

Peter Dreier Swanstrom, John Mollenkopf, Todd. *Place Matters: Metropolitica for the Twenty-First Century*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001. xv + 349 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-1135-5.



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The Democratic Crisis of Metropolitan Inequality

Smart growth" and "livability" became political buzzwords in the late 1990s as elected officials began to pay more attention to the social and environmental costs of the auto-dependent, low-density patterns of metropolitan growth in the United States. The past decade produced a number of important scholarly analyses that demonstrate the connection between central city decline and unconstrained suburban sprawl.[1] At the same time, studies of urban poverty have begun to emphasize the importance of place as a determinant of income, opportunity, and cultural behavior. While there continues to be scholarly debate over whether the plight of the urban poor is more the result of racial segregation or class segregation, there is growing agreement that a chief reason many urban Americans cannot escape from poverty is that they are spatially isolated in neighborhoods with high concentrations of unemployed people, failing public schools, and limited access to suburban jobs.[2]

In *Place Matters*, Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom bring the findings of recent research together with incisive political analysis. The result is a compelling narrative that is an important contribution to the scholarly and political debate about metropolitan growth and inequality. While the book's observations will not be new to those familiar with postwar urban history and recent growth patterns, the authors place economic, social, political, and spatial trends in a broader context that clearly shows the interdependence of city and suburb and creates a persuasive argument for political change. Deepening economic inequality, the authors argue, is fundamentally associated with the spatial polarization between central cities and sprawling suburbs, and between wealthy regions and poorer ones. This economic segregation hurts wealthy and middle-class suburbanites as well as the urban poor. Policy choices, not just market forces, are responsible for these growth patterns, and it is up to public policy - chiefly that of the federal government - to "level the metropolitan playing field" (p. 209). In carefully weaving together this argument, the authors demonstrate that "smart

growth" isn't simply another item on a long wish list of desired public policy, but that it is something fundamental to the maintenance of national economic health and the continued functioning of democratic society.

Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom make their case by, first, showing how economic segregation is increasing within metropolitan areas as well as between different regions of the country. While "racial segregation is clearly a major cause of economic segregation" (p. 50), it has now become one element in the larger trend of widening spatial separation between rich and poor. Since 1970, the authors argue, the U.S. has not become more racially segregated, but it has become more economically segregated. The authors then examine the detrimental effects of economic segregation and sprawl: disparities in job opportunity and income levels; inadequate health care and higher rates of disease and mortality among the poor; environmental degradation; differentials in cost and selection of consumer goods; and crime rates. While the arguments the authors make about neighborhoods of concentrated poverty are supported by a rich body of scholarly literature, their discussion of the problems faced by wealthy suburbs-long commutes, lack of family time, teen delinquency-has fewer rigorous academic analyses to draw upon and relies more heavily upon newspaper and magazine articles. As a consequence, the discussion of suburban problems is sometimes thin and less convincing, a result that validates the authors' observation that inner cities have been intensively studied while suburban "pathologies" have been largely ignored.

The next section of the book identifies the causes of economic segregation and sprawl. The authors assail conservative market-based growth arguments and public choice theory, arguing that these ideas ignore the influence of government on the market and the fact that "paths taken or not taken in the past frame current choices" (p. 98). Choices the authors term "stealth urban policies,"

like transportation funding, military spending, home ownership policy, and fair housing laws had a tremendous effect on urban growth, far overshadowing the impact of the federal programs actually targeted to central cities. The following two chapters document the efforts of various urban regimes to reverse the central city's economic deterioration, and the halting and mostly ineffective efforts around regional governance. Among other things, the analysis in this part of the book seeks to refute the argument that suburban migration was a result of "push" factors (crime, schools) as much as "pull" factors (housing, consumer goods, highway accessibility). It does this quite effectively, although certain problematic issues are glossed over, such as the detrimental effects of past urban mismanagement and high city taxes.[3]

The final section of the book lays out an ambitious national policy agenda that includes important regional equity measures: eliminating the incentives for competition between localities that result in exclusionary zoning and wasteful land use; the implementation of federal programs-particularly U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development programs like Section 8 housing vouchers-on a regional, cross-jurisdictional basis; refocusing community development programs so that they link urban workers into the regional economy; and new state and local monies to eliminate regional disparities in public school funding. Other elements of the agenda are broader economic equity measures that echo the domestic program of the early Clinton Administration: further expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, raising the minimum wage, and expanded health insurance and child care. The inclusion of these prompts questions about the feasibility of these changes in the short term-if they did not happen during the past eight years, what is the possibility that they will happen under the more conservative Bush Administration? However, this agenda is an important contribution to the metropolitan growth debate, in that it understands that most

U.S. metropolitan areas are not like Minneapolis and Portland (the two superstars of regional governance and "smart growth" whose success has yet to be replicated in other, more politically fractured places), and because the authors emphasize incremental, long-term changes over more glamorous, short-term fixes. As they note, "...these problems took fifty years to emerge, and they will take fifty years to fix" (p. 259). The authors also remind us that metropolitan equity is not accomplished by land zoning changes and revenue sharing alone, but also requires more sweeping governmental interventions to improve the lives of the working poor and middle-class, regardless of where they live.

The last chapter of *Place Matters* outlines a political strategy for accomplishing a policy agenda that limits sprawl and fosters economic integration, and supports this strategy with a useful analysis of U.S. voting patterns from 1990 to 2000 that highlights the growing significance of middle-class interests shared by urban and suburban voters. As the policy agenda proposed by the authors is progressive and relatively interventionist, they center their political strategy around electing more Democrats to Congress and mobilizing Democratic party organizations to organize and act on a regional basis. This approach perhaps too quickly dismisses the potential for Republican activism. Certainly, while many state and national GOP officials have displayed hostility to cities in general and regional governance in particular, there are some notable examples of moderate Republican leaders-former New Jersey Governor Christie Todd Whitman, for example- who have implemented important smart growth measures. As the authors argue so persuasively, metropolitan inequality is something that hurts both city and suburban residents. Because this is the case, leveling the playing field should be a policy agenda that cuts across party lines and that might provide an important opportunity for bipartisan cooperation.

Sadly, the authors' policy proposals are now further compromised by current national political and economic conditions. The tragedies of September 11 move a progressive metropolitan growth agenda-along with other important domestic policy initiatives-even further away from becoming a governmental reality, at least in the short term. The federal budget must now accommodate the costs of war and economic recession, creating a far different political landscape from that of the prosperous years of governmental surplus during the late 1990s. Yet the terrorist attacks have also demonstrated the ability of a socially and economically fractured nation to rally together in response to a grave national threat, and this newfound unity might create greater possibilities for political mobilization on other matters. "Liberal democracies can tolerate a great deal of economic inequality," conclude the authors, "but they cannot tolerate the combining of economic, political, and social inequalities into a vicious circle of rising inequality" (p. 260). If we understand our common interests, American voters can reverse the harmful and divisive ways our metropolitan areas have grown over the past half-century. This important book can help build the momentum for change.

[1]. A few examples of the literature that have been particularly effective in winning the attention of politicians and opinion leaders are David Rusk, *Cities Without Suburbs* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993); Neil Pierce, Curtis Johnson, and John Hall, *Citistates* (Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press, 1993); Myron Orfield, *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability* (Washington, D.C. and Cambridge, Mass.: Brookings Institution Press and the Lincoln Institute for Land Policy, 1997); David Rusk, *Inside Game/Outside Game: Winning Strategies for Saving Urban America* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999); Bruce Katz, ed., *Reflections on Regionalism* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000). A thoughtful evaluation of the literature is Keith Ihlanfeldt,

"The Importance of the Central City to the Regional and National Economy: A Review of the Arguments and Empirical Evidence," *Cityscape* 1, no. 2 (June 1995): 125-50.

[2]. An important analysis of the effect of place on urban poverty is Paul Jargowsky, *Poverty and Place: Ghettos, Barrios, and the American City* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997). In the debate over the root causes of urban joblessness and social isolation, William Julius Wilson has argued for "the declining significance of race" and pointed to class segregation as the chief reason for the perpetuation of concentrated poverty (*The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987] and *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996]). Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton's *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) argues instead that racial segregation is the main cause of minority poverty and unemployment.

[3]. See for example Robert Inman, "Anatomy of a Fiscal Crisis." *Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank Business Review* (September/October 1983), 15-22 and Andrew Haughwout, Robert Inman, Steven Craig, Thomas Luce, *Local Revenue Hills: A General Equilibrium Specification with Evidence from Four U.S. Cities*, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. W7603 (March 2000).

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