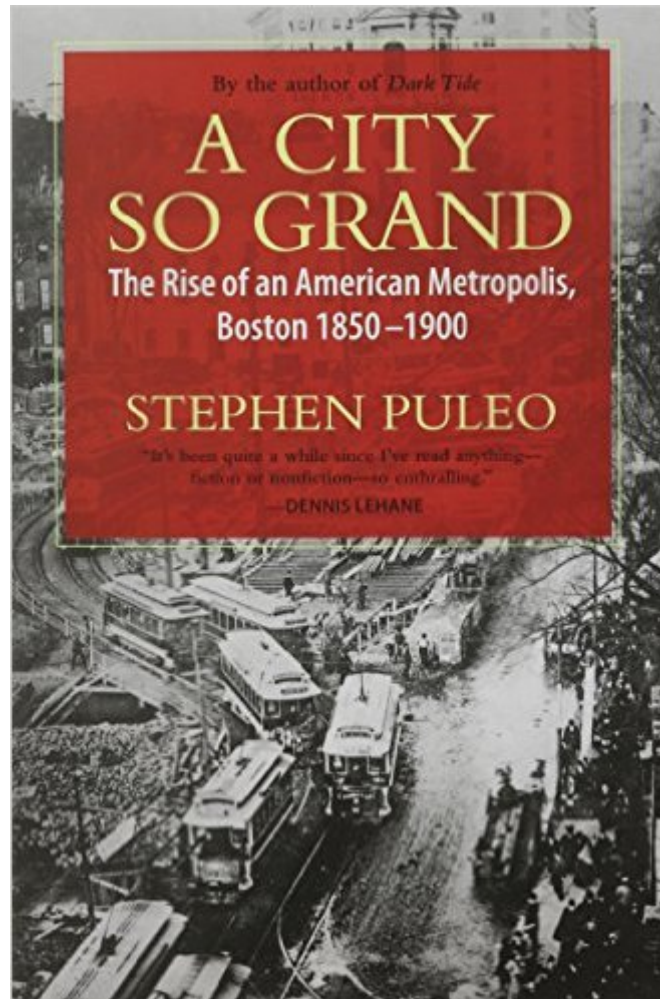


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A City So Grand: The Rise Of An American Metropolis, Boston 1850-1900



Synopsis

Between 1850 and 1900, Boston underwent a stunning metamorphosis from an insulated New England town into one of the world's great metropolises—one that achieved worldwide prominence in politics, medicine, education, science, social activism, literature, commerce, and transportation. In *A City So Grand*, Stephen Puleo chronicles this remarkable period in Boston's history. He takes readers through the ferocity of the abolitionist movement of the 1850s, the thirty-five-year engineering and city-planning feat of the Back Bay project, Boston's explosion in size through immigration and annexation, the devastating Great Fire of 1872, and the glorious opening of America's first subway station in 1897. This lively journey paints a portrait of a half century of progress, leadership, and influence.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Steven Puleo's new book "A City So Grand" is a historical love letter to Boston detailing the astounding amount of visionary thinking in that city during the last half of the nineteenth century. Puleo's pride in his hometown spills over into every paragraph and leaves a sweet taste in your mouth. Boston was home to an impressive number of milestones of progressive thinking - most of the material Puleo covers involves major figures in the abolitionist movement before and during the Civil War. But I enjoyed the description of technological achievements even more. Filling of Back Bay was impressive enough - just that they could do it! - but the successful financing of this project was equally impressive. Many people know that Boston built the first subway in America, but I had

never heard of the move from horse to electric power that preceded the building of the subway, which I thought was even more interesting. Invention of the telephone? Boston! First X-ray image in the U.S? Boston! Largest railroad station in the world at the turn of the century? Boston! (OK, I'll stop with the spoilers.) What I came away with most is that the people making these decisions at that time were really "big thinkers" - the scope and scale of the things they attempted and achieved were on a grand scale and left us with some of the greatest features of the city. Stroll down the mall in the middle of Commonwealth Avenue or stand in the center of South Station and you'll see what I mean. Any attempt to understand Boston would be incomplete without this material - read it, by all means.

I purchased this book based on the excellent reviews at (ten reviews, all five stars); thus, my expectations were high. I was disappointed. The author chooses to "bore in" on certain topics that are only tangentially related to the development of the city, for example, 38 pages on the abolitionist movement. Also, there are many digressions to discuss rather minor characters, for example, five pages on the individual who first used X-ray technology at the Massachusetts General Hospital. There are a few photographs in the book (hardcover), and they are poorly reproduced. The photos are so dark that the details are obscured. Perhaps the photographs should have been printed separately on glossy paper rather than on the pages of the text. Throughout the text, the author refers to specific locations in the city by street names. Unless one is intimately familiar with Boston, this is quite confusing. A few simple maps would have been very helpful. A specific example is the filling in of the Back Bay. Maps showing the outline of the Back Bay before the project began and showing the arrangement of the streets (named) after the project was completed would have been very instructive.

Stephen Puleo's 'A City So Grand' chronicles the transformation of Boston from a small, insular Protestant city in 1850 to a cosmopolitan global city in 1900. Having now lived in Boston since 2005, it's quite fascinating to read about the changes that took place in Boston in the nineteenth century and compare the described areas to the Boston of the 21st century. Divided into three parts, Puleo discusses the many changes that affected Boston. Puleo begins with a fair section of the book to the abolition movement and to the Civil War, events that affected the entire country and in which Boston played a leading role due to its status as center of the intellectual movement in the US during the antebellum period. He then moves to a host of topics. From the immigration of large numbers of Catholic Irish and Italian immigrants to the filling in of the Back Bay and excavation of

the tunnels used for the Boston train system to the descriptions of the intellectual going-ons that included the invention of the telephone and the discovery of x-rays, Puleo describes a city that was radically transformed in fifty years. This short, well written book is great for anyone who lives in Boston and wants to know more about its past, or to anyone interested in nineteenth century American history, or to anyone who loves history. Highly recommended and makes me want to read the authors other books about Boston.

I love Boston, so enjoyed reading this. It covers so many important events that took place in the last part of the 19th century, when Boston really became a leading American city in ingenuity, infrastructure (the first subway), technology (the invention of the telephone), medical advancements (development of the X-ray), and population and geographic growth (the filling in of the Back Bay). All of this is written in an engaging manner. This is my third book by Puleo, who is a fine historical writer.

The filling in of the Back Bay, the digging of the subways, and the rise of the Boston Irish explained in depth. As usual, wish there were more pictures or diagrams included in the Kindle edition, especially to help explain the construction process in the Back Bay.

This book is a wonderful telling of the fifty years that birthed what we call the City of Boston. The book showed me the original events that provide the echoes I hear today. The city that installed the first subway and became the the city that implemented the Big Dig. The city that roused itself against having a slave returned to his master became the city that emptied its streets to capture a bomber. The book showed that the Bostonian's feelings that Boston is a special place are not the result of a provincialist's narrow view of the world, but instead are an echo of what Boston justifiably felt about itself at the end of the 19th century,

Wonderful read full of fascinating historical detail of a very productive fifty years in the history of Boston. I thought that I knew a lot of it, before I opened the book, having lived here for nearly fifty years, but I learned so much more from Stephen Puleo's beautifully written book. I recommend it to anyone, either moving here or just interested in this charming city. I know I will impress my English visitors with all my new found knowledge when I take them around! Kudos !

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