

In Class Writing Prompt (15 minutes): If early-to-mid-twentieth century Boston could be characterized as “modern” in its architecture, urbanism, politics, and economics, then using today’s readings discuss how Boston from the late 1960s through the 1980s evolved beyond the modern, in terms of architecture, urbanism, politics, and economics.

Postmodern Boston

March 2020

Boston from the late 1960s through the 1980s evolved beyond the modern in terms of architecture, urbanism, politics, and economics by changing the approach to modern architecture by looking at the community at large, being more critical of the currently existing architecture, and putting more emphasis on historically significant structures and the community. Rather than pushing into a more and more modern direction, Boston became more critical of these trends of development and attempted to bring back and incorporate what modernism oversaw - the importance of community and history. This project was made possible also with the help of Flynn and Coyle, who were at the center of Boston administration after Kevin White (Kennedy).

Venturi’s paper focused on Copley Square, and the author offered a critical examination of the Square in its current state. The main idea from the paper was that Copley Square included a multiplicity of paradoxical design elements, and this is realized by the juxtapositions: “slight irregularities contrast violent irregularities which come from the juxtapositions of blurred and sharp focuses.” The author also points out the idea that the Copley Square is very “un-american”, in that people would rather sit at home than sitting in a square. However, the Copley Square *is* an outdoor public space. This tension in the space resembles the tension between modernization and the lookback at history and community.

Rawn's paper also offered a critical approach to architecture. The author talked about the creation of the Navy Yard in Charleston, and talked about both the skyline as well as the importance of a public space. The building Rawn outlines strongly takes the whole surrounding city into consideration, and the building is viewed as a piece of the whole city rather than an artifact on its own. Rawn adds that the shore must also be a public space, and "the building must celebrate its end at the water's edge."

O'Connell also mentions the establishment of Quincy Market, emphasizes the historic landmarks lost during urban renewal, and the increased focus on public transport rather than the highways. The Red line and the Orange lines were strengthened during this time as well.

Overall, Boston is putting attention both into the city planning process, the city skyline--White's legacy, and also the reconciliation of downtown prosperity and neighborhood needs. The Flynn administration was able to stabilize the economy after White, and mentioned that they will treat Boston as a whole, rather than focus on specific parts only. They wanted to address community needs, and also cater to districts that did not receive too much attention. White people also moved out of Boston, and a large influx of Black and Hispanic residents came in. Basically, Flynn and Coyle dramatically changed the city and the process of city planning.

To note, this process of Boston evolving is very reminiscent of the Hegelian dialectic. Put simply, it is the process in which something takes one direction, then opposition is created, and then as a result a synthesis of both is created at the end.