

# UC Santa Barbara

## CSISS Classics

### Title

Joel Garreau, Edge Cities and the Nine Nations of North America. *CSISS Classics*

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/38j2h9ws>

### Author

Brown, Nina

### Publication Date

2002

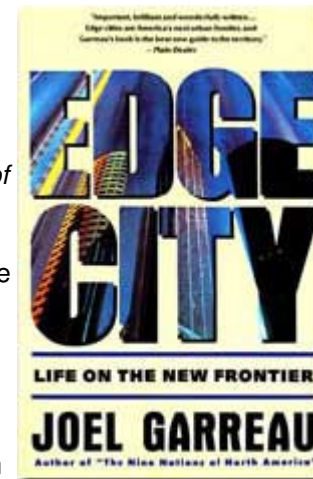


**Joel Garreau: *Edge Cities* and the *Nine Nations of North America***  
**By Nina Brown**

*Background*

Garreau, Joel (1948–)

Joel Garreau, a journalist for the *Washington Post*, is the author of two popular books: *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (1991) and *The Nine Nations of North America* (1981). These books, based on observations Garreau made while traveling throughout North America as a journalist, analyze the social and political forces Garreau believes are transforming the geography of contemporary American communities. His ideas have found a ready audience in both academic and nonacademic settings. Both books are fixtures in college classes in anthropology, geography, demography, and urban planning. In addition to writing for the *Washington Post*, Garreau is senior fellow at the School of Public Policy at George Mason University.



*Innovation*

In his first book, *The Nine Nations of North America* (1981), Garreau argued that the existing political boundaries of North America are becoming increasingly irrelevant as regions begin to coalesce into smaller "nations," each with its own economic, political, and cultural characteristics. Garreau identifies nine new North American nations:

1. **The Breadbasket:** Iowa, Nebraska, Oklahoma and northern Texas as well as southern Saskatchewan and Manitoba in Canada
2. **Dixie:** southern and southeastern U.S. states, including most of eastern Texas and Florida to the city of Fort Meyers
3. **Ecotopia:** the Pacific Northwest coast stretching from Alaska in the north

to just south of San Francisco.

4. **The Empty Quarter:** most of Alaska, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, and Denver, Colorado as well as the eastern portions of Oregon, California, Washington, and all of Alberta, British Columbia and Northern Canada.
5. **The Foundry:** the declining industrial areas of the northeastern United States stretching from New York City to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and including Chicago as well as southern Ontario
6. **The Islands:** the Caribbean islands, parts of Venezuela and the Miami-Fort Lauderdale portion of southern Florida
7. **Mex America:** the southern and central valley portions of California as well as Arizona, New Mexico and Mexico
8. **New England:** Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut and the Canadian Atlantic provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland
9. **Quebec:** the Canadian province of Quebec

The implication of these developments, Garreau argues, is that everything from politics to urban planning needs to be redesigned to match the evolving regional sensibilities that now matter more to people than national and international borders. In the Ecotopia, for instance, residents prize the natural environment and specialize in environmentally friendly high-technology industries like software. Meanwhile, communities in the Empty Quarter are organized around extraction of natural resources such as the oil and timber that are their economic mainstay. Such regional differences, Garreau suggests, result in fundamental differences in worldviews that are pulling each of the nine nations apart. This evocative thesis has been controversial since the book was first published, but even critics concede that in the ensuing years developments in national and international politics, including the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement, have made Garreau's views seem especially prescient.

Garreau's second book, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (1991), examined the intensification of U.S. suburban space. In this book Garreau explained that the initial suburbanization of the 1950s–1970s had given way to more intensive developments in the 1980s, developments that brought large amounts of office and retail space into suburban residential areas. The result was the emergence of "edge cities" surrounding older, declining urban areas. Garreau argued that these developments were fundamentally altering the geography of entire regions. For instance, more people now commute daily from one edge city to another rather than to the older downtown cores. Although the rapidly growing edge cities are plagued by problems such as ugliness and gridlock, Garreau was basically optimistic about their future prospects. His best-selling book, nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, stimulated a series of nationwide conferences

and several academic and popular books. Garreau is widely credited with reinvigorating studies of suburban geography and planning.

*Publications*

*Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

*The Nine Nations of North America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.

*Related Works*

Ayers, Edward L, Patricia Nelson Limerick, Stephen Nissenbaum, and Peter S. Onuf. *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Bingham, Richard D., William M. Bowen and Yosra A. Amara, eds. *Beyond Edge Cities*. New York: Garland, 1997.

Gastil, Raymond D. *Cultural Regions of the United States*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975.

Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Kunstler, James Howard. *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.

*Links*

[http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/3.12/edgier.cities\\_pr.html](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/3.12/edgier.cities_pr.html)