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Vincent N. Parrillo

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Housing and Urbanization

Facts About Cities

- Most Americans commute between suburbs, not between cities and suburbs.
- About 4.7 million American hourseholds are in public housing.
- Habitat for Humanity has built over 45,000 new homes in cities.
- Families account for 41 percent of the 800,000-person homeless population of the United States.
- About 75 percent of the U.S. homeless family population consists of children.
- One in five Americans lives in the BosWash megalopolis.
- Inner-ring suburbs have many of the same problems as cities.

Cities have always represented the best and worst of a society. Because of their large, concentrated, heterogeneous populations, cities frequently magnify the social problems existing within the entire society. At the same time, cities are the centers of economic, cultural, governmental, and religious influence; they are the centers of civilization. As beacons of opportunity, cities continually attract people seeking an end to their problems elsewhere.

The key to successful cities, past and present, lies in their mutual interdependence with surrounding regions. As long as each benefits from the other—enjoying a reciprocity of relationships—both cities and outlying regions prosper. Serious social problems result when this symbiotic

exchange ends, when farmland can no longer sustain an urban population, or when a city becomes parasitic on surrounding areas due to loss of industry, population, or tax revenues.

Failure to maintain regional integration helps explain why U.S. cities are in trouble. No other developed country has allowed its urban centers to deteriorate and decline as we have. Like all decay, urban degeneration is not a sudden occurrence; it results from decades of government neglect, misguided policy decisions, and exploitation by individual property owners.

The social problems discussed throughout this book coalesce in acute forms in many of our nation's cities. Drugs, crime, gangs, violence, poverty, difficulties in race relations, lack of affordable housing and homelessness, poor-quality schools, dysfunctional families, inadequate health care, pollution, and a decaying **infrastructure** of bridges, roads, sidewalks, and water and waste disposal systems cause many affluent Americans to turn their backs on cities. Factor in a shrinking tax base and serious urban budgetary problems, and the older cities would appear to be in their death throes. Are they? In this chapter we will investigate that question.

U.S. Cities in Sociohistorical Context

For the first sixty years of the twentieth century, central cities contained the large majority of the U.S. population, expanding their influence to surrounding towns and villages. Cities contained the best jobs, schools, and stores and offered a wide range of leisure activities as well. While bedroom suburbs have existed throughout the twentieth century, the exodus from the cities truly began after World War II. To meet the housing shortage caused by returning GIs and the resulting "baby boom," Congress passed the Housing Act of 1949, which encouraged building on vacant land outside city boundaries. Affordable housing on these suburban development tracts, financed through government-insured mortgages from the Federal Housing Authority or the Veterans Administration, helped end the housing shortage and encouraged outward migration from the cities.

Other federal policies and programs contributed to this population shift as well. Urban renewal replaced older neighborhoods with commercial properties, forcing residents to move elsewhere—which usually meant the suburbs, since little new urban housing stock was being built. Building interstate highways and expressways made vacant land farther away more attractive to developers by bringing prospective new suburbanites within commuting distance to their city jobs.[1]

In the 1960s, a new phase of suburban development took place: shopping malls proliferated and eventually surpassed the traditional city downtown as North America's retail center. By the 1970s, suburban areas had reached *critical mass*, that point at which population base has grown large enough to support various economic, cultural, and social activities. Regional and national corporate headquarters began locating outside cities in suburbs, as did accounting and banking services, movie theaters, restaurants, legal and medical offices, hospitals, and even hotels. Office and light industrial parks set up on large tracts of land as the suburbanization of economic activity reached a probably irreversible level.[2]

Many cities once prospered because they had developed profitable specialties in the U.S. industrial economy. Detroit was the automobile manufacturing center; Akron, the city of rubber; Pittsburgh, the city of steel; Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, coal-mining cities; Grand Rapids,

a furniture city; Bridgeport, a metalworking trades city; and Paterson, a textile-manufacturing city. All fell on lean times because of global economic competition; but in attempting to convert to a service-based economy, these and other cities fell victim to the telecommunications revolution, which has enabled companies to locate anywhere and still maintain an interactive network of information and services.

Urban Changes in the United States

The 1980s witnessed the evolution of cities into an entirely new form, one that Joel Garreau calls "edge cities."[3] An **edge city**, situated on the fringe of an older urban area, is a new, sprawling, middle-class, automobile-dependent urban center with distinct living, working, shopping, and leisure sections. It is the site of many good jobs; safety is a high priority within its boundaries; and racial integration with social class lines has become a reality.

Edge cities fall into three categories, according to Garreau. Least common is the **greenfield city**, which is a master-planned city by one developer on thousands of acres of farmland, such as Los Colinas, Texas, west of Dallas, or Irvine, California, southeast of Los Angeles. An **uptown city** is one built on top of a pre-automobile city, such as Pasadena, California, or White Plains, New York. A **boomer city**, the most common type of edge city, is usually situated at the intersection of two major highways, with a shopping mall forming its urban core; examples include Tyson's Corner, Virginia, just outside the Washington, D.C. Beltway, and King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, northwest of Philadelphia. Boomer cities were not originally planned as cities, so buildings do not relate to one another and traffic congestion is common. Because it has a history, an uptown city has more texture than does the relatively sterile boomer city. A greenfield city attempts to avert the chaotic layout of a boomer city through the developer's control over all aspects of traffic patterns and land usage.

Urban Sprawl

As metropolitan areas spread out and overlap one another, the result is a **megalopolis**, or unbroken high-population tract of interconnected cities and adjoining suburbs. The spread of an unrelenting megalopolis concerns many people. As Americans move farther from core cities and into outlying regions, so do all the trappings of urban life: stores, offices, factories, hospitals, crime, congestion, and pollution. Developers gobble up more and more open land as the population increases and disperses. One town looks like another, stores on the highways erect signs to shout out their wares to the fast-moving traffic going by, and every activity requires a separate trip by car.

We pay a high social price for urban sprawl. By spreading residences, medical and commercial offices, and industries throughout a region on large tracts of land, we increase residents' dependence on automobile transportation. Everything and everyone is too spread out to make public transportation economically feasible. With insufficient coordination of work sites and highways, traffic congestion results. Nor can everyone get around by car: a lifestyle that requires a car discriminates against poor families, the elderly, the disabled, and the young. Suburban

Cities and urban life have implications for social identity and social isolation. Cities also concentrate people, goods, cars, services, and the forces of mass consumerism. What urban development patterns, housing, and transportation trends do American cities increasingly reflect today?

teenagers, for instance, usually lack sufficient activities in their town but are unable to travel to locations where such diversions do exist. Suburban parents thus spend a large part of their time chauffeuring their children to stores, juvenile activities, and other events.

When a company—lured by tax incentives and/or utility subsidies—relocates to a suburban location, the city loses jobs, tax revenues, and business revenues for stores, restaurants, and services that previously depended on that company as a source of customers. Other problems occur in the new setting. Several studies show that the average employee trip to work increases by several miles after relocation, thereby raising traveling costs.[4] Low-income workers who don't have a car must depend on a car pool or look for another job, both risky ventures. The company incurs some higher costs, too: maintaining grounds and parking facilities, running a subsidized cafeteria, arranging messenger service to specialized support firms in corporate law, marketing, bond transactions, or similar services. Businesses then pass on the cost of providing utilities to an isolated site to the general public.

According to the nonprofit Regional Plan Association, if the office space needed for each 5 million increase in population were built on suburban campuses, it would cut a swath one-half mile wide and fifty-four miles long.[5] In a large city with skyscrapers, two hundred acres would fulfill the same need. Each 1 million square feet of suburban office space occupies, on average, eighty acres (twenty-five acres for parking lots) as compared to occupying 1 acre in a large city, half of that for an office plaza. In smaller cities, the same 1 million square feet takes up about six acres (twenty-five–story buildings with landscaping and parking lots).

Yet urban and suburban sprawl continues at an alarming pace. In Pennsylvania over the past fifty years, more than 4 million acres of farmland—an area larger than Connecticut and Rhode Island combined—fell into sprawl. One of the nation's fastest-growing cities, Phoenix, now covers over 600 square miles, an area larger than the state of Delaware. Experts predict that, over the next fifty years, sprawl will consume more than 3.5 million acres of one of the nation's prime agricultural regions, California's great Central Valley.[6]

Sprawl hurts cities in several ways. First, it erodes a city's tax base as it lures more people to the suburbs, forcing cities to raise taxes on remaining taxpayers to pay for city services. Second, it destroys downtown commerce by pulling shoppers from once-thriving locally owned stores and restaurants to large regional malls and highway megastores. Such changes in demographics and shopping patterns lead to an increase in urban unemployment and concentrations of poverty in central cities. The out-migration also robs cities of character as abandoned factories, boarded-up homes, and decaying retail centers dominate the landscape.[7]

Traffic Congestion

More than twice as many commuters in the United States today journey from suburb to suburb as travel from suburb to central city. Most Americans now commute between suburbs—areas ill-prepared in terms of public facilities, roads, bridges, and transit to handle the volume—and traffic jams have become a way of life. In fact, a majority of residents in suburban areas, increasingly frustrated by repeated traffic delays that cost them money and waste time, consider traffic congestion their most serious local problem.[8] And the amount of time commuters spend stalled in traffic in small and medium-sized cities has more than quadrupled since 1982, although the bigger cities increased the most in travel time.[9]

Traffic congestion is a nationwide problem, from suburban Gwinnet County, Georgia (one of the nation's fastest growing counties), to Los Angeles (the nation's most congested area). One annual study reveals that drivers in one-third of the sixty-eight U.S. cities studied spend at least half as much time stuck in traffic as they do on vacation each year. This delay is growing worse, increasing by at least 350 percent over the past sixteen years in half of the cities studied. The annual cost of traffic congestion in over one-third of these cities exceeds the statewide average of auto insurance for those cities.[10]

With most new jobs involving suburb-to-suburb commutes, mass transit has declined from a 6.3 percent market share in 1980 to 4 percent in 2000. However, in the more densely populated Northeast, about 11 percent still rely on mass transit. In contrast, the number of licensed drivers nationwide has increased 64 percent since 1970, while the number of vehicle miles traveled has gone up 131 percent (partly due to increased work distances due to sprawl).[11]

Only in eight major cities does public transportation play a significant role. And in seven of them (Chicago; Washington, D.C.; Boston; San Francisco–Oakland; Philadelphia; Honolulu; and Pittsburgh) the mass transit share is only between 10 and 16 percent. New York City tops the list at 30 percent.[12] In smaller metropolitan areas, public transit accounts for less than 2 percent of trips, a pattern unlikely to change. Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Oakland–San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., have subway systems, which accounts for their relatively high number of mass transit commuters. At first glance, extending and improving

rapid transit systems would appear to be an ideal solution to the overabundance of automobiles and resulting urban congestion. A rapid transit track can move 40,000 persons past a given point in an hour; at 1.8 persons per car, it would take a sixteen-lane highway to do the same job.[13] Mass transit thus moves the greatest number of people for the least expenditure of energy and use of space.

In most large U.S. cities, mass transit has been placed in an untenable mixed-definition position. The government owns and operates most lines and sees them as a ''public service,'' but it also insists they should pay for themselves. Comfort—and even necessary maintenance—seldom receives adequate funding because politicians set artificially low fare structures that they think will please voters and increase ridership. If we could decide whether transit should be a private enterprise, a government-run business, or a public utility, better planning would be possible. In most European cities, rapid transit has gone the whole definitional route and is now considered a public utility. Transit is better there.

Mass transit has been failing financially for many years. The precipitous decline in ridership is not merely due to people leaving for the suburbs or to conditions deteriorating. It is part of a vicious cycle of loss of income–deterioration–loss of riders–loss of income. Political neglect intensifies the cycle. Back in 1980, the Boston transit system briefly shut down because no government body would take responsibility for its debts. A similar battle has raged for years in New York City over how much of the mass transit deficit should be assumed by the city, state, and federal budgets. Curtailment of mass transit subsidies from the federal government obviously

Traffic congestion in Jakarta, Indonesia, and in many other cities of the world, is even greater than in U.S. cities. To what social problems does traffic congestion contribute? What are some other transportation challenges of cities and how do they contribute to problems of urban life? Why has public transportation so far failed to solve the problem, and what other solutions are there?

hampers efforts to upgrade urban mass transit. Nevertheless, mass transit carries more than 9.3 billion passengers yearly, and its quality is important to the vitality of cities' economies.[14]

Housing Problems and Solutions

Many central cities lack sufficient middle-income housing to meet demand, and much low-income housing needs extensive improvement. Part of today's urban housing problem can be traced to policies and actions undertaken six decades ago. Beginning in the 1930s, the federal government began to subsidize the movement of Whites to the suburbs. Through the Federal Home Bank System (1932), the Home Owners Loan Corporation (1933), and the National Housing Act (1934), which set up the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), banking practices became more liberal, allowing people without much capital to buy homes. The Housing Act of 1949, together with FHA loans and GI benefits to World War II veterans, funded the building of homes on vacant land, launching the suburban boom of the 1950s and 1960s. Significantly, during this booming postwar construction period, the FHA maintained an official policy against underwriting construction in racially integrated areas, thereby contributing to building decay in those areas.

Redlining and Abandonment

Long after the FHA discontinued its discriminatory practice of refusing financial support in "undesirable" areas, banks and savings and loan associations continued it. **Redlining**—drawing a red line on a map around "bad risk" neighborhoods—marks areas where lending institutions refuse to furnish mortgages or home improvement loans. Consequently, the older housing in these areas deteriorates, attracting few buyers, and reinforcing the bankers' supposed wisdom. Although illegal today, redlining continues at a reduced level. Bankers defend their actions by claiming that this is a response to deteriorating housing, not its cause.[15]

Beset by rising fuel and maintenance costs, city demands for compliance with housing codes, higher taxes, rent control laws, and spreading urban blight, urban landlords find themselves in a no-win situation. Unable to charge higher rents, obtain improvement loans, or sell their property, many owners try to squeeze the last ounce of profits from rental properties by ignoring necessary repairs and tax payments. After that, they abandon the buildings to junkies, looters, and arsonists.

Once urban decline commences, it's hard to stop. Anyone who can move out does so. The poor and helpless are left behind to cope with degenerating city services and increasing crime. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, landlords abandoned about 150,000 buildings each year. In the 1990s, the numbers dropped considerably, thanks to the economic revitalization in many cities and the gentrification process. Still, at that time Detroit was tearing down about 1,500 housing units each year, and cities such as Akron, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, and New York also experienced significant abandonment.[16]

Urban Renewal

Launched by the Housing Act of 1949 with the lofty goal of improving city neighborhoods through planned redevelopment, **urban renewal** proved to be a remarkably destructive force.

First, slum clearance displaced the poor without any provision having been made for their relocation. This action destroyed local neighborhoods, shattering sentimental attachments to old residences, neighborhood cohesiveness, friendships, and a whole way of life. Second, the cities sold the cleared land to private developers, who chose to build the most profitable forms of housing—almost never low-income housing.

One study found that replacement construction was 36 percent for housing (mostly for the upper middle class), 27 percent for commercial and industrial, and 37 percent for institutional and public use.[17] Another study showed that, from 1949 to 1965, only 166,288 new housing units replaced the 311,197 units demolished through urban renewal.[18] At an expenditure of $3 billion, urban renewal substantially reduced available low-cost housing in U.S. cities.[19]

Undoubtedly, the most notorious instance of community destruction through urban renewal involved the West End of Boston. Because it was an area of old buildings, city planners slated this tight-knit Italian neighborhood—popularized by Herbert Gans in *The Urban Villagers*—for urban renewal.[20] Noted urban sociologist Jane Jacobs, fighting the decision, said of this proud, cohesive, and stable neighborhood, "If this is a slum, we should have more of them." Nevertheless, the old ethnic neighborhood was bulldozed into oblivion and its residents scattered, to be replaced by high-rise luxury apartments and office buildings.

Public Housing

Another ill-conceived plan, introduced by the Housing Act of 1937, was **public housing** for the poor. The problem here was that policymakers ignored fundamental social concepts about human needs and interaction. Old, dilapidated buildings alone do not constitute a slum; a slum is an environment in which personal disorganization, apathy, alienation, lack of community, frustration, despair, and lack of opportunity exist. By attempting a purely physical solution to the social problem of poverty, the government simply created new slums.

The architectural design of the "supertenements" or "federal ghettos," as they came to be called, actually intensified the isolation, alienation, and crime already prevalent in disorganized low-income areas. Living in such a starkly segregated place set aside for impoverished minorities stigmatized the residents, and the poor considered such projects as dwellings of last resort. Moreover, income limits meant that the upwardly mobile were evicted, further concentrating the very poor and providing few legitimate successful role models for children.

Today there are about 4.7 million public housing units, which account for about 4 percent of the nation's housing stock.[21] In major need of repairs and replacement, many units are in poor condition. Yet in the 1990s, the Chicago Housing Authority encountered opposition from residents when it proposed to raze six high-rise buildings in the huge 3,600-unit Cabrini-Green monolithic ghetto and replace them with smaller buildings built for a mix of welfare and working-class families. Nevertheless, a stunning metamorphosis is occurring on adjacent property. Changes include a rejuvenated Seward Park playground, the new Jenner Academy of the Arts, the Neapolitan condominiums with $1 million-plus penthouses, and new retail outlets such as Blockbuster and Starbucks. Another notable addition is North Town Village, a bold mixed-income development of 261 homes, with one-third of them occupied by residents from Cabrini-Green. That public housing site will eventually duplicate Chicago's widely praised Lake Parc project—a mixed-income public

Housing the poor in high-rise apartment buildings built in the 1960s and 1970s was a dismal failure. These places became so unsafe that the poor did not want to live there; many were torn down and replaced with low-rise buildings. In contrast, Co-op City in the Bronx, the largest city housing project in the United States, is a good place to live. Why is this mostly middle-class, diverse community a success when others were not?

housing development project with 282 apartments, where (since its opening in 1991) crime and graffiti have been virtually nonexistent.[22] Half of the 230 new units in the nearby Wards redevelopment project are being set aside for public housing residents from Cabrini-Green, as more high-rise complexes are razed.[23]

Housing Subsidies

When government leaders realized that public housing projects were not the answer, they tried offering direct subsidies to the poor to purchase homes or rent apartments of their choice. Greedy speculators, exploiting the government and the poor through criminal collusion, undermined this program (the Housing and Urban Redevelopment of Act of 1968). Typically, a real estate broker or speculator would either buy rundown ghetto housing at low prices or frighten White owners in transitional neighborhoods into selling at much higher prices. By bribing government appraisers, the speculators could then sell the property at a much higher price to low-income buyers who qualified for the federal subsidies. Their tenuous financial situation forced some low-income buyers to subsequently default on their mortgages. More often, they abandoned the property because cosmetic repairs made before the sale had not corrected very serious defects in heating, plumbing, or structural soundness. In either case, having guaranteed the bank its money, the FHA or VA found itself owning another house no one wanted. Despite criminal prosecutions and the termination of this program, the Department of Housing and Urban

Development (HUD) found itself stuck with 150,000 abandoned properties, and to this day it remains one of the nation's largest slumlords.

In 1974, after other futile attempts at direct housing subsidy programs, the government created the **Section 8** program, which enables tenants to find private-market housing and have HUD pay landlords two-thirds of the "fair rental value" directly. Unfortunately, in the 1980s, this program lost $8 billion through gross mismanagement and fraud. Its budget has grown from $2.5 billion in 1974 to $7.2 billion in 1980 to nearly $16 billion in 2000.[24] Nonetheless Section 8 housing is a step above public housing projects, and it is valued by the persons who live in such units.

Gentrification

Some older cities in the Snowbelt—Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.—have experienced a renaissance of sorts, with middle-class families moving into dilapidated neighborhoods and restoring them. In most major European cities, **gentrification** has long been a significant movement, but only in recent years have affluent, young professionals in the United States reversed the outward migration trend and moved into areas previously inhabited by low-income persons. In some areas such as New York City's SoHo district, formerly commercial buildings—like warehouses and factories—were converted into loft apartments. Most rehabilitation, however, occurs in older residential neighborhoods of formerly depressed city areas.

Numerous factors contribute to this trend: the increased proportion of young adults in the population, the high level of professional jobs in the city, the high cost of suburban living, the low cost of much inner-city real estate, the desire to eliminate or reduce commuter time and costs, and accessibility to urban activities. Even though the older homes are in disrepair when purchased, renovation often costs less than buying or constructing a suburban home. Moreover, older buildings were built to standards not available today: hardwood floors, oak or mahogany doors and woodwork, brick, marble, or tile fireplaces, leaded glass windows, lath-and-plaster walls, and greater square footage.

While gentrification revitalizes city neighborhoods and returns the middle class to the cities, it also has negative aspects. The influx of affluent families, mostly White, leads to higher rents and property taxes, forcing poor and minority residents out of their neighborhoods and into less desirable ones or into new ghettos outside the city. Encouraging economic redevelopment thus creates a dilemma: how to protect the poor and prevent the spread of urban blight elsewhere.

Urban Homesteading

Begun in Wilmington, Delaware, in 1973, and a moderate success in other cities, **urban homesteading** offers one example of how gentrification works. Cities sell abandoned or foreclosed dwellings for a token price to people who agree to rehabilitate the home, usually within two years, and live there for at least three years. Through city efforts and federal support, the homesteaders receive low-interest bank loans for the renovations needed to meet housing code standards. Such costs put this type of housing program beyond the reach of the urban poor, although "sweat equity" projects for low-income people, such as the People's Development Cor-

poration (PDC) in the South Bronx have successfully reclaimed abandoned tenements.

Although urban homesteading would appear to be a local housing solution for troubled neighborhoods, it remains a relatively small program. Most restoration efforts have been in occupied buildings, not abandoned ones that looters have stripped and vandals have harmed. Many abandoned buildings are often beyond an economically feasible point of rehabilitation. These ''lost'' buildings or cleared land often surround salvageable buildings. Unless an entire neighborhood can be improved, urban homesteading is not the answer, continuing the problems of urban blight, street crime and violence, limited shopping opportunities, poor schools and inadequate public services.

Another form of urban homesteading requiring sweat equity of incoming homeowners is Habitat for Humanity. Habitat is a nonprofit organization that uses volunteer labor and some donated materials from area churches and organizations to build new housing for low-income families. In the first seventeen years of its existence, Habitat built 10,000 new homes, mostly in areas of massive urban blight, ultimately transforming many places into attractive, stable neighborhoods. Now comprising over 1,500 local organizations, Habitat has built over 45,000 homes nationwide and over 150,000 homes worldwide. If it continues at this pace, Habitat will soon surpass public urban homesteading in the number of urban homes built or restored.

Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit organization that builds new low-income family housing. It has built more than 150,000 homes around the world to date through church fundraising, volunteer labor, and donated materials, as seen here in Detroit, Michigan. How do urban homesteading projects, such as Habitat for Humanity, gentrification, and condominium conversion offer alternative solutions to problems of urban housing?

Condominium Conversions

The conversion of urban rental apartments into condominium units has been extensive in recent years, with more than 600,000 such units now converted. Caught in a squeeze between increasing operating costs and narrowing profit margins, owners find it advantageous to convert their buildings. Middle-class tenants gain both property ownership and the accompanying tax advantages; but their monthly payments for mortgage, taxes, and maintenance fees exceed their previous monthly rents. As the condo trend continues, the persons most adversely affected are the working poor, who cannot afford ownership financing and yet do not qualify for subsidized housing. Often they are forced out of their rented apartments when the building converts into condominium units.

Homelessness

Although nearly everyone agrees that homelessness (primarily existing in the nation's cities) is a problem, opinions vary as to what extent it is a problem. While estimates of the actual number of homeless people vary, the Urban Institute estimates that on any given day, at least 800,000 people in the United States are homeless.[25] And the numbers grow higher each year; the U.S. Conference of Mayors reported a steady increase in requests for emergency shelters since the 1990s, with a 19 percent increase from 2001 to 2002. This organization also reported that the average length of time a person remains homeless is five months.[26]

Who are the homeless? For about twenty years now, they have been a diverse group from different backgrounds. In a twenty-six–city survey in 2000, the U.S. Conference of Mayors reported this demographic profile of the homeless:[27]

- Families with children (41 percent), of which 63 percent are single parents;
- Single men (41 percent);
- Single women (13 percent);
- Unaccompanied minors (5 percent).

Within these totals, the following subgroups existed:

- Veterans, mainly from the Vietnam War (10 percent);
- Mentally ill (23 percent);
- Substance abusers (32 percent);

The racial/ethnic breakdown was:

- African American (50 percent);
- Asian American (1 percent);
- Hispanic American (12 percent);
- Native American (2 percent);
- White American (35 percent).

What caused **homelessness** to become such a major social problem? Ironically, social forces unleashed to improve other aspects of life contributed to a massive increase in homelessness. Efforts to revitalize cities resulted in new construction on the edges of the central business districts, or downtowns, destroying in the process 2.2 million low-rent housing units between 1973 and 1993. The loss of low-cost housing due to urban renewal or gentrification forced many other poor people out of their neighborhoods, thereby increasing demand on remaining low-income housing, which in turn raised rents beyond what many could afford. As median rental costs paid by low-income renters rose 21 percent in the late 1990s, the affordable housing gap for them grew by 1 million.[28] Yet another factor was the 1975 Supreme Court ruling in *O'Connor v. Donaldson,* which held that nondangerous mental patients cannot be confined against their will. The resulting deinstitutionalization of mental patients released tens of thousands of marginally autonomous people into the streets. Other contributing elements include the growing number of female-headed families and addiction to crack or other drugs.

Particularly disturbing is the fact that 75 percent of the homeless family population consists of children, the most vulnerable members of our society.[29] The average age of homeless children is six. Homeless children are nine times more likely to repeat a grade and four times more likely to drop out of school than nonhomeless children.[30] A recent survey of homeless parents in New York City revealed that 35 percent are named in open cases of child abuse or neglect with the Child Welfare Administration. Moreover, in comparison to the overall homeless population, these

One of New York City's homeless lives in a mail cart near the post office. One can find the street people in all U.S. cities, indeed in all of the world's cities. Living in poverty, struggling daily to survive, many without hope or direction in their lives, they evoke pity, contempt, or indifference from the nonpoor. What makes homelessness a social problem that affects all of us and not just an individual problem the homeless should resolve themselves?

▲ Social Constructions of Social Problems

Attitudes toward the Homeless

For much of the twentieth century, the stereotype of the homeless in our cities was that of an older male—the skid-row wino. Several decades ago, a second image evolved, that of a bag lady scavenging through refuse and carrying all her accumulated "treasures" with her wherever she went. Often these unfortunate people were disoriented, disorganized individuals released from psychiatric hospitals as part of a deinstitutionalization practice designed to end the warehousing of mentally ill patients. Supposedly, psychoactive drugs and transitional community services would aid their adjustment to life outside the hospital. In reality, many stopped taking the drugs, did not know how to find assistance, or refused to comply with the conditions for such help. As a result, some ended up homeless, panhandling and surviving as best they could on the streets.

Another, more recent, version of the homeless is that of the substance abuser. Crack, a relatively cheap alternative to alcohol, accelerated the problem of substance abuse among the homeless, especially among younger Black and Hispanic men. In Philadelphia in the past two decades, for example, the Diagnostic and Rehabilitation Center (DRC) has detoxified tens of thousands of homeless adults. The vast majority were alcoholics, but, in recent years, most now have a primary diagnosis of crack addiction and are problem drinkers as well.

Public attitudes and reactions to the increased visibility of the homeless and stereotyped perceptions of their acute personal problems are often negative. Disdain and discomfort are common responses of pedestrians encountering a homeless person. Frustrated at the lack of progress in addressing the homeless problem and pressured by angry residents and merchants over the continued presence and more aggressive panhandling by many of the street dwellers, local leaders have turned to evicting the homeless. Through new laws and tighter restrictions on panhandling and sleeping in public places, in at least 234 cities in the 1990s, according to the National Law Center of Homeless and Poverty, the police forcibly removed the homeless from certain sections of their cities.

Such actions do not deal with the causes of homelessness. Nor do public stereotypes accurately fit many of the homeless population. As explained elsewhere in this text, the homeless include families, mothers in poverty, and vagrant teenagers, as well as the mentally ill and substance abusers. Ironically, the public is more sympathetic to alcoholics and drug abusers who are rich and famous than to those who tug on the sleeves of passersby for a handout. What people need to understand is that addicts living in the streets need just as much help as the celebrities treated at private, expensive clinics.

parents are 30 percent more likely to have a history of substance abuse, 50 percent more likely to have a history of domestic violence, and twice as likely to have a history of mental illness.[31]

Virtually every city is taking steps to combat homelessness, not just with shelters, but with supportive programs as well. Best results have been obtained by turning shelters into transitional housing, and addressing health and job problems directly. Homes for the Homeless, for example, offers comprehensive programs such as Crisis Nursery, Together in Emotional Strength

(TIES), and the Residential Educational Training (RET) Center to address the multifaceted problems at the core of homelessness: poor education, inadequate health care, domestic violence, substance abuse, and the need for job training.

Despite these promising signs, however, the root causes of homelessness—the lack of education, insufficient low-cost housing, and poverty—are unlikely to go away soon. Homelessness still remains a national social problem heavily concentrated in our cities (see the box on the previous page).

Political Fragmentation

Our political structure's inability to adapt to the needs of metropolitan regions explains much about the causes and continuation of many urban problems. Traditional political boundaries are irrelevant to the need for services in adjacent communities. Crime control, education, housing, pollution, solid waste disposal, transportation, and water supply require planning and control over an entire region not within single localities. Museums, libraries, sports arenas, convention halls, cultural centers, and parks attract many suburbanites, but the city bears the cost of staff, police, sanitation, and transportation services.

We function in metropolitan regions but are not governed that way. The existence of multiple small governing bodies within the metropolis results in inefficient duplication of services (departments and agencies of government, fire and public safety, roads, sanitation, and so forth). Each municipality pursues its own course, without coordination and often in competition with others for ratables, creating unnecessary conflict and waste.

Cities actually have little control over their own affairs. Subject to many state and federal regulations, dependent on other levels of government for funding and policy decisions, urban governments are impotent to deal with many of their problems with mass transit, poverty, pollution, and so on. Until the 1970s, cities lacked political power in the rural-dominated state and federal legislatures, despite their higher overall population. By the time the Supreme Court ruled in favor of one-person, one-vote–mandated reapportionment to balance legislative district representation, the majority of the population had shifted to the suburbs. Added to the rural-suburban bias against cities is the frequent political split between Democratic-controlled city governments and Republican-controlled state legislatures, further hindering efforts to solve urban problems.

Another aspect of **political fragmentation** is the presence of so many decision-making points in a large city, making overall coordination difficult. One consequence of the 1960s reform movement to eliminate political machines was the creation of dozens of new (albeit smaller) machines—semiautonomous city agencies and bureaucracies staffed by career professionals. These agencies shape important policies, but their leadership tends to be self-perpetuating and does not readily submit to a higher authority. A city mayor, never certain if the bureau chiefs and career commissioners will look beyond their vested interests at the larger picture, serves more as a mediator between conflicting interest groups than as a chief executive in control of the city's operations.

Table 4.1   Largest U.S. Cities, 2000

1. New York	8,008,278	5. Philadelphia	1,517,550	8. Dallas	1,188,580
2. Los Angeles	3,694,280	6. Phoenix	1,321,045	9. San Antonio	1,144,646
3. Chicago	2,896,016	7. San Diego	1,223,400	10. Detroit	951,270
4. Houston	1,953,631				

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Can Snowbelt Cities Compete with Sunbelt Cities?

Updates from the Census Bureau continually reaffirm the continuing growth of Sunbelt cities and the concomitant decline in population of most Snowbelt cities. The South and West now claim over half the U.S. population and six of the ten largest cities (see Table 4.1 above). Of the ten fastest-growing metropolitan areas since 1990, seven were in Florida, two in Texas, and one in New Mexico. Cities experiencing the largest percentages of population loss in the same period were Hartford, Connecticut; St. Louis, Missouri; Gary, Indiana; Baltimore, Maryland; Flint, Michigan; and Buffalo, New York.[32] The 1990s also saw a large exodus of business and industry from the older central cities away from high taxes, energy costs, congestion, outmoded plants, and organized labor. The cumulative loss of people and manufacturing jobs led some observers to sound the death knell for the older cities.

Are the older, Snowbelt cities dying? Some experts predict economic disaster for them because of the loss of jobs to suburban or Sunbelt locations. A closer look, however, reveals a more balanced picture. For example, Columbus, Ohio, New York City, and Stamford gained in population, while such Sunbelt cities as Birmingham, Jackson, New Orleans, Norfolk, Richmond, and Savannah lost population.[33] Moreover, in 1998, office vacancy rates were higher in Atlanta, Dallas, Denver, and Orlando than they were in Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.[34]

Sunbelt cities face many problems confronting the Snowbelt cities. Rapid population growth in the South and West brought urban sprawl, traffic congestion, air pollution, environmental deterioration, depletion of limited groundwater reserves, and strained water supply and sewer systems. Crime is another serious problem shared equally in Sunbelt and Snowbelt cities. In 2001, for example, the ten cities with the highest crime rates were St. Louis, Missouri, Atlanta, Kansas City, Missouri, Tampa, Memphis, Tucson, Columbus, Ohio, Baltimore, Miami, and Detroit.[35] In yet another area, economic problems can beset the Sunbelt as well as the Snowbelt. Unemployment rates in California, Florida, and Texas in recent years have exceeded the national average. The poverty rate in the South remains higher than in other parts of the country (see Chapter 6)—as it has for decades.

The BosWash Megalopolis

In a densely populated area that extends from the foothills of southern New Hampshire to the red-clay hills of northern Virginia, lie the cities of Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore,

and Washington, D.C.,—a region that French geographer Jean Gottman identified in 1961 as the first U.S. megalopolis.[36] Here, some measure of the strength of the Snowbelt can be illustrated.

Over 56 million people, one in every five Americans, lives in the BosWash megalopolis. This 22 percent of the nation's population produces more than its share (27 percent) of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP); in comparison, the South and West, which contain 58 percent of the total U.S. population, produce 57 percent of the nation's GDP.[37] In 2000, banks in the Northeast held assets of $2.1 trillion, accounting for 33 percent of the nation's total bank assets.[38] The more assets banks have, the more venture capital they can lend; consequently, many corporations elsewhere in the nation—including movie studios—rely on the financial strength of the BosWash megalopolis for their activities.

Why does this region continue to attract job-creating investments? From interviews with employers and state secretaries of commerce, Rushworth Kidder identified the following factors[39]:

1. *Market concentration*. The region is the most concentrated market in the nation (one-fifth the population on one-twentieth the land mass). A centrally located manufacturer in the BosWash corridor can reach more than half of all U.S. and Canadian manufacturing firms and retail sales outlets within twenty-four hours by truck. The corridor states are also closer, by air and by sea, to the 376 million people in the European Union countries.

2. *Education*. The eleven-state region has the highest concentration of centers of higher education, sending about 3 million students annually to 875 colleges and universities. Proximity to top colleges influences the location choice of high-technology firms. Massachusetts's famous Route 128 (now called "America's Technology Highway") is near MIT and Harvard. New Jersey, with only 3 percent of the nation's population, has laboratories (many near Princeton University) that do 9 percent of America's research and development work.

3. *Infrastructure*. Although in need of repairs, the region's infrastructure—roads, bridges, and water systems—is already in place. Many fast-growth cities have not yet developed adequate systems, and the cost of doing so (including obtaining the necessary lands) is rising rapidly.

4. *Quality of life*. Many people consider the region to be the artistic and cultural center of the country. Access to the seacoast, lakes, and mountains brings a rich mix of city and country, work and leisure opportunities.

Each of the cities in BosWash is beset by problems of poverty and homelessness, drugs, crime, violence, teenage pregnancies, low-quality public education, and a decaying infrastructure. Within the megalopolis, the larger cities are undergoing a renaissance while smaller cities show less resiliency. Amid the mixed signs of rejuvenation and decline, this region reflects both the power and the perils of urban America.

Urban-Suburban Interdependence

Although the United States has been an urban society for over 100 years, we are redefining what it means to be an urban people. It is less a matter of place than a way of life. Distinctions between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan people blur as their occupations, consumer habits, and degree

of sophistication become undistinguishable. Yet even as we blend into an interdependent urban system where local boundaries are meaningless, we often fail to recognize that problems in one area (the cities) adversely affect other areas (the suburbs).

The Central Cities

To offset loss of their manufacturing base, many cities evolved service-based economies, emerging as centers of sophisticated services in advertising, corporate management, finance, and government. This change eliminated many entry-level jobs traditionally held by the poorly educated urban poor, but it increased the need for computer-literate workers with verbal and quantitative skills. The result is a **skills mismatch** between people and jobs.[40] The skilled labor pool that companies require, therefore, tends to come from outside the cities, and many urban poor find fewer jobs available to them. As the job-generating power of cities weakens, their reduced independence places a heavier burden on suburbs for tax-supported relief.

The Outer-Ring Suburbs

The suburbs, seeking a broader tax base to relieve the burden on individual property owners, compete with cities for service-sector companies. They are often successful, as the lure of tax incentives, the freedom of telecommunications-based linkage, and the availability of desired workers make relocation practical. Furthermore, the concentration of social problems in our cities—crime, drugs, guns, gang violence, the inner-city AIDS epidemic, and racial problems—places cities at a disadvantage against the more positive suburban image. Each loss of a company to an edge city is an economic blow to the central city, further eroding its economic vitality and tax base. Meanwhile, each addition to the outer-ring further urbanizes that region.

The Inner-Ring Suburbs

The development of edge cities on the fringe of metropolitan regions has brought into usage the term **inner-ring suburbs** to refer to older suburbs directly adjacent to central cities. Over the past two decades, these inner-ring suburbs, like cities, have lost jobs and higher-income families while attracting lower-income residents fleeing inner-city chaos. Although one-fourth of the Black population now lives in the suburbs, they are mostly located in inner-ring suburbs, some of which are now predominantly Black. Consequently, economic and racial realities have drawn the political interests of inner-ring suburbs closer to those of central cities.

Thinking Regionally

At the beginning of this chapter we observed that the key to successful cities lies in their mutual interdependence with their surrounding region. It works the other way, too. Research shows that suburbs suffer if they let their central cities deteriorate. In *Cities Without Suburbs* (1993), former Albuquerque mayor David Rusk reasons that "elastic cities"—those that capture suburban

The Globalization of Social Problems

Cities in an International Context

Worldwide, people have flocked to cities for thousands of years, but within the next few years, for the first time in history, more people on Earth will live in and around cities than in rural areas. Explosive population growth and extensive migration from the countryside are creating huge concentrations of people. By 2015 the world will contain twenty-three **megacities**—metropolitan areas with populations of 10 million or more.[43] Most of these megacities will be in developing countries, including some of the poorest nations in the world (see Table 4.2 on the next page).

Since 1980, the number of megacities in less-developed regions has increased from three to fifteen. U.N. population growth projections for some cities are simply staggering: 10 million more people for Dhaka and 9 million more people for Delhi between 2000 and 2015. Accompanying this massive growth are many problems. Can these and other of the world's poorest megacities effectively absorb the millions of additional residents anticipated in the near future?

Despite any economic progress such rapid growth to enormous size brings, the strain on the infrastructure intensifies problems. An inadequate water supply and poor sanitation invite infections and disease. One report estimates that more than half of the 300 million urban poor in LDCs subsist in a permanently weakened condition because they carry one or more parasites. Other health problems result from high levels of pollution and fatalities from motor vehicles, illicit drug use, and widespread sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, studies show that such cities have higher mortality rates than rural areas.[44]

As megacities grow, so do environmental concerns. Recall our discussion in the previous chapter about global warming. Imagine now the extensive energy demands, not just of modern urban systems, but of these megacities. Then consider the consequent emissions of carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxides from fossil fuel combustion that trap excess heat and contribute to climate change, rising sea levels, and changes in vegetation. Also, these rapidly growing cities create expanded demand for food, wood, building materials, and furniture, leading in turn to problems of soil depletion and deforestation. And this doesn't occur only in the immediate vicinity. For example, the decimation of Borneo's forests is due in large measure to the lumber needs of Japanese cities. Clearly, there exists an extensive interconnectivity between urbanization (particularly the rapid growth of megacities), environmental issues, and quality of life.

growth within their boundaries—generate more jobs and exhibit less racial segregation.[41] In *Citistates* (1993), Neal Peirce and his colleagues argue that only metropolitan areas that create flexible governance structures will succeed in the global marketplace.[42]

For decades, organizations such as the Regional Plan Association based in New York have encouraged cities and suburbs to eliminate wasteful duplication by consolidating and sharing school districts, mental health centers, sewage treatment, solid-waste disposal, and emergency services. State court decisions regarding urban school funding and public pressure to reduce taxes and government spending have forced many municipalities to take such steps. It remains to be seen whether similar cooperative efforts will extend into other areas.

Table 4.2   Population of Metropolitan Areas with 10 Million Inhabitants or More, 1975, 2000 and 2015 (in millions)

1975		2000		2015	
City	**Population**	**City**	**Population**	**City**	**Population**
1 Tokyo	19.8	1 Tokyo	26.4	1 Tokyo	27.2
2 New York	15.9	2 Mexico City	18.1	2 Dhaka	22.8
3 Shanghai	11.4	3 Bombay	18.1	3 Bombay	22.6
4 Mexico City	11.2	4 São Paolo	17.8	4 São Paolo	21.2
5 São Paolo	10.0	5 New York	16.6	5 Delhi	20.9
		6 Lagos	13.4	6 Mexico City	20.4
		7 Los Angeles	13.1	7 New York	17.9
		8 Calcutta	12.9	8 Jakarta	17.3
		9 Shanghai	12.9	9 Calcutta	16.7
		10 Buenos Aires	12.6	10 Karachi	16.2
		11 Dhaka	12.3	11 Lagos	16.2
		12 Karachi	11.8	12 Los Angeles	14.5
		13 Delhi	11.7	13 Shanghai	13.6
		14 Jakarta	11.0	14 Buenos Aires	13.2
		15 Osaka	11.0	15 Metro Manila	12.6
		16 Metro Manila	10.9	16 Beijing	11.7
		17 Beijing	10.8	17 Rio de Janeiro	11.5
		18 Rio de Janeiro	10.6	18 Cairo	11.5
		19 Cairo	10.6	19 Istanbul	11.4
				20 Osaka	11.0
				21 Tianjin	10.3

Note: Metropolitan area estimates vary widely, depending on definitions and recency of census data.

Source: United Nations Population Division.

Living with Terrorism

All of us have become sensitized to the vulnerability of cities to terrorist attacks. In Tokyo in 1995 thousands fell victim to chemical terrorism with the use of the toxic gas sarin on defenseless civilians that killed 12 in a subway tunnel. The 2001 attacks on the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, with their horrific losses of 3,000 people and mass destruction, still reverberate in the minds of hundreds of millions of people worldwide. In 2002, Chechnyan terrorists took over 700 people hostage in a Moscow music theater resulting in the deaths of nearly 200 rebels and hostages, mostly by gas used during a rescue attempt.

These and other incidents remind us all too often that urban centers attract terrorists. The large concentrations of people—as well as the tall buildings, symbolic monuments, and infrastructure of bridges and tunnels—are all tempting targets to those intent on inflicting maximum damage and deaths. People once avoided cities for fear of becoming a victim of a violent crime. Now many fear, not just being in major cities, but even living near one in the event of biological, chemical, or nuclear attack.

Seeing concrete barricades at many important locations and undergoing bag searches at concerts, sporting events, and airports are part of our new reality. For some, living or working in tall buildings, or viewing the cityscape from high-perched observation decks, holds little appeal. Others, refusing to allow their lives to be ruled by fear, continue their daily urban routines and lifestyles.

Whether they respond by avoidance or defiance, however, urbanites recognize that their world is a different one than that which existed before September 11th, 2002. That realization is a new element in considering social problems that affect our cities.

Sociological Perspectives

Sociological analysis provides a means of interpreting the numerous changes and intensifying problems experienced by cities from more than a superficial viewpoint. Depending on the theoretical orientation used, however, definitions of the underlying problems and their proposed solutions vary.

The Functionalist Viewpoint

Functionalists blame rapid urbanization for disrupting the social organization of society. First, large masses of rural residents and immigrants came to U.S. cities, creating intolerable living conditions. Unprepared to assimilate the newcomers—who themselves were ill-equipped for urban living—the cities experienced increasing pathologies of sickness, disease, death, crime, and social disorganization. Before the urban system could regain its equilibrium, it suffered another jolt as the exodus to the suburbs began. Factories, stores, and offices followed the former urbanites, leaving the city core unable to assist the non-White minorities replacing them.

Much of this social change was functional. Modern manufacturing technology required horizontal plant expansion that cities could not provide but suburbs could. Suburban expansion created many job opportunities for the building, automotive, and transport industries. It also took population pressure off cities, reducing their density. Businesses and industries benefited from lower taxes and greater ease in shipping products. Workers gained the satisfaction of home ownership and travel flexibility by automobile. Yet many dysfunctions flowed from these social changes as well. Cities lost tax revenues, became disproportionately inhabited by the poor, and lacked employment opportunities and sufficient resources to provide adequately for them. Housing and schools deteriorated, demands for services increased, and the inner city declined into a near-comatose state.

To restore stability and equity to the system, Functionalists assert adjustments must occur. Since our communities have merged with each other in all ways but politically, perhaps reorganization along more realistic lines would return the governing and financial balance needed. Regional planning and coordination would ensure more rational land use and a greater sense of mutual interdependence. Problems that know no geographic boundary—water supply, pollution, traffic—could be addressed more effectively. We might resolve problems of employment and housing more easily if we redefined our community in terms of a metropolitan governing body to coordinate services, business locations, housing, and transportation.

Another possibility for restoring the social system's balance may be a further strengthening of the economic functions of the central cities to make companies want to stay or return there. We need to encourage further the processes already occurring—gentrification, new office building construction, and revitalized downtowns. Reduced density and numerous vacant lots provide the physical opportunity to rebuild a city, improving its aesthetic beauty while providing new opportunities for its poor. Urban enterprise zones offering tax incentives to industry, together with job-training programs, could bring jobs to the people who need them. Cities do not exist in isolation; their welfare hinges on taking steps to place them on an equal economic footing with other regions.

The Conflict Viewpoint

Conflict theorists view the problems in cities as being the uneven outcome of competition among various interest groups for limited resources. This struggle takes many forms, often pitting more powerful groups with little concern for particular urban problems against less powerful, but directly affected groups. The conflict often occurs among groups within the city; at other times it involves city dwellers and suburbanites.

Urban heterogeneity makes potential conflict among different groups quite likely. Should a city's limited funds be used to improve the downtown shopping district, build low-cost housing for the poor, construct recreation centers, improve the schools, or expand public transportation? All cannot be accomplished at once, yet all needs are immediate. Merchants and representatives of different citizen constituencies thus vie with one another, pressing for their own interests. Stirring up this oft-seething cauldron of conflict further are the vested interests of civic bureaucrats, seeking higher salaries, improved working conditions, or simply the preservation of their domain. As unresolved issues continue, the likelihood of organized protest—demonstrations, protest meetings, noisy confrontations, rent strikes, union job actions, or violence—increases.

Within the city lies another focal point for Conflict analysis: economic exploitation. When cities were manufacturing centers, powerful industrialists often maximized their profits by exploiting the available cheap labor; their one-sided gains led to widespread poverty and neighborhood deterioration for large sections of the city. Similarly, slumlords seeking maximum profits through "rent gouging" and/or minimal maintenance accelerated the decline. Forced eviction of low-rent tenants to upgrade a building into a middle-income rental facility and engineered condemnation of an area to build more lucrative structures are but two instances of how real estate entrepreneurs have garnered profits at others' expense. Political machines and crooked politicians often bilked cities of millions of dollars to the detriment of the public welfare.

In recent years a new urban sociology evolved—the political economy approach—that recommends examining cities in the context of their economic and political systems. Manuel Castells, for example, maintains that the fiscal crisis of cities is an inevitable consequence of a capitalistic economic system. Seeking ever-greater profits, corporations influenced federal approval of government-insured mortgages and subsidized expressways so that they and their executives could move to suburbs where property costs and taxes were lower.[45] On a global scale, cities in LDCs grow rapidly and become dependent links in the world system, serving as control centers in a web designed to exploit the rural sectors.[46]

The Feminist Viewpoint

As stated previously, female-headed households exist below the poverty line and among the homeless population in large numbers. Feminists point to a body of evidence showing that single-parent females and elderly females often suffer in the housing market because of landlord discrimination, limited fixed incomes, and inadequate public assistance. Thus female-headed households are more dependent on subsidized housing than other groups. However, the government makes existing subsidy mechanisms available primarily for construction or rehabilitation of single-family houses affordable only to two–wage-earner households. Some Feminists, citing the Tenant Interim Lease program in New York City as a model, suggest a more widespread creation of low-income tenant cooperatives, ones in which a system of women's values and relationships becomes an essential component of the co-op process.[47]

Another major factor of Feminist urban studies is the extent to which cities use space to meet the needs of women. For example, how does the city environment support the needs of today's working women? The emergence of a wide variety of specialized services (child care, household cleaning, shopping assistance, take-out restaurants, pick-up and delivery services) is one answer. Hot food delis and salad bars in supermarkets, mini-malls, large merchandising stores for one-stop shopping efficiently minimize time spent going from store to store.[48]

Feminist urban researchers also examine the allocation of public leisure space, which is often gendered, since it typically favors male-oriented activities such as sports, giving little consideration to the needs of women. Feminists argue that spatial arrangements should not segregate the sexes, thereby reinforcing traditional ideas about gender, but it should allocate space to help all individuals' lives. Moreover, more attention should be given to creating safe environments to protect children at play, providing less-constrained places for women to walk or jog, and creating housing that promotes more contact with neighbors, especially for children.[49] Judith DeSena suggests that women's greater movement in urban space allows them to control information/events and to create networks, making them more likely then men to recognize problems and develop community strategies to transform urban spaces and/or create new ones. Through this feminization of communities, women can thus be power brokers in directing and shaping social-physical space.[50]

The Interactionist Viewpoint

Focusing on how people subjectively define reality, interactionists examine how values, shared expectations, and perceptions apply to social problems in cities. Traditional American values

have always stressed the small town ideal, with its personal cohesiveness and sense of community. Warnings against the corrupting influence of cities, while common throughout world history, have been especially pronounced in the U.S. experience. People living in the once-predominant rural regions of the United States mistrusted the cities. Later the influx of millions of culturally distinct European immigrants, followed by African Americans and then Hispanics triggered responses of prejudice and avoidance. Acclimation to suburban living similarly provoked disdain for urban lifestyles. Perceiving the city as a place inhabited by "lesser types" thus removes any sense of social responsibility to improve the situation.

Anti-city value orientations prompt the response that cities bring on their own problems, rather than the recognition that they intensely reflect broader and deeper societal problems. Media coverage—whether films or television shows about depressed urban areas or news reports of urban crime or racial tensions—further convey a rather pessimistic image of the nation's cities. These portrayals feed an already existing anti-city bias that has been a centuries-old component of U.S. culture. The resulting social construction of reality stereotypes most city dwellers as downtrodden, even dangerous, even though most urbanites live completely different lifestyles. Still, this false perception has negative consequences.

Because cities house large concentrations of poor people, nonurbanites often stereotype cities as being almost exclusively urban war zones and slum neighborhoods. While sections of cities do match that perception, other areas are safe, cohesive, and beautiful. Even in poor sections, problems of overcrowding, substandard housing, crime, and health are less severe than they were two generations ago. They remain matters of concern, however, because they still contrast with more favorable conditions elsewhere. The rise in living standards and expectations (car, TV, hot water, and other necessities once thought luxuries) cause the poor to feel deprived compared to the nonpoor who possess such items.

Another common interaction difficulty involves relations between poverty-stricken urban minorities and the police and city government agencies. Beginning with their treatment of the Irish in the mid-nineteenth century and continuing to the present day, officials responsible for maintaining formal social control mechanisms of the city often view minority groups as the enemy. The latter's physical and cultural differences, the pathologies flowing out of their poverty, and the ethnocentric attitudes of the privileged middle class all serve to reinforce this perception. Mutual antagonisms develop and a vicious circle of attitudes, actions, and reactions follows. By the time the minority achieves economic and political power, another group has replaced it at the bottom of the ladder, and the cycle begins anew. Currently, Blacks and Hispanics are gaining stronger representation in elected and appointive positions, suggesting that improved social policy reinterpretations and actions for their constituents may be on the way.

◤ Thinking About the Future

Our cities today offer both encouraging and disheartening signs. We appear to be going in two directions at the same time. On the one hand, we see an influx of middle-class, refurbished neighborhoods and new office buildings, as well as much cultural and economic activity. Yet,

we also see decay and decline, congestion and pollution, crime and poverty, and suburbanites continuing to shun the city. Which trend will prevail?

What do we do about sprawling edge cities, malls, office and industrial parks, all with huge parking lots? At the present time, suburban growth gobbles up more and more land, as towns sprawl into each other. Every place is beginning to look like anyplace, giving fewer towns a unique sense of identity or community. Suburbs become more urbanized, suburban traffic congestion increases, and cities find it harder and harder to compete with cinema complexes, malls, and megastores out on the highway. What future do you envision for your community if the current growth and development patterns continue?

Should we keep letting local communities compete with one another and develop as they please regardless of their impact on the environment and neighboring towns? How can we promote greater urban-suburban cooperation and interdependence? Or shouldn't we? Do you favor some type of regional planning and control, perhaps at a county level, to contain growth, minimize traffic congestion, and protect the environment? Should we do more to encourage greater use of mass transit, such as through new light-rail systems (where feasible) that perhaps parallel our highways along the center islands? What are the implications and problems in these solutions?

What about housing? We are simply not building enough affordable housing, and the gentrification of some existing housing raises rents beyond the means of many former residents of those neighborhoods. What future do you see if these trends continue? How do we improve the quality of life in our urban communities presently suffering from substandard housing and lack of jobs, stores, and public amenities and services? How do we solve the problem of homelessness?

Give some thought to all these questions. What answers come to mind? Which of these proposed solutions seem practical in terms of cost and feasibility? Which do not? Can you think of others? Can you envision two futures, one if nothing is done and one if something is done? What *is* that something? How is that future different?

How can you *personally* help the homeless? There are a great many ways in which you can make an important difference in their lives *now*, even before you graduate. One instant way is just a mouse-click at a computer. Others involve advocacy actions, contributions (clothing, household items, ''survival'' kits, food certificates, etc.), and volunteer activities. To learn more go to Chapter 4 of this book's Web site (www.ablongman.com/parrillo) and be part of the solution.

SUMMARY

1. Cities are no longer the major places of residence or manufacturing in the United States. Since 1960, suburbs have evolved into independent urban entities. Many metropolitan areas overlap and interpenetrate each other, forming megalopolises. This urban sprawl uses up large tracts of land, increasing residents' dependency on automobiles, and raising the cost of living. Now edge cities are evolving on the fringes of older urban areas, forming greenfield, uptown, or boomer cities for the middle class.

2. The flight of jobs to the suburbs results in traffic congestion on interstate highways and within the suburbs themselves. Mass transit helps reduce urban congestion, but some people feel that it should be self-paying, not a public utility. Consequently, mass transit in the United States is not as good as elsewhere in the industrialized world.

3. Redlining remains an institutional contributor to housing deterioration, although it is not practiced as extensively today as in the past. A cycle of abandonment by landlords caught in an increasing costs–declining income syndrome spreads urban blight. Urban renewal was a disastrous public program, destroying neighborhoods and reducing available low-cost housing. High-rise public housing projects ignored human needs, inviting stigma, alienation, vandalism, and crime. Housing subsidies have had mixed results and are skyrocketing in cost.

4. Positive housing steps include gentrification, urban homesteading, low-interest city mortgages, and condominium conversions. The persons who benefit least from these measures—and often are displaced by them—are the poor. The homeless, numbering about 800,000 in the United States, are a mixture of different kinds of people, over one-third of them families. About 75 percent of the homeless family population consists of children, who are four times more likely to drop out of school than nonhomeless children.

5. Although a functional interdependence exists between cities and suburbs, each municipality governs itself independently, which usually results in unnecessary conflict and waste. Fragmentation of political authority prevents cities from controlling their own affairs and forces them to depend on state and federal bodies that are often biased against them. Competing civic bureaucracies within a city also impede coordinated efforts, since they seek their own narrow objectives.

6. Since 1980, population declines occurred in some Sunbelt cities and in most Snowbelt cities except Hartford, New York City, and Stamford. Sunbelt cities are beset with problems of crime, congestion, pollution, infrastructure needs, and economic concerns. The BosWash megalopolis is home to one in five Americans; generates 27 percent of the nation's GDP; and possesses a high concentration of consumers and educated workers, an established infrastructure, and many world-class cultural attractions.

7. Nonmetropolitan and metropolitan people are converging in their occupations, consumer habits, and sophistication. Inner-ring suburbs have similar problems to central cities, while outer-ring suburbs attract higher-income people and industries, creating edge cities. Regionalization of school districts and services is becoming more common among municipalities.

8. Within a few years, more people worldwide will live in or near a city than in rural areas. Urban growth, especially among megacities in developing countries, poses serious problems of environmental degradation.

9. Recent terrorist attacks in Tokyo, New York City, Washington, D.C., and Moscow have made us aware of the attraction of urban centers to such people. Avoidance and defiance are common responses, but everyone realizes the new social problem that cities now face.

10. Both urbanization and suburbanization were functional for society, according to Functionalists, but certain dysfunctions require adjustments: new political boundaries, new financing structures, or further evolution of cities as transactional centers. Conflict theorists point to competing urban constituencies, profiteering exploiters, outside political powers, and the competitive capitalistic system worldwide as causes of urban problems. Feminists emphasize the need for inclusion of women's values in the co-op process to meet critical housing needs for female-headed households and for greater equity in the allocation of public space. Interactionists stress value-biased perceptions, relative definitions of deprivation, and cultural differentiation as important to our understanding of interaction patterns.

KEY TERMS

Boomer city	Political fragmentation
Edge city	Public housing
Gentrification	Redlining
Greenfield city	Section 8
Homelessness	Skills mismatch
Infrastructure	Uptown city
Inner-ring suburbs	Urban homesteading
Megacities	Urban renewal
Megalopolis	

INTERNET RESOURCES

At this book's Web site with Allyn & Bacon, you will find numerous links pertaining to the problems about housing and urbanization. To explore these resources, go first to the author's page (**http://www.ablongman.com/parrillo**). Next, select this edition of *Contemporary Social Problems* and then select **Internet Readings and Exercises**. Then select **Chapter 4**, where you will find both a variety of sites to investigate and some questions that pertain to those sites.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Blau, Joel. *The Visible Poor: Homelessness in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Debunks current myths about the homeless, thoughtfully discusses issues on America's poor, and attacks government policies as pointless, quick-fix solutions that don't deal with the underlying causes.

Fowler, Edmund P. *Building Cities that Work,* 11th ed. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994. A thought-provoking critique of costly U.S. urban development programs that have had little positive impact.

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Garreau, Joel. *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*. New York: Doubleday, 1992. Highly readable, informative analysis of geographic, economic, and sociological forces shaping our new downtowns and urban environments.

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