

CITIES AND URBAN LIFE



JOHN J. MACIONIS
VINCENT N. PARRILLO

A stylized, black and white graphic of a city skyline with various building shapes. The title 'CITIES AND URBAN LIFE' is superimposed in large, bold, black capital letters across the middle of the skyline.

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John J. Macionis

Kenyon College

Vincent N. Parrillo

William Paterson University



PRENTICE HALL, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

MACIONIS, JOHN J.

Cities and urban life / John J. Macionis, Vincent N. Parrillo.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-13-736323-0 (case: alk. paper)

1. Cities and towns. 2. Cities and towns—History. 3. Sociology.
Urban. 4. City and town life. I. Parrillo, Vincent N. II. Title.

HT151.M335 1998

307.76—dc21

97-37717

CIP

Editorial director: Charlyce Jones Owen

Editor-in-chief: Nancy Roberts

Acquisitions editor: John Chillingworth

Editorial/production supervision

and interior design: Rob DeGeorge

Copy editor: Virginia Rubens

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Image permission supervisor: Kay Dellosa

Marketing manager: Christopher DeJohn

Cover director: Jayne Conte

Cover designer: Bruce Kenselaar

Cover art: Theo Rudnak

Director, Image Resource Center: Lori Morris-Nantz

This book was set in 10/11 Baskerville by A & A Publishing Services, Inc.,

and was printed and bound by Hamilton Printing Company.

The cover was printed by Phoenix Color Corp.



© 1998 by Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Simon & Schuster/A Viacom Company

Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 0-13-736323-0

PRENTICE-HALL INTERNATIONAL (UK) LIMITED, *London*

PRENTICE-HALL OF AUSTRALIA PTY. LIMITED, *Sydney*

PRENTICE-HALL CANADA INC., *Toronto*

PRENTICE-HALL HISPANOAMERICANA, S.A., *Mexico*

PRENTICE-HALL OF INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED, *New Delhi*

PRENTICE-HALL OF JAPAN, INC., *Tokyo*

SIMON & SCHUSTER ASIA PTE. LTD., *Singapore*

EDITORA PRENTICE-HALL DO BRASIL, LTDA., *Rio de Janeiro*



As we approach the beginning of a new century—indeed, the start of a new millennium—the world stands on the brink of a historic landmark: Within a decade, a majority of the planet's people will live in cities. Urban living is rapidly becoming the *norm* for members of our species. Surely, there is no more compelling reason to undertake the study of cities and urban life.

THE BASIC APPROACH

The approach of this text is multidisciplinary but fundamentally sociological. Readers will find here the enduring contributions of the classical European social thinkers, including Max Weber, Karl Marx, Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Simmel, and Emile Durkheim, as well as those of early pioneers in North America, including Robert Park and Louis Wirth. Of course, many men and women have stood on the shoulders of these giants and extended our understanding. Thus, this text also considers the ideas of a host of contemporary urbanists, including Henri Lefebvre, Jane Jacobs, Manuel Castells, John Logan, Harvey Molotch, Kevin Lynch, Lyn Lofland, Carol Stack, and Herbert Gans.

Yet, as this string of well-known names suggests, urban studies rests on research and theory developed within many disciplines. *Cities*

and *Urban Life*, therefore, is truly a multidisciplinary text that draws together the work of historians (Chapter 2: “The Origins and Development of the World’s Cities,” and Chapter 3: “The Development of North American Cities”); sociologists (Chapter 4: “Urban Sociology: The Classic Statements”); social psychologists (Chapter 5: “Social Psychology: The Urban Experience”); geographers and urban ecologists (Chapter 6: “Geography and Ecology: Making Sense of Space”); political economists working within various disciplines (Chapter 7: “Structural Imperatives: Urban Political Economy”); anthropologists (Chapter 11: “Latin American Cities,” Chapter 12: “African and Middle Eastern Cities,” and Chapter 13: “Asian Cities”); and architects as well as city planners (Chapter 14: “Planning the Urban Environment”).

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS TEXT

Part I of the text, “Understanding the City,” introduces the main questions and themes that resonate throughout the book (Chapter 1). Part II, “The History of Cities,” surveys the historical development of cities, noting how urban life has often differed in striking ways from contemporary patterns we take for granted (Chapters 2 and 3). Part III, “Disciplinary Perspec-

tives,” highlights the various disciplinary orientations that, together, have so advanced our understanding of cities (Chapters 4 through 7). Part IV, “The Anatomy of the City,” focuses on the social organization of today’s cities in North America, highlighting how urban living reflects the importance of social class (Chapter 8), race, ethnicity, and gender (Chapter 9), as well as forcing us to confront vexing problems such as poor housing and crime (Chapter 10). Part V, “Global Urbanization,” offers a look at the history and current urbanization in four major world regions: Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia (Chapters 11 through 13). It is in these areas of the world that urbanization is now most rapid, with cities reaching unprecedented size. Finally, Part VI, “The Planning and Evaluation of Cities,” examines the architectural, social, and political dimensions of urban planning, as well as points out the problems that prevent cities from living up to their promise of improving everyone’s lives (Chapter 14).

FOUR KEY THEMES

This attempt to tell the urban story will lead us to consider a wide range of issues and to confront countless questions. Yet four main themes guide this exploration, and it is useful to make these explicit. To put it another way, whatever else a student entering the field of urban studies might learn, he or she must pay attention to these themes:

1. *Cities and urban life vary according to time and place.* Since the idea of the city came to our ancestors some 10,000 years ago, the urban scene has been re-created time and again, all around the world, in countless ways. The authors—informed by their own travels to some 60 of the world’s nations—have labored to portray this remarkable diversity throughout this text.

2. *Cities reflect and intensify society and culture.* Although cities vary in striking ways, everywhere they stand as physical symbols of human civilization. For example,

nowhere do we perceive the inward-looking world of the Middle Ages better than in the walled medieval cities of that era. Similarly, modern U.S. cities are powerful statements about the contemporary forces of industrial capitalism.

3. *Cities reveal the best and the worst about the human condition.* Another way to “read” cities is as testimony to the achievements and failings of a way of life. Thus, while New York boasts some spectacular architecture, exciting public parks, vital art galleries, and vibrant concert halls, it also forces us to confront chronic prejudice, wrenching poverty, and sometimes explosive violence.

4. *Cities offer the promise—but not always the reality—of a better life.* At least since the time of the ancient Greeks, people have recognized that the city holds the promise of living “the good life.” Yet all urban places fall short of this ideal in some ways, and in a number of today’s cities, people are struggling valiantly simply to survive. The great promise of urban living, coupled with the daunting problems of actual cities, provokes us to ask how (or, indeed, if) we can intentionally and thoughtfully make urban places better. Although we are realistic about the problems, we remain optimistic about the possibilities.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE TEXT

Two special features warrant the attention of readers.

Boxes First, each chapter contains several boxed inserts. These boxes are of five kinds. *Critical Thinking* boxes ask readers to grapple with a particular problem or question, assess some evidence, and reach a reasoned conclusion. *Urban Living* boxes provide a picture of the city “at street level”—that is, a close-up look at how people really live. *Looking Back* boxes amplify the historical content of the text, reminding us that our cities are built on the

past, culturally and, indeed, literally. *The City in Literature* boxes are testimony to our belief that writers and poets (from Charles Dickens, Walt Whitman, and T. S. Eliot to Paul Theroux, John Steinbeck, Piri Thomas, James Baldwin, and Francine Garcia-Hallcom) have special abilities to capture the sights and sounds—and sometimes even the soul—of cities. Finally, *Cityscapes* present an extended literary account or scholarly analysis of some significant dimension of urban life.

Case Studies The text includes six case studies that offer a broad historical look at major cities in various regions of the world as they illustrate a chapter's key points. The cities profiled in these case studies are London (Chapter 2), New York (Chapter 3), Chicago (Chapter 9), La Paz, Bolivia (Chapter 11), Kano, Nigeria (Chapter 12), and Portland, Oregon (Chapter 14).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, and most important, the authors wish to acknowledge the role played by James L. Spates, of Hobart and William Smith Colleges, in the development of this book. An earlier version of this manuscript, titled *The Sociology of Cities*, was coauthored by Jim Spates and John Macionis. Although John Macionis and Vince Parrillo have significantly revised that effort at

many levels, Jim's ideas and enthusiasm for cities are still evident here.

Macionis and Parrillo wish to thank the editorial team at Prentice Hall for their efforts in making this text a reality. John Chillingworth, senior acquisitions editor for sociology, has admirably handled the review and production of the manuscript. Particular thanks go to Nancy Roberts, editor-in-chief, for signing the project and helping to get the work under way. Interior design and technical production of the manuscript attests to the skills of Rob DeGeorge; and we are grateful to Virginia Rubens for copyediting and to Melanie Belkin and Associates for preparing the index. Finally, we wish to thank Karen Pugliano for selecting the striking photographs that appear in the book.

For reviewing part or all of the manuscript and generously sharing their time and ideas with us, we gratefully acknowledge Ronald S. Edari, University of Wisconsin; and Daniel Monti, Boston University.

John J. Macionis
Kenyon College
Gambier, Ohio 43022
E-mail: macionis@kenyon.edu
<http://www.macionis.com>

Vincent N. Parrillo
William Paterson University
Wayne, New Jersey 07470
E-mail: parrillo@wpc.wilpaterson.edu







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