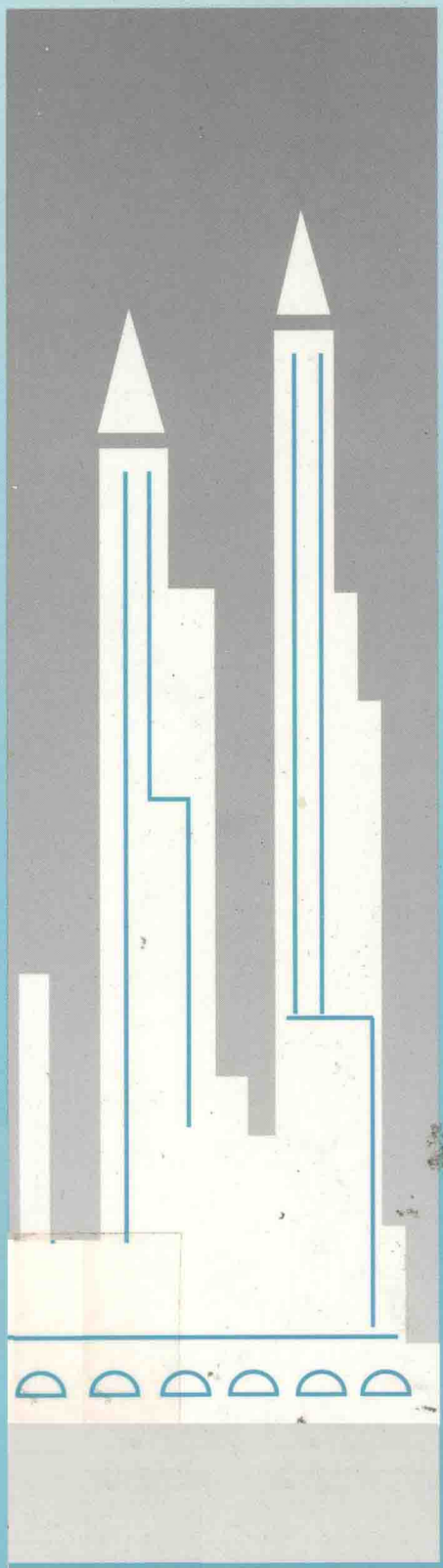

GOVERNING THE POSTINDUSTRIAL CITY

Marcus D. Pohlmann

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Rhodes College

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Preface

This book is a critical introduction to contemporary urban politics in the United States. To understand that politics, there is not only a detailed analysis here of formal and informal political processes but also consideration of the social and economic contexts within which a city's political decisions are made. In addition, the book will explore the interrelationships between these social and economic realities and the distribution of political power.

The central theme is that urban political institutions, the roles of the actors who occupy them, and the ultimate distribution of political power have evolved considerably over the course of U.S. history. They have been significantly affected by the economic and social realities of postindustrialism. Specifically, in the postindustrial era, technological changes in production, transportation, and communication allow many corporations and better-off individuals and families to move to more attractive environs. Thus, host cities face a dilemma. They must provide taxing and spending incentives that will prove attractive to the increasingly mobile corporations and wealthier individuals while maintaining expenditures to support the central city poor and the bureaucracy that provides various city services. Cities have become increasingly dependent on state and federal funding to provide these services, even though their clout in those legislative arenas has declined. Moreover, all city activities are carried out under the watchful eye of an ever more pervasive mass media and without the strong political party organizations that in the past served as effective countervailing forces to the interests of the wealthy.

This book is concerned primarily with large U.S. cities, meaning those that have populations currently exceeding 200,000. In particular, the focus is on the basic similarities of the governments in some large cities such as Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Los Angeles. These similarities allow the development of an archetypal "postindustrial city." Significant variations among them will be

noted as the book proceeds. If the historical discussion is accurate, what is true for large, previously industrialized cities will be true to some degree for all U.S. cities—even those that did not emerge until after the postindustrial era began.

OVERVIEW BY CHAPTER

Chapter 2 provides a conceptual framework for the ensuing analysis. Chapters 3 through 6 survey in detail the economic, social, and political evolution of America's largest cities. Chapters 7 through 11 examine the institutions and individuals that have contributed to the political policy-making process in what are often increasingly troubled cities. These chapters look at the current structures, functions, and relative power of these institutions and actors. Chapter 12 summarizes the dilemmas faced and considers alternative policy routes as these cities attempt to cope more effectively with the realities of postindustrialism.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

William Jeffries is the first African American to be elected mayor in this large industrialized city. The city he inherits faces tremendous problems. A number of its largest industries have either moved elsewhere or are threatening to do so. Meanwhile, the city's population has dipped significantly over recent years, and this has reduced electoral clout in statewide and national elections—meaning a decreasing likelihood of favorable consideration in the state capitol as well as in Washington. In addition, there is racial polarization. A majority of the population is of African American descent, reflecting a steady out-migration of better-off whites to the suburbs or beyond. Many of the remaining blacks and whites are poor because they are not employable, they are unemployed, or they are left with service-sector positions that pay scarcely better than minimum wage and provide few fringe benefits.

Although a large portion of the mayor's votes came from this lower-income constituency, the out-migration of businesses and higher-income residents as well as the decline of influence in external legislatures have left little money in the public coffers with which to serve those most in need. When a bit of discretionary revenue does become available, Mayor Jeffries, like his predecessors, will have little choice but to use it to create an urban atmosphere attractive to potential wealthy investors. He will feel compelled to build office buildings rather than shelters for the homeless, football stadium skyboxes rather than modern public schools, and so on with the hope that some opportunities eventually will trickle down. The increasing ability of the wealthy to invest virtually anywhere on earth has left the mayor competing with cities around the globe. As a result, even more political power has shifted to the owners of this capital—simply a contemporary urban fact of life.

How did we arrive at this present juncture? And just how widely has this phenomenon spread—particularly in the United States?

URBANIZATION

Where and how populations come together generally reflect the economic necessities supporting these arrangements. The history of societies can be divided into three phases: (1) preindustrial, (2) industrial, and (3) postindustrial. Following are definitions of these periods and a general description of how they evolve in any nation where economic development has not been centrally planned by its government. Time frames vary by country and by regions within a country depending on when industrialization and urbanization actually occurred.

Time Frames

A *preindustrial* society revolves around its agricultural base. Its principal cities remain relatively small and are located at logical transshipment points to serve as efficient trading and commercial centers. Most city dwellers tend to be employed as independent artisans or shopkeepers, although a few are likely to be wealthy merchants. Governance in these societies tends to be conducted in a relatively informal way by those with the greatest material interests in governmental policies, such as the wealthiest local landowners and merchants.

When the society acquires the technology necessary to perform large-scale manufacturing, it is said to be *industrial.* When industrialization occurs, factories need to be near specific natural resources, work forces, and markets. Thus, large cities arise in locations that allow manufacturers to obtain necessary materials, workers, markets, intercity trading facilities, and commercial services such as banking and insurance. These cities grow in size as more people arrive in search of employment opportunities that industrialization has created for managers and skilled and unskilled workers. More formal political mechanisms are needed to help structure these new complexities into an orderly environment for industrial production and trade.

The *postindustrial* period can be distinguished by technological developments such as automated assembly lines, automobiles, airplanes, computers, and telecommunications. These technologies enable companies to locate away from workers, markets, waterfronts, and related businesses. As a result, these corporations become mechanized and mobile, with serious implications for the society's cities in general, and specifically for their work forces and political power structures.

The first and most obvious indicator of postindustrial development is a marked decline in a previously industrialized city's population. With their manufacturers and related industries no longer tied to that particular location, firms often opt to locate in the more attractive outlying areas. As expected, those workers who can afford it often follow. The advantages for both businesses and individuals include more space, less congestion, less crime, and lower taxes. Unless liberal state annexation laws allow a city to continue to annex these outlying havens, the older city's number of residents will decline as postindustrialism gathers momentum.

Not only do the city's population and economic growth begin to shrink, but the nature of employment changes for those left in the wake of these developments. At best, the older cities once again become commercial centers,

with the manufacturing that remains being more mechanized and employing fewer people in well-paying factory positions. Another indicator is polarizing of city occupations, leaving a number of positions for managers and professionals at the top and more low-paying service positions at the bottom, for example, cleaning, cooking, waiting tables, stocking shelves, emptying bedpans, and so on. Also, many of the professional/manager class will choose to live outside the city and commute to their jobs. As a result, the median income of city residents will begin to fall given that service jobs generally pay less than manufacturing positions.

The structure of political power will begin to change. Those who can invest are now able to put their money in a number of places, and cities will compete to attract that investment. Thus, potential investors normally will get their industrial parks, subsidies, tax breaks, or whatever project they desire. A post-industrial city's political officials simply will seldom be in a position to say no. However, such a shift in priorities also will lead to periodic unrest among those left stranded at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, so government occasionally will have to provide them with assistance. Consequently, a "bureaucratic state" will develop as an increasing number of governmental employees will be required to provide these various services. At the same time, governmental officials need to remember that the interests of investors will come first. Table 1.1 shows the evolution of a city through its three phases.

THE CITY

History of the City's Development

Historically, cities are a relatively new phenomenon. There has been life on earth for more than a million years, but human beings formed cities only within approximately the last 7,000 years and to any real extent only in the last 2,500.

TABLE 1.1 Urban Evolutionary Periods

	Phase		
	Preindustrial	***Industrial***	***Postindustrial***
Economy	commerce, home enterprises	expanding, immobile, labor-intensive manufacturing	commerce, service, and slower-expanding, more capital-intensive manufacturing
Work force	merchants, artisans, shopkeepers	factory owners, managers, artisans, unskilled laborers	corporate owners, managers, professionals, service laborers
City functions	trading center	site of industrial resources, markets and transportation; immigrant "staging area"	commercial center, services, "dumping ground" for the economically marginal
City governance	informally by economic elites	more formal structures and mass participation	elite-dominated bureaucratic state

The early growth of cities seems to have corresponded to such innovations as the domestication of grain, the invention of the plow, the use of irrigation, and the development of storage containers, power generation, and the coinage of money. Thus fewer farmers were able to provide more food for a larger number of people, and greater specialization, division of labor, trade, and commerce became possible. Cities began to serve as small-scale production and consumption centers as well as becoming the location for markets, meetings, and information. They were where many of the economic elites lived.

In 1800 only 2.4 percent of the world's population lived in cities larger than 20,000 people and that figure had increased to only 5 percent by 1900.[1] Yet by 1900, new forces had been set in motion that would soon lead a clear majority of the world population to live in cities.

Nineteenth Century. As the nineteenth century developed, significant changes occurred in many parts of the world: populations grew rapidly, governments began to stabilize, and transportation advancements increased mobility. Farm laborers were replaced by machines such as the steam-powered tractor and the mechanical thresher. Farm owners themselves were plagued by droughts, insects, and other crop perils. Without governmentally stabilized costs and prices, the farm owners began to search for more reliable forms of livelihood. Even more important, industrialization had begun, providing many with alternate occupations; as manufacturers located their factories where they could most efficiently acquire necessary resources, process them, and distribute the final product, these industries took root in urban areas that provided access to key resources, services, and markets.[2]

In addition to these industrial advantages cities offered promises of a better life. There were job opportunities and a variety of consumer items as well as a host of social and cultural possibilities that required support services and large clienteles, for example, fine arts, libraries, museums, schools, colleges, and the press. Cities also offered formal and informal occupational, ethnic, racial, and religious organizations.

Twentieth Century. In scarcely more than a century, industrialization ushered in the urbanization of much of the world. As the twentieth century dawned, Great Britain became the first urbanized nation—a nation having more of its people living in cities than in the country. Today, nearly half the world's population lives in cities, and it is no longer unusual to find cities populated by as many as a million people. Mexico City has more than 20 million; São Paulo, Bombay and Calcutta, Rio de Janeiro, and Seoul more than 10 million each; and a growing number have more than 6.5 million: Moscow, New Delhi, Tokyo, New York City, Shanghai, London, and Istanbul.[3]

With the growth of cities came increasing urban problems. Sewage and garbage accumulation, overcrowding, poverty, and shortage of livable housing have plagued cities since the days of ancient Greece and Rome. In addition, another thread that seems continuously to run through urban history is that people who can afford it generally attempt to escape urban pollution, congestion,

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