

# *Introduction*

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Much recent work in the social science arena has examined the growing “placelessness” of modern American society. Experts point to, variously, the Internet, satellite television, globalization of the consumer economy, the increase in long-distance moves, and the decline in measures of “social capital” as evidence that Americans are less attached than ever before to the particular places in which they live.<sup>1</sup>

True enough, few Americans today buy their groceries at the corner market. But the places in which people live—which are defined by both political and social boundaries—still reflect a lot about their inhabitants. In turn, those communities shape the views and experiences of those who inhabit them. In choosing where to live, Americans select not just their neighbors, but also their job opportunities, their children’s schools, their commute, their future home wealth, their health care, and their places of worship and congregation.

In other words, place still matters, and *where* we live says a lot about *how* we live. This, the third volume of the Redefining Urban and Suburban America series, examines the contours and implications of the nation’s shifting residential landscape. It represents a confluence of the first two volumes,

1. See, for example, Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976); Ada Louise Huxtable, *The Unreal America* (New York: New Press, 1997); Manuel Castells, *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring, and the Urban-Regional Process* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989). For an alternative view, see Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (MIT Press, 1995).

drawing on both short-form census questionnaire subjects such as population and ethnicity and detailed long-form subjects such as income and educational attainment.

The analytical lens of this volume remains a geographic one, centered specifically on metropolitan areas, cities, and in some cases, neighborhoods. The volume seeks to provide a clearer view of what the results of Census 2000 have revealed about the changing shape of American places, and ultimately, how those results have changed the very idea of the city, the suburb, and the small town. The diversity of outcomes across places—on measures such as population growth, racial and ethnic diversity, employment, and income—reinforces the need to look beyond the national level to discern the impacts of demographic and economic change on a country as large as the United States.

The first four chapters describe how centers of growth in the United States shifted over the 1990s and beyond. Immigration and migration and patterns of development and redevelopment have given rise to population and household growth in a distinct set of places, both new and old.

The next four chapters examine the social consequences of the divergent growth patterns within and across cities, metropolitan areas, and larger regions. The forces of integration and segregation, by income and by race, have produced differing outcomes for different parts of the nation and their inhabitants. These chapters document the shifting arrangement of people and jobs in metropolitan areas and the possible consequences for the social and economic health of those places.

The population dynamics explored in this volume and past volumes have contributed to a changed urban and suburban landscape in the United States. The last two chapters describe how the federal government has modified the very system used to classify U.S. cities and suburbs in response to those dynamics and the likely implications for political and popular views of where Americans live.

## **SHIFTING GROWTH CENTERS SIGNAL NEW URBAN AND SUBURBAN DESTINATIONS**

The rise and fall—and rise again—of major American cities have commanded a great deal of attention among researchers and in the media. So, too, has the post–World War II suburban population boom, which continues in most metropolitan regions today. Yet these general patterns overlook the diverse gains made within cities and metropolitan areas. An emerging set of new growth centers, the subject of the first four chapters of this volume, has forced us to refine our mental map of which communities within metropolitan America drove population growth in the 1990s.

To begin with, although the first volume in this series focused on trends in the nation's largest cities, the resurgence of urban population in the 1990s was hardly limited to those giants. Medium-sized cities like Tallahassee, Florida, and Hayward, California, also captured significant numbers of new residents over the decade. In chapter 1, Jennifer Vey and Benjamin Forman demonstrate that these medium-sized cities, as a group, grew about as fast as the United States as a whole in the 1990s and considerably faster than the 100 largest cities. Vey and Forman draw important distinctions, however, regarding the growth of medium-sized cities in different regions of the country and in different locations within the metropolis. Specifically, Western and Southern cities experienced population booms, and satellite cities not located at the core of their respective metropolitan area tended to grow faster than central cities. That more and more Americans—including many members of racial and ethnic minorities—are living in medium-sized cities highlights an opportunity for their leaders to collaborate on common issues and to lead the way by adopting innovative public policies from which larger cities can learn.

In a number of cities, the locus for growth has recently shifted to some of their oldest sections—their downtowns. In the first volume of this series, Robert Lang and Rebecca Sohmer quantified this “downtown rebound” in a selection of U.S. cities. In chapter 2 of this volume, Eugenie Birch goes further to examine the size and characteristics of the downtown-dweller population in forty-five cities and to explore how they are changing the complexion and economic and social trajectory of the neighborhoods they inhabit. She finds that fewer families with children live downtown today than in decades past but that more downtown households own their homes. She also confirms that downtowns are home to a diverse lot, containing both the young and highly educated and some very low-income residents. In the end, Birch suggests that downtowns fit one of five categories based on their phase in the development cycle. Cities seeking to capitalize on the “living downtown” movement could benefit from studying their development climate, generating additional housing for occupancy by owners, and creating a higher-density style of living that differentiates them from suburban markets.

Despite these city and downtown gains, the suburbs remain at the cutting edge of population growth in metropolitan America. At the heart of suburbia lie some of America's fastest-growing places, which Robert Lang and Meghan Zimmerman Gough call “growth counties” in chapter 3. These 124 counties together captured more than one-third of the nation's population growth over the five decades from 1950 to 2000. They are found within the urban core of rapidly changing Sun Belt metropolitan areas like Houston and

Phoenix, as well as at the exurban fringe of slower-growing Northern areas like Milwaukee and St. Louis. Depending on their location within the metropolis, growth counties and their residents share similar demographic, economic, and even attitudinal characteristics. Because of their fast growth, these areas will be the focus of local policy debates on development, transportation, and fiscal capacity for many years to come. Lang and Gough argue that growth counties can learn much from one another about the opportunities and challenges that growth presents.

Among the fastest-growing large and medium-sized municipalities are several that look more like suburbs than traditional cities. Robert Lang and Patrick Simmons examined these “boomburbs” in the first volume of this series, and Lang is back in chapter 4 of this volume to examine whether these places are still booming. His conclusion: most of the boomburbs continued to gain on traditional cities from 2000 to 2003, accounting for more than half of the population growth of cities in their size category. Growth in some of the older, denser, built-out suburbs—like Anaheim, California, and Tempe, Arizona—has stalled in recent years, however. As today’s boomburbs become tomorrow’s mature cities, Lang argues, they and their regions must confront issues related to planning, design, and use of natural resources that will determine their long-term sustainability.

## **METROPOLITAN DECENTRALIZATION AND RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY BRING SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES**

Movement of the U.S. population into these new destinations represents more than a geographic phenomenon. As people change their residential locations, so too they change the social characteristics of their communities. The quality of schooling, employment options, and amenities available—even political viewpoints—may be shaped by the location of one’s housing. The chapters in this section demonstrate that the continued spreading out of the American population has brought both gains and setbacks in the nation’s social progress.

One promising story to emerge from Census 2000 concerned the decline in residential racial segregation over the 1990s, detailed in the first volume of this series. In chapter 5 of this volume, David Fasenfest, Jason Booza, and Kurt Metzger examine the flip side—racial integration in metropolitan America. Focusing on the nation’s ten largest metropolitan areas, the authors examine changes over the 1990s in how people of different races organized themselves at the neighborhood level. The trend is unmistakable: the number of predominantly white neighborhoods declined dramatically

as the number of mixed-race neighborhoods increased in most metropolitan areas. As a result, white and black Americans today live in more racially heterogeneous communities than in previous decades, signaling improvement in intergroup relations. At the same time, the authors find, fast-growing numbers of U.S. Hispanics and Asians are living in neighborhoods in which their group predominates. Fasenfest, Booza, and Metzger conclude that efforts to study and promote further racial integration in America should look beyond the traditional white-black divide.

What benefits might accrue from increased racial integration in metropolitan America? In chapter 6, Steven Raphael and Michael Stoll focus on one measure of progress: the physical distance between African Americans and jobs. Decades of research have pointed to the existence and negative consequences of a “spatial mismatch” between lower-income blacks, who until recently have lived overwhelmingly in central cities, and job opportunities, which have followed the U.S. population to the suburbs. Promisingly, Raphael and Stoll find that although blacks remain the group most spatially isolated from jobs, the spatial mismatch between them and jobs fell during the 1990s by a greater degree than the comparable measure for whites. Regional differences remain important, and the more residentially segregated metropolitan areas of the Northeast and Midwest exhibit a greater blacks-jobs mismatch than more integrated areas of the South and West. What is most revealing is that the movement of black households into areas nearer to jobs accounted for the entire decline in spatial mismatch. Jobs actually moved farther away from predominantly black neighborhoods, as employment locations continued to decentralize over the decade. Raphael and Stoll’s findings suggest that continued efforts to promote residential mobility for black households may contribute to further employment gains for that group.

Americans’ movements over the past few decades have produced less positive social outcomes, too. In chapter 7, Todd Swanstrom and colleagues find that among them was the increasing economic segregation of the population into high- and low-income communities. This sorting of households by income was especially pronounced in the 1980s but subsided somewhat in the 1990s. Yet the long term has produced wide and variable income gaps—not just between cities and suburbs but also among suburbs themselves. Fewer suburbs today have a middle-income profile; compared with the metropolitan norm, more and more suburbs, the authors find, look either rich or poor. Swanstrom and colleagues catalog the potential harmful effects of economic segregation in a system in which the quality of public services depends greatly on local fiscal capacity, and they call for a greater public policy focus on the needs of lower-income municipalities, wherever they exist.

One of the underlying causes of the widening economic gap between cities and suburbs lies in the imbalance between household and housing growth in metropolitan areas. Thomas Bier and Charlie Post examine the evidence in chapter 8 and find that metropolitan areas that built more housing than needed to accommodate household growth during the 1980s and 1990s—in effect creating a housing surplus—suffered from increased vacancy and abandonment in their central cities. As more new housing became available, often at the outer suburban fringe, the first housing to be abandoned typically lay within the central city and older suburbs. In the 1990s, for instance, the Pittsburgh region built three new houses for every household the region added, and partly as a consequence, the city of Pittsburgh lost households to its suburbs and saw its vacancy rate rise. Bier and Post show that on the other hand, in areas where household growth outpaced housing growth and where a significant percentage of new housing was located in the central city, city vacancies remained low. The authors describe several policy avenues that could put central cities and their suburbs on more even footing for development and ameliorate the negative consequences of metropolitan overbuilding for city neighborhoods.

## **NEW CLASSIFICATIONS REDEFINE THE LANDSCAPE—LITERALLY**

Geography provides the lens through which this volume tracks the evolution of urban and suburban America. As people move within and across communities, they bring about change, in both their place of origin and their destination. Migration and its consequent growth alter the demographic, economic, and social characteristics of places. Eventually, those changes affect the geographic systems used to classify America itself. Towns expand to become cities, developing rural areas are annexed by nearby jurisdictions, and neighborhoods contract and merge with one another. Because of that, the nation's emerging growth centers have literally redefined the urban and suburban landscape.

With every decennial census (and sometimes between censuses, too) the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) joins forces with the Census Bureau to update metropolitan statistical areas, which are defined by their population and economic characteristics. These areas form the basis for research throughout the Redefining Urban and Suburban America series, as well as for public sector programs and business decisionmaking. Before Census 2000 was conducted, however, OMB and the bureau undertook a much more comprehensive review of how these areas were constructed

and recommended significant changes to the classification system. Those changes were designed to reflect the growth of new communities and the increasing economic and social connections across regions. In June 2003, the agencies announced the new system. The last two chapters of this volume examine the system's major features and implications.

In chapter 9, William Frey and colleagues map the major changes embodied in the new system. The system establishes the metropolitan statistical area as the primary unit of analysis but offers researchers other options for how to view and measure change in their local areas. Frey and coauthors find that the majority of the nation's largest metropolitan areas underwent some change in territory and population in transitioning to the new system. The continued suburbanization of America in the 1990s and the movement of population even farther away from the urban core meant that most metro areas expanded in size. The titles of several areas also changed, reflecting the ascendance of boomburbs like Naperville, Illinois (outside Chicago); Scottsdale, Arizona (outside Phoenix); and Fremont, California (outside San Francisco). Perhaps the most significant change involved the naming of more than 500 new "micropolitan areas," which bridge the gap between rural and metropolitan areas. The authors explain how the extensive changes to metropolitan areas and the development of the new micropolitan concept might be expected to affect federal policy, public and private sector research, and popular notions of the places in which we live.

Because micropolitan areas represent the new system's landmark innovation, they have attracted a great deal of attention in the popular press, and the research community has focused on analyzing just what these places represent. In chapter 10, Robert Lang and Dawn Dhavale disentangle the very different types of places subsumed in micropolitan America by their size, growth, and function. They point out that with the advent of micropolitan areas, truly rural areas cover less than half of the continental United States for the first time. While as a universe micropolitan areas are growing somewhat more slowly than the nation as a whole, they vary quite dramatically on size and growth factors. Many of the fastest growing are peripheral outposts of metropolitan development, or they are rich in natural (Silverthorne, Colorado) or man-made (Branson, Missouri) amenities. The fastest-shrinking micropolitan areas—"Dwindlevilles" in Lang and Dhavale's terminology—are typically highly remote areas surrounding big towns and small cities in the South and Midwest. Lang and Dhavale conclude that micropolitan areas might use their new "quasi-metropolitan" status as a tool for economic development or to organize and lobby federal and state governments for program changes that recognize their newly elevated status.

## **SUMMARY**

Although it is now five years on from Census 2000, the findings discussed in this volume highlight abiding long-term trends regarding where Americans live, whom they live with, and what the consequences are for public policy and civil society. The authors demonstrate that places can shape Americans' exposure to racial and ethnic diversity, different groups' access to employment, and the quality of local public services. As growth centers shift, the response of private investment and public resource allocation affects the economic and social trajectory of local communities. Leaders in the political, civic, and business communities therefore will benefit from greater understanding of how, both literally and figuratively, America continues to redefine its metropolitan landscape. This volume presents a compelling field guide to that ongoing transformation.