At the beginning of the 20th century, major American cities were growing vertically. Most urban observers agreed that cities were destined to a future of increasing density, concentration and towering height. We now know that most urban expansion has been horizontal, with low-density development and "sprawl" extending the suburban boundaries of metropolitan settlement. This presentation will review 20th century history to identify the moment when the tide of urban form began to shift from vertical to horizontal development. In a critical juncture in the 1920s, a new model of urbanism emerged in Southern California. This model was far from the concentrated centers imagined by most Americans at the time. This seminar will show when and where our own urban era began, and will invite us to speculate upon what configurations might replace the horizontal city in the future.

Jeremiah Axelrod is a Kevin Starr Fellow in California Studies at UCI's Humanities Research Institute. His research focuses on issues of urban form, public space and transportation infrastructure in 20th century Southern California. He has taught extensively in the fields of American history and film studies, and has written and spoken on such diverse topics as the Lincoln Memorial, the discourse of public space and the cultural politics of Disneyland Park. He is the author of a forthcoming textbook, "A Theory Toolkit", designed to teach undergraduates how to use critical theory in constructing academic arguments. He is also preparing a cultural and social history of the post-WW II Southern California freeway system. "Toward Autopia", a study of modern urbanism in Jazz Age Los Angeles, is currently under review by the University of California Press. Dr. Axelrod holds a Ph.D. in history from UCI (2001).