

still bear the name “Boston Post Road” or “Old Post Road,” though it is impossible to follow any of these for more than a few miles. The road, says Jaffe, “has assumed an air of senility, a sense of self more scattered than ever” (p. 244).

Jaffe is especially strong when describing the profound social, political, and commercial implications of the route’s evolution and the ways in which major decisions about the future of transportation along the Boston Post Road have shaped the modern Northeast. For example, New Haven—which thrived during the heyday of the New York and New Haven Railroad in the latter half of the nineteenth century—is today economically degraded in part because Interstate 95, which passes through New Haven along the shorefront, diverted traffic that once flowed through the city’s streets. By contrast, “transportation rearrangement” (p. 237), part of a visionary rethinking of the entire city by planners in Providence—another city traversed by Interstate 95—has led to a renaissance there.

Jaffe occasionally succumbs to distracting rhetorical excess, all the more noticeable because of his otherwise strong narrative skill. For example, he describes John Winthrop Jr.’s goats in 1649 as “munch[ing] away their days, bleating goatish wisdom in the blue Long Island breeze” (p. 15). Narrating Nathan Hale’s 1825 epiphany about the future importance of “rail roads,” Jaffe writes, “A puff of steam rose to his brain” (p. 111). But these discordant notes do not dim an otherwise impressive achievement: a retelling of important pieces of American history using a singular route to stitch it together.

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*A City So Grand: The Rise of an American Metropolis, Boston, 1850–1900.* By Stephen Puleo. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010. Pp. xiii, 297. \$26.95.)

Stephen Puleo, a historian and journalist, sets out to chronicle the half-century-long period of “Boston’s metamorphosis from a large

and insulated town to a thriving metropolis that achieved national and international prominence in politics, medicine, education, science, social activism, literature, commerce, and transportation" (p. x). He does this in an effective but unusual way, zeroing in on specific incidents in Boston while providing a wealth of information on related national events. Puleo narrates the abolitionist movement and the Civil War in relation to Boston, the early women's suffrage movement, and the massive influx of Irish immigrants into the city, where they faced harsh treatment. Other sections of the book focus on changes brought about by transportation innovations like steam railroads, electric streetcars, and the nation's first subway. Puleo details the new technologies and diverse motivations that led to the massive Back Bay landfill project, touches on the annexation of independent cities and towns as part of metropolitan expansion during this period, and covers the effects of the Great Fire of 1872 and other important events in the later nineteenth century.

Puleo crafts compelling stories to introduce his themes and make his points. For example, the section on abolitionism begins with the gripping tale of radical antislavery activists' failed attempt to free runaway slave Thomas Sims from jail on Fugitive Slave Law charges in 1851. A description of the furor surrounding the 1851 appointment of Barney McGinniskin as the first Irish-born Boston police officer introduces the chapter on Irish immigrants. Puleo opens his coverage of Boston and the Civil War by relating the saga of the Massachusetts Sixth Regiment, which was attacked by a Baltimore street mob in April 1861 as it rushed southward to become the first Union regiment to defend Washington. Later in the book, Puleo tells the captivating tale of Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone.

While the chapters are roughly chronological, Puleo includes contextual material at many points. Often he describes the activities of Bostonians on the national scene, adding more depth to the stories. Puleo also pays more attention to Boston's immigrant groups and working-class interests than to the ruling elites. While high cultural and educational institutions are addressed, they are not emphasized. Overall, Puleo's book is thorough in its coverage of the period, and readers will likely encounter much new information.

Puleo draws from a wide range of sources for his material, including several recently published books. He does utilize original sources in some instances. Although he employs no footnotes, Puleo provides a good bibliographic essay that discusses the sources he consulted for each chapter.

Stephen Puleo is an excellent writer when he is telling a story. Many riveting episodes are included throughout the book, bringing individuals and events to life for readers. The dramatic narrative about the Minkins case, for instance, clearly portrays the strains among abolitionists over breaking an unjust law. The flow of the overall story falters at some points due to the complexity of the period and the lack of gripping anecdotes.

On some topics, Puleo explores complicated issues adeptly. For example, he portrays the changing and conflicting views of Boston's Irish-American citizens as their Civil War regiments fought bravely but suffered severe losses. Puleo relates this issue to political matters; many Irish leaders felt that Republicans did not appreciate their soldiers' sacrifices to the Union cause.

Some sections seem less relevant to the larger history; many of these are intended as bridging elements between chapters. For instance, early in the chapter "Filling the Back Bay," Puleo describes the 1851 introduction of the nation's first electric fire alarm system in Boston, stating that this accomplishment, among others, made the ambitious landfill project seem possible. Then, still before beginning the story of the Back Bay Project, he includes a page on the founding of the Boston Public Library.

As is probably inevitable when a book covers so much material, there are some minor inaccuracies. In "Filling the Back Bay," for example, Puleo writes that the 1821 dams in the Back Bay "provided water power for the company's mills in Watertown, Dorchester Lower Mills, and the Neponset River" (p. 86). Thankfully, such mistakes are not critical because Puleo provides his sources, which can be checked by readers. In addition, some important topics of the period have been overlooked, such as the political transformations that occurred when Irish-Americans replaced English Protestants as the largest population group.

*A City So Grand* will appeal to a broad range of readers who want to understand Boston's history during the crucial second half of the nineteenth century. The author contextualizes numerous complex elements in an eminently readable way.

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