

New York

Manhattan Island

Manhattan Island was the original site of New York. To most present-day tourists and overseas visitors, Manhattan is New York, although in reality it is only one of five boroughs (the others are Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Staten Island – Figure 3.38). Figure 3.39 is a photo of the island (looking north) with Long Island, which provides the major residential and recreational areas for New Yorkers, to the east (to the right of the photo). Skyscraper development has taken place in two distinct zones:

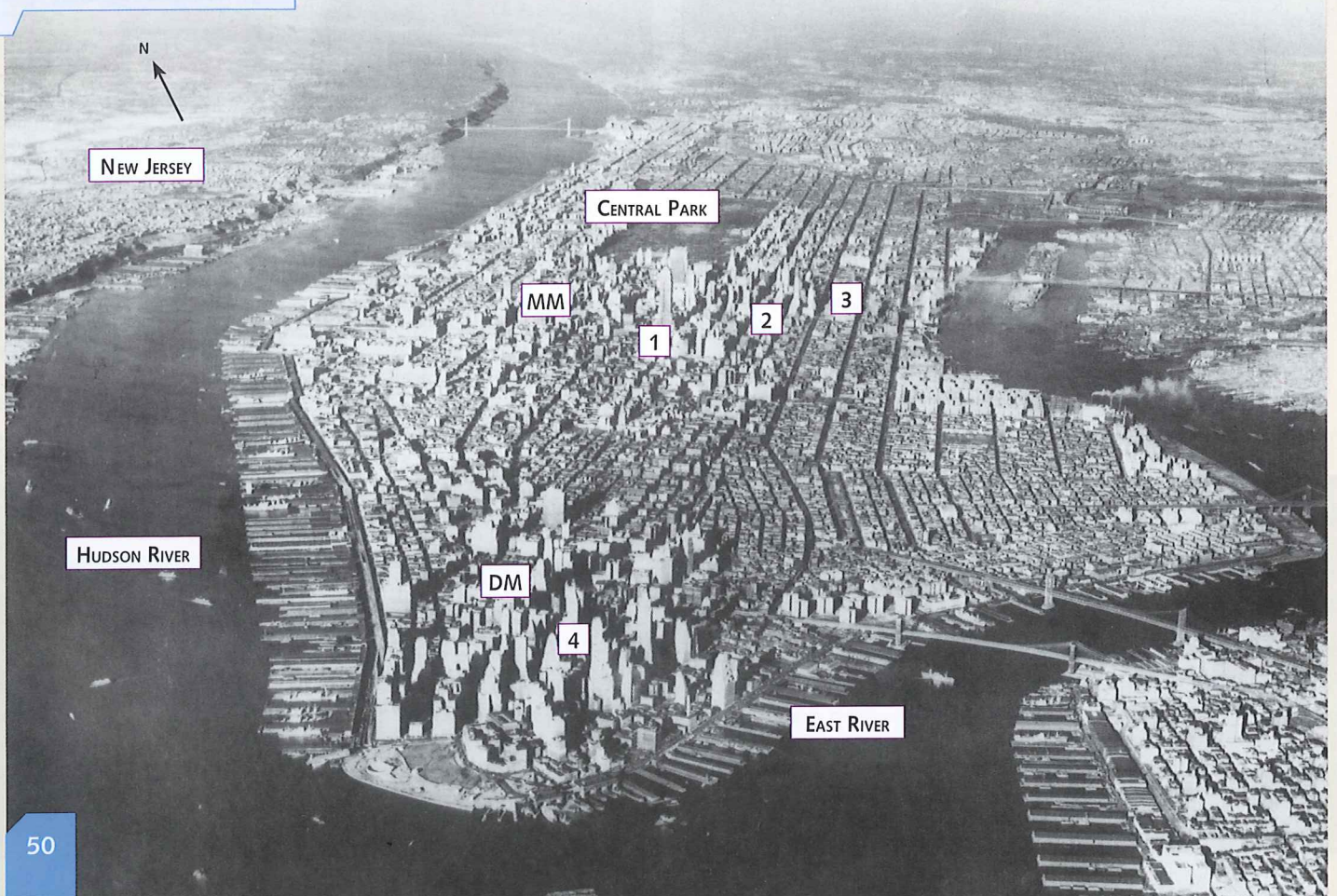
- Midtown Manhattan (MM on Figure 3.38) which includes the main hotels (the Plaza and Waldorf Astoria), shops (Fifth Avenue and Park Avenue), theatres (Broadway) and prestige buildings (Empire State, Chrysler and United Nations)
- Downtown Manhattan (DM on Figure 3.38) which includes the financial and banking district (Wall Street and the Stock Exchange) – and, until 11 September 2001, it also included the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center.

On both the map and photo of Manhattan, notice the grid-iron layout of the roads to the north of Chinatown. There are 12 'avenues' that run north to south between the East and Hudson Rivers. There are also 219 'streets' that run across the island from east to west. The Empire State Building is 'on Fifth Avenue at 34th Street'.

Figure 3.38
Manhattan Island



Figure 3.39
Aerial view of Manhattan Island



Problems resulting from the growth of New York

New York had become, by the middle of the twentieth century, the world's largest city (estimates in 2007 suggested it had fallen to third). Its size exaggerated problems that were shared by most other large cities in developed countries. This case study gives a negative view of New York because it concentrates on **problems** rather than on seeing what **solutions** have been attempted and with what success.

High cost of land In the central areas, especially in the CBD districts of Middle and Downtown Manhattan, this has led to skyscraper development (Figure 3.40). High land values do mean, however, that only highly successful firms can locate here (e.g. large banks and giant oil-corporations). Many smaller companies have been forced out and even some of the larger ones are seeking less expensive and environmentally more attractive sites.

Urban decay Many areas of inner city housing, such as Harlem, were built, as in Britain, in the late nineteenth century. The tenement blocks, flats and terraced housing suffered through years of neglect (Figure 3.41). Some of the worst areas became 'ghettos' with few properties having modern amenities such as hot water, bathroom and WC. Most people rented their homes and if they could not afford the high rent, their houses became empty and vandalised. The ghettos became home for the very poorest families – ethnic minorities, the unskilled and the unemployed. They experienced overcrowding both in terms of the number of houses per square kilometre and the number of people per house.

Immigrants America has always welcomed large numbers of immigrants but has not always been able to offer them equal opportunities. Over a period of time, many immigrants find jobs and, as their wealth increases, are able to move away from the poorest areas, leaving them vacant for the next wave of immigrants. This process, known as **centrifugal movement**, is illustrated in Figure 3.42. Immigrants and poor families who cannot find work or only earn low wages may find themselves trapped in the so-called **vicious circle of poverty** (Figure 3.43). In 1990, estimates suggested that there were over 50 000 homeless people in New York, most of them in Manhattan.



Figure 3.41
Poor-quality housing
in Manhattan

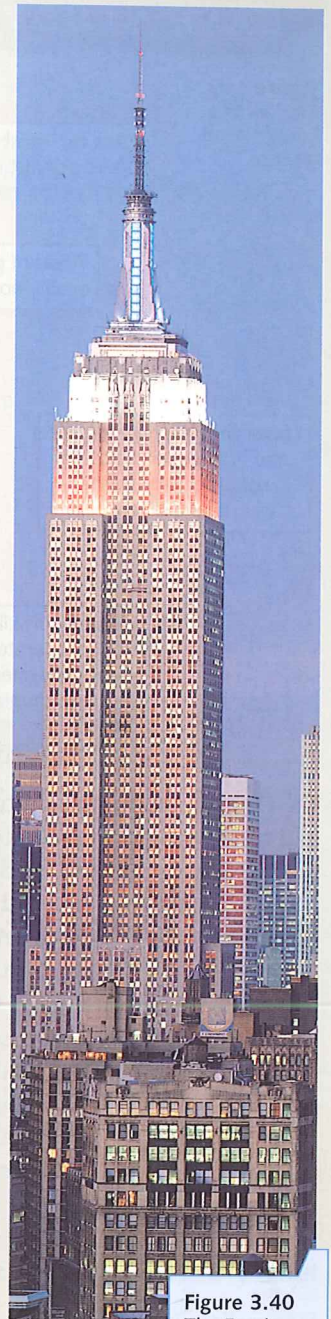
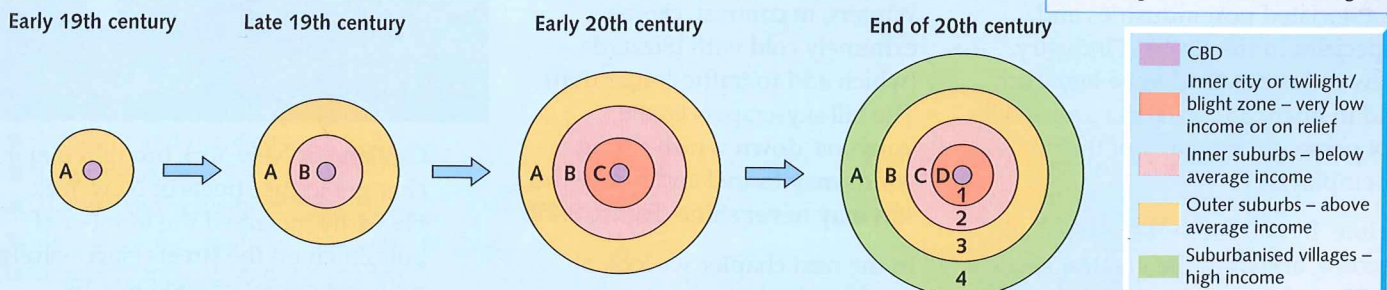


Figure 3.40
The Empire
State Building

Figure 3.42
Centrifugal movement of immigrants



Applied to New York:

A Established inhabitants of north-west European descent (British, German, French)

B Immigrants and their descendants from poorer European countries (Irish, Italian, Eastern European)

C Blacks from south-east of the USA and immigrants from the Caribbean (Puerto Rico)

D Recent immigrants, including refugees

1 Harlem (tenement blocks and flats)

2 Bronx and Brooklyn (apartment blocks and flats)

3 Queens, Yonkers, western Long Island (detached)

4 Eastern Long Island and the states of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut (detached)

Figure 3.43
The 'vicious circle' of the ghetto

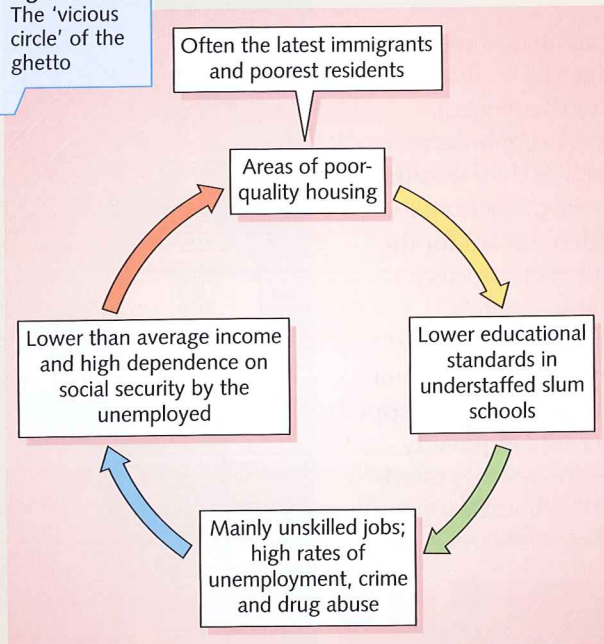
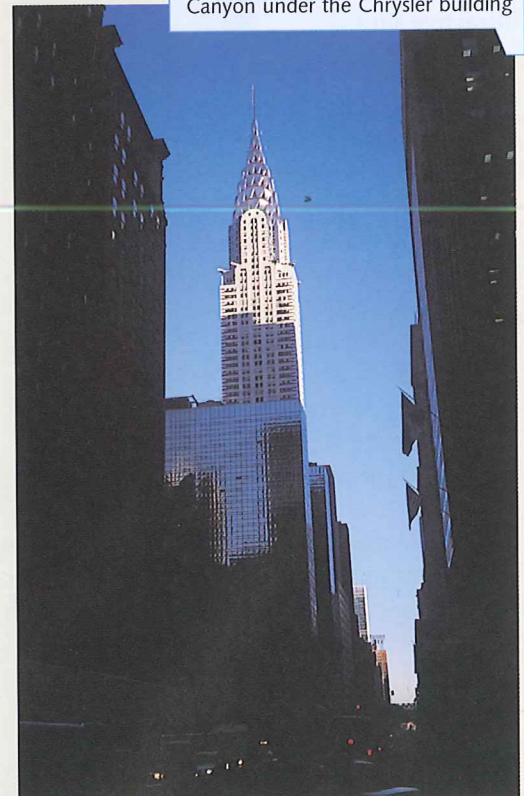


Figure 3.44
Graffiti on the New York subway



Figure 3.45
Canyon under the Chrysler building



Traffic congestion Each morning up to 2 million commuters (people living outside Manhattan but working there) travel into the area. At night the direction of movement is reversed. About 75 per cent of commuters travel by public transport, mainly the underground, or 'subway' (Figure 3.44). Roads become blocked with cars, buses and yellow taxis. Although the rivers that surround Manhattan made it an ideal site for the first settlers, they now add to the congestion, especially where they are crossed by bridges, tunnels and ferries (Figure 3.38).

Unemployment During the 1980s up to 1.5 million New Yorkers (one in every seven of the workforce) were unemployed. Unemployment was mainly due to a decline in the port, in associated port industries and, especially, in the clothing industry. New industries tend to be high-tech and in finance – jobs that require skills not possessed by many of the unemployed.

Crime By the late 1980s, crime had become, arguably, the greatest single problem. Street violence, subway muggings, drug-related crimes and murder (on average, one every five hours) had turned certain parts of

Manhattan into 'no-go' areas. Ethnic groups tended to congregate into their own small communities, and racial tension was high.

Pollution New York has a severe refuse collection and disposal problem. Vehicles cause air and noise pollution, while run-down houses and graffiti cause visual pollution.

Water supply Water has to be pumped a distance of almost 200 km.

Climate New York becomes so hot in summer that many of the more wealthy residents have a second home in order to escape from the high temperatures and humidity. Winters, in contrast, can be extremely cold with blizzards (which add to traffic congestion). The tall skyscrapers create 'canyons' down which strong winds may funnel and where the sun may never shine (Figure 3.45).

In the next chapter we look at attempted solutions to urban problems. It should be noted here that during his eight years in office (his term finished in early 2002), Mayor

Guiliano of New York brought major changes to the streets of New York. He vastly increased the number of policemen on the streets (successfully reducing crime), created jobs by improving houses and tidying up the streets, and reduced the number of homeless.