The Canadian Discourse on Urban Neighbourhoods, 1900-present

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Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership

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Scope:

- **Discourse: speech + action**
- **Residents and experts**
- **All urban areas**
- **All types of neighbourhoods** (esp. middle-income and poor)

Sources:

- **Academic studies**
- **Planning documents, 1945-** (thanks to Emily Hawes, Amy Shanks, Alexandre Maltais, Will Gregory)
- **Newspaper coverage** (*Globe and Mail*; *New York Times*)
- **Google *Ngram Viewer***

Outline:

1. **Why neighbourhoods matter more now**
2. **Historical trend in discourse**
3. **Geographical focus (within urban area)**
4. **Issues: social, physical, process**

1. Why neighbourhoods matter more now

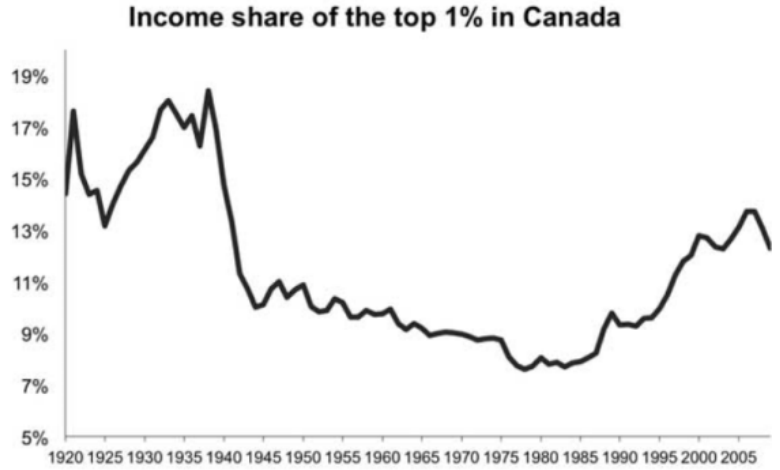
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e45eZz1DwYY
(Chicago Urban Forum, April, 2014)

A. Homeownership: 33% to 66%
   - Owners have a twofold stake in their neighbourhood
   - Lower rates of residential mobility
   - Owners care more – NIMBYism

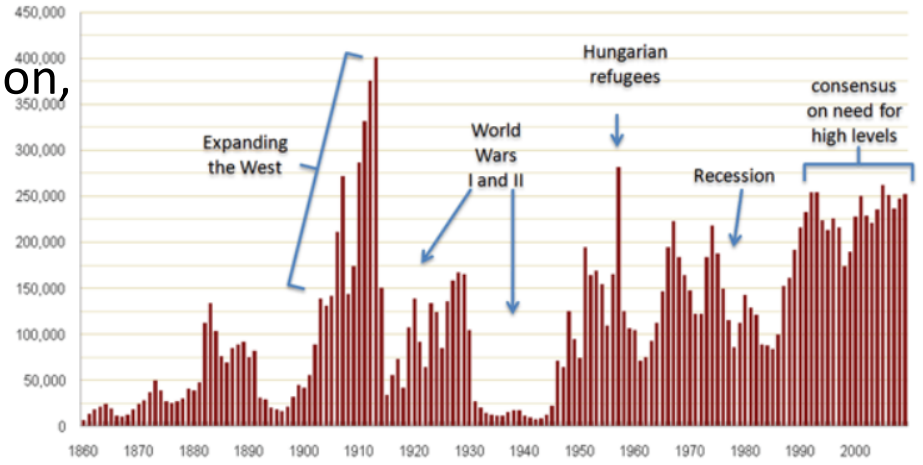
B. Education: neighbourhood school
   - Increased importance of formal education
   - Neighbourhoods chosen because of school

C. Long-term cycles of immigration and income disparity

- 1900s-1920s:
  - High disparity
  - High immigration
  - Limited state services
- 1930s-1970s:
  - Reduced disparity (1940s)
  - Initially lower immigration
  - Standardised services
- 1970s-present:
  - Increasing disparity
  - Sustained high immigration, visible minorities
  - cutbacks

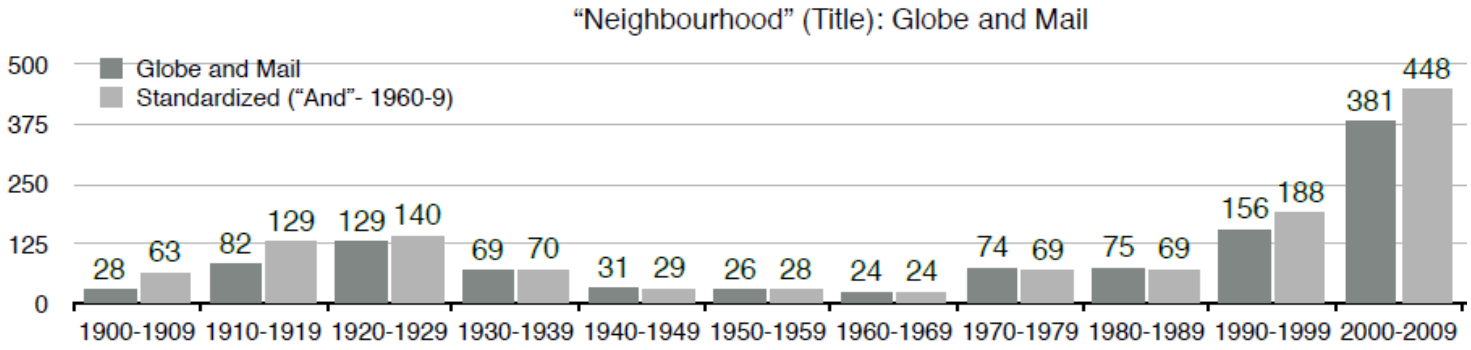


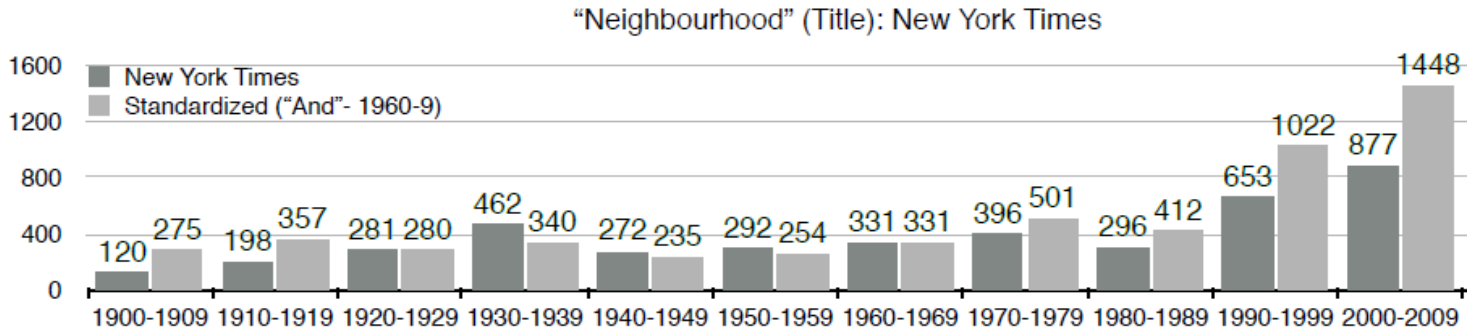
Numbers of immigrants, 1860-2010



2. Historical trend in the discourse

- **Two peaks : 1900-1920s, 1970s-present**
- **Difference is the role of the state**



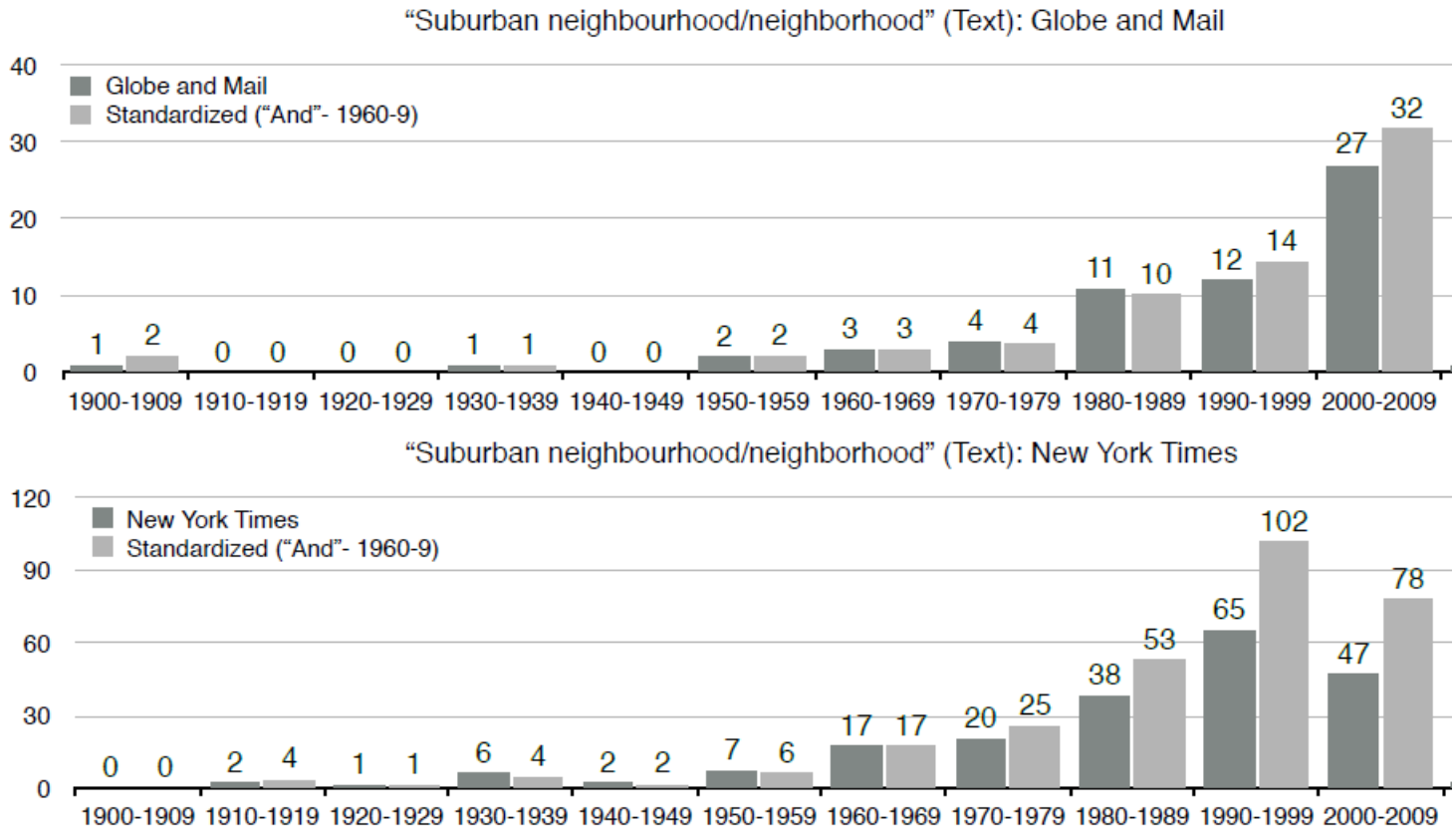


Google books Ngram Viewer

Graph these comma-separated phrases: |" neighborhoods " ✕ ☐ case-insensitive

between 1900 and 2008 from the corpus English with smoothing of 5 . Search lots of books

- **Trend complicated by 'neighbourhood unit', esp. 1940s-1960s**
- **(a discourse largely confined to planners)**

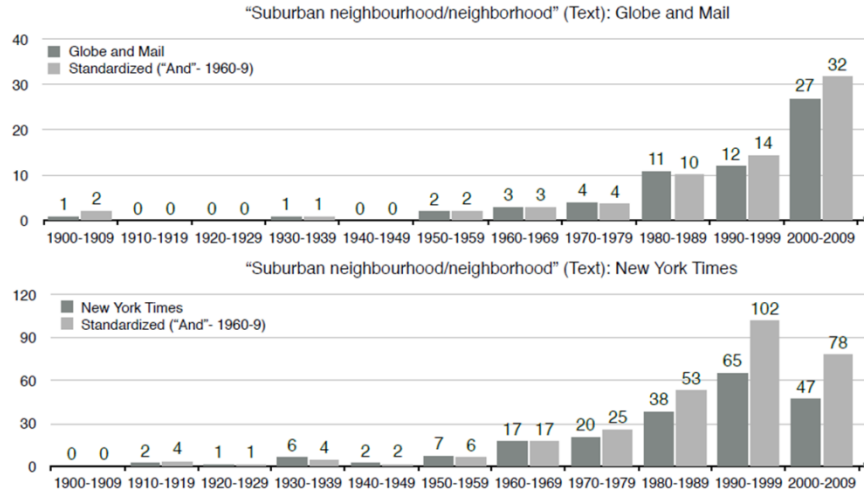


3. Geographical focus

- **Always disproportionately inner city**
  - **1900s-1920s – lower income need : 'neglected neighbourhoods' and settlement houses**
    - **e.g. Neighbourhood Workers' Association, 1918**
    - **(but note suburban Earlscourt, Peter Bryce)**
  - **1970s onwards – redevelopment pressures, NIP neighbourhoods, gentrification** (e.g. Toronto, Vancouver)
  - **1990s onwards – lower income need : 'priority neighbourhoods'** (e.g. Hamilton, Winnipeg)

HAMILTON'S NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTION STRATEGY BOUNDARIES

- **Recent emergence of concern for inner suburbs** (variable)



4. Issues

1900s-1920s

1. **Social –** settlement houses, social workers, etc
    - **Living conditions : health**
    - **Cultural assimilation – 'becoming Canadian'**
    - **Soft services: recreational facilities, libraries**
2. **Physical –** ratepayer associations
    - **Services**
    - **Land use restrictions (zoning/residential restrictions)**

1970s onwards

1. **Social –** service agencies, city administrations
    - **Living conditions : affordability**
    - **Cultural recognition**
    - **Jobs and soft services**
2. **Physical –** neighbourhood associations
    - **Redevelopment (NIMBYism)**
    - **Transit**
    - **'Complete' neighbourhoods, with mixed land use, walkability & public services.**

1970s onwards (continued)

3. **Process : relation with municipal government**
   - **Appease** (1960s-1970s)
   - **Encourage participation** (1970s-1980s)
   - **Integrate** (1990s-present): 'City of Neighbourhoods'
     - Protect middle class neighbourhoods
     - Foster community in poor, immigrant neighbourhoods