

Legoland

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A primary LEGO showpiece, Miniland USA is a celebration of American achievements, a canvas to illustrate the diversification of its peoples and cultures, past and present.

—LEGOLAND WEBSITE

The main attraction of Legoland, a theme park just outside of Carlsbad, California, is Miniland USA, which features miniatures of quintessentially American places built from 20 million Legos. Miniland has a replica of Washington, complete with federal museums, monuments, the White House, and the Capitol. It even has a miniature Georgetown and a working model of the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal. Other places in Miniland include the French Quarter of New Orleans, a New England fishing village, and Manhattan. The miniature of California is a hodgepodge of scenes, from an Orange County surfing town to Chinatown in San Francisco.

What's missing from Miniland, however, is the built landscapes so typical of America—the housing subdivision, the retail strip mall, the office park—in short, suburbia. The irony is that Lego building blocks are perfectly suited to make such places, especially the commercial structures. The basic Lego is a small rectangular block. Think of the ease with which the Miniland model makers could depict big-box retail centers or the low-slung, banded-window suburban office building. Just snap a bunch of

Legos together and, presto, instant “edge city.”¹ It is not as if the Lego folks could have missed knowing about suburban malls and office buildings: Southern California is chock full of them. Such buildings even lie just outside the gates of Legoland, along Interstate 5 as it approaches San Diego. But apparently suburban sprawl does not count as an “American achievement.”

Modern suburbia’s absence from Miniland USA reflects a national ambivalence about what we have built in the past half century. We made the suburbs, and we increasingly live in the suburbs, but we still often disregard them as real places. Even though one could describe much of modern suburban commercial development as Lego-like, there was little chance that Miniland would include a replica of nearby Costa Mesa, California, which contains the nation’s biggest suburban office complex and one of its largest malls.²

Boomburbs: The Booming Suburbs

This book is about the places that rarely inspire theme parks but, interestingly, are home to them, such as Anaheim, California, which is famous for Disneyland. While these booming suburbs may not capture the public imagination, they have consistently been the fastest-growing cities over the past several decades. This growth has not translated into immediate name recognition, except perhaps among demographers, who keep seeing the population growth of these cities exceed that of older cities.

The essence of a boomburb is that people know of them but find them unremarkable and unmemorable. As this book shows, all sorts of high-profile industries and activities occur in boomburbs, but few identify with the city. For example, over a dozen major league sports are centered in boomburbs, but only the Anaheim Mighty Ducks (a hockey team) carries the place name. The fact that the one professional baseball team that had a boomburb identity—the Anaheim Angels—has since become the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim points to the problem. The city of Anaheim took the trouble to highlight this switch in its entry for Wikipedia.com, an online encyclopedia:

On January 3, 2005, Angels Baseball, LP, the ownership group for the Anaheim Angels, announced that it would change the name of the club to the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim. Team spokesmen pointed out that, from its inception, the Angels had been granted territorial rights by Major League Baseball to the counties of Los Angeles, Ven-

tura, Riverside, and San Bernardino in addition to Orange County. New owner Arturo Moreno believed the new name would help him market the team to the entire Southern California region rather than just Orange County. The “of Anaheim” was included in the official name to comply with a provision of the team’s lease at Angel Stadium, which requires that “Anaheim be included” in the team’s name.

Thus Anaheim, a city with as many residents as Pittsburgh or Cincinnati, is reduced to an addendum on the Angels name—and only then because of a legal technicality.

Scratch most boomburb mayors and you may find that they have a Rodney Dangerfield complex: their cities get no respect. Michael L. Montandon, the mayor of North Las Vegas (one of the nation’s fastest-growing boomburbs), tells of an encounter in which the mayor of Salt Lake City dismissed the idea that the two places share common problems, despite the fact that North Las Vegas is both bigger and more ethnically diverse than Salt Lake City.³

North Las Vegas is not alone. Few big-city mayors seem to recognize boomburbs as peers, and visa versa. Mayor Keno Hawker of Mesa, Arizona (a boomburb that is now bigger than Atlanta or St. Louis), spent just one year in the U.S. Conference of Mayors before withdrawing his city. His problem (in addition to the stiff dues) was that the other mayors were simply not discussing issues that concerned him.⁴ As of 2004 Mesa was the largest city in the nation that does not belong to the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

But boomburbs also have a hard time fitting into the National League of Cities, whose membership is dominated by smaller cities and suburbs. Although most boomburbs do belong to the National League of Cities, their size and growth rates make it difficult for them to share common perspectives and problems with the typical cities in the organization. As one boomburb mayor put it, “How do you relate to cities that are smaller than your city grows in just a year?”

We call boomburbs accidental cities.⁵ But they are accidental not because they lack planning, for many are filled with master-planned communities; when one master-planned community runs into another, however, they may not add up to one well-planned city. Too new and different for the U.S. Conference of Mayors and too big and fast growing for the National League of Cities, boomburbs have a hard time fitting into the urban policy discussion. Washington’s think tank crowd is simply stumped by them.

It seems that few boomburbs anticipated becoming big cities, or have yet to fully absorb this identity, and thus have accidentally arrived at this status. Part of the confusion may be that in the past the port, the factory, and the rail terminal fueled metropolitan growth. Today booms occur in places with multiple exchanges on new freeways, where subdivisions, shopping strips, and office parks spring up. This is the development zone that Bruce Katz refers to as “the exit-ramp economy.”⁶ Or as Jane Jacobs would say, boomburbs develop as “micro-destinations” (such as office parks) as opposed to “macro-destinations” (downtowns).⁷

Boomburbs are not traditional cities nor are they bedroom communities for these cities. They are instead a new type of city, a subset of and a new variation of American suburbanization.⁸ This book explores the fundamental nature of this new type of city.

The Boomburb Concept

The boomburb concept came from a Fannie Mae Foundation project, undertaken by Robert Lang and Patrick Simmons, to study the 2000 U.S. census to better understand changes in the U.S. city population in the second half of the twentieth century, or since 1950.⁹ Lang and Simmons argued that an analysis of five decades of change provides a context for understanding the population shifts of the 1990s.

The year 1950 is an important benchmark for American cities. For many older cities, it was their population high point.¹⁰ Cities swelled as soldiers returning from World War II started families and sought housing in a nation that had built hardly any new residences in twenty years due to war and depression. With the beginning of Levittown and similar tract-style developments in the late 1940s, the 1950 census also marks the start of large-scale suburbanization.¹¹

Lang and Simmons were determined to fix two major deficiencies that they saw in most urban population analysis—the lack of historical data and the lumping together of all big cities (comparing, for example, Newark and Las Vegas). By looking at, say, only the hundred biggest cities in the United States in 2000, and using just one decade for comparison (the 1990s), the finding is always the same—Las Vegas blows out Newark. But by developing a peer-city analysis (Newark compared to Cleveland, Las Vegas compared to Phoenix) and by looking at several decades, a more precise reading of urban change is possible.

Lang and Simmons therefore split all major U.S. cities into two categories: boomers and decliners. Boomers were defined as all cities above 100,000 in

population as of 2000 that had sustained double-digit population growth since 1950. Decliners included all cities with a 1950 population of 200,000 or more with at least two decades of population loss since 1950.¹²

Looking at the boomers, Lang and Simmons found a surprise—most were not booming cities such as Las Vegas and Phoenix but were instead the suburbs of these big Sunbelt cities. The simple fact is that the fastest-growing U.S. cities with more than 100,000 residents have little identity outside their region. Given this finding, Lang and Simmons decided to focus only on places that are not the central city of their region. So instead of, say, comparing Las Vegas to Phoenix, they compared a Las Vegas suburb, such as Henderson, to a Phoenix suburb, such as Chandler. Thus was born the boomburb concept.¹³

The 2001 boomburb research was covered by such national media as *USA Today*, CNN, and MSNBC. A big reason for such attention, besides the catchy title, was some truly revealing findings. For example, the population of the biggest boomburb—Mesa, Arizona—surpassed that of such traditional big cities as Minneapolis and Miami.¹⁴ Even many smaller boomburbs were now bigger than older and better-known medium-size cities. Tellingly, Peoria, Arizona, was poised to jump ahead of Peoria, Illinois (its namesake)—which it has subsequently done.¹⁵

The boomburb concept touched a nerve. It tapped into the sense that Americans are building very different places than in the past. There is an extensive literature on the suburbs and even a good deal of work showing that suburbs have evolved past their traditional role as bedroom communities.¹⁶ But the boomburb findings capture the immense scale of this change. The rise of boomburbs has shock value—Mesa bigger than Minneapolis and Miami? It presents the questions, How did this happen and what does it mean?

The idea behind boomburb research was always to explore these places as emerging urban forms and not to judge them. This book seeks to do the same. Boomburbs make an easy target for those who find fault with the way such places are developing.¹⁷ This study does not add to that chorus of criticism. Nor does it apologize for boomburbs. Rather, the book lays out the facts and lets readers render their own verdict. Both detractors and boosters will find plenty of new facts in this book to support their views.

Boomburbs Redux

The starting year in this analysis is 1970, not 1950, as in the original research. This shift added one more boomburb—Palmdale, California—to

Table 1-1. Boomburbs, 2000 Census^a

Anaheim, California	Gilbert, Arizona	Palmdale, California
Arlington, Texas	Glendale, Arizona	Pembroke Pines, Florida
Aurora, Colorado	Grand Prairie, Texas	Peoria, Arizona
Bellevue, Washington	Henderson, Nevada	Plano, Texas
Carrollton, Texas	Hialeah, Florida	Rancho Cucamonga, California
Chandler, Arizona	Irvine, California	Riverside, California
Chesapeake, Virginia	Irving, Texas	Salem, Oregon
Chula Vista, California	Lakewood, Colorado	San Bernardino, California
Clearwater, Florida	Lancaster, California	Santa Ana, California
Coral Springs, Florida	Mesa, Arizona	Santa Clarita, California
Corona City, California	Mesquite, Texas	Santa Rosa, California
Costa Mesa, California	Moreno Valley, California	Scottsdale, Arizona
Daly City, California	Naperville, Illinois	Simi Valley, California
Escondido, California	North Las Vegas, Nevada	Sunnyvale, California
Fontana, California	Oceanside, California	Tempe, Arizona
Fremont, California	Ontario, California	Thousand Oaks, California
Fullerton City, California	Orange, California	West Valley City, Arizona
Garland, Texas	Oxnard, California	Westminster, Colorado

a. A boomburb is defined as an incorporated suburban city with at least 100,000 in population, as not the core city of their region, and as having double digit population growth in each census since 1970.

the list. Boomburbs are still defined as having more than 100,000 residents, as not the core city in their region, and as having maintained double-digit rates of population growth for each census since the beginning year (now 1970). Boomburbs are incorporated and are located in the nation's fifty largest metropolitan statistical areas as of the 2000 census, areas that range from New York City, with over 20 million residents, to Richmond, Virginia, with just under 1 million people.¹⁸ As of the 2000 census, four boomburbs topped 300,000 in population, eight surpassed 200,000, and forty-two exceeded 100,000. The fifty-four boomburbs account for 52 percent of 1990s' growth in cities with 100,000 to 400,000 residents. (The fifty-four boomburbs are listed alphabetically in table 1-1.)

Boomburbs now contain over a quarter of all residents of small to midsize cities. There may be just a few dozen boomburbs, but they now dominate growth in the category of places that fall just below the nation's biggest cities. Another way to grasp just how big boomburbs have become is by comparing their current populations with those of some better-known traditional cities. Mesa, Arizona, the most populous boomburb at 396,375 residents in 2000, is bigger than such traditional large cities as Minneapolis (population 382,618), Miami (population 362,470), and St. Louis (population 348,189). Arlington, Texas, the third biggest boomburb, with 332,969 people, falls just behind Pittsburgh (with 334,536) and just ahead of Cincinnati (with 331,285). Even

such smaller boomburbs as Chandler, Arizona, and Henderson, Nevada (with 176,581 and 175,381 residents, respectively) now surpass older midsize cities such as Knoxville (with 173,890), Providence, Rhode Island (with 173,618), and Worcester, Massachusetts (with 172,648).

By the 2000 census, fifteen of the hundred largest cities in the United States were boomburbs. More significant, from 1990 to 2000, fourteen of the twenty-five fastest-growing cities among these hundred were boomburbs—including five of the top ten. Since the 2000 census, many of the largest boomburbs jumped ahead of their traditional (and much better-known) big-city peers (based on 2002 census estimates). Mesa (with an estimated population of 426,841) edged out Atlanta (estimated at 424,868). Both Arlington, Texas (estimated at 349,944), and Santa Ana, California (estimated at 343,413), passed St. Louis (which lost nearly 10,000 residents by 2002). Anaheim (with an estimated 2002 population of 332,642) is now immediately trailing St. Louis. Aurora, Colorado (286,028), has overtaken St. Paul (284,037). Finally, Peoria, Arizona (123,239), surged ahead of Peoria, Illinois (112,670), which has actually lost residents in recent years.¹⁹

To put the boomburb rise in perspective, consider that only about a quarter of the U.S. population lives in municipalities that exceed 100,000 people. The fraction of the population living in cities this size or above peaked in 1930. Boomburbs are among the few large cities that are actually booming. Much of the nation's metropolitan population gains have shifted to their edges.²⁰

While some boomburbs are well on their way to becoming major cities, at least as defined by population size, it is not surprising that these places fall below the public radar. But it is interesting how little boomburbs register with urban experts, too. For instance, a recent encyclopedia of urban America that covers both cities and “major suburbs” fails to list even one boomburb exceeding 300,000 people; it does, however, have entries for comparably sized (and often even smaller) traditional cities.²¹

This book also tracks, in addition to boomburbs, a category of fast-growing suburban city, the baby boomburb. It meets the same boomburb growth qualifications; however, it ranges in size from 50,000 to 100,000 residents as of the 2000 census. There are eighty-six baby boomburbs in the United States (table 1-2).

Baby boomburbs are important to examine for two reasons. First, many are up-and-coming boomburbs. In fact, several have jumped over the 100,000 mark since 2000.²² The second reason is that baby boomburbs are numerous. They are especially well represented in the Midwest and the

Table 1-2. U.S. Baby Boomburbs, 2000 Census^a

Antioch, California	Gresham, Oregon	Pittsburg, California
Apple Valley, California	Hemet, California	Plantation, Florida
Beaverton, Oregon	Hesperia, California	Pleasanton, California
Boca Raton, Florida	Hillsboro, Oregon	Plymouth, Minnesota
Boynton Beach, Florida	Kent, Washington	Renton, Washington
Brooklyn Park, Minnesota	Laguna Niguel, California	Rialto, California
Burnsville, Minnesota	Lauderhill, Florida	Rochester Hills, Michigan
Carlsbad, California	Layton, Utah	Roseville, California
Cary, North Carolina	Lee's Summit, Missouri	Roswell, Georgia
Chino, California	Lewisville, Texas	Round Rock, Texas
Coon Rapids, Minnesota	Livermore, California	San Marcos, California
Cupertino, California	Longmont, Colorado	Sandy, Utah
Davie, Florida	Lynwood, California	Santa Cruz, California
Davis, California	Maple Grove, Minnesota	South Gate, California
Deerfield Beach, Florida	Margate, Florida	St. Charles, Missouri
Delray Beach, Florida	Marietta, Georgia	St. Peters, Missouri
Denton, Texas	Milpitas, California	Sugar Land, Texas
Eagan, Minnesota	Miramar, Florida	Sunrise, Florida
Eden Prairie, Minnesota	Mission Viejo, California	Tamarac, Florida
Edmond, Oklahoma	Missouri, Texas	Thornton, Colorado
Elgin, Illinois	Murfreesboro, Tennessee	Tustin, California
Fairfield, California	Napa, California	Union, California
Federal Way, Washington	Norman, Oklahoma	Vacaville, California
Flower Mound, Texas	North Miami, Florida	Victorville, California
Folsom, California	North Richland Hills, Texas	Vista, California
Frederick, Maryland	Olathe, Kansas	Waukesha, Wisconsin
Gaithersburg, Maryland	Orland Park, Illinois	West Jordan, Utah
Gardena, California	Palatine, Illinois	Yorba Linda, California
Greeley, Colorado	Petaluma, California	

a. A baby boomburb is defined as a suburban city with a population of 50,000 to 100,000 that is not the core city of its region and has had double digit population growth in each census since 1970.

South. They capture the growth in places that boom but lack boomburbs. The change that has swept boomburbs also impacted baby boomburbs. In many instances the latter are at an earlier stage in the process of change than the former. Baby boomburbs came up in many of the discussions the authors had with elected boomburb officials, who often saw these places as potential rivals.

Where Are Boomburbs?

While boomburbs and baby boomburbs are found throughout the nation, they occur mostly in the Southwest in a belt of metropolitan areas stretching from Texas to the Pacific, with almost half in California alone. Even a relatively small Western metropolis such as Las Vegas contains two boom-

burbs. The Las Vegas region also contains three census-designated places (or unincorporated places) that exceed 100,000 residents and so would qualify as boomburbs were they incorporated.²³

Two key ingredients are needed to produce boomburbs and baby boomburbs—fast, sustained development in big incorporated places. The West (with eighty-four boomburbs and baby boomburbs) has both. The South (with forty-one boomburbs and baby boomburbs) in general is booming but has mostly smaller incorporated places and even many unincorporated places that capture growth. The Northeast and the Midwest have plenty of large incorporated places but are growing at a much slower rate than the South and the West. Thus, no metropolitan area in the Northeast and Midwest except Chicago has a single boomburb. Even large and rapidly growing Sunbelt metropolitan areas east of the Mississippi, such as Atlanta and Charlotte, often lack boomburbs. Thus, a region can boom and still not have a boomburb.

The one region that could have produced perhaps a dozen boomburbs—metropolitan Washington—has none.²⁴ Washington's problem is not slow growth, for it is the only real boom region of the megalopolis running from Virginia to Maine.²⁵ Rather, metropolitan Washington lacks the units of government that would produce boomburbs. Counties are the main unit of governance in suburban Washington, and only incorporated cities qualify as boomburbs. Consider Fairfax County, Virginia, which now has over a million residents and has experienced double-digit growth rates since World War II.²⁶ Fairfax would likely contain several boomburbs if the county's ministerial districts were separate, incorporated cities.²⁷

The Atlanta metropolitan area's rapid growth could also have produced several boomburbs, but the region has only one city above 100,000—Atlanta. By contrast, the Phoenix metropolitan area has eight cities with more than 100,000 people—Phoenix and seven boomburbs (one of which is bigger than Atlanta). This bounty of large cities comes despite the fact that almost a million fewer people live in the Phoenix region than in the Atlanta region. But if boomburbs were counties and not cities, Atlanta and Washington would have plenty of them.²⁸

So why does the West have such large incorporated places? There are several reasons. The metropolitan West is home to enormous master-planned communities usually located in a single town. These communities annex unincorporated land as they grow. The land and its new residents are added to municipalities, turning what were once small towns into boomburbs. Also, the public lands in the West that surround big metropolitan

areas are often transferred to developers in large blocks.²⁹ By contrast, Eastern builders of master-planned communities must assemble land from mostly smaller, privately held parcels.³⁰

Western water districts also play a role in promoting boomburbs. The West is mostly dry, and places seeking to grow must organize to access water.³¹ Big incorporated cities are better positioned to buy water rights, providing an incentive for suburbs to join a large incorporated city.³² Finally, the revenue system in many Western states relies on municipal-level sales taxes, so the incentive to incorporate land and promote retail development on it has produced what William Fulton calls “sales tax canyons.”³³ The only census regions missing both boomburbs and baby boomburbs are the New England and Middle Atlantic states, home to major metropolitan areas such as Boston, Philadelphia, and of course New York. Again, this is not to say that there has been no growth in the Northeast over the past several decades. The New York region in particular has boomed, but much of its development has been in exurban counties. Orange County, New York, and Ocean County, New Jersey (both at least fifty miles from midtown Manhattan), have seen double-digit growth for each census since 1950 and would qualify as boomburbs were they cities.³⁴ But no incorporated city in either Orange or Ocean Counties is even a baby boomburb.

By contrast, in the Midwest, the Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis, St. Louis, and Kansas City regions all have many baby boomburbs. Minneapolis alone has seven. Although St. Louis has seen decades of decline, its suburbs of St. Charles and St. Peters have boomed. Baby boomburbs also appear in many of the same metropolitan areas that have boomburbs. Los Angeles and San Francisco have a bunch, as does South Florida. Almost all of the western development edge of Broward County, Florida—which presses against the Everglades—consists of several baby boomburbs.

Boomburb: A Bold New Metropolis or an Updated Satellite City?

When satellite cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reached a certain size they became dense urban cores. But as boomburbs grow to be the size of these earlier satellite cities, most remain essentially suburban in character. Just as satellite cities reflected the dominant urban pattern of their time, boomburbs may be the ultimate symbol of the sprawling postwar metropolitan form. Boomburbs typically develop along the interstate freeways that ring large U.S. metropolitan areas. The commercial elements of the new suburban metropolis—office parks, big-box

retail stores, and most characteristically, strip malls—gather at highway exit ramps and major intersections. Beyond these lie residential subdivisions dominated by large-lot, single-family homes.

Some may ask whether the boomburb is merely a new kind of satellite city. Business, particularly manufacturing, has been decentralizing for many decades—perhaps even a century. For example, in a 1915 publication titled *Satellite Cities: A Case Study of Industrial Suburbs*, the economist Graham Taylor described an emerging metropolitan pattern in which heavy industry was rapidly shifting to the suburbs in search of more space and lower costs. More than seventy-five years ago, the sociologist Ernest Burgess noted that there was already business growth at Chicago's edge, which he characterized as being “centralized-decentralized” in structure.³⁵ Early twentieth-century “satellite” and “centralized” suburbs mimicked big cities, although at slightly lower density and scale. Satellites had all of the places that defined a city: a main street shopping area, high-density residential neighborhoods, and by the late nineteenth century, factory districts.³⁶ In the 1920s it was even typical for larger satellite cities in the New York region, such as Newark, to have a signature art deco office tower, representing an already decentralizing service economy.³⁷

Boomburbs, however, do not resemble these older satellites. While boomburbs possess most elements found in cities—such as housing, retailing, entertainment, and offices—they are not typically patterned in a traditional urban form. Boomburbs almost always lack, for example, a dense business core and are thus distinct from traditional cities and satellites—not so much in their function as in their low-density and loosely configured spatial structure. Boomburbs are urban in fact but not in feel.

A distinction must be made between the boomburbs of a traditional city and those of the newer and less traditional Southwestern city. The boomburbs of Phoenix, Dallas, and Las Vegas, for example, are similar to their core city. Glendale, near Phoenix, and Garland, near Dallas, for example, have the density and urban form of their core cities—except for a large downtown. Boomburbs in these metropolitan areas, in other words, are extensions of the auto-dependent city typical of the Sunbelt.

Terms for the Boomburb Phenomenon

Urban scholars have been attempting for the past three decades to characterize the large suburban cities that are referred to here as boomburbs. As William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock note, “In the early 1970s, as concern about the inner-city crisis waned and the decentralization of the metropolis

reached new proportions, ‘the urbanization of the suburbs’ suddenly became a topic of national interest. The ensuing flurry of articles and books introduced neologisms such as ‘outer city,’ ‘satellite sprawl,’ ‘new city,’ ‘suburban city,’ ‘urban fringe,’ and ‘neo city’ to describe this phenomenon.”³⁸ Despite years of effort to label the new suburban form, there remains no single name for it—boomburb being one of many. Instead, as Sharpe and Wallock note, observers use an array of names, suggesting that planners, developers, journalists, and academics do not yet understand it.

Part of the problem is that we are bound by a language that hierarchically ranks living space—urban, suburban, exurban, rural—when the old ladder image no longer applies.³⁹ But properly naming the new suburban city is an important step in better understanding it. As Pierce Lewis argues, “Language is important. We cannot talk about . . . phenomena unless we possess the vocabulary to describe them, and many observers still cannot agree on what to call this new amorphous form of urban geography.”⁴⁰

A boomburb, as defined in this analysis, corresponds to what urban historian Robert Fishman refers to as a technoburb, which he defines as “a hopeless jumble of housing, industry, commerce, and even agricultural uses.”⁴¹ In his view, today’s sprawling suburban metropolitan areas can no longer be judged by the standards of the old metropolis, in part because the new suburban form “lacks any definable borders, a center or a periphery, or clear distinctions between residential, industrial, and commercial zones.”⁴² In Jane Jacobs’s parlance, boomburbs have far more microdestinations than macrodestinations.⁴³ Yet while many boomburbs may fit what Robert Lang refers to as edgeless cities, several also are what Joel Garreau calls edge cities, a term for metropolitan focal points outside the urban cores and older satellite suburbs.⁴⁴ A list of such terms appears on the next page.⁴⁵

And the names keep coming. Not content with the fast growth implied by the term *boomburb*, Dolores Hayden recently added *zoomburb* to describe even more explosive suburban development.⁴⁶

The terms above capture the dispersal of urban functions, most notably the suburbanization of offices. Thus the terms *suburb* and *suburban* continue to be used. But this process is much more complex than a simple dispersal; the decentralization involves a degree of recentralization, hence the terms *city*, *urban*, *center*, *downtown*, *core*. The spread-out nature of the phenomenon is reflected in the terms *corridor*, *regional*, *spillover*, *spread*, *outer*, *unbound*, *edge*, *edgeless*, and *limitless*. There are also indications that the new forms negate the traditional city, as in *anticity*, *exopolis*, and *outtown*, and bring together features usually considered opposites, as in *countrified city* and *urban village*. The labels were not conceived in a

anticity	metropolitan-level	sprinkler city
boomburb	core	stealth city
city a la carte	metropolitan suburb	subcenter
concentrated	metrotown	suburban business
decentralization	minicity	center
countrified city	mini-downtown	suburban downtown
disurb	multicentered net	suburban employment
edge city	net of mixed beads	center
edge county	new downtown	suburban freeway
edgeless city	outer city	corridor
exit ramp economy	outtown	suburban growth
exopolis	penturbia	corridor
galactic city	regional city	suburban nucleation
limitless city	regional town center	technoburb
major diversified	rururbia	the new heartland
center	servurb	urban core
megacenter	slurb	urban galaxy
megacounty	spillover city	urban realm
megalopolis unbound	spread city	urban village

political vacuum: derogatory appellations also are used, such as *disurb* and *slurb*.

The Look and Feel of Boomburbs

Boomburbs are much more horizontally built and less pedestrian friendly than most older suburbs. The fifty-four boomburbs collectively—with millions of residents in total—may have fewer urban qualities than those of such older suburbs as Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia, together.

Alexandria is a city of almost 130,000 residents; Arlington is a county of 190,000 people (it is the smallest county in the United States and is often treated in the U.S. census as a city). Together, the population of these two places is slightly smaller than a big boomburb such as Anaheim. Arlington and Alexandria are directly across the Potomac River from Washington and occupy the entire area that was once part of the District but was ceded back to Virginia in the mid-nineteenth century because it was not developing.⁴⁷ Compared to the District they are suburbs, but they are urban environments when contrasted to the rest of suburban northern

Virginia. Note also that neither place is known nationally for its big-city qualities. Arlington is famous for its national military cemetery, Alexandria is loved by tourists for its quaint Old Town.

Alexandria's Old Town section is the most pedestrian-friendly area in the two places. Arlington has a much larger office market. Newer parts of Alexandria also have office and high-rise residential buildings. The Washington region's Metrorail system laces through both Arlington and Alexandria (especially the former). Arlington's Metro stops have encouraged mixed-use, high-density development.⁴⁸ Alexandria's are beginning to develop in the same way. Both places are fully built, and most new development is within the existing built environment.

Two traditional urban qualities—high-rise buildings and pedestrian-oriented streets—provide a basis for comparing these D.C. suburbs with boomburbs. The number of tall buildings is easy to assess. All buildings worldwide above thirty-five meters tall (about 115 feet) are tracked by Emporis, a real estate consulting firm.⁴⁹ Table 1-3 gives the number of high-rise buildings in Arlington and Alexandria and in those boomburbs that have any. Arlington has 152 high-rise buildings, most of them offices, followed by residences and hotels. Alexandria has 52 high-rises. Compare their total of 204 to 160 for all boomburbs combined.

Some boomburbs contain substantial amounts of office space: Scottsdale, Arizona, and Plano, Texas, have dozens of office buildings with millions of square feet of floor space—and mostly upper-end space at that. Yet together these two communities have only four high-rise office buildings. Welcome to the boomburbs, where low-slung office cubes line the freeways.

In recent years there has been a trend in boomburbs toward taller buildings, especially residential towers. Consider Anaheim, which has proposals on the books for six high-rise condominiums, all of which exceed twenty-three floors, with one rising to thirty-five. In fact, Orange County, California, is in a miniboom of high-rises centered mostly in Anaheim, Costa Mesa, Irvine, and Santa Ana.⁵⁰ Tempe and Scottsdale, Arizona, are also seeing a burst in this building, with ten condominium towers either approved or under construction. Overall, boomburbs have fifteen residential towers under construction, thirty-three more have been approved, and twenty-three have been proposed.⁵¹

The other urban quality missing from boomburbs—pedestrian-friendly streets—is harder to measure than building height. Large areas of Alexandria and Arlington were built for pedestrians. These include Old Town, Alexandria, and the areas around the Metro stops along Arlington's Wilson Boulevard corridor at Rosslyn, Clarendon, Virginia Square, and Ballston. Both

Table 1-3. High-Rise Buildings in Two Washington Suburbs and Boomburbs^a

<i>Suburb/boomburb</i>	<i>Office buildings</i>	<i>Other</i>
Alexandria	8	44
Arlington	78	74
<i>Boomburb</i>	83	77
Anaheim, California	1	8
Arlington, Texas	0	2
Aurora, Colorado	4	0
Bellevue, Washington	11	3
Clearwater, Florida	1	31
Coral Springs	0	1
Costa Mesa, California	9	0
Hialeah, Florida	0	3
Irvine, California	19	3
Irving, Texas	16	6
Lakewood, Colorado	0	2
Mesa, Arizona	1	2
Mesquite, Texas	1	0
North Las Vegas	0	1
Orange, California	7	2
Oxnard, California	2	0
Plano, Texas	3	0
Riverside, California	1	3
Salem, Oregon	0	2
San Bernardino, California	1	1
Santa Ana, California	5	2
Santa Rosa, California	0	1
Scottsdale, Arizona	1	1
Tempe, Arizona	0	2
Westminster, Colorado	0	1

a. Only boomburbs with at least one high-rise building are listed.

places also have densely built pre–World War II subdivisions. Conservatively, perhaps five square miles of Arlington and Alexandria combined is friendly to pedestrians. That may not seem like much, but it may equal or surpass the total of such space in all of the boomburbs in America put together. There are plenty of boomburbs—even big ones—in which pedestrian-oriented areas are only several blocks or even one block. The so-called downtowns of cities such as North Las Vegas and Chandler are quite literally one block. Those boomburbs with several blocks of downtown include Plano, Texas, and Riverside and Orange in California. Tempe has a decent downtown (which is helped by being proximate to Arizona State University), as do Salem, Oregon (the only boomburb state capital—and the biggest outlier in the study), and Bellevue, Washington.

There are also some boomburb new towns on the model of places such as Reston, Virginia. Las Colinas in Irving, Texas, is an example of a well-

designed new town, with shopping, residences, and offices mixed together. Further down the pedestrian-friendly scale is a “lifestyle center” such as The Camp in Costa Mesa, which is a shopping area laid out in village form. Victoria Gardens is an ambitious lifestyle center in Rancho Cucamonga, California; it has some high-density housing mixed with retail space and all laid out in an urban grid. Finally, there is Main Street USA at Disneyland in Anaheim, which ironically is a bigger main street than the ones found in perhaps half of all boomburbs.

Boomburbs: Cool, Hip, and Hot

From the perspective of big cities, or even of Arlington, it is easy for some people to feel smug in relation to boomburbs. But attractiveness is an elusive quality. The boomburbs may be horizontally built and virtually 100 percent auto oriented, but some are considered “cool” or even “hot” or at least “hip” by the media. These are the adjectives especially applied to boomburbs in Orange County, California. The Camp in Costa Mesa, in Orange County, for example, is full of twentysomethings trolling for the latest in surfing gear. And nearby Irvine houses the center of auto design, in its Spectrum office complex (because according to a Spectrum developer at the Irvine Corporation, Orange County is a proving ground for “cool” cars).⁵²

Even in the remote edges of northeastern Mesa, Arizona, where speculative McMansions are under construction in gated cul de sacs, upscale and trendy shopping and dining are already firmly planted. A major surprise in many of the authors’ site tours in the new parts of boomburbs is how much urban artifacts are already present. Not just chain restaurants—although there were plenty—but locally owned, white linen restaurants, many already filled with regulars. Along with restaurants are stores selling high-cost modern furnishings.

Another surprise, and one that contradicts the new urbanist notions on the use of space, is the fact that boomburb mini-malls are alive with street life. New urbanists have been sharply critical of the supposed alienation produced by modern suburban retail centers, in contrast to traditional town centers.⁵³ But shopping malls have come a long way from the utilitarian days when stores starkly fronted onto parking lots. Sidewalks have widened, and most malls and restaurants in the Sunbelt offer outdoor seating. Chains such as Starbucks often anchor a public space in these places. On site tours to the boomburbs the authors repeatedly

observed that social life in mini-malls stands as perhaps the empirical finding most contrary to preconceived ideas of suburban alienation. Some future Jane Jacobs may turn urban planning orthodoxy on its head by describing the intricate social ballet of these spaces and perhaps could argue—as Jacobs did for the city—that boomburbs need to be studied on their own terms.⁵⁴

Money Magazine looked at 271 small to midsize U.S. cities to determine which are the hottest, that is, fast-growing cities where residents can “expect big-time benefits from small-town life.”⁵⁵ The list includes “towns” with above-average home prices, income, and population growth, arranged by region: East (including the South), Central (the Midwest), and West (from Texas to the Pacific). *Money*, like the boomburb study, uses 100,000 population as the break point between midsize and small towns.

Boomburbs and baby boomburbs dominate *Money*’s hottest towns list. In fact, the hottest town above 100,000 in all three regions is a boomburb. *Money* ranks eight places in the East with more than 100,000 people as hot. Cary, North Carolina (104,210 residents in 2002), tops the list, while Coral Springs, Florida, ranks third, and Chesapeake, Virginia, comes in seventh. Half of the hottest places in the East are in northern Virginia. Alexandria is one, but the other three are not cities at all but rather three ministerial districts in Fairfax County: Dranesville (with 110,480 residents), Hunter Mill (with 115,428), and Sully (with 152,169).

Money lists four places in the Midwest. The top-ranked Naperville, Illinois, and the fourth-place Olathe, Kansas, are boomburbs. But most of the hot towns (thirteen of them) are in the West, as are the highest three: Plano ranks first, Anaheim is second, and Scottsdale is third.⁵⁶

The article is interesting as an example of the way the popular press labels boomburbs. Despite the fact that some of the places *Money* ranks as hot have well over 200,000 residents (or even 300,000 in the case of Anaheim), the magazine refers to them as “towns.” Based on the evidence presented here, *Money* has it about half right. Boomburbs may look like towns, but it is hard to argue that living in an Anaheim offers one a “small-town life.” That is, of course, unless the person is a permanent resident of Disneyland’s Main Street USA.

In 2006 *Money Magazine* published a feature on “America’s best small cities,” which did include baby boomburbs.⁵⁷ The study ranked ninety “cities” of 50,000 to 250,000 residents on criteria similar to *Money*’s hot-city list. Boomburbs and baby boomburbs account for seventeen of the twenty-five best small cities.

Some Surprises

Boomburbs being cool or hip is but one of the surprises that turned up in the research for this book (of which being hot was not a surprise). Another opinion of boomburbs—that they are rich, elitist, white, and exclusive—is also wrong for the most part. Here are our findings:

—Several boomburbs have some of the highest percentages of foreign-born populations in the United States, often exceeding that of central cities. Boomburbs with diverse populations have been labeled “new Brooklyns.”

—Housing in some new Brooklyns is among the most crowded in the United States, with two or more people to a room.

—Boomburbs have less affordable housing than much of the nation—only about half of boomburb residents can afford to buy houses in their community, as opposed to a U.S. average of nearly 59 percent. Because of this, homeownership in boomburbs tends to be lower than the national average.

—Boomburbs are much more like one another than like a comparably sized traditional city. Multiple demographic forces sustain growth, with often high levels of both immigration and migration.

—Many boomburbs have a right side and a wrong side of the tracks—or, more accurately, of the freeway. For example, Interstate 15 literally divides North Las Vegas’s affluent and distressed halves.

—The Southwestern boomburbs are a land of big skies and small lots, ironically, for a place with such open spaces.

—Boomburbs can be so big that parts of the city may be declining while other parts are still developing. For instance, the central parts of Chandler, Arizona, badly need redevelopment, although developers are building new housing in open desert that the city has annexed.

—Most boomburbs are newer than the rest of the nation, with housing eight years newer than the U.S. average (1979 versus 1971). Yet seven boomburbs have housing older than the national average.

—Many, if not most, boomburbs are approaching their buildout point. The year each runs out of land—and its peak population when it does—is usually easily predicted. By 2020 more than half of present-day boomburbs will be built out.

—Just about every boomburb mayor interviewed would like to have light-rail transportation in his or her city, reflecting a shift in projection of growth from out to up: light rail would promote real estate development in the downtown. Light-rail projects are under way in Tempe and Mesa, Arizona, Lakewood, Colorado, and Mesquite, Texas.

—Only three boomburbs contain edge cities (or large clusters of suburban offices and shopping malls). But boomburbs collectively do contain plenty of office space in edgeless cities (scattered developments that never coalesce into edge cities).

—A dozen boomburbs and eighteen baby boomburbs have more jobs than households, and about two-thirds of both city types nearly have a jobs-to-housing balance.

—Boomburb leaders often worry about the next round of boomburbs that are gaining on their city—and maybe at the expense of their city.

—Almost all boomburb mayorships are part-time (often nonpaying) jobs. Given the size of these places, it is hard to believe that more of these positions are not full time.

—Boomburbs have devised a number of strategies to adapt governments intended for small towns to the realities of big cities. In many cases, private solutions relieve the burden on both public finance and management.

—Most boomburbs have been growing rapidly since 1940, so their boom started with World War II and did not wait for the postwar era.

—Several dozen new boomburbs could form by the mid-twenty-first century. Interestingly, some of these places are as yet unoccupied and unnamed but are part of big proposed projects, such as Superstition Vistas east of Phoenix.⁵⁸

Why Study Boomburbs?

Boomburbs and baby boomburbs are critical cities to examine on their own terms. For one thing, they contain one in nine U.S. suburban dwellers. Since 1990 over half of all growth in cities of 100,000–400,000 residents has been in these cities: boomburbs now account for a quarter of all people who live in this size city. When the bank robber Willie Sutton was asked, Why do you rob banks? his famous answer was, Because that's where the money is. For similar reasons we study boomburbs and baby boomburbs: because that is where the people are. . . . In addition, a study of boomburbs reveals how large-scale communities are being built and points to how America is growing.

The key finding is not entirely surprising: U.S. cities developed since 1950 have been built around automobiles. But what fills this auto-dependent space is often unexpected. For example, America's new face of poverty is surprisingly often seen in boomburb neighborhoods of small single-family homes, neighborhoods that once represented the American dream. In addition, these cities constitute a new census type. In the Census Bureau's redefinition of

metropolitan America, it reformulated its municipal classification from the old central-city concept to the new principal-city concept.⁵⁹ Interestingly, dozens of boomburbs and baby boomburbs, once termed *noncentral cities* (that is, suburbs), are now termed *principal cities* and have a metropolitan statistical area identification.⁶⁰

The Census Bureau, in loosening its concept of what constitutes a city in the metropolitan context, recognizes that boomburbs have a principal role in their regions, and some metropolitan statistical areas may incorporate their names (such as the Phoenix, Mesa, Scottsdale metropolitan statistical area). Redefining many suburbs as cities added almost 13 million people to the principal-city share of metropolitan area population.⁶¹ Were it not for the new category, central cities would be seen as losing a significant share of metropolitan growth.

A study of boomburbs and baby boomburbs also sheds light on other fast-developing parts of the country, such as fast-growing counties containing mostly unincorporated land. Further, the patterns of growth found in boomburbs often apply to big suburban counties around large cities like Atlanta, Nashville, and Washington.⁶² The major exception to this observation concerns governance: boomburbs and baby boomburbs are incorporated and thus are managed differently from unincorporated developments, and understanding this contrast can help shape development patterns. For example, commercial development in large suburban counties may occur across a wide area, with the tax benefits being shared equally. By contrast, boomburbs—as separate incorporated places—often compete against one another for land uses that generate high sales taxes. This theme is explored throughout the book and forms a major focus in the business and governance chapters.

In an even broader sense, studying boomburbs provides insight into metropolitan change writ large. There is a tradition in the sociological literature to do a depth analysis on one type of city or even of individual neighborhood to catch sight of the larger theoretical currents. Consider such classic works as *Middletown* and *Levittown* and more contemporary studies such as *Streetwise* and the *Celebration Chronicles*.⁶³ In *Levittown*, the new town is treated as both an exemplar and a metaphor for all U.S. post-World War II suburbia. This work does suffer somewhat from a limitation due to face validity (a problem with all case analysis), but it succeeds in fleshing out some basic truths about life in tract-style subdivisions. In *Celebration Chronicles*, the approach is to treat the town of Celebration as representative of the most modern manifestation of suburbia and to test (and

find wanting) the “new urbanist” claim that an “architecture of engagement” enhances social interaction.⁶⁴

By offering an in-depth, objective, nonpolarizing view of large suburban cities, this book can be important not only to policymakers but also to developers, city officials, and of course all who find themselves living in a boomburb. It may be no accident that boomburbs boomed, but the size these places reached and the speed at which they became complicated urban environments have an accidental quality. Boomburbs were often planned, but few planned to become cities (and some even remain in denial). Even boomburbs that have stopped growing face the consequences of their earlier growth. As this book shows, they are the proving grounds for a twenty-first-century suburban cosmopolitanism.