THE CORE
Wilbur Zelinsky

The final approach to LaGuardia or JFK airports in New York sometimes takes you right over the island of Manhattan. There, just below, are the great skyscrapers, a tight mass of them huddled around Wall Street toward the southern tip. Now all of the vast, intricate harbor is visible with its scores of ships from all over the world. Five monumental bridges crammed with cars, buses, trains, and trucks reach out from the city, and even in broad daylight there may be no problem picking out the bright glare and promise of Times Square. A long rectangle of green appears - Central Park - on two sides girdled by the poshest of hotels and apartment buildings. Off to the east, north, and west, as far as you can look, an endless maze of homes, shops, factories, warehouses, all overlain by loops of broad parkways pulsating with their traffic loads.

If you could look far enough out your plane window, you would see a skyline that stretches far up and down the Atlantic coast from Boston to Washington D.C. You are gazing at the very center of the North American Core. And, insofar as any place is entitled to the claim, this is still the spine, the command post for much of the western world.

THE CORE
Sergei Rogachev

The New Year enters every Russian house with the chime of the Moscow Kremlin’s bells. In all time zones of the huge country, watches are set by the clocks of Moscow; the schedules of trains and airplanes are put on Moscow time. From the Spasskiy Tower, the rotating hands of the Kremlin’s clock make a circular sweep of benediction all around Russia. The packed cobbles of Red Square resonate with the historic memory that this place represents, and the bustle of a huge city that surrounds it invades only one corner where the country’s largest department store is located. But in just a few paces the noises die down, as if calmed down by imperious gesture of the bronze statue of Kuzma Minin (a 17th century organizer of resistance to Polish rule), outstretched over the solemn square. The orgy of colors of the famous St. Basil’s dominates the southern side, but fails to create an ambiance for the whole place. Instead, another rhythm prevails: one measured by the regular striking of the chimes and by the ceremonial steps of the honor guard, still replaced hourly at Lenin’s tomb.

This is probably the only spot in all of Russia where everything functions in perfect clockwork order, constant and unshakable. For a person from the provinces who arrives in Moscow by trains or airplanes that are chronically behind schedule, who is used to chaos in his workplace and who distrusts the authorities, this is the only place where he may sense the regular heartbeat of Russia. It is only here that he may regain his faith in the state.
MOSCOW

The Core of Russia is a single great urban area, Moscow, and that city dominates a hierarchical structure which permeates both the spatial and societal layout of the country. The outline of Moscow on the distant horizon does not gather up into the pyramid of skyscrapers driven by the land values of a western city, but rather shows a few large buildings that symbolize the singularity of power in the state: the onion domes of cathedrals directing the eye up to heaven, the towers rising out of the Kremlin walls, and the Stalin-era “wedding cake” skyscrapers - all reminders of political and spiritual power on the urban landscape. The highest points of Moscow were pushed up by decree, and the relationship between this urban brain center and the country resonates down the hierarchy.

How the Core Prevailed

For all the Core’s apparent centrality today, in the days of Kievan Rus it was strictly peripheral. The Core was not one of the original cradles of the Russian state, but its colonized periphery. Most of the ancient cities of the region were founded by settlers from either northern Novgorodian or southern Kievan mother sources.

The two waves of colonists’ movement from the southern and northern cradles of Russia were strongly influenced by an increasingly continental climate to the east. Thus, the arid environment and threats from steppe nomads made the flow of settlers from the Dnieper veer off to the north, along the Oka River. Meanwhile, the eastward movement of people from Novgorod was likewise deflected to the south along the Volga by harsh winters and bare soils. But the wedge of land bounded by the Volga and Oka Rivers seems to be a compromise landscape between northern forest and southern steppe zones. The North creeps into the Core with moraines, swampy lowlands, and lakes that seem to be tiny splatters of the huge lakes of the northwest. Novgorodians

MEGALOPOLIS

New York may indeed be a formidable city, but it alone does not define the American Core; instead, the region is made up of a line of cities often called Megalopolis, running down the northeastern seaboard - a geographic expression of concentrated economic and social power. The reasons for the evolution of a linear nerve center, rather than a single dominating city, may be explained at least in part by the nature of power in this country. The skyscrapers commanding the downtowns erupted from the same market forces that drove the competition among the cities of Megalopolis. Eventually an oligarchy of urban areas emerged; but then, would a singular Core have fit a pluralistic society?

The Line Crystallizes

There was little in its physical geography that could have made the dramatic success of the Core inevitable. The fortuitous character of the Core’s ascendency becomes clear enough when we realize that 500 years ago, prior to the European invasion, this was decidedly one of North America’s backwater areas. A moderately dense array of Native Americans did dwell within the region, but at a level of technology and social organization less advanced than in communities to the southwest and southeast. Initially, the region emerged as a succession of urban and agrarian communities along the North Atlantic littoral between New York Harbor and upper Chesapeake Bay. The early Core was claimed and settled by a variety of European powers and their subjects: several distinct groups from the British Isles, the Dutch, Flemish, Swedes, and Finns. The urban points that originated here at first faced Europe: Philadelphia was the largest city in the original colonies, and served as an export point for food from its hinterland; Baltimore began as a harbor city to ship out tobacco; and when New York was founded by the Dutch in the 1660’s, its natural port sites seemed ready made for trade with the
entered the region following this familiar environment. Southern Russia penetrated the Core in the form of large fertile clearings, extremely rewarding for agricultural colonization. The northern and southern flows of colonization, both deflected by unfriendly environments, thus met and coalesced in the Core. Ultimately, the two major cultural strands of Russia (transplanted Byzantine and Baltic European influences) blended here into a uniquely "native" Russian style that came to define the face of the country. It was in the Core that northern and southern Slavs blended into Greater Russians.

In the homogenous environment of the huge Russian plain the ascendancy of a single center may have been inevitable, but Moscow had no special advantage that would determine its rise to power. The history of Moscow as a self-made domineering focus of Russia is reflected in the very asymmetrical shape of the Core. The region extends far to the East while being severely circumscribed in the South, North, and especially the West, the front where it had to fight for its very survival. The asymmetry is especially striking in the west, which took the brunt of frequent invasions from Europe, and where the Core's expansion was long arrested. As a result, the western boundary of the Core is a mere 40 miles from Moscow, perhaps contributing to Russian xenophobia about the West. While Moscow frequently proclaimed itself to be the heir to the best achievement of humanity with titles such as the Third Rome or First Socialist State, it was still frustrated to discover equal or surpassing achievement on its western frontiers. The feeling of Russian superiority to the West (especially in terms of "spirituality") is but the reverse side of an inferiority complex about western material achievement.

The region's southern boundary is marked by a line of cities along the Oka that once formed a protective belt from the nomads. When the early Russian state of Muscovy made its first tentative moves beyond the Oka and into the steppe, the city of Tula became its first outpost, and famous Tula armories (still a major industry) supplied Russia's southward expansion. Clashes with Islam along the southern interface of the Old World. Washington D.C., with its function of service the now independent country, was a relative newcomer to the line of cities crystallizing along the east coast. But why did this particular region of the country emerge to become so dominant? Although there was a considerable range of geographic conditions and physical resources, none of the latter were so exceptional as to foster regional supremacy. We can invoke climate as one of the factors in the inability of the Core to push south past the Potomac River. In lower latitudes, weather and soil combine to create problems for the traditional Northwest European modes of farming and animal husbandry. Similarly, any substantial northward extension in New York has been pretty well precluded by the shortness of the growing season and particularly by the stoniness of the soil where glaciers once lay.

In terms of prospects for expansion, the American Core has suffered from one major drawback: the formidable Appalachian barrier. On the other hand, the accidents of geological history have furnished the Core with three crucial and easy entry ways from ocean to interior: the Hudson River, open to oceangoing vessels as far north as Albany, and providing fine natural harbors near its mouth in the New York City area and northern New Jersey; the Delaware River and its estuary; and Chesapeake Bay, with its extension into Pennsylvania via the Susquehanna. New York's Mohawk Valley and the various glacial spillways in Ohio and Indiana made canal building a relatively simple proposition. But the development of harbors, canals, and even the watery highway of the Great Lakes awaited the political and technological events that came to pass later in the Core. Finally, the region enjoyed a physical advantage shared with New England of relative proximity to Europe in terms of both shipping time and costs. In any competition with the Core, the coastal zone to the south was at a distinct disadvantage because of the near absence of decent natural harbors and the greater distances to European ports.
region sustained Russia’s messianic feeling. Muscovites saw the simultaneous decline of Constantinople and the ascent of Moscow as a sign of its predestination to become the Third Rome. Here in the south were forged such elements of national character as the belief that Russia can be a savior and a teacher to other peoples and perform some global mission. This youthful arrogance of a child that outstripped its parents has frequently led Moscow to reject the valuable heritage of its two older “mother cradles”: the Novgorodian tradition of popular self rule or the scholarly conventions of Kiev, and St. Petersburg’s westernism has likewise been irritating.

Threatened from the west and from the south, Moscow sought escape, guidance, and new identity in the only natural direction left: the east, where Moscow always retreated at crucial moments of its history. In the turmoil of the Time of Troubles (1609-1613), when Moscow was overrun by the Poles, the northeastern forests near Kostroma served as a hiding place for the Romanov family who became the new Russian dynasty. The most venerated saint of Russia, Sergei of Radonezh, was born in a small town northeast of Moscow and established there the famous Trinity monastery, a holy place of pilgrimage which remains the buttress of Russian Orthodoxy. From this monastery came the blessings and encouragement for two decisive battles against the Mongols.

Finally, it was Moscow’s eastward expansion into the Volga Basin that turned the Core into the master of a huge country. In the east, Muscovite culture became “the” Russian culture.

Russian to the Core

As if in conscious symbolism, Moscow is located in the center of the triangle formed by the three Novgorods: Novgorod the Great, Russia’s ancient foothold in the North and its old window on western Europe; Novgorod Seversky; the outpost of ancient Kiivan Rus closest to Moscow and the starting point of ancient colonization movement from the Kiivan core; and Nizhniy Novgorod, Russia’s easternmost outpost from the 13th to

But it was the opening up of America that finally pushed the region into the forefront. As the American Midwest began to realize its agricultural productivity, the need for a good passage route into the interior emerged as paramount. Rapid land development along the coast and rising populations generated pressure for settlement of new lands to the west, but first the north-south ranging Appalachian Mountains had to be breached. The east coast cities of the Core naturally entered into competition for the control of trade routes into the interior. New York already had the advantage of controlling access to the easiest passage in the northern half of the nation, the route along the flat expase of land due south of Lake Ontario. But it did not emerge as the clear winner until the Erie Canal opened in 1825, creating a waterway from the Great Lakes all the way to New York City. Two decades later, rail connections followed to the burgeoning Chicago, and New York became the largest city in the United States as early as the mid 19th century.

American to the Core

What makes the American Core unique is the fact that from the initial years of European settlement up to the present moment, it has been the arena for meeting, mingling, and fertile hybridization of contrasting peoples and cultures, and at the same time has formed a political setting that encouraged creative use of wealth and power. While both the Northern and Southern hearths of settlement were easily recognizable as transplants of European society, in the Core something quite new and distinctively American emerged. It was in this region, particularly Pennsylvania, that smaller family farms prevailed over larger landholdings.

In terms of its social life, the region brought together peoples from such a large sweep that a spirit of tolerance and liberalism developed, helped in part by the Quaker heritage of the midlands. One of the oldest free Black communities in the United States was founded in Philadelphia, and so many people from abroad were pouring in...
16th centuries, which served as a gateway to the Volga cradle of Islamic world and later became the hinge connecting the fate of central Russia to that of Asia. Moscow’s original rise to power was due to the external support of Mongol rulers on the Volga who used Muscovite princes as their henchmen in the control of Russian principalities. Moscow learned well the Mongol lesson in politics and built its strength through an Oriental mode of totalitarian rule. Many historians argue that the early roots of Russian autocracy, so different from European feudalism, are to be found in the Core’s early history as a frontier periphery, where the princes directed the colonization process and enjoyed powers that they did not have in the North or South. Later, the needs of eastward expansion into the Volga basin furthered the militarization of the state and the introduction of universal serfdom. Leaning on the East, the great prince of Moscow became the Tsar ("Caesar"), with absolute unbounded autocratic power that eventually mutated into the powers of the General Secretary of the Communist Party. Many key developments of Russian history occurred along the eastern vector of the Core. In the 19th century, the zone east of Moscow nurtured indigenous Russian capitalism (as opposed to the state-created capitalism of St. Petersburg). The northeastern flank of the Core became the land of textiles and the most industrialized part of Russia, due to the energy and quiet solidity of the Old Believers (who once hid in the forests of the northeast) which made them the famous early industrialists of Moscow. To our day, the Core remains Russia’s largest industrial region, accounting for a fifth of industrial output. It is also the most urbanized one, as many industrial villages of the past, such as Ivanovo, have developed into large cities. It was in such industrial cities that not only Russian capitalism but also a very Russian egalitarian response to it were born. In 1905, Ivanovo became the birthplace of the first "soviet" (literally "council") of workers, a uniquely proletarian concept that gave its name to the Soviet Union. Thus the Core has effectively shaped Russian political forms from the 12th century to the present.

11 through the Core by 1789 that a new word appeared to describe arrivals more precisely: the two-way English word "emigrant" became the Americanized term, "immigrant." As historian Henry Adams noted about Pennsylvania’s role in American cultural history: "When one summed up the results of Pennsylvania influences, one inclined to think that Pennsylvania set up the government in 1789, saved it in 1861; created the American system; developed its iron and coal power; and invented its great railways. The Pennsylvania mind was not complex; it reasoned little and never talked; but in practical matters, it was the steadiest of all American types; perhaps the most efficient; certainly the safest." In its economic life, the Core represented the competition that was to become so characteristic of a capitalist system. In the cities of the region, the profit motive has always been a prime consideration, whether by way of commerce, shipment of goods, manufacturing, services, banking, information management, or even speculation. Other rationales for existence were secondary: only occasionally were the early towns fortified for some military mission, and the development of social and cultural traditions was even something of an afterthought. Furthermore, in keeping with the competitive ethos of capitalism, the leading port cities of the Core have engaged in the fiercest sort of rivalry among themselves (and with such external competitors as New Orleans, Norfolk, Boston, and Montreal) in the struggle to capture the traffic of the rich continental heartland.

By the nineteenth century, the Core was even dominating the speech and literary patterns of what was to be identified as American. A North Midland speech dialect (which is considered “standard American English”) developed along the coast and moved inland through the Heartland and on to the American West. One of the first writers to emerge and become identified with a uniquely American literature was a child of the Core: Walt Whitman was born on Long Island, raised in Brooklyn, and
From the 13th century to 1941, Russia answered the vital question "to be or not to be?" in historic battles fought along the perimeter of the Core. While pushing out the boundaries of early Muscovy centrifugally to the limits of the world's largest state, the region in turn developed a powerful centripetal tendency, gathering power inward to Moscow. Throughout most of Russian history, the awesome machinery of state managed to control even the most remote corners of the country and to extract from them a sort of "tribute", both in the form of centrally redistributed fiscal and material resources, and by requisitioning the nation's best brains and strong personalities. The region that "made" the country developed a kind of sacral aura as the epitome of the true and Holy Russia. Even after the imperial capital was moved to St. Petersburg in 1712, the Core preserved its key role, as exemplified by Napoleon's invasion in 1812 that aimed at the heart of Russia, Moscow. During the Middle Ages, visitors from Europe who clearly saw the unique role of the city called the state itself not after its people ("Russia") but after its node ("Moscow"). The notorious centralism of the USSR was not the rule of Russia, but the rule of Moscow's bureaucracy and its satraps over both Russian and non-Russian provinces. In the Soviet Union, a traditional differentiation was made between people of Moscow (Muscovites) and people outside of Moscow (provincials). Even in post-Soviet Russia, Moscow has retained and even strengthened its sense of separateness and superiority from the rest of the country.

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died in 1892 in Camden, New Jersey. His Leaves of Grass, published in the 1850s, marks the beginning of America's departure from a European literary tradition and represents the brush pride that was beginning to define the nation:

We must march my darling, we must bear the brunt of danger,
We the youthful sinewy races, all the rest on us depend,

One would expect to find the capital of a nation located within the historically dominant region of any sensible country, but the path to that choice of site was not smooth for the United States. When the Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia in 1787, the logical selection for the young republic's capital city would have been Philadelphia itself or New York City, either of which could then have claimed supremacy in population or wealth. But, as it happened, severe sectional rivalry between North and South scuttled any such possibility. Though commercial power favored the North, Virginia was still the country's most populous state, and perhaps its most powerful in terms of social and intellectual impact. The District of Columbia, that unprepossessing swampy rural site along the Potomac, became the compromise solution. The precarious borderland position of Washington became all too obvious during the Civil War when it barely escaped serious military assault, and only slowly did the city become the large, imposing place it is today. After the outcome of the Civil War determined that the Core plus New England, not the South, would administer the economic and political business of the nation, it was then too late shift the capital; however, the decision to situate the United Nations' headquarters in Manhattan is a recognition of the hard geographic realities of our contemporary world. As a result, New York today represents the power elite of the United States, the embodiment of "big government" and a place which is at once exciting and dangerous.
THEME 1: LIFE IN THE URBAN ISLAND

Being the almost monopolistic dispenser of power, the capital city was in many ways a privileged one, enjoying a disproportionate share of budgetary outlays. The State took good care of Moscow's armies of office workers and intellectuals who legitimized and strengthened the regime. Moscow's privileged population enjoyed better housing, an excellent subway system and access to comparatively well stocked shelves in groceries or imported consumer goods in department stores. In Moscow, businesses ran on schedule, business could be done without bribes, and families were fed without resort to the black market. After all, Moscow was also a showpiece for the outside world and the country's own residents, and the city was officially designated as a "model communist city." Sharp witted Russians said the same in different words, quipping that "Socialism ends at the line of Moscow's Beltway." The many advantages of life in Moscow made it an obvious magnet for migrants. Early on, Moscow based planners realized that to remain a privileged island, the city needed to close its doors to diluting hosts of newcomers. The task was performed by the unique Soviet system of propiska, or residence permit system. Without a local propiska, one cannot get a job or an apartment. Moscow initiated the practice of "closing" the city by denying propiskas to newcomers. Since under the Soviet system the quality-of-life index for any city was directly related to its administrative status, the practice of "closing" cities quickly spread to the 14 mini Moscows of the former Union republic capitals, and then to even smaller administrative centers. The sense of a perfect pyramidal hierarchy permeated the Soviet settlement structure, and upward social mobility became synonymous with moving to ever larger cities, until the final coveted apex, Moscow. A passage through the propiska barriers was possible through elaborate chains of apartment exchanges or by marriage. Marrying a registered resident of Moscow made an out of towner a resident too, and cases of marriages of convenience abound. But a shortcut into the socialist haven lay through blue collar industrial labor.

THEME 1: LIFE IN THE URBAN ARCHIPELAGO

During the past few decades, the Core has spilled its urban character even further outward as modern transport and greater affluence have enabled millions of persons to escape not just into suburbs but also even farther into what is termed Exurbia. There, in scattered clustered developments, highway strips, or isolated dwellings, a population which is rural but not farmers by profession lives amidst bucolic surroundings, yet still enjoys many of the amenities of urban existence. The majority of people in the Core, however, are urban and suburban dwellers, living in an amazing mixture of races, ethnicities, and incomes. Few places can think of challenging New York City when it comes to sheer number and diversity of ethnic groups. Here is a dazzling mosaic of peoples, languages, and cultural traditions, to rival the Tower of Babel. Even in its earliest years under Dutch rule, the city welcomed a mixture of newcomers quite unusual for the period. As time went on, New York became by far the nation's leading port of entry, and a large fraction of those arriving traveled no farther than America's largest city with its exceptional range of economic possibilities. The result has been a place the majority of whose residents are first- or second-generation foreign stock. At the present time, the leading "minorities," if that is an accurate term, are African-Americans and Hispanics, but neither category is uniform in composition. Although the former consists mostly of migrants from the American South and their progeny, Africans, Jamaican, Haitians, and other West Indians are also well represented, while Cubans, Salvadorans, Dominicans, Brazilians, and other Latin Americans, as well as the numerically dominant Puerto Ricans, are easy enough to find within the Hispanic fold. Like some other American cities, New York has witnessed ethnic succession over space and time as great numbers of Italian and Germans were followed by Chinese, Italians, Jews, and various East European groups, then more recently by not only Latin Americans but also by large numbers of Chinese and Japanese, as well as Koreans.
employment: the chronically understaffed industrial enterprises had the right to recruit labor elsewhere. After a passage of several years these recruits above the limit, *limitchiki*, became registered Muscovites. Paradoxically, *propiska* limitations only accelerated the growth of Moscow. The difficulties of getting into the city gave Muscovites a caste like superiority complex and aristocratic disdain of blue collar work, forcing the enterprises to annually import thousands of *limitchiki* to man the jobs that Muscovites avoided.

If the higher material standard of living was the major attraction for *limitchiki* types, the city was also a magnet for intellectual aspirants. Over the years Moscow sucked in informational wealth by concentrating libraries, archives, and museum collections from all over the country and creating an environment where research and culture thrive. In the late 1980's, Moscow concentrated more than one quarter of the Ph.D.'s in the USSR and was by far the country's largest center of higher learning. More importantly, against the low standards in most provincial schools, a Moscow diploma or degree is taken as a sign of quality. The city further enriched its cultural compost by practically monopolizing contacts with the outside world. Until recently, Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport was the only entrypoint for international flights, and no other place in the country saw so many foreign visitors. No other city in the USSR was so exposed to "contaminating" influences of the West and so ready to imbibe them. Moscow's elite culture is strikingly cosmopolitan and liberal.

However, the cosmopolitanism hardly shows in the ethnic structure of Moscow's population. In 1989, ninety percent of the population called themselves Russian, and ninety-nine percent gave Russian as their mother tongue. Even the largest minorities, Jews, Ukrainians and Tatars, are almost completely Russified in cultural terms. Yet one should not hurry to conclude that Moscow is a purely Russian city. As an "island of socialism" Moscow long functioned as safe haven for those who aspired to good education and careers but were barred from them in the USSR's non Russian peripheries where too much depends on traditionalistic clan networks, bribes, or

Americans, but also Middle Easterners, East Indians, Thai, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Chinese from a variety of countries, Ethiopians, and still another influx of Russian Jews. Frequently, as the group that had dominated a relatively homogeneous neighborhood moved up the socioeconomic ladder and outward to suburbia, a different set of immigrants would replace them, and later repeat the process - but not always. If neighborhoods that were once heavily Jewish, German, Italian, Hungarian, Czech, or whatever have turned into something else, the large, ever-expanding African-American districts show no signs of yielding to invaders; and Chinatown is becoming more Chinese than ever and bulging outward ever since the liberalization of immigration laws in 1965.

This wild ethnicity is visible - and audible, smellable, and tastable - in restaurants, groceries, and other sidewalk food vendors catering to their own kin or offering exotic specialties to the adventurous gentile. The diversity shows up as well in the churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques with their ethnically exclusive flocks, and in the social clubs, fraternal groups, and special schools, the multifarious foreign-language press and radio and television programs, the festivals, parades, and music pouring out of windows into the streets.

The urban archipelago of the Core does suffer chronically from dilemmas peculiar to the area or relatively extreme versions of general American conditions. The most intense and pervasive problem may be the striking social and economic disparities seen within small areas, sometimes even a single city block. Such jarring discontinuities, the coexistence side by side of ostentatious wealth and privilege on the one hand and destitution and physical decay on the other are not unknown elsewhere in the United States, but they are probably nowhere more visibly intrusive and unavoidable than in the Core.
belonging to the ruling ethnic group. By contrast, the capital was always the most tolerant part of the USSR, rapidly recasting peripheral “refugees” from nationalism or poverty not so much into Russians as into generic “Soviets.” The non Slavic physiognomies and names of many officially “Russian” Muscovites present a picture of the population far more diverse than official statistics would have us believe.

The place where one can best see Moscow’s mixture of peoples is in its stores and streets. Department stores swarm with visitors from the provinces, hunting for fancy gifts. In post-Soviet times, western firms such as Estee Lauder and McDonald’s opened outlets first in Moscow. People from the Caucasus and Central Asia swept the stores for merchandise that was available in their home areas only from under the counter and previously not at a fixed state price. The city’s prohibitively expensive farmer’s markets were primarily occupied by Ukrainians or distinctively Mediterranean Azeris. Yet the area where non Russian presence is most tangible is the criminal world dominated by ethnic mafias, from the Vietnamese one to the especially notorious Chechens from the northern Caucasus. Moscow now houses nightclubs where the young, newly rich class of post-Soviet Russia may meet for one-hundred dollar a glass champagnes. Mafia control of much of speculative trading activity in the capital is breeding strong resentment against all dark skinned southerners collectively dubbed as Caucasians.

In such manifestations of racism, the nation’s ultimate city that so disdains its provinces as “rural backwaters” itself demonstrates some parochial ruralism. With a large share of its residents, especially the limitchiki, coming directly from the countryside, Moscow may have been the least urbane of urban giants and was sometimes called the “big village.” Still, Muscovites largely belonged to the Soviet breed of middle class: outwardly loyal to the regime but also well educated and therefore deeply cynical. Ironically, the Core of Russia is a city that is at once both sophisticated and provincial.

From the very beginning of European colonization, the cities of the Core embodied the principles of capitalism as purely and singlemindedly as any other group of places in the modern world. The barguoning, nondescript, unplanned, and uncontrolled suburban belts encircling Core metropolises are models of similar excessences in other regions. The same is true for the “Edge Cities,” those effectively autonomous agglomerations of retail, office, entertainment, residential, and other facilities that have mushroomed at strategic points along the peripheries of New York, Philadelphia, and Washington. In general, the central sections of virtually every American city founded in the 19th century or earlier have experienced serious economic decline and neglect, despite the rehabilitation of selected neighborhoods. A decline in manufacturing employment and the change to a “postindustrial” economy have exacerbated the gulf between the well-off and the poor in the Core cities. But in no other region of the country has this downward spiral progressed further than in some Core metropolises such as Newark. In fact, New York City, Philadelphia and other Core cities have recently veered dangerously close to bankruptcy and more such episodes are bound to occur in the years ahead.

The vast accumulation of inhabitants and the presence of so many enterprises consuming great quantities of water have led to increasing difficulties in insuring adequate supplies, especially in the eastern portions of the Core, even though it is a relatively well watered part of the world. In the case of a thirsty NYC, some of its principal water sources lie many miles away. When drought occurs, as has happened more than once in recent decades, the situation has been worrisome, raising the prospect of outright disaster.

Declining quality of the natural environment is matched by deterioration in the social structures necessary for the proper functioning of a great metropolitan public schools, transportation lines, government facilities and services. But it may be premature to write the obituary for New York and other cities of the Core: there is every likelihood
No other city of the Core can even remotely compare to Moscow in size or importance. The doughnut area that remains if one removes Moscow from the Core region is known as Podmoskovye (literally, “Around and Under Moscow”), an unprecedented placename, the likes of which was never coined for St Petersburg, Kiev, or any other metropolis of Russia. In retrospect it appears that the Core’s historic mission was its shielding, nourishing, and raising Moscov, the giant, which in a sense overshadowed the region that nurtured it. Today, the Core is still synonymous with Moscow. The busy activity of its outlying towns is largely part of the capital’s metabolism. It is a dominant city indeed, more than twice the size of St. Petersburg or Kiev and ten times that of the Core’s second largest city, Nizhniy Novgorod. Appropriately enough, in Soviet political parlance Moscow was called simply “The Center,” and it has once again emerged in post-Soviet Russia as a focus of power and prestige for the nouveaux riches.

THEME 2: POWER OF THE CORE

The Center perpetuates its power over the country by firmly controlling its communications. In the past, the roads did not so much converge on Moscow as spread out from it, sent out almost as tentacles to bind the nation with a single will. Moscow’s transport supremacy is somewhat artificial but completely unchallenged. All roads begin in Moscow in a strictly radial pattern. Frequently the only way to get from one part of the country to another is via Moscow, and every day, the capital sees hundreds of thousands of transit passengers. As a transportation node, Moscow is a transit point for one half of the cargo traffic of the former USSR, and one fifth of its passenger traffic. At the other end of the scale, the strictly hierarchical nature of Soviet society was imprinted in the pattern of the streets of Moscow itself. All major streets and the lines of Moscow’s extensive subway system converge in the center although only one major ring line is close to the Kremlin itself. While getting from the outlying areas of the city to downtown center is fast and convenient, that the region will continue to enact its well-established role as a leading member in the ensemble of American regions, even if not necessarily with the same degree of absolute dominance as in the past.

THEME 2: POWER OF THE CORE

The Core includes more territory than just Megalopolis, but Megalopolis in turn so dominates the region as to drain out an established identity for other places in the region. The small area of New Jersey that lies outside the built-up urban area, central Pennsylvania, and the cities of upstate New York are all living in the shadow of Megalopolis, dependent on it and yet resentful of its power and role in the spotlight.

The concentration of people, power, and wealth in the Core has been phenomenal, but what proportion of the American population is in the region? From Connecticut to Washington D.C, 47 million people, or nineteen percent of the United States, are packed into the region, most living in urban concentrations along the coast. For the better part of 200 years, it was residents of this region, along with those in a strongly influential neighboring southern New England, who so largely molded the economic, political, social, and cultural destinies of the entire country.

The case for the Core’s supremacy is strong, for example, in the field of communications. New York City has a near monopoly of book publishing; the bulk of important American magazines are edited there or in Philadelphia and other Core metropolises; and the Government Printing Office in Washington is by all odds the world’s single greatest generator of printed matter. The United States may not have a full-fledged national newspaper, but The New York Times and Washington Post are plausible facsimiles, while the contents of the nationally distributed USA Today emanate from a Manhattan address. Commercial radio and television stations and networks originated in the Core (as did electric telegraphy and telephones much
tangential movements are difficult. Downtown (logically called "the center" in Russian) dominates daily lives of all Muscovites, not least because it is as privileged in terms of provision of goods and services compared to Moscow as a whole, as Moscow is compared to the country. Being close to the center is a great advantage, and the value of housing steadily declines as one moves away from the center. This pattern of housing markets (typical not only for Moscow) was quite the opposite of the western one, mirroring the chain of command structure of center dominated Soviet society and economy.

In a predominantly non-private and non-market economy, Moscow was a general headquarters, the home of ministries that controlled all the branches of the economy. Their central location itself was hardly surprising unless one considers the peculiarity of dozens of Soviet "industrial ministries" that were for all practical purposes corporate headquarters of huge monopolies, and regulated even minute aspects of operations. It was in Moscow, almost 400 miles from the nearest seas, that bureaucrats decided how best to fish in the open oceans. Six hundred miles from the nearest vineyard, guidelines were laid for preparing wines.

Moscow focused the thoughts and hopes of the people in all of the former USSR: in the offices of Moscow's ministries, many a career was decided, and there is hardly a town in the country that does not have some graduates from Moscow's institutes of higher learning. With the population mainly consisting of migrants, the city is linked to the rest of the country by networks of family ties, friendships, or personal loyalties. In all of the country, a person aspiring to a promising career had much better chances if he or she had some connections in Moscow. In the entertainment industry, acquiring national fame was only possible by performing on the scenes of Moscow's theaters, by publishing in its publishing houses, or by exhibiting one's work in its art galleries.

earlier), and despite severe competition from Los Angeles, corporate control and much programming remain in New York City. The early film industry came into being in the metropolis, but subsequently became the only major mode of communication to escape concentration in the Core.

Thanks to an early start and a convergence of favorable historical and economic circumstances, not too many decades ago, the Core claimed a highly disproportionate share of America's manufacturing enterprises and industrial output, and was engaged in every imaginable type of production. The major cities of the Core also rank prominently within the retailing and wholesaling sectors of the American economy. Moreover, few places in the world can rival New York City in the range and variety of specialized commodities for sale in their shops and showrooms.

Impressive though the accumulation of transportation, communication, industrial, and commercial resources in the Core may be, the most convincing measures of its preeminence appear in the higher reaches of the economy and of human endeavor. Wherever in the United States or overseas products or services may be physically produced, it is in the Core, notably New York City, that control is exercised, that governing decisions are formulated. There has been little erosion in the long term, top heavy concentration of capital, of banking and other financial services, stock market transactions, major law firms, and the ruling advertising agencies in a handful of districts within a handful of Core cities. Within those same neighborhoods, in a symbiotic relationship, are the offices of most of the major private foundations that dispense support for so much philanthropic, educational, scientific, and artistic activity throughout America and much of the rest of the world.

While the office towers of New York City symbolize economic power, political control emanates from the purposefully low-profile government buildings in the nation's capital. Perhaps Washington's situation is the most extraordinary among all the world's
The provinces reinforce a deeply embedded image of Moscow as a fairytale dispenser of both benefits and punishments. Regional bureaucracies outside Moscow have always tried to maintain their own lobbyists in the city. The very word “Moscow” contained a certain magic for a provincial, and in local administrative centers, the words “I am from Moscow” would frequently open the doors of a bureaucrats office closed to the locals. Muscovites visiting remote corners of the country frequently find themselves in an awkward position, as they perceive locals’ ambiguous attitude toward the Core. Bitterly complaining about the problems in their own backyards, the provincials view “the Center” as universal villain, but whose guilt, paradoxically, is neglect of local affairs. The laments are underpinned with the hopes for some redress from the Center. Moscow’s super centralization would frequently force people to come to the city to solve petty problems that could in principle be dealt with by locally. From early on, the belief in the “good far” sitting in Moscow had been implanted in the Russian psyche, as the capital symbolized not only power but also justice. The populace firmly believed that local authorities did not want to address people’s problems, while the good far of Moscow could do so. Thus, Moscow became the last resort of appeals against power abuses back home.

Moscow’s rulers were always concerned with the common good of the country and therefore quite sincerely (and not so wrongly) believed that they knew what a particular region should do better than the self-serving bureaucracies of the region itself. The caring and protecting parental hand of the center was sometimes very heavy, and yet it would be wrong to say that Moscow merely profited at the expense of its children. Preoccupied with its socialist egalitarian concerns, the “Communist City” redistributed national product through all embracing centralized budget so as to preclude the emergence within the country of unfairly privileged “oil emirates” or deprived, depressed areas. If the Core’s success in this self-appointed mission was indecisive it was because of the failure of the grand socialist project itself. cities in terms of the sheer accumulation of lobbyists, think tanks, influence peddlers, and other would be manipulators of law, not to mention a world class array of diplomatic missions and international agencies.

Parallel with this astonishing assemblage of economic and, in the broad sense, political resources at so few points within the American Core, there is also an equally intense stockpiling of cultural resources and activities in the same privileged region. Many of the oldest, most prestigious, and most influential of colleges and universities (public and private), such as Princeton, Columbia, and Johns Hopkins, are situated in the Core. Many hundreds of notable museums of every description are established in the region, and the Core also claims an unduly generous share of the nation’s libraries, including literally thousands of specialized ones in addition to such immense collections as those in the New York Public Library or Library of Congress. A good many leading laboratories and Research and Development centers are also here, whether in association with universities or private corporations. When it comes to nearly all the more sophisticated forms of culture and entertainment, no city can think of challenging New York City’s supremacy. It is there, on Broadway and off, that American theater is most concentrated, venturesome, and alive (if also perpetually dying). The city is also the great arbiter and marketplace, the place of ultimate pilgrimage and performance, for practitioners and artists in the world of opera, dance, symphony, and all other categories of art.
The Pulse of Change: Moscow and the Devolution of the USSR

“As is known, all the land begins from the Kremlin.”
- Mayakovskiy

In a country which has fallen apart, these words may appear out of place, but they contain an important grain of historic truth and neatly summarize the basics of the region. Any weakening of the universal control center, like the one brought by perestroika, set the provinces drifting apart. Having first lost the satellites in Europe, Moscow then let go the former union republics, and now even Russia itself is cracking at the seams. The demise of the USSR hit Muscovites hard by divesting them of their privileged status, but it barely diminished the powers and vitality of the Core. To our day, Moscow remains an indisputable economic frontrunner as the Core has emerged as a leader in market reforms and a “free” economy. Beyond Russian boundaries things Soviet are by no means dead. Moscow can feel (with a certain vengeance) that it merely replicated itself in the capitals of the 14 newly independent republics who fully emulate the old Soviet patterns of centralized control within their respective domains. Their politics give ample proof that they imbibed far more of the common all Soviet culture and attitudes than the nationalistic parties would admit. However, none of the new states shows economic viability without massive subsidies from Russia, directed as ever, by Moscow. The regions that hastily scurried away from “The Center” are finding themselves drawn back by strings that are stronger than alleged “Muscovite imperialism.” No less importantly, the lives of people in the former USSR still depend on Moscow, and with the euphoria of local sovereignties wearing off, the Core, striped of its old coercive powers, may again find itself presiding over some reborn Union.

Moving Ahead: New York City and the Growth of the Sunbelt

Will Megalopolis continue its dominance of American life and the country’s economy? The ever-changing geography of the United States may be witnessing a shift of the core, either to the southern California, or to a dispersed Sunbelt along the southern and western tier.

Various pieces of evidence support this notion: population change, which indicates a movement of the American population center south and westward as the Sunbelt grows and the so-called “Rustbelt” regions decline; political shifts as districts outside of the traditional Core gain political representation at the expense of northeast states; and economic change as the United States loses manufacturing jobs and moves into a post-industrial employment base of service and white-collar occupations. Even popular culture in the U.S. seems more defined by Southern California styles, speech, and preferences these days than by those of Megalopolis. But the Core cities are not going down without a fight. Revitalization of inner city waterfronts, downtowns, and neighborhoods is beginning with such projects as Baltimore’s Harborplace, New York’s South Street Seaport, and Philadelphia’s Society Hill. High-tech employment, often associated with universities or government functions, have grown in many areas of the Core, notably along the beltway around Washington D.C. But despite the vitality and life that throb in Megalopolis, economic hard times are creating ever deeper divisions between rich and poor in the region, and the middle class seems to be moving on down the highway. In a period of change and in a society which always looks ahead, the Core may be in for a tough fight.