

A Sense of Place

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1. Three Home Towns

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1. Three Home Towns

BEFORE CROSSING TO EUROPE, we might establish some criteria by considering three towns here in the United States: **New Orleans** (founded 1718), **Washington DC** (1790), and **Chicago** (1830). Each has a distinct atmosphere. Each grew up at a particular place and time for different reasons, and each plays a different role in the life of this country. While all three are tourist destinations, each takes pains to preserve and promote a particular image; how does this image—its *Sense of Place*—relate to the origin, location, and purpose of the city?

In terms of relationship to the arts, we should distinguish between the **curatorial** and **creative** functions of a city. Washington is one of the great art cities of the world; its museums are among the largest and most comprehensive, yet very little of that art was produced in the city itself. New Orleans, by contrast, is known for the music, architecture, and way of living developed right there, even though you might say its creative heyday has passed, and it is now largely concerned with curating its own traditions. *rb.*

A. Screen Test

We look at promotional videos or mini-documentaries about each city, official or otherwise, to see what image each is trying to convey and who is the intended market.

Chicago: *Let's Go, Chicago!* (Beautiful Destinations, 2019)

Washington: *Welcome to Washington DC* (official, 2024)

Washington: *Welcome to Washington DC* (official, 2018)

New Orleans: *Welcome to New Orleans* (CBS Sunday Morning, 2025)

B. Built Onsite

A brief history of each city: why it was founded when and where it was, how it expanded, and how this DNA (so to speak) is reflected in the layout and physical architecture of each place.

Video: Evolution of L'Enfant's plan for Washington

Edison: *Madison and State Streets, Chicago* (1897)

Documentary: World's Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893

C. Arts in the Cities

You might think of **Washington DC** as a vast exercise in curatorship, keeping the national memory alive. But it has spawned some beautiful buildings in the process, and built collections that testify to the place of the United States on the international scene.

Stravinsky: *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto* (1938), opening

Video: *National Gallery of Art* (Travel Ted, 2023)

After a brief look at the **Chicago** Art Institute (another world-class museum), we focus especially on the city's long relationship to literature, and its creation of the Poetry Slam.

Hughes: *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), Art Institute scene

Sandburg: *Chicago* (1914), read by Gary Sinise

Interview: Studs Terkel on *Working* (1974)

Schwartz: *Working* (musical, 1978), trailer of recent production

Gottlieb: *Poet Breathe Now* (Louder than a Gun, 2012)

New Orleans was the birthplace of jazz—but is the baby still alive? We answer with different aspects of the contemporary scene.

Skinny Tuba: *Jubilee Stomp*

Preservation Hall Band: Jazz Funeral demo

Video: *If Cities Could Dance: New Orleans* (2018)

Trendafilka: *Chichovite Konye* ("My Uncle's Horses," 2024)