This article goes into an in-depth analysis of modern communities. It mentions what kinds of community’s flourish, what they do, what they do not do, and how they operate in different social systems. It also mentions that contemporary city dwellers have a much easier life than their ancestors. They are better clothed, fed, live in better houses and overall have a better standard of living. However, most of them “are often without history”. They have not learned where their ancestors have been, what they have done, or what type of life they have had.

The article makes the point that most people nowadays believe the sense of community has been lost. However, the article insists that through much research there is evidence of communities everywhere – contrary to popular belief.

The article attempts to answer the question whether structure, composition, and contents of large-scale social systems affect the overall nature of the community. Furthermore, the article also attempts to answer if communities do in fact share resources or are simply isolated by class enclaves (such as race or socioeconomic status).

I found it very interesting when the article mentioned a reason that communities have changed is because of the development of quick, easy transportation and long-distance communication devices such as the phone and Internet. This point immediately made sense to me. It makes sense that people might not feel a need to build relationships with those immediately around them, because they are able to easily maintain relationships
with those further away that they already know. However, our ancestors did not have access to these types of communication and transport technologies. They had to rely on building and maintaining relationships with those around them to develop a sense of community.

*The Strength of Weak Ties by Mark S. Granovetter*

The article by Granovetter is on the concept of the strength of weak ties. It basically illustrated the spread of information over a social network.

A strong tie is a relationship that you have developed thoroughly with family and friends. A weak tie is a relationship that you have with an acquaintance. The basic premise of this concept is that you are directly connected to those people who you are close with strong ties. Furthermore, you are connected to your acquaintances with weak ties. These acquaintances are probably directly connected to many other people with strong ties. Furthermore, the chance of an overlap of ties with your acquaintance is very rare. Therefore, this one weak tie with an acquaintance serves as bridge to group of strong ties. The ties are evaluated through the amount of time spent, emotional strength, reciprocal services and the mutual confidence between two people. This is the basic premise behind the theory of the strength of weak ties.

This idea is quite interesting. It can be illustrated in a variety of ways through visualization. Another interesting point made through this concept is the introduction of a new product in the market. A person with many strong and weak ties needs to adopt the idea and spread it first among its strong connections and then weak connections. This is how new products become successful.
This article, Visualizing Social Networks, goes over a brief history of the visualization of social networks. As illustrated by Alfred Crosby, a historian, the author makes the point that visualization has contributed significantly to the development of modern science - as big of a contribution as measurement. The author, Linton C. Freeman, illustrates the history of social networks through five distinct phases. In 1930, graphic images were produced by hand. In the 1950s use of standard computational procedures to produce images. In the 1970s computers used to produce machine drawn images automatically. In the 1980s personal computers develop images that could be displayed on monitors and in color. In the 1990s, availability of browsers and the World Wide Web opened up new possibilities for graphic display. Freeman goes through each of these phases and provides examples of the types of visualization seen. I was fascinated to witness such an evolution in the development of visualizations.

I was slightly disappointed that Freeman did not discuss in detail, what he thinks, the future of visualizations on social network will bring. He only mentions that it will probably bring more of the same types of methods. Furthermore, his last point about bringing together programs that are able to compute, visualize and store, retrieve data easily would be a real breakthrough in the field. I believe that we already have such programs. Some of our visualizations that we did in class, were able to pull data from Facebook or Gmail, compute it according to our specifications and then display it in a visual format. Furthermore, I believe Microsoft Excel, and Apple iWork program Numbers can do all of those things with ease.