditions. The opportunity now exists in planning for a cultural overhaul to enable social cohesion only if, and when, studies are designed to facilitate inclusive dialogue amongst diverse identities. Rather than invent new tools to accomplish this, as suggested by the APA, I suggest planners expend the same energy towards engaging with residents to uncover the rich urban history of our communities that is often found decades later buried in archives. The erasure of resident narratives and physical evidence of their

⁴⁴ Lopez, R. (2015). *Boston's south end: the clash of ideas in a historic neighborhood*.

existence because of displacement ensures the voice of the voiceless remains silent. While the field of planning itself is not solely responsible for the perpetuation of structural racism in our cities today, it is important to consider how the attitudes and policies, at both a local and federal level, have been historically enforced by planners and designers and translated into built form. Instead, we must look to how planning can provide a platform for amplifying historic community narratives to combat structural racism. With limited institutional knowledge of the rich urban history for diverse communities, I conclude our profession should instead turn to the residents who hold the knowledge we seek. Afterall, if a major role of city planning is to raise the voice of the voiceless, maybe it is time we lower ours.

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APPENDIX A



The City Wilderness (1898) in its box after arriving from MIT's Library Storage Annex.

APPENDIX B

Notices of the "City Wilderness"

The Outlook, New York :

"'The City Wilderness' is a book of preëminent moral value. We say moral value, because the authors' keen and quickening interest in tenement-house life has been a moral interest—equally removed from the dry-as-dust interest of the mere investigator, or the love of the picturesque of the mere writer. . . . This does not mean that there is any lack of interest in economic conditions. In fact, the chapter on 'Work and Wages' is worth any volume of statistics published, in the matter of presenting an accurate as well as clear picture of economic conditions. But the interest in these conditions which has been the spring of the singularly discriminating study of them, has been because of their bearing upon a wholesome life. We can hardly commend the volume too highly to readers who share our interest in the problems of great cities."

The Standard, Chicago :

"If any competent student has doubts of the high value of residence in a settlement, he may be convinced by a careful reading of the book. No casual visitor could ever gather material for such an adequate, comprehensive and intelligent revelation of the inner life of a crowded city population. . . . We have in this little volume more reliable and instructive facts than could be gained from libraries of statistics and sensational slum articles. . . . It arouses the conscience while it supports patience and inspires hope."

New England Magazine, Boston :

"It is surely not too much to say that since Charles Booth published his remarkable study of the conditions of life and labor

in East London, there has appeared no such careful or valuable survey of any 'wilderness' section of a great city as that given in the present volume."

Economic Journal, London :

"The book before us is a complete justification, if need there be, not only of the original ideal of the institution, but of the diligent and effective way in which it has been followed out in actual practice. It is full of trustworthy information about the conditions of life in a degenerate section of a New England town, put in a quiet and forcible way by men who are thoroughly conversant with the facts under consideration; and who, moreover, besides being impartial and painstaking students, are also obviously concerned to do all that lies in their power to find some practical solution for the problems which confront them."

The Scotsman, Edinburgh :

"It gives a vivid and detailed picture of a population not so poor, perhaps, as that which is to be found in some of our large cities, but which has still a hard struggle for life. The book is a striking evidence of what is being done in the United States in what might be called practical sociology."

Yale Review, New Haven :

"The expectation that settlement workers should share with the public what they learn, should become purveyors of much-needed social knowledge, is a just one. The present volume amply meets this expectation. . . . While much of the book is of purely local interest, the breadth of view, sane criticism, and the spirit of sympathy and hope which breathes through it, makes it appeal to a wide circle of readers."

The Nation, New York :

"This investigation is thoroughly scientific in character. . . . The description of the development of the local 'boss' is a genuine contribution to political science. . . . We heartily appreciate the disinterested labors which have resulted in so instructive a volume."

American Journal of Sociology, Chicago :

"The social settlements have borne no better fruit than this remarkable study of urban conditions in a crowded part of South End, Boston. In twelve chapters, written by competent and trained observers, we have not merely a revelation of local conditions, but of world-wide tendencies."

Literature, New York :

"That intense ethical feeling which often marks the literary output of Boston does not confine itself to the highways of culture. There are byways in Boston that can equally well yield up ethics at sight and literature on demand. 'The City Wilderness' is as ethical as anything the professed leaders of Boston's higher thought could have produced. . . . A strong optimistic strain, joined with an intense feeling of neighborly sympathy, runs through every essay in the book until they all practically cohere into the connected chapters of an interesting sociological novel."

The Advertiser, Boston :

"It would not be easy to speak of the book in terms of praise too emphatic. It is written in a clear, straightforward style. It is eminently readable. It is picturesque and graphic in description, full of information, yet wholly free from every kind of sensationalism. The judicious reader will be impressed on every page with what will strike him as astonishingly level-headed common sense."

THE CO-OPERATIVE PRESS, 114 AUSTIN ST., CAMBRIDGE



APPENDIX C

The following list of *The City Wilderness* study's authors is intended to highlight their individual area of expertise:

1. Anonymous, the author of two chapters, VI. The Roots of Political Power and X. Strongholds of Education, was made anonymous "out of consideration for certain interests that involve outside persons"
2. Charles D. Underhill, M. D., author of chapter IV. Public Health
3. Fred E. Haynes, Ph D., author of chapters II. Historical and VIII. Amusements
4. Frederick A. Bushee, author of chapter III. Population, provided data for district maps II. Land and Buildings and IV. Race Factors
5. Robert A. Woods, author of chapters V. Work and Wages, Social Recovery and The Total Drift, provided data for district maps VI. Industrial Grade and VII. Institutions and Meeting Places - Head of House
6. William I. Cole, author of chapters I. Introduction, VII. Criminal Tendencies and IX. The Church and the People, provided data for district map VII. Institutions and Meeting Places.

The following list of positions held by residents of the South End House shows the extent to which residents of the South End House were involved in municipal affairs listed in the *South End House Report 1892-1907*:

1. A member of the Municipal Commission for Public Baths
2. A member of the Mayor's advisory committee for free municipal lectures
3. An executive board member of Associated Charities
4. An executive board member of the Co-operative Building Company
5. An executive board member of the Consumers' League
6. An executive board member of the Watch and Ward Society
7. An executive board member of the Tenement House Committee of the Twentieth Century Club
8. A special agent of the attack upon insanitary slums led by the Twentieth Century Club
9. A member of the office staff of the Children's Aid Society

APPENDIX D

The following narratives are provided to show evidence of the legacy of *The City Wilderness* study and respond to claims made by the settlers of the House while observing the diverse population living in the South End district:

1. Charles Ernst (1952) stated “In the early days of the Settlement, Mr. Woods through the pages of “The City Wilderness” voiced the needs of the South End. Ever since then the activities of city and state planning boards have followed the lines of the first survey”⁴⁵.
2. “The variety of inhabitants is incredibly wide, socially, economically, ethnically and morally. The South End is potentially the most intriguing residential area within the City of Boston, and a city must have people living in it to have character and vigor”⁴⁶.
3. Sculptor Kahlil Gibran and his Wife mentioned while talking about the South End, “it’s the last stand for middle income people in the city... diversity means “cooperation is essential”... unlike some liberal factions who “tell the city what to do then go home to the suburbs”, people of the South End are involved in the city’s problems”⁴⁷.
4. According to Royal Cloyd, “the South End is distinguished by the fact that the “process of racial, social, economic and ethnic polarizations has not taken a very significant toll.” He also claims that “diversity excites some people and makes them wonderfully aware and politically manipulative. Others are destroyed by it”⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ Ernst, Charles. (1952) *Review of the past decade: Special meeting address in lieu of annual meeting by head of the south end house.*

⁴⁶ Remark made by an anonymous resident of the South End and recorded in the SEHS. (1966). *A picture of the South End.*

⁴⁷ SEHS. (1966). *A picture of the South End.*

⁴⁸ Ibid. Important to note: Royal Cloyd at the time was the President of the South End Federation of Community Organizations and served as the chair of the South End Urban Renewal Committee from 1961 to 1964.

5. In the words of South End resident Mel King (1981), “In defense of their neighborhood, South End residents advanced from service activities, to organizing, to institution-building characterized by Black community development in all areas”⁴⁹.
6. In 1976, South End resident and writer for Gay Community News, William Koelsch, published a short history on the neighborhood in which he states, “for over a century the South End has suffered an image problem and the label of ‘City Wilderness’ hung on it in the 1890s persists”⁵⁰.
7. In the background of BRA 1977 South End Profile, it read “In 1898, South End social worker, Robert Woods, coined the term “the city wilderness” to describe the district. The description didn’t sit too well with the area’s more working-class population which found the area a friendly, inexpensive, and convenient place to live”⁵¹.

⁴⁹ King, M. (1981). *Chain of change: Struggles for black community development*.

⁵⁰ Barnet, A. (2019). *Once upon a neighborhood: A timeline and anecdotal history of the South End of Boston*.

⁵¹ This is the first time a BRA document mentions “the city wilderness” in a publication.

APPENDIX E

The following are written excerpts from *The City Wilderness* study describing the moral behaviors of the Black population:

1. The older generation of Black residents observed in the area by Bushee were “entirely uneducated” and “former slaves”.
2. When explaining their behavior, “the majority exhibit the usual characteristics of their race: loud and course, much more animal qualities than of the spiritual, very religious in their crude way”.
3. “There is a degraded class which through its unfortunate prominence, seriously injures the reputation of the whole. They are idle, vicious, course, vulgar, immoral, extremely loose in their marriage, desertions are frequent which women seem to be unconcerned with, more often she is relieved at being “rid of him”.
4. “These people” exhibit nearly all grades of refinement and morality”.

The following are written excerpts from *The City Wilderness* study describing the moral behaviors of the Immigrant population:

1. “The South End has become a common resort for all nationalities... a population as complicated as it is harmonious “
2. “South End people have to some extent become toned down and adapted to their environment through the influence of a longer residence in the country or a closer contact with American institutions”
3. “The process of assimilation has advanced a step. Although there is still a tendency for nationalities to group themselves, extended isolation is no longer possible.”
4. “The sifting of the competent and incompetent is still taking place.”
5. “The second generation of the Irish residents are making a better showing than the preceding one; yet instances of deterioration are not infrequent due to idleness and evil surroundings.”
6. “The Syrians are nearly all peddlers if they are anything and some are persistent candidates for charity.”
7. “The Chinese and Syrians can never be in any real sense American, they are the most foreign of all our foreigners.”