In adding coverage of the last twenty-five years to the classic narratives of the automobile industry by James J. Flink and John B. Rae, Rubenstein has helped address a long-felt need. The chapters dealing with recent history will particularly interest readers who want to know about the global automobile business since the various crises and challenges that the American industry faced beginning in the 1970s. Specialist readers may wish Rubenstein had utilized more of the recent literature on the larger implications of consumerism, installment buying, marketing, and advertising. More could also have been said about the long-term side effects of the automobile industry, such as safety, environmental damage, and the complicated story of government subsidies which have helped from its earliest days to make the industry possible. Despite these issues, for readers seeking an overview of the industry Rubenstein's book offers a useful profile, especially for the last quarter century.

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America's New Downtowns
Revitalization or Reinvention?
By Larry R. Ford

This is a book with a purpose that succeeds admirably in not becoming partisan. It is a serviceable book that does what it sets out to do, which is to create a vocabulary of comparative terms for assessing American downtowns. Is it fun to read? Not particularly. Is it useful? That depends on what you want as a reader. This is a book of information, not big ideas. And if it is information about downtowns you are after, then this may be the book for you.

Ford's work enters a field already well established, which might be referred to loosely as contemporary city studies. It is a field that starts, maybe, with Jane Jacobs and *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), and proceeds through the work of, among others, William H. Whyte in *City: Rediscovering the Center* (1988), Richard Sennett's philosophizing in *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities* (1990, 1992), and on to the postmodernist Mike Davis's *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (1990, 1992), and more recent works such as Thomas Bender's *The Unfinished City: New York and the Metropolitan Idea* (2002), and Robert M. Fogelson's *Downtown:*

Its Rise and Fall, 1880–1950 (2001), to which Ford's book bears an immediate resemblance.

But Ford's work is distinctive in an important way. A geographer on the faculty of San Diego State University for more than 30 years, Ford is not out to intellectualize or interpret so much as he is to describe, and his object is not the city as a whole, but only the downtown: "My goal is to add to our understanding of just what the American downtown has been and what it is becoming . . . . I feel that we need to describe downtown before we can critique it adequately" (p. 5). To that end, he studies sixteen downtowns of American metropolitan areas with populations between one and three million, downtowns that he knows well and has visited over a period of years: Atlanta, Seattle, Cleveland, Minneapolis, San Diego, Phoenix, St. Louis, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Denver, Portland, Indianapolis, San Antonio, Columbus, Charlotte, and Providence. Each is amply illustrated with photographs and drawings.

Each of the sixteen downtowns is graded qualitatively relative to ten variables: physical site, street morphology, civic space, office/skyline, retail anchors, hotels/convention facilities, major attractions, historic districts/support zones, residential activity and variety, and transit options. Each downtown ends up with a composite score, by means of which it can be compared to others. Seattle finishes at the top (91 out of 100 points), Charlotte at the bottom, with a score

of 48. Indianapolis comes in for a solid 74, in a tie with Minneapolis. "The goal," Ford says, "is to clarify what works and what does not as cities enter the twenty-first century. . . . I propose a series of generalizations on downtown morphology that I hope will elucidate the processes at work in the new American downtown" (p. 278).

Ford does not discover anything that people living in his selected cities do not already know. Consider, for example, his conclusion about downtown Indianapolis: "While all of the downtowns on the list have made great strides over the past two decades, Indianapolis is a leading candidate for the 'most improved' award. . . . Today, the city has a lively, compact core and a strong image as a sports and convention center. . . . The downtown core still has relatively poor connections to most of the surrounding neighborhoods, although major improvements are being made, especially toward the White River" (p. 286). The value of Ford's study lies not in its political or cultural insight, but rather in the kind of conclusion-making that his comparable data facilitate.

His overall conclusion is a vote for what (without any implied negative) might be called a Disney-fied downtown: "I present the final composite generalization: the linear, Disneyland-like, megastructure-buffered, amenity-oriented, civic-centered, greater downtown special event venue model. . . . The pieces may vary from city to city,

but the linear organization, amenity-orientation, big-footprint buildings, and distinctive subdistricts characterize nearly all successful downtowns" (p. 308). Ford's findings are not path-breaking, probably, but his conclusions are well worth considering.

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