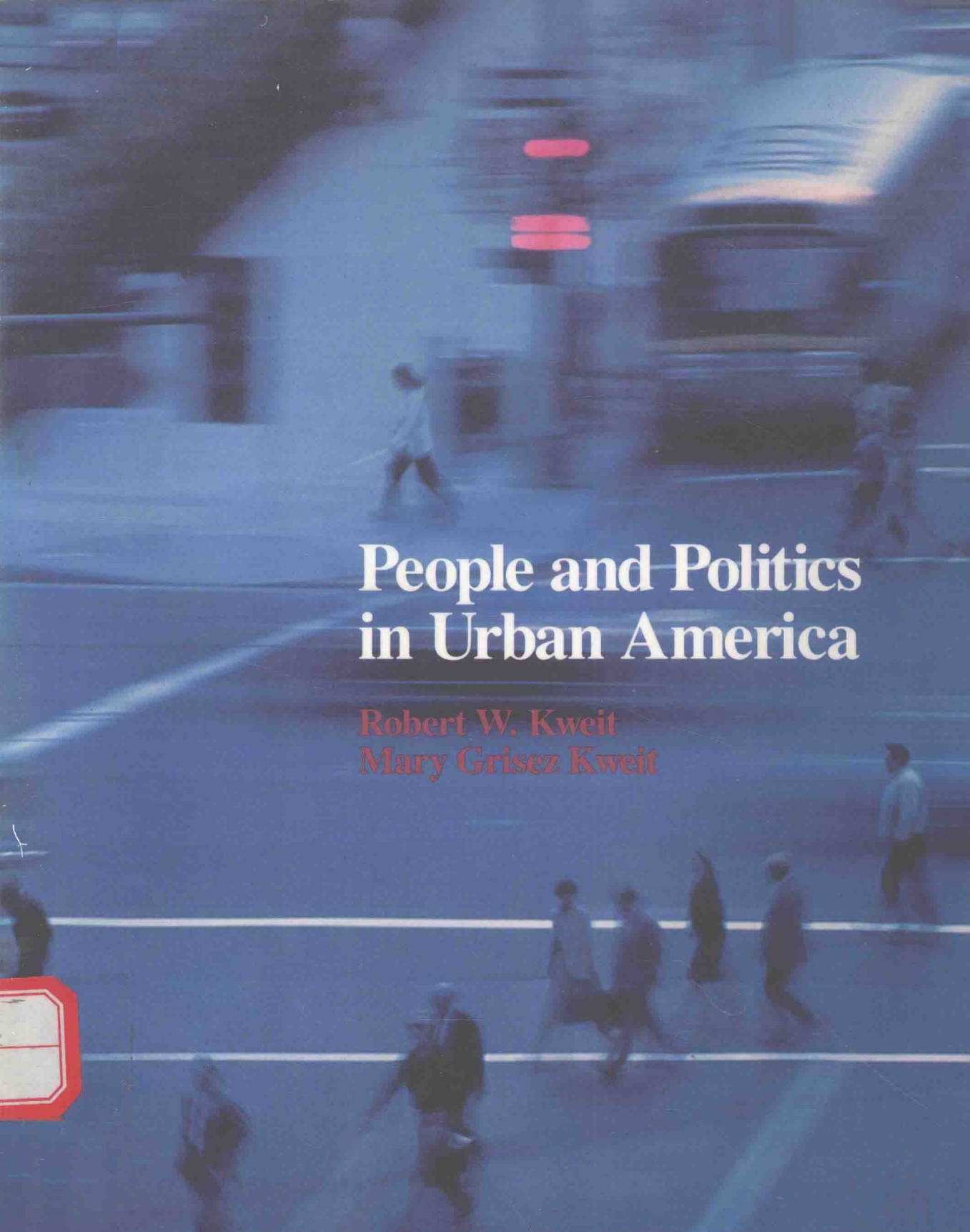

People and Politics in Urban America

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PREFACE

America's cities are anomalies. On the one hand, they house some of the greatest human accomplishments: museums that are full of artistic masterpieces, symphony halls that showcase musicians, dancers, and other performers, buildings that are architectural and technical marvels. On the other hand, those same cities also are home to human despair and depravity. People live in decayed and rat-infested buildings. Many, living in a drug-fogged world, prey on others for money to support their habits. Seventy-five percent of Americans live in our cities and surrounding suburbs and the characteristics of those cities inescapably affect the quality of their lives. This book examines the extent to which these Americans use the political process to control the characteristics of life in their metropolises.

In the last decade, the field of urban politics has become one of the most exiting, dynamic areas of both empirical and normative research. Spurred by the publication in 1981 of Paul Peterson's *City Limits* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), an elegant explanation of urban politics and policy in terms of economic imperatives, many observers of the urban scene offered variations on the theme that economic forces dominate on the urban level. These analyses are compelling and any book that surveys the field of urban politics must consider them. But compelling arguments also exist for focusing on the role of citizens.

First, there is empirical evidence that citizens can have an impact on policy. Ironically, while many students of urban politics have despaired for democracy in the city, current developments indicate that politics does matter and that citizens can use the political process to effect change. Blacks and Hispanics are more politically active than ever before, and in city after city they have used their political power to begin to alter the distribution of resources. In *Protest Is Not Enough* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), Browning, Marshall, and Tabb documented the inclusion of blacks and Hispanics in the ruling coalitions of several California cities and the resulting policy impact. Other observers have commented on the growing activism of urban neighborhoods and on the impact of that activism on urban policy.

This activism still does not mean that access and power are equally distributed within the city. To be politically effective, resources are necessary and not all citizens possess the necessary resources. Nor does it mean that citizen control is inevitable. However, under some circumstances, citizen control is possible. The goal of this book is to understand more thoroughly the extent of citizen control in urban politics. To accomplish this goal, we will document cases in which citizens have been successful and examine the mechanisms and resources that have led to that success.

Second, there are normative reasons to examine the role of the citizen in urban politics. It would be ironic indeed if the three-quarters of Americans who live in urban areas could exercise no control over the governments that determine the quality of their daily lives, especially considering historic observations that American democracy originated in and could only flourish at the local level. If democracy is dead in the cities, prospects for keeping it alive at other levels of government would seem dim.

Another reason to examine citizen control is to avoid creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. This text is designed for undergradute classes in urban politics. If the role of the citizen is not considered in these classes, why should future students believe they can have an impact on local government? If economic interests control politics, why should any citizen become politically active? And if citizens show no interest, then economic concerns will surely dominate.

Finally, examining this issue in an urban politics course makes the course more relevant to the students. Many observers attempt to explain occurrences on the urban level by ignoring both politics and citizens. If economic forces control the cities and if citizens can play no part in the political process, why bother to learn about urban *politics*?

While normative concerns have given birth to this project, we have tried to present the evidence concerning citizen control in as unbiased a manner as possible. Although we believe that the issue is important, we do not believe that there is any simplistic answer. This book examines the evidence of control as well as the limits on it. In summary, we feel that citizens can have an impact, but the process is neither inevitable nor easy. In *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1975) William Gamson observed, "Entry is not prohibited for those with the gumption, the persistence, and the skill to pursue it long enough."

The book is divided into four sections. The first section examines the historical, social, and economic environment of America's cities. The second part focuses on the governmental context. Both sections attempt to explain the setting in which citizens must try to exercise control. Part III examines the mechanisms, resources, and strategies that citizens can use and the groups that are most active at the urban level. After the context has been established, Part IV describes several important urban policy areas and the control citizens exercise over each policy type. A process model is used to follow each policy from agenda setting to implementation and evaluation.

Throughout the book, literature from various fields and perspectives is surveyed. In particular, the historical development of America's metrop-

olises and of the major policy areas affecting them is reviewed. As a result, this text is relevant for urban studies and urban history courses as well.

One goal that we did not manage to achieve was to include more discussion of small and medium-sized cities. One of us grew up in New York City and is still bemused by the North Dakota version of a city. While he tends to view Grand Forks (population 42,000) as a village, students from the small towns of North Dakota see it as a major urban place. It is all relative, as we observe in Chapter 2. Unfortunately, the literature on which we relied focused on New York, Chicago, and other cities of similar size. Thus, this book is mainly about big cities.

This text has had a long gestation and we have accrued many debts. We have studied urban areas under several outstanding scholars who shared, and continue to share, their knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject. We wish to acknowledge Alan Campbell, Guthrie Birkhead, Morton Schussheim, Julian Wolpert, Stephen Elkin, and Oliver P. Williams. Because of the breadth of the field of urban politics, we have found it necessary to rely on many colleagues and practitioners for sources, articles, and words of wisdom. We wish to thank John Hutcheson, Department of Planning, Georgia State University; Michael Meyer, Department of Sociology, University of North Dakota; Vern Keel, School of Communication, University of North Dakota; Robert Korbach, Department of Economics, University of North Dakota; Richard Hill, Department of Educational Administration, University of North Dakota; Howard Swanson, Assistant City Attorney, City of Grand Forks; and Robert Bushfield, City Planner, City of Grand Forks.

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CITY POLITICS

"The mobs of great cities," observed Thomas Jefferson, "add just so much to pure government as sores do to the strength of the human body."[1] When Jefferson, who was renowned for his love of the pastoral life, wrote this evaluation of the urban condition, only 5 percent of Americans lived in cities. Ironically, with three-quarters of Americans now living in metropolitan areas, many modern observers would agree with Jefferson's evaluation of the urban impact on "pure government."

Since the 1960s, people have claimed that an urban crisis exists because of the physical and social decay that abounds, for example, the slums, the underclass, and the rising crime rates. But Jefferson was concerned about another kind of urban crisis: the impact of cities on government processes. Echoes of his concern can be traced back to Aristotle, who believed that democracy was most suitable for people living in a rural, agricultural society.[2] More recently, Douglas Yates argued that America's cities are ungovernable, in part because "citizens and citizen groups have little control over policy making, however strong and frequent their demands."[3]

Many contemporary studies assume that citizens play no role in governing cities. Indeed, many of these analyses assume that even politics does not play a meaningful role. Political econ-

omists believe that economic forces produce inexorable pressures that inevitably constrain urban political systems and force the political process into a subservient position. As a result, citizens participating in politics have no power and therefore examining their role is not necessary. Others argue that the limits on the power of urban political systems are so substantial that political decisions are meaningless. Few citizens bother to participate and those who do have little impact.

This book takes issue with these arguments. One fundamental premise of this book is that the question of whether America's urban citizens can play a meaningful role in the decisions that affect their lives is crucial. On normative grounds it is a question that should not simply be dismissed. For the three-quarters of Americans who live in metropolises, the question is whether democracy is possible in real life or whether it is merely Fourth-of-July rhetoric.

What happens in the city determines on a day-to-day basis the quality of life of urban residents. This is not to discount the importance of or the impact of national politics. However, local politics affects urban residents in intimate and inescapable ways. Their ability to control those aspects of their lives is essential if this country is to claim to be a democracy. For this reason alone, the question of the role of citizens should not simply be dismissed.

This question is also not so easily answered. There is evidence to support the premise that, in some instances, and under some conditions, urban residents can use the political process to effect change. Consideration of this evidence makes it impossible to conclude that the political process is subservient to inexorable economic forces or is so limited that it has no impact.

The mobilization of people can make a difference in the determination of urban policy. Protests and political activity have resulted in the incorporation of new groups into governing coalitions. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb examined the change in urban policy as blacks and Hispanics became significant parts of the governing coalitions of the San Francisco Bay area. Their study makes clear that, while not inevitable, citizens can force change by their political involvement and activity.[4]

Political leaders have helped mobilize urban residents. The large urban electorate has proved irresistible to political leaders seeking a national constituency. These leaders have attempted to lure voters by forging a national urban policy aimed at redevelopment. At times, the impact of that policy on some residents has led to protests and opposition and has resulted in fundamental policy changes at both the national and local levels.[5]

Many researchers have commented on the increase in the political activity of urban residents, especially at the neighborhood level. It has been called a "backyard revolution."[6] Thomas has argued that many cities have experienced a "political revival" that has produced "what can accurately be termed a new urban politics," which has three characteristics: (1) an increase in the incentives for political organization and a corresponding increase in the number of groups active in urban politics; (2) an increase in the responsiveness of city governments to these new groups; and (3) "a new political content in many municipal programs" as a result of the increased activity and increased responsiveness.[7]

These studies agree that politics does matter. The mobilization of people and the resources that they command *can* produce political power. But the power is not inevitable. Success depends on many factors. This book examines the conditions that affect the ability of citizens to use the political process to control their lives in urban America.

In sum, the argument here is that the political process does affect what happens in urban America. Because of that, it matters who controls the political processes in cities. Since America claims to be a democracy, citizens