Urban America
Processes and Problems

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Preface

The focus of this book is the modern American city and metropolitan area. Its subject exists at the intersection of a number of fields—sociology, history, economics, geography, political science, urban planning, and public administration, to name only some. The field of urban studies is huge and not sharply delineated at its edges. Different texts on the subject emphasize different aspects of the subject matter and come at the subject from different analytical perspectives. Many texts on urban studies, perhaps the majority, are written from a sociological perspective. The perspective in this book is somewhat different, with relatively more emphasis on economic, financial, political, and administrative considerations. This approach reflects the author's academic background in economics and public policy, as well as a decade of employment in urban planning and economic development.

Studying urban affairs inevitably takes one into controversy, for urban studies is far from an exact science. In a number of cases this book presents alternate views of questions, whether they be matters of interpreting what has happened or of considering what ought to be done. I believe that it is the role of the author to present facts, hypotheses, mechanisms, and explanations, and to encourage the student to think about the subject—but not to tell the student what to think. Whether I have been successful in this regard is for the reader to judge.

THE PLAN OF THIS BOOK

Part I, the shortest section of the book, presents some general ideas about urbanization and then provides a history of U.S. urbanization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The purpose of these chapters is to provide

sufficient background to support the rest of the text. They are not intended as a detailed history of U.S. urbanization.

In Part II we examine the workings of the modern city and metropolitan area. Chapter 4 contains a brief history of the evolution of municipal government followed by a discussion of the workings of contemporary municipal government. Chapter 5 provides a spectrum of views, from pluralists' to political economists' perspectives, on the realities of city government. Chapter 6 presents municipal finance within the framework of the U.S. federal system. It then proceeds to taxation, borrowing, the pattern of expenditures and grants, and municipal budgeting. Chapter 7 explores the economy of the city and the metropolitan region. In addition to some of the standard fare of urban economics, such as the export base model, there is also substantial material on cities in the world economy, as well as on the very fundamental matter of intermunicipal economic competition and the extent to which it shapes and constrains municipal policy. Chapter 8 presents an overview of city planning, in part informed by the author's years as a planner. I have tried to go beyond the forms and legalities of planning into some of the economic, political, and financial realities. Part II concludes with two chapters on housing. The first provides an overview of the U.S. housing situation, a discussion of housing finance, and a section on the mechanics of housing stock change. The second looks at housing policy and housing programs, both past and present.

Part III presents a number of controversies and policy issues. It begins with a chapter on the "melting pot" versus "mosaic" issue. Which way we go on the issue of multiculturalism will have major consequences for many decades to come, and inevitably, much of that controversy will be played out in the cities. There is a chapter on immigration, for in the long term it is hard to identify any issue of public policy that will have more impact upon urban America than what we do regarding immigration policy. The chapter begins with a history of U.S. immigration and then presents a variety of policy positions from an essentially open-door policy to a highly restrictive one. In recent decades poverty has become an increasingly urban problem, and so Part III provides a substantial treatment of that subject. The first of two chapters on poverty lays out the background. The second poverty chapter chronicles U.S. poverty policy from the "War on Poverty" begun in the 1960s to the present era of "welfare reform." Few things effect the tone and quality of urban life more than the matter of crime and public safety. The section contains a chapter on crime and the criminal justice system that presents some background and some history and then examines differing approaches to issues of crime and punishment. Public education is the largest item of expenditure for both local and state governments, employing vastly more people than any other activity of government, and for most people is probably the most important and sustained contact that they have with government. Part III concludes with a chapter on public education and the city. The chapter provides general background on the subject and then turns to pros and cons of

three important issues: busing to achieve integration, the question of bilingual education, and, most recently, the movement for vouchers and charter schools.

Parts I and II form a unit, with the first addressing "how we got here" and the second providing a broad picture of the workings of the present-day city and metropolitan area. Part III can be read as a whole, but each of the chapters—or pair of chapters in the case the subject of poverty—will stand on its own once the material in Parts I and II has been presented.

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John M. Levy

A Note on Data and Definitions

Much of the data on present-day America in this book comes from the Bureau of the Census, and so a few words on the census are appropriate. The Bureau of the Census, a division of the Department of Commerce, does a full enumeration of the population every ten years, and it has done so since 1790. A decennial census is required by Section 2 of Article 1 of the United States Constitution because a count of the population is needed for the allocation of seats in the United States House of Representatives. Over the years the basic task of enumerating the population has grown into a massive data-gathering operation. The censuses conducted by the Bureau of the Census now provide by far the largest source of social and economic data about the United States. If you see a statistic such as the percentage of Americans who have been divorced, how many Americans drive to work as opposed to taking public transportation, the percentage of the population that moves each year, the percentage of Americans who live in households below the federal poverty line, or how many householders own the homes in which they live and how many rent, the chances are that the data originated with the census.

The decennial census, conducted in each year ending in 0, is—so far as is possible—a complete count of the population. The Bureau of the Census obtains as complete mailing lists as it can in order to send a questionnaire to every household in the nation. The majority of the households return the questionnaire without further contact with the Bureau of the Census. For those households that do not return the questionnaire, the Bureau of the Census follows up with a phone call or visit by a census enumerator.

Although the Bureau of the Census attempts to count everyone, the count is inevitably not complete. By law you must respond to the Bureau of the Census request for information. In fact, after every census the Bureau of the Census prose-

cutes a few people who have made a conspicuous point of refusing to cooperate with the census. However, as a practical matter, most people who do not wish to be counted are not counted. And, of course, many people are missed accidentally.

After the 1990 census, the Bureau of the Census estimated that it had missed about 1.6 percent of the U.S. population. People who do not have a permanent address are hard to count accurately. In the 1990 census the Bureau of the Census attempted to count the homeless by sending workers to homeless shelters, but many of the homeless were undoubtedly missed. People who are in trouble with the law are likely to avoid being counted. People who are in the country illegally are undercounted. The census count in middle-class suburban neighborhoods is more complete than the count in poor inner-city neighborhoods. In short, the Bureau of the Census count of the population is the best measure that we have, but it is far from perfect.

In the decennial census a limited number of questions are asked of the entire population. The demographic items asked of the entire population are age, race, sex, whether or not the person is of Spanish/Hispanic origin, marital status, and relationship to the head of the household. There are also a few housing questions asked of the entire population. These are structure type (mobile home, one-family house detached, one-family house attached, etc.), number of rooms, owner or rental status, and value of the unit or its monthly rent. All other data items in the census reports, such as information on income, education, employment, method of transportation to work, types of appliances in the housing unit, and the like come from more detailed questionnaires that are sent to a sample of the population.

The Bureau of the Census accepts the answers that respondents provide and does not attempt to verify them. To the census you are what you say you are. Some census questions provide better data than other questions. Answers to the age, sex, and marital status questions are likely to provide very good data because they are hard to get wrong. The questions on income elicit less accurate data. The person answering the question may not recall exactly how much income he or she earned from each source in the previous year. He or she may not have read the questionnaire instructions carefully enough to know exactly what items are and are not to be counted as income. If people have not been truthful in filling out their income tax returns, they are unlikely to provide full disclosure on their census questionnaires. Some questions are inherently imprecise. For example, a sample of the population is asked about ancestry. It is from this question that statistics about the national origins of the U.S. population are derived. The instructions for this question in the 1990 census read, in part:

> Ancestry refers to a person's ethnic origin or descent, "roots," or heritage. Ancestry may also refer to the country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States.

The above language provides enough choices so that different people whose ancestry is the same might answer the question differently. In the

1990s it was suggested that the 2000 census add a "mixed race" category, for this represents reality for many people and would prevent people from having to choose which part of their ancestry to acknowledge and which to ignore. That suggestion was ultimately disallowed but the form was redesigned for respondents to check off more than one race. This brings us back to the point that census data, though often the best data that there is on a subject, is neither perfect data nor without ambiguity.

In years other than those ending in 0, the Bureau of the Census conducts a variety of sample surveys in order to provide estimates for years between the decennial censuses. For example, for every year between decennial censuses the Bureau of the Census provides data on family income based upon sample surveys much smaller than the sample used in the decennial census. The Bureau of the Census also makes annual current population estimates for states and municipalities based upon a variety of sources, using the population numbers from the last decennial census as the baseline figure.

Census Geography

In this book you will see terms such as *central city, suburban ring,* and *metropolitan area.* These terms and similar ones refer to Bureau of the Census geographical concepts.

The Bureau of the Census divides the entire nation into metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. The basic unit of metropolitan America is the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). For a place to be classified as an MSA it must have a city with a population of at least 50,000. The MSA consists of that city plus any additional counties that are linked to the city by contiguous urbanization or that have strong economic links to the city as measured primarily in numbers of commuters to work. This picture of a central city surrounded by a ring of suburban counties is the basic metropolitan area picture. If the metropolitan area has a population of 1 million or more and if it contains more than one area that, on its own, would meet the requirements of being an MSA, then the entire area may be designated as a Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA). Each area within it that could meet MSA requirements on its own is designated as a Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA). The entire CMSA is composed of two or more PMSAs.

The above acronyms and relationships can be confusing. To summarize, any point of land in the United States is either in a metropolitan area or in nonmetropolitan America. The relationships within the metropolitan parts of the nation are shown below.

Nonmetropolitan Area

Metropolitan Area
In MSA or in CMSA
Any point within a CMSA is also in a PMSA

As of 1995 there were 253 MSAs in the United States. There were also 18 CMSAs composed of a total of 73 PMSAs. These numbers grow as additional cities pass the 50,000 mark and become eligible to be classified as central cities.

The term *suburban ring* or, sometimes, *part outside* refers to the part of the MSA or CMSA that is not contained in the central city or cities. Statistics that show the growth of metropolitan area populations and the changing relationship between central city and suburban ring populations should be taken only as general indications of trends because of the previously noted designation of new MSAs and CMSAs.

One last point of Bureau of the Census terminology should be noted: the use of the terms *urban* and *rural.* Any incorporated place such as a city, town, or village with a population of 2,500 or more is defined as urban. The rest of the nation is defined as rural. Thus the Bureau of the Census use of the word *urban* is not synonymous with its use of the word *metropolitan.* Hundreds of small towns and cities in nonmetropolitan America are considered urban places because they meet the 2,500-person requirement.

For a more detailed discussion of the Bureau of the Census geographical concepts and for a list of all of the MSAs, CMSAs, and PMSAs, the reader is referred to the Appendix of the *Statistical Abstract of the United States,* a publication of the Bureau of the Census since 1880. For the reader seeking demographic, social, or economic data, the same book is often the best place to start. It contains a wealth of data from the census, from other government sources, and from a variety of private sources, such as industry trade associations. If you cannot find the item in the book itself, very often its footnotes and guides to sources will tell you where it can be found. Virtually any library will have a copy of the *Statistical Abstract of the United States.* It can also be accessed on-line at **www.gov/statab/www/.**

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Chapter

1 The Origins of the City

Although this book is about the city in modern America, a few generalizations about urbanization will be useful before we turn to the American case. Cities endure for a very long time. They are much more permanent than nations. London was a city on the Thames when Britain was a province in the Roman Empire, more than a millennium before the English language came into being. Paris was a settlement on the Isle de La Cité (the present site of Notre Dame cathedral) before Charlemagne ruled. The city bears the imprint of technologies, ideas, and political regimes long gone, and one cannot understand its present state without some sense of how it came to be. Below are a few generalizations about the process of urbanization. In the following chapter we turn to the American case in particular.

In the standard view urbanization was a consequence of the development of agriculture. When the human race lived by food gathering and hunting, population densities were limited to a few persons per square mile and large permanent settlements were not possible. The development of agriculture greatly increased the number of people who could be sustained by a given land area. It also permitted the part of the population that farmed to produce some surplus so that at least a small fraction of the population would be able to live a nonagricultural life. The transition from food gathering and hunting to settled agriculture and the first appearance of permanent human settlement both make their appearance in human history in the Middle East several millennia before the birth of Christ.

Cities have served various functions in ancient and modern times. They have often served as centers of trade and production. Cities have long served a defensive and military function, as exemplified by the walled cities of medieval Europe. Cities have served an administrative function, whether it be for a small area or a worldwide empire. Many cities have served a sacred function as shrines and destinations for pilgrims.

The growth of urban places and the specialization of labor have gone together. Bringing large numbers of people together both makes possible greater specialization of labor and creates the demand that supports many separate trades and activities. Because cities brought many minds together and freed some people from the routine of manual labor, the city has been the locus of much of humanity's intellectual and artistic progress. The archeological record indicates that writing appeared at about the same time as did large, permanent settlements, suggesting that it may have been used originally for commercial and administrative record keeping. Science, technology, art, and architecture have their roots largely in cities. Formalized government and social stratification also seem to have their roots in cities, in part because cities contained sufficient population to permit such developments.[1]

Where Cities Developed

We know that generally cities developed at certain types of sites and that some sites have been occupied for thousands of years. The possibilities of trade make certain sites favorable. Samarkand in Central Asia developed along overland trade routes. A very large number of the world's great cities, like New York and San Francisco, developed at natural harbors. Numerous others, like St. Louis, are located along navigable waterways or, like New Orleans, where rivers empty into the ocean. Before the development of modern land transportation, water transportation was generally the fastest mode. It was, and remains today, the least expensive mode per ton mile. The city with a natural harbor, or the city located on a waterway that gave it easy access to the ocean, like London on the Thames, enjoyed a great commercial advantage. In some cases, its access to the sea gave it the long reach that provided military and administrative advantages as well.

The location on water, whether a river or the ocean, makes the city a "breakpoint" in transportation.[2] Where the mode of transportation must change, as from water to land, employment is created in freight handling and such related activities as warehousing. In modern times, ancillary activities such as insurance and finance related to trade are likely to spring up there. If further processing of goods or raw materials needs to be done somewhere along the route to the final destination, it makes sense to do it where goods have to be unloaded anyway rather than where separate loading and unloading operations would be needed solely for that purpose. Thus breakpoints in transportation are natural locations for the development of manufacturing and refining or processing operations.

Canada's largest city, Montreal, is located at the point on the St. Lawrence River where rapids made further passage up the river by sailing vessel impossible. There, cargoes had to be unloaded, moved around the rapids, and reloaded before they could move farther into the interior of the continent. The city developed around that breakpoint. Buffalo, New York, near