On October 19, 1899, eighteen-year-old Robert H. Goddard climbed a cherry tree in Worcester, MA and had a vision of a device launching to Mars that would shape the rest of his life. Inspired by this vision, Goddard went on to become the father of liquid-fueled rocketry, and Worcester became home to yet another visionary inventor and his work. But what was it about Worcester that set it apart from the plethora of other industrial towns in nineteenth century New England? What made it not only a haven for manufacturing, but of science, ideas, and innovation? In order to answer these questions, we need to look at the connections between place and the development of the ideas and work of the people who interact with that place.

**Background**
Geographers Livingstone, Finnegan, Henke, and Gieryn argue place is vital to scientific development because of availability of resources and like-minded people, as well as cultural significance.
- For example: Galapagos associated with Darwin’s work on evolution; Silicon Valley with computer software technology; Detroit with automotive industry
- 19th century Worcester, MA had strong association with manufacturing, machining, and engineering, from steel and wire manufacturing to advanced machine parts.

Sociologist Collins reworks Durkheim’s theory of interaction to state that a person’s surroundings and a sense of belonging influences personality and emotions. They feel positively when they are in-place and negatively when out-of-place.
- Worcester had many institutions built around innovation, including schools and companies focusing on engineering and science, and people had pride in being part of these things that gave Worcester its identity.

**Discussion and Conclusion**
Goddard had a bright mind and grew up in a home and city where invention was celebrated. He attended schools where his interests were celebrated. Worcester provided a place for him to study and work that was not only urban enough to have access to materials and knowledge, but that also had enough open space to encourage large scale work. Yet Goddard’s work became too much for Worcester, causing him to be ostracized at times and no longer permitted to experiment on rocketry in the city.

Through the tension between being both in place and out of place at various points, Goddard’s unique perspective and personality were formed in a way that was different had he spent formative time in other places.

**Partial Bibliography:**

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