

**SOCIETY**

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The clash between civilization and barbarians was most intense during three eras: the second millennium B.C., when Bronze Age charioteers charged out of Central Asia to seize all the land between Mesopotamia and China; the age of Attila the Hun, in the 5th century A.D., when the Roman Empire was under siege; and the 12th and 13th centuries A.D., when Genghis Khan created a nomadic empire extending from the Pacific to the Hungarian plain. The characteristics shared by these and other barbarians were pastoralism and a nomadic way of life. Lifestyle, not race, says Jones, defined barbarian man.

The Central Asian nomads eventually found themselves in hostile climates and environments and were forced to adopt more "civilized" forms of economic and social organization. By the early Middle Ages, the distinctions between "civilized" and "barbarian" cultures had become artificial. Yet cultural prejudice continued to cause civilized men to judge outsiders by their own ideals of virtue and propriety and to label as "barbarous" any who did not conform to accepted notions of spiritual and moral excellence.

Long after historical "barbarism" had disappeared as a real threat to the civilized Western world, the word retained its cultural and moral connotations, separating farmers and city dwellers, for example, from shepherds and nomads. The "barbarian" myth survives, says Jones. "Modern universal historians from Gibbon to Toynbee have continued to employ the concept of the 'Barbarian' as a category of historical generalization and cross-cultural analysis."

### *Sizing Up the Ideal City*

"The Polis Perplexity: An Inquiry Into the Size of Cities" by Kirkpatrick Sale, in *Working Papers for a New Society* (Jan.-Feb. 1978), Center for the Study of Public Policy, 123 Mt. Auburn St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Philosophers (since Plato) and contemporary urban planners are in remarkable agreement that the optimum population for a city is between 50,000 and 100,000. America's planned "New Towns" (e.g., Columbia, Md., and Reston, Va.) were designed for an average population of 73,000, and similar limits have been set for new communities in Great Britain, China, the Soviet Union, Israel, and the Netherlands. So writes Sale, a writer specializing in politics and government. The root cause of today's urban crises, he says, may be that many older American cities have simply grown too big.

Today there is evidence that population size is the single most important factor in determining the quality of urban life. A U.S. city of 50,000 population can provide almost every business service found in much larger cities. Once a city exceeds 100,000, it becomes less efficient: Per capita costs of municipal services, such as schools and police, rise inexorably; the ability to deliver them declines. (In a city of 50,000-

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100,000, the per capita cost of municipal services averages \$229 per year; in cities from 500,000 to 1 million the cost rises to \$426; and in cities over 1 million, to \$681.) Violent crime rates are 100 times greater in cities of 250,000 than in cities in the 50,000 to 100,000 range. Increasing congestion, water and air pollution, poor schools, and high taxes raise the cost of commerce, encouraging business firms to flee.

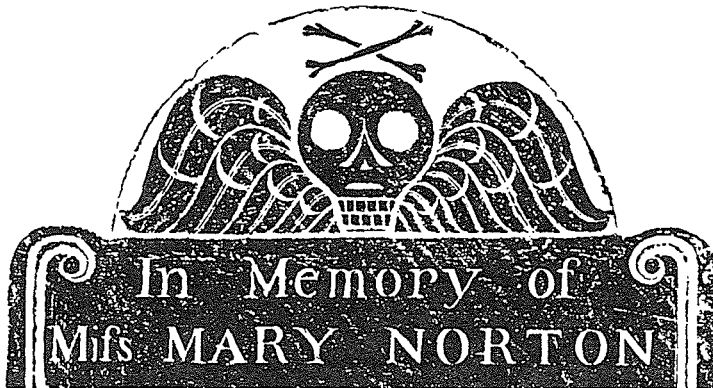
Surveys show that Americans *want* to live in smaller cities (32 percent prefer small towns and cities, 25 percent suburban cities, 26 percent rural areas, 17 percent large cities, according to Sale's compilation); populations of the large older cities have been declining for the last 20 years. Therefore, Sale says, U.S. lawmakers have an "unshirkable obligation" to encourage settlement in smaller cities; federal urban aid programs should favor smaller cities in the allocation of funds and in offering incentives for business investment.

*Is Death  
Un-American?*

"American Attitudes to Death" by Charles O. Jackson, in *The Journal of American Studies* (Dec. 1977), Cambridge University Press, 32 E. 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

Twentieth-century custom enjoins Americans to repress grief and to deny any thought of death. But it has not always been so. Jackson, a University of Tennessee historian, reviews the scant literature and finds three distinct phases in the history of American attitudes and responses to dying.

In colonial times, when as many as one in four children died before the age of 10, death was a harsh and common occurrence that could not be



*The death's-head on gravestones in colonial times conveyed a macabre view of mortality in an age when life was short and none too sweet.*