ESSAY

SUBURBS AS EXIT, SUBURBS AS ENTRANCE

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Most academics assume that suburbanites are “exiters” who have abandoned central cities. The exit story is a foundational one in the fields of land-use and local-government law: exiters’ historical, social, and economic connections with “their” center cities are frequently used to justify both growth controls and regional government. The exit story, however, no longer captures the American suburban experience. For a majority of Americans, suburbs have become points of entrance to, not exit from, urban life. Most suburbanites are “enterers”—people who were born in, or migrated directly to, suburbs and who have not spent time living in any central city. This Essay reexamines current debates about growth management and regional governance in light of the underappreciated suburbs-as-entrance story. The exit paradigm provides a powerful normative justification for policies constraining urban growth. When it is stripped away, proponents are left with utilitarian arguments. Economists challenge these arguments by showing that metropolitan fragmentation actually may be efficiency enhancing—and these arguments may ring hollow with suburban enterers themselves. This Essay sounds a cautionary note in the growth management and regional government debates. The exit story is an outdated rhetorical flourish that tends to oversimplify the case for—and camouflage the complexities of—policies restricting suburban growth, especially when it comes to distributional and transitional-fairness concerns.

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INTRODUCTION

Most academic discussions assume that suburbs are places of exit. According to the conventional account, suburbanites abandoned cities in favor of an isolated, privatized realm. Municipal incorporation laws shield suburbs from city governments that might otherwise annex them; suburban land-use policies exclude otherwise mobile, poor, urban residents who would like to be their neighbors. The exit story is a foundation of land-use and local-government law. Not only is exit considered a primary cause of intrametropolitan inequality, but proponents of growth management and regional government argue that former urban dwellers who exit for the suburbs remain, in important respects, part of the urban polity. Exiters’ historical, social, and economic connections to their center cities are used to justify both growth controls and regional government.

The exit story accurately describes much of the history of American suburban development. From their inception, American suburbs were self-consciously anti-urban. Post–Civil War suburbs reflected the Victorian ideal of the home as a semipastoral retreat both from the cold, calculating world of commerce and industry and from the burgeoning immigrant ghettos. By the late nineteenth century, suburbanites had begun to spurn larger cities’ consolidation and annexation overtures and to guarantee political autonomy by defensively incorporating their communities as independent municipalities. This suburbanization-as-exit phenomenon continued apace throughout the twentieth century. It reached its zenith after World War II, when legal and demographic changes spawned white flight from previously stable urban enclaves. In recent years, African Americans and other minorities have become exiters as well. During the 1990s, in fact, minorities were responsible for the bulk of suburban population gains in many major metropolitan areas. A majority of Asian Americans, half of Hispanic


Americans, and nearly forty percent of African Americans are now suburbanites.\(^4\)

The exit story no longer captures the American suburban experience. For a majority of Americans, suburbs have become points of entrance to, not exit from, “urban” life. The U.S. Census Bureau defines “urbanized areas” as central cities and areas around them that have a population of 1000 or more people per square mile.\(^5\) By this definition, suburbs are the only “urban” areas most Americans have ever known. Most suburbanites are “enterers”—people who were born in, or migrated directly to, suburbs and who have not spent time living in any central city. By the 1960s, more Americans lived in suburbs than in central cities;\(^6\) the employment balance shifted to the suburbs by the 1980s.\(^7\) By 1990, the United States had become a suburban nation, with a solid majority of all Americans residing in the suburbs.\(^8\) As a result, many suburban residents likely are second- or third-generation exiters. Perhaps their parents or grandparents left the old neighborhood, but their own experience is entirely suburban. Other suburbanites lack even this historical connection with the center city closest to their suburban homes. For example, the nation’s fastest-growing suburbs—on the fringes of “New Sunbelt” cities—benefit from domestic migration from other parts of the country: they may absorb more Rust Belt exiters than hometown exiters. Finally, two groups of suburbanites—new immigrants who increasingly bypass city centers for new immigrant gateways\(^9\) and domestic migrants from depopulating rural areas—lack social and historical connections with any major U.S. urban center.

This Essay situates the underappreciated suburbs-as-entrance story within current debates about growth management and regional governance. The exit paradigm provides a powerful normative justification for metropolitan solidarity by tying the fortunes of center cities to the selfish actions of surrounding communities and their residents. Demands to remedy the “inequitable” distribution of fiscal resources within a metropolitan area are most powerful if those benefiting from the inequities helped create them by abandoning their former neighbors. Similarly, proponents of regional government can most plausibly assert that a metropolitan region is, in reality, a single polity when the residents of outlying areas share social, economic,

\(^4\) Id. at 167–74.


\(^6\) See Peter O. Muller, Contemporary Suburban America 4 (1981).

\(^7\) See John D. Kasarda, Industrial Restructuring and the Changing Location of Jobs, in 1 State of the Union: America in the 1990s, at 215, 220 (Reynolds Farley ed., 1995).

\(^8\) Kevin M. Kruse & Thomas J. Sugrue, Introduction to The New Suburban History 1, 1 (Kevin M. Kruse & Thomas J. Sugrue eds., 2006).

and historical connections to the region’s anchor city and to one another. When the exit account is stripped away, however, regional government and growth control proponents must increasingly fall back on utilitarian arguments: metropolitan fragmentation is inefficient, suburban fortunes stand or fall with the fortunes of center cities, and so on. Not only are these arguments challenged by economists who argue that metropolitan fragmentation is efficiency enhancing, but they may also ring hollow with suburban enter-
ers who have little or no affinity for (or connection to) urban life.

This Essay does not argue that the entrance story requires unfettered suburban growth or obliterates the case against metropolitan fragmentation. Municipal boundaries are arbitrary, intrametropolitan inequality is troubling, and self-interested suburbanites do impose externalities on their neighbors. Rather, the Essay seeks to sound a cautionary note in the debate over growth management and regional government. The exit story is an out-
dated rhetorical flourish that tends to oversimplify the case for—and camouflage the complexities of—policies restricting suburban growth, especially when it comes to distributional and transitional-fairness concerns.

I. THE EXIT STORY

Cities have spawned suburbs throughout history. The earliest suburbs developed primarily to accommodate noxious land uses and provide housing for those too poor to afford the protection of city walls.11 (Ancient Romans referred to this area as “suburbium.”) The wealthiest urbanites, however, also built suburban homes to escape the evils of city life—congestion, disease, and unrest. Indeed, as early as 539 BC, the emperor of Persia received a letter from a subject extolling the virtues of suburban life: “Our property seems to me the most beautiful in the world. It is so close to Babylon that we enjoy all the advantages of the city, and yet when we come home we are away from all the noise and dust.”13 By the early modern period, as increasing numbers of city residents could afford suburban life, development beyond city walls exploded throughout the Western world.14 While industrialization increased population density in cities, it also drove residents with financial means to flee the unpleasant and dangerous aspects of urban life (including city crowding).15 By the turn of the twentieth century, the latter phenomenon overtook the former. In both Europe and the United States, the

12. Id. at 23.
13. Jackson, supra note 1, at 12.
15. Id. at 26–27 (noting that, in the early years of the twentieth century, densities in the Lower East Side of Manhattan peaked at more than 400,000 people per square mile and further observing that the same area began to empty rapidly as immigrants gained the money to buy housing in less-dense neighborhoods outside the city).
urban form began decentralizing rapidly, as more and more city residents fled to new suburban communities.  

A. Exit Begins

By the mid-nineteenth century, American suburban developments began gaining prestige, as city conditions worsened and transportation improvements made daily commuting possible. Even before the Civil War, wealthy Americans began to flee center-city neighborhoods for the first bedroom communities—New York’s Brooklyn Heights, Philadelphia’s Germantown, and San Francisco’s Nob Hill. As historian Kenneth Jackson has observed, however, ideology, as well as technology and economics, fueled the phenomenal growth of American suburbia. Americans fell in love with the suburbs and grew to loathe the city. Flight from the city to the suburbs became the American ideal.

Americans had good reasons to flee nineteenth-century cities. Industrialization made them crowded, dangerous, unhealthy places to live. But the decision to leave the city for the suburbs was, for many, ideological as well as practical. Industrialization had separated work and home for the first time in human history, giving rise to the Victorian-era “cult of domesticity,” which held that home and work were separate spheres of human existence: “[t]he market was a male sphere of competitive self-seeking, while the home was celebrated as a female sphere, a site of spiritual uplift that offered relief from the vicissitudes of market struggle.” The home became an oasis of comfort for husbands returning weary from the daily struggle and, importantly, a fortress that shielded women and children from the corruption of modern economic forces. Scholars have convincingly linked the phenomenal suburban growth in the United States following the Civil War to Americans’ peculiarly strong endorsement of this “separate spheres” ideology. Suburban communities provided protective enclaves for the all-important home.

16. Id. at 25–28.
17. Jackson, supra note 1, at 25–32.
18. Id. at 47–61.
Jackson observes, “[t]he suburban ideal offered the promise of . . . retreat from commercialism and industry,” and every suburban home—from the Victorian mansion to the workingman’s cottage—“seemed immune to the dislocations of an industrializing society and cut off from the toil and turbulence of emerging immigrant ghettos.”

By the turn of the twentieth century, abundant land and technological advances in both transportation and construction methods brought suburban homes within the financial reach of more and more Americans. By 1920, “exit” had become a mass phenomenon. Fredrick Law Olmsted’s vision of “ruralizing all our urban population” was both within reach and shared by suburban political leaders who spoke of their duty to rescue the working man from the evil vicissitudes of city life. In the decades that followed, even big city boosters (and, importantly, their wives) would choose suburban homes for the good of their families. Thus, Gerald Gamm has argued that the true origins of the decline of American cities and the problems commonly associated with that decline began by the 1920s, not, as many historians assert, after World War II. By the 1920s, the urban exodus was well underway.

Postwar exit, discussed below, was different in scale, but not in kind, from earlier waves of suburbanization. The postwar economic boom enabled more people than ever before to choose a suburban life. In- deed, while many commentators assume that suburban sprawl is an ever-accelerating phenomenon, the decentralization of urban areas in the United States actually peaked between the 1920s and the 1950s.

B. “White Flight”

Race and class have long influenced American suburbanization. Early suburban boosters, including luminaries like Frederick Law Olmsted, were

22. Jackson, supra note 1, at 71–72. See also Wright, supra note 21, at 107–09 (describing connections between the “separate spheres” ideology and early suburban developments).

23. See Jackson, supra note 1, at 136 (“For the first time in the history of the world, middle-class families . . . could reasonably expect to buy a detached home on an accessible lot in a safe and sanitary environment.”); Wright, supra note 21, at 99–104.

24. Robert Fishman, Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia 129 (1987) (quoting Letter from Frederick Law Olmsted to Edward Everett Hale (Oct. 21, 1869) (on file with the Library of Congress)). See also, e.g., Dilworth, supra note 2, at 121 (2005) (discussing how Hoboken, New Jersey, boosters promoted the town as “a suburban location where one could escape “the trials of the big city”).

25. See Jon C. Teaford, City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850–1970, at 85–90 (1979) (noting that city business leaders during the expansionist era chose bedroom suburbs for their home life).


27. See Bruegmann, supra note 5, at 42–43.

28. See, e.g., id. at 67–69.
convinced that “ruralizing” urban immigrants would Americanize them. 29 These beliefs later were codified in zoning laws promoted by Progressive-era “positive environmentalists,” who “believed that changing surroundings would change behavior.” 30 There is little historical dispute that many early suburban exiters fled cities for a related reason—to distance themselves from urban immigrants. Richardson Dilworth’s recent treatment of early suburbs, for example, includes a colorful account of one suburban community’s opposition to certain “Sunday activities” associated with Newark’s large immigrant population. Annexation by Newark, the Bloomfield paper warned, would be “beer gardens and Sunday baseball galore.” 31 Not surprisingly, race and class lurked just below the surface of legal skirmishes leading to the Supreme Court’s ratification of zoning in Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co. 32 In the lower court, District Judge Westenhaver compared the Village of Euclid’s zoning ordinance to the racial zoning law invalidated a few years earlier in Buchanan v. Warley. 33 He warned that, just as racial zoning would have “spread from city to city throughout the length and breadth of the land[,] . . . it is equally apparent that the next step [after zoning] . . . would be to apply similar restrictions for the purpose of segregating in like manner various groups of newly arrived immigrants.” 34

While prewar suburbanization had racial and ethnic overtones—early middle- and upper-middle-class suburban enclaves developed in response to the Protestant elite’s desire to separate from Catholic and Jewish immigrants—resistance to neighborhood integration following World War II sharpened the association between race and suburban exit. Somewhat ironically, descendants of these Catholic and Jewish immigrants fled the stable urban enclaves built by their unwelcome grandparents in earlier decades. Many of these communities were originally suburban: they were built by and for blue-collar workers who themselves sought escape from the perils and discomforts of industrial cities. These denser, poorer suburbs, however, were quickly absorbed by annexation and became “city” neighborhoods. White exodus began prior to the postwar period, and the departure of late exiters from these working-class neighborhoods that had sustained urban life throughout the first half of the twentieth century represented the final unravelling of many center cities.

Historians dispute the extent to which integration pressures, which began to build before World War II, precipitated the urban crisis. Thomas

29. See Fishman, supra note 24, at 126–29 (quoting Letter from Frederick Law Olmsted to Edward Everett Hale (Oct. 21, 1869) (on file with the Library of Congress)).


31. Dilworth, supra note 2, at 178.

32. 272 U.S. 365 (1926).

33. 245 U.S. 60 (1917) (invalidating ordinance prohibiting “colored” people from occupying certain houses).


Sugrue and Arnold Hirsch, for example, provide the conventional account—that the ultimate nail in the urban coffin was postwar white flight from rapidly integrating city neighborhoods. Others, notably Gerald Gamm, argue that postwar exiters were really the last strands of an already frayed urban fabric. There is no question, however, that race played a major role in the great wave of postwar suburban exit. Gamm may be correct that prewar ethnic enclaves were produced by the same forces that were already pulling cities apart, but their disappearance after World War II was in large part a response to racial pressure. Gamm persuasively argues that religious rules and institutions—specifically the territorial parish—rooted Catholics in urban communities far longer than other white urban dwellers. This “rootedness” slowed Catholic suburbanization and led Catholics to resist neighborhood integration energetically, even violently. Although a few urban Catholic strongholds remain, most white Catholics eventually suburbanized. And while race was not the only factor that pushed them to the suburbs, it was certainly a major factor.

Some historians, most recently Kevin Kruse, have suggested that suburbanization was a form of “massive resistance” to school desegregation efforts, especially in southern cities. Fears about school integration likely drove some white residents to the suburbs even before Brown v. Board of Education, particularly in cities without de jure segregation. Becky Nicolaides, for example, recounts how, as early as 1926, residents in the South Gate neighborhood of Los Angeles County sought to transfer their children from the Watts School District to the wealthier Huntington Park City School District, at least in part to avoid integrated schools. School integration fears were not a factor in southern states prior to 1954. And even after Brown, integration of public schools was not a major concern for many urban Catholics, who chose (and were required by their church) to send their children to parochial schools. As John McGreevy has observed, “[g]iven that white families tended to abandon a neighborhood when the number of minority students in the public schools increased dramatically, [Catholic]...
schools also enabled white Catholic families . . . to remain in the city longer than their non-Catholic counterparts." Catholic schools had their own integration battles, of course, some of which undoubtedly affected white Catholics’ residential choices.

Available data also support the conventional wisdom that pressure from federal courts to integrate public schools fueled suburbanization in many American cities. A number of studies document significant declines in white public school enrollment following the implementation of forced integration decrees. The empirical evidence further suggests that school desegregation efforts also affected whites’ residential choices. It is worth noting, however, that courts did not implement forced integration plans until the 1960s and 1970s, a half century after the urban exodus began and two decades into the wave of postwar suburbanization. Desegregation, therefore, may have accelerated the final stages of exit by driving late exiters away from their urban neighborhoods. Suburbs undoubtedly absorbed and (as discussed in more detail below) extended legal protection to exiters fleeing integration. “White flight” from desegregation decrees, however, probably came too late to be a primary cause of suburbanization.

C. Exit Rights (and Responsibilities)

Two early twentieth century developments had the effect of legally protecting suburbanites who wished to permanently exit the center city. The first was the rise of municipal fragmentation; the second was zoning. These legal developments effectively created “exit rights” by entitling suburban communities to independent political status and endowing them with the legal tools to define an entirely suburban existence.

Throughout the nineteenth century, all major American cities gained territory by annexing unincorporated suburban communities and consolidating with incorporated ones. Given the pressing need for city services, few suburban communities could afford to spurn annexation overtures, which frequently came with the promise of extended infrastructure. Moreover, state legislatures at this time generally favored municipal expansion, going so far as to ratify forcible annexations and consolidations. The rate of mu-
municipal territorial expansion began to decline, however, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and annexations had screeched to a halt by 1930 (at least with respect to older, industrial cities). For example, between 1850 and 1910, New York City grew by 277 square miles (from just 22 square miles to 299 square miles); between 1910 and 1980, it expanded only 5 miles. Similarly, Philadelphia grew from 2 square miles to 130 square miles between 1850 and 1910; it lost 2 square miles between 1910 and 1980.\(^{51}\) Scholars have posited several explanations for the decline, all related to suburban communities’ desire to immunize themselves against urban acquisition. By the last years of the nineteenth century, technological advances in public infrastructure limited cities’ ability to woo suburbanites with the promise of extended city services. Freed from dependence on urban services and infrastructure, political independence became all the more attractive to suburbanites who associated urban governance with immigrant ghettos, high taxes, and corruption.\(^{52}\) At the same time, state legislatures began to respect suburbanites’ desire for self-determination. Forcible annexations and consolidations ceased, and unincorporated communities began using general municipal incorporation procedures to stop their absorption into the urban polity. With the rise of this practice, commonly known as “defensive incorporation,” metropolitan fragmentation emerged.

In a 2004 article, William Fischel connected the rise of metropolitan fragmentation with another early-twentieth-century legal development—Euclidean zoning.\(^{53}\) Residents of early-twentieth-century suburbs, Fischel argues, were anxious about the invasion of residential communities by non-conforming uses. Zoning protected residents from these invasions and therefore guaranteed stable property values and the concomitant tax revenues.\(^{54}\) Zoning also gave local governments a legal mechanism for preventing the influx of large industries demanding capital-intensive city services. Prior to zoning, the inevitability of “urban uses and urban densities,” Fischel hypothesized, made annexation and consolidation overtures attractive to suburban communities. But with the widespread adoption of zoning, suburban communities no longer viewed industrial or urban development as inevitable. Once they could control their land-use densities, suburbs no longer needed access to city services and infrastructure. Instead, they could affordably provide the less-intense services demanded by a residential and commercial citizenry, either alone or in cooperation with other suburban governments. Thus, zoning accelerated the practice of defensive

\(^{51}\) See id. at 140. See also Teaford, supra note 25, at 76–77 (observing that the expansion of most major cities through annexation ceased by 1920).

\(^{52}\) See Teaford, supra note 25, at 77–84 (linking suburban political independence to the declining need for city services and rising concerns about urban corruption). See generally Dilworth, supra note 2 (positing a connection between early metropolitan fragmentation and the development of infrastructure technology).


\(^{54}\) Id. at 322–25.
incorporation, as increasing numbers of communities sought to guarantee long-term legal control over land uses (and, relatedly, over their tax bases). 55

Postwar suburbs perfected the arts of defensive incorporation and exclusionary zoning. Some suburban communities, eager to avoid annexation but cautious about the costs of running a local government, became “cities by contract”: postincorporation, they continued to purchase most essential government services from private entities or other local governments. 56 Newly incorporated municipalities used their power to regulate land uses to price out poor and moderate-income migrants through a variety of exclusionary zoning techniques—limiting multifamily housing, mandating large lots, or restricting all new development. 57 Because exclusionary zoning protects past exiters from future ones, it raises serious transitional-fairness questions. 58 It also has racial ramifications, both because low (but improving) income levels and home-ownership rates make minorities the last exiters 59 and because federal constitutional law shields suburban school districts from the reach of urban desegregation decrees. 60

D. The Last Exiters?

In a hopeful addendum to these tales, today’s exiters are predominantly minorities, many of whom were precluded by economic circumstances, exclusionary zoning, and intentional discrimination from joining previous waves of exit. Not only were minorities responsible for the bulk of suburban population gains in the 1990s, but the suburbs of many metropolitan areas also lost white residents. 61 There are many reasons to assume that, at least

55. Id. at 326. For further discussion, see chapter ten of William A. Fischel, The Homevoter Hypothesis (2001).


60. See, e.g., Milliken v. Bradley, 418 U.S. 717 (1974) (holding that a federal court could not include a suburban school district in a forced desegregation effort absent evidence that the district engaged in intentional past discrimination).

61. See Frey, supra note 3, at 159–65; see also Michael Jones-Corra, Reshaping the American Dream: Immigrants, Ethnic Minorities, and the Politics of the New Suburbs, in THE NEW SUBURBAN HISTORY, supra note 8, at 183, 184 (“[T]he suburbanization of immigrants, as well as
with respect to African Americans, many of these new suburbanites are ex-iterers, following the century-old pattern of leaving center cities when it becomes feasible for them to do so. (More than twice as many Hispanics and Asians live in the suburbs as do African Americans, although, for reasons discussed below, it is more difficult to differentiate enterers from exiters in these groups.)

In 1968, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, or the Kerner Commission, predicted that virtually all increases in African American populations within metropolitan areas would be concentrated in central cities. This mistaken assumption resulted from a reasonable extrapolation from ongoing demographic trends. While a handful of African Americans suburbanized before World War II (for example, a small subset of those who relocated from the rural South during the Great Migration ended up in suburbs rather than central cities), most did not join the great wave of postwar suburban exit. Contrary to the Kerner Commission’s pessimistic predictions, however, African American suburbanization began accelerating in the 1970s. Between 1970 and 1995, the number of African American suburbanites increased from 3.6 million to 10.6 million, and the proportion of African Americans living in suburbs nearly doubled, from less than one-sixth to nearly one-third. During the last two decades of the twentieth century, as many African Americans moved to the suburbs as in the preceding seventy years. Today, approximately 40 percent of African Americans live in the suburbs.

Overall demographic trends suggest that many of these new suburbanites are exiters. Importantly, since the 1980s, African Americans have undertaken what some scholars call the second Great Migration. Over the past two decades, a number of highly segregated northern central cities lost blacks to southern metropolitan areas. The vast majority of metropolitan

that of ethnic and racial minorities more generally, is approaching, and in some cases has surpassed, that of the population as a whole.


64. The number of African Americans within center cities increased during the period, as exiters’ departures freed previously unavailable, and higher-quality, urban housing options. See, e.g., Brian J.L. Berry, Ghetto Expansion and Single-Family Housing Prices: Chicago, 1968–1972, 3 J. Urb. Econ. 397, 417 (1976) (arguing that suburbanization led to a massive chain of moves, which mitigated price effects of racial discrimination in urban Chicago and enabled many families to improve their living situations).

65. Thernstrom & Thernstrom, supra note 63, at 212.

66. Wiese, supra note 63, at 255.

67. Id. at 264 (“In contrast to whites, who were most likely to have moved from one suburb to another, African Americans who moved to suburbs in the 1980s and 1990s frequently asserted their hopes in the form of a contrast between the suburbs they imagined and the city they knew.”).

68. See id. at 255.
areas gaining African Americans are in the South. Moreover, African American suburban gains have also been concentrated in southern metropolitan areas, reversing historical trends. African Americans now compose more than one-quarter of the total suburban population in metropolitan Atlanta. (African Americans compose less than 10 percent of the total suburban population in most cities.) Some of the African American suburban population gains are the result of suburban sprawl—the urbanization of previously rural areas with large black populations. Many new African American suburbanites, however, are cross-country exiters from northern cities; not only do African American migrants prefer southern metropolitan areas, but black migrants to the South are more likely to reside in suburban areas than are long-term African American residents, in part because African American exiters tend to be better educated and wealthier. These demographic changes support the promising trajectory toward suburban integration, especially in southern metropolitan areas. While early African American suburbanites frequently settled in majority-black suburbs, black suburban population gains in recent decades have fueled suburban integration. African Americans, especially those who are middle class and well educated (and therefore most likely to be exiters), increasingly are choosing to live in majority-white suburban communities.


70. Wiese, supra note 63, at 16 (noting that most early black suburbanization took place in southern and midwestern metropolitan areas).

71. Frey, supra note 3, at 172.


73. Frey, supra note 69, at 95–98 (noting that, between 1990–2000, the top destinations for midwestern and northern black migrants were all in the South; in contrast, white migrants tended to favor western and southwestern metropolitan areas).


75. See Edward L. Glaeser & Jacob L. Vigdor, *Racial Segregation: Promising News, in Redefining*, Vol. 1, supra note 3, at 211, 216 (noting that levels of black/white segregation are now at their lowest point since the 1920s).


77. See Thomas J. Phelan & Mark Schneider, *Race, Ethnicity, and Class in American Suburbs*, 31 URB. AFF. REV. 659, 662–63 (1996) (comparing data on 1773 suburbs in 1980 and 1990 and finding that, of 328 suburbs with “significant” black population—that is, more than twenty-eight percent—only 87 were majority black).

78. See Wiese, supra note 63, at 285.
II. The Entrance Story

The exit story may not be over, but it has certainly reached its denouement. Since the 1980s, a majority of Americans have lived in suburbs, but increasingly few of them are exiters—that is, former urban dwellers who left the center city that anchors the metropolitan area in which they live. Indeed, with the important exception of minority exiters, it is more accurate to describe suburbs as points of entrance to, not exit from, urban life. Suburban life is the only “urban” life that most Americans know: many suburban residents are native suburbanites; others migrated directly to suburbs, either from abroad or from nonmetropolitan areas. Increasing numbers, as I suggest above, moved to their current suburban homes from other metropolitan regions. All of these enterers lack a historical connection to—and many lack knowledge of, or affinity for—the center city that anchors their new suburban home.

A. Native Suburbanites and Domestic Migrants

Population deconcentration in the United States began before World War I and continued apace throughout the twentieth century. By the 1960s, more people lived in the suburbs than in major cities.79 (The metropolitan employment balance shifted to the suburbs a decade later, in the mid-1970s.80) In the 1980s, the United States became a suburban nation, and for over two decades, a majority of all U.S. residents have lived in the suburbs, suggesting that most Americans are today—or will soon be—native suburbanites. The number of exiters in the suburbs is thus dwindling rapidly. Suburbanites’ historical ties to the urban center grow more attenuated with each new generation: they live on in grandparents’ memories of the old neighborhood, but most suburbanites have no connection of their own.

Many suburban residents lack any historical connection to the urban exit story. These suburbanites are rural exiters and those rural exiters’ children and grandchildren. The demographic changes of the twentieth century did not only affect major urban centers: nonmetropolitan America also underwent a radical transformation, as millions of small-town and rural residents migrated to major metropolitan areas. Between 1900 and today, the percentage of the U.S. population living in rural and nonmetropolitan areas fell from over 60 percent to 17 percent.81 Since 1920, U.S. urbanized areas (as

79. Muller, supra note 6, at 4.
80. See Kasarda, supra note 7, at 215, 239–40.
81. See Glenn V. Fuguitt et al., Rural and Small Town America 20–21 (1989) (describing the trend between 1900 and 1980); Kenneth Johnson, Demographic Trends in Rural and Small Town America, 1 Univ. N.H. CAREY INST. REP. on RURAL AM. No. 1, 2006, at 1–2 (listing current population figures), available at http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/documents/Demographics_complete_file.pdf. Since 1950, the Census Bureau has defined “rural” areas to encompass the remainder of those areas not classified as “urban.” U.S. Census Bureau, Urban and Rural Definitions (Oct. 1995), http://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/urdef.txt (last visited May 16, 2007). Urban areas are defined to include jurisdictions or census-designated places with populations greater than 2500 and to include “urbanized areas.” Id. (Prior to 1950, the definition of rural ex-
defined by the Census Bureau) grew by 253 percent. Some of this growth occurred when suburbs consumed previously rural areas, but most of it arose from domestic migration toward cities.82

As early as 1957, Donald Bogue observed that “suburban rings are a destination of large numbers of migrants coming directly from nonmetropolitan areas,” leading him to conclude that “the old theory that the metropolitan area grows largely by outward radial expansion from the center is no longer valid.”83 Bogue found, in fact, that one-half of metropolitan growth between 1940 and 1950 occurred “without benefit of mediation through the central city.”84 Because the populations of metropolitan areas grew far more rapidly than populations in center cities declined, we can deduce that this pattern of rural exiters migrating to suburbs continued throughout the twentieth century. With the exception of African Americans, who tended (at least until recently) to migrate from the rural South to the urban North, most nonmetropolitan migrants move directly to the suburbs. The suburbs are their entrance to metropolitan America and the closest thing to an “urban” life that most will likely ever know.85

Other domestic migrants join these nonmetropolitan enterers in their suburban communities. Edward Glaeser and Jesse Shapiro helpfully summarized much of the 2000 Census as follows: “Warm, dry places grew. Cold, wet places declined.”86 This pattern, which reflects postwar trends generally, held true for both cities and their suburbs. Western and southern cities and their suburbs grew faster than midwestern and northeastern ones, with western cities and suburbs growing the fastest.87 The fastest-growing suburbs are what Robert Lang and Patrick Simmons have described as “boomburbs”—municipalities with populations over 100,000 that are are not the largest cities in their metropolitan areas but have experienced double-digit rates of

82. Nonmetropolitan areas experienced net emigration from the 1940s through the 1960s and again in the 1980s. Nonmetropolitan areas experienced net immigration in the 1970s and again since 1990. See Johnson, supra note 81, at 8–11.


84. Id.


87. Id. at 13–32; see also Alan Berube, Gaining But Losing Ground: Population Change in Large Cities and Their Suburbs, in Redefining, Vol. 1, supra note 3, at 33.
population growth in recent decades. Most boomburbs are located in the Sun Belt, many are overgrown master planned communities, and some did not even exist a few decades ago. Many boomburbs are also more diverse than smaller suburbs, and many have fairly large immigrant populations. Explanations for these demographic changes vary (as a resident of a cold, wet place, I favor weather), but the trends further unravel the exit story. Millions of suburbanites now live thousands of miles from their ancestral homes—not dozens of miles (as would be the case for true exilers) or hundreds of miles (as might be the case for rural enterers).

B. The New Immigrant Gateways

In the United States, the immigrant experience and the exit story have long been intertwined. Many early suburbs developed partly in reaction to (and revulsion of) immigrant ghettos and their Catholic and Jewish residents. Others developed to enable immigrants to exit those ghettos. Especially during the nineteenth century, many immigrants settled immediately in rural areas. But for most of the past century, immigration to—and eventual migration away from—gateway cities has been the paradigmatic American tale. The path from the city to the suburb was, for many immigrants, a long road that ended decades or even generations after they arrived. Suburban exit was, in some sense, the ultimate act of assimilation.

The vast majority of immigrants continue to settle in major metropolitan areas, especially in traditional gateways like New York and Los Angeles. In the 1990s, 94 percent of foreign-born residents lived in metropolitan areas, and 40 percent lived in the New York or Los Angeles metropolitan areas.

Over the past few decades, however, immigrants have increasingly suburbanized. This trend is one reason why suburbs are becoming so diverse. In 1999, the U.S. immigrant population was evenly divided between urban areas (47 percent) and suburbs (48 percent). Evidence from the 2000 Census suggests that many immigrant suburbanites are true enterers: they move directly to the suburbs upon arriving in the United States. In 2000, forty-eight percent of immigrants who arrived during the 1990s were already residing outside central cities. Suburbs of gateway metropolitan areas also gained more immigrants in absolute numbers as well as in percentage

89. Id. at 101–14.
92. Hispanics are driving minority suburbanization trends across the United States, but the most diverse suburban areas are located in “melting pot metros” in the West that have large Asian and Hispanic immigrant populations. See Frey, supra note 3, at 174.
93. See Jones-Correa, supra note 61, at 184.
94. Alba & Nee, supra note 91, at 254.
growth. The suburban immigrant population of the Atlanta and Las Vegas metropolitan areas increased by 283% and 251%, respectively! The conclusion that many immigrants are suburban enterers also flows from the fact that the most diverse suburban areas are located in “melting pot metros” in the West that have large Asian and Hispanic immigrant populations.

III. THE CASE(S) FOR METROPOLITAN SOLIDARITY
IN A POSTEXIT WORLD

The exit story has long played a central role in the case for metropolitan governance. Regional government and growth-control proponents frequently assert that the current system of local government law unjustly protects suburbanites from their urban neighbors, shielding them from the economic burdens for which they are historically responsible and from social relationships that might challenge their preferences for homogeneity and isolation. This exit-based account provides a strong normative case against metropolitan fragmentation, suggesting that local government law unjustly and artificially divides metropolitan regions. These regions, according to the standard account, are, in reality, single economic and political communities, artificially divided into legally distinct polities.

A. The Exit Story as a Normative Justification for Regionalism

Suburbanites’ shared responsibility for regional burdens generally, and for urban problems specifically, serves as a primary normative justification for regional-governance and growth-management policies. The two versions of this “responsibility account” are both intertwined with the exit story. First, regional government and growth-control proponents’ objections to intrametropolitan economic inequalities frequently become intertwined with specific historical assertions that suburbanites selfishly fled “their” center cities. Exiters’ collective decision to abandon their former neighbors is cited as the reason that suburbanites should be forced to bear their fair share of regional burdens. This sentiment is reflected in the work of Jerry Frug, who

95. In the 1990s, the immigrant population in suburbs grew by 66 percent (compared to 43 percent in cities), and by the end of the 1990s, suburbs had 3,000,000 more immigrant residents than did cities. Audrey Singer, The Rise of the New Immigrant Gateways, in Redefining, Vol. 2, supra note 9, at 41, 58.

96. Id. at 60.

97. Frey, supra note 3, at 155.

98. See, e.g., Gerald E. Frug, City Making: Building Communities Without Building Walls 106–09 (1999) (suggesting regional legislatures as a way of overcoming social isolation); id. at 167–95 (arguing for regionally allocating the burdens of city services); Myron Orfield, Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability 2–14 (1997) (discussing the interconnectedness of metropolitan regions and asserting that metropolitan problems result from residents moving “up and out” of the urban core); Neal R. Peirce, Citistates: How Urban America Can Prosper in a Competitive World 291–325 (1993) (arguing that metropolitan regions are, in reality, single polities tied to historical centers); Briffault, supra note 57, at 1141–42 (connecting incorporation and race); Cashin, supra note 57, at 1995–98 (reviewing the “normative debate” over regionalism).
asserts that “millions of people have escaped city problems by crossing the boundary between city and suburb . . . segregat[ing] many of America’s metropolitan areas into ‘two nations’: rich and poor, white and black, expanding and contracting.” 99 It is also a foundational assumption of Myron Orfield’s influential work on regional government. Orfield argues that “[t]hroughout the United States, people move ‘up and out,’ taking their economic and social resources with them and leaving behind an increasingly dense core of poverty in the city and rapidly growing social needs in older suburbs.” 100

The second version of the responsibility account holds that suburban and urban residents are, in reality, part of the same metropolitan community. Neal Peirce succinctly summarized this view when he asserted that “metropolitan regions . . . are the true cities of our time.” 101 Edward Rubin has argued, in a different context, that Americans have become “puppy federalists”; although we live in a socially and economically homogenous nation, with stronger national identities than local ones, we maintain nostalgia for our “bygone federalist system.” 102 Although I do not subscribe to Rubin’s general conclusions about constitutional federalism, 103 he undoubtedly captures a truth about the modern American psyche. And if state allegiances are fading, surely our local ones are, for many Americans, nonexistent: whereas just a few decades ago, many urban Catholics (and some non-Catholics) would respond to the question, where are you from? with their local parish name, most modern suburbanites likely would respond by naming their region’s anchor city. For example, a migrant to Chandler, Arizona, from metro Detroit or Sonora, Mexico, might well tell relatives back home that she has moved to “Phoenix.” Psychology aside, the continued importance of center cities is supported by substantial evidence linking overall regional health with center-city fortunes 104 and suggesting that commuters to city jobs tend

99. Jerry Frug, Decentering Decentralization, 60 U. CHI. L. REV. 253, 256 (1993); see also Frug, supra note 98, at 3–4 (arguing that local government law enables suburbs to “entice[ ] millions of people to escape the problems associated with America’s central cities by crossing the city/suburb boundary”); Jerry Frug, The Geography of Community, 48 STAN. L. REV. 1047, 1066 (1996) (complaining that wealthy suburbanites invoke the danger of center cities to explain their residential choices, despite the fact that “these are the very people who, by moving . . . have been able to escape paying the city taxes that are designed to improve the quality of life in poor African-American neighborhoods”).

100. Orfield, supra note 98, at 2.


to have higher wages than suburban employees. Richard Briffault is certainly right that “regions, not the cities within them, function as labor markets and housing markets . . . . Cultural and educational institutions . . . serve broader regions than just their home cities. Environmental and natural resource questions . . . transcend local boundaries.” Most suburbanites undoubtedly cross municipal boundaries many times a day, and some of them enjoy urban cultural and economic amenities without contributing to the cost of maintaining them.

Yet while these realities press us to question our fragmented system of local governance, the entrance account substantially complicates the claim that metropolitan regions are today’s “communities.” The difficulty is that central cities likely play only a small role in the economic lives of most suburban enterers. The metropolitan employment balance shifted to the suburbs three decades ago: by 1990, the number of suburb-to-suburb or intrasuburb commuters outnumbered traditional suburb-to-center-city commuters by a two-to-one margin. Although some center cities continue to serve as retail and cultural playgrounds, these kinds of amenities are also increasingly found in suburbs. In 1990, for example, over 70 percent of retail and manufacturing jobs were located in the suburbs. Moreover, for the reasons discussed below, enterers formed by decidedly antiurban experiences may lack the aesthetic and cultural affinities that would lead them to take advantage of urban amenities.

Of course, the exit account is not the only normative basis for limiting suburban growth, rethinking the current system of fragmented local authority within metropolitan regions, or both. Some scholars, notably Sheryll Cashin, argue forcefully that the current distribution of resources among the various municipalities within our metropolitan regions is unjustifiable. Suburban parochialism is especially unseemly, however, when suburban residents share historic, social, and economic ties to their center city. Absent a theory linking the fortunes of center cities and suburbs—which the exit account often provides—complaints about the wealth of suburbs vis-à-vis


106. Briffault, supra note 101, at 3.

107. See Richard Briffault, Our Localism: Part II—Localism and Legal Theory, 90 Colum. L. Rev. 346, 443 (1990) (asserting that suburbanites routinely deny that “[t]he city was the primary center of jobs and commercial and cultural institutions for the region”); Gillette, supra note 105, at 241 (“Suburbanites exploit the central city by taking advantage of the cultural and commercial benefits . . . but then retreat without contributing to the services necessary to provide those benefits and without redressing the social problems endemic to cities.”).


109. Cf. e.g., BRUEGGMANN, supra note 5, at 221 (“Some attractive central cities will become essentially resort areas filled with second homes.”); JOEL KOTKIN, THE CITY: A GLOBAL HISTORY 151–54 (2005) (expressing concern that Bruegmann’s prediction may come to pass).


their anchor cities sound like a general demand for distributive justice. We can ground a stronger case for suburban responsibility not on exiters’ act of abandonment, nor on the skewed distribution of metropolitan resources, but rather on the more nuanced claim that local boundaries perpetuate a past wrong. Even if claims of “abandonment” are factually problematic in an era of suburban entrance, there is little question that cities continue to suffer the effects of, and enterers continue to enjoy the benefits of, exiters’ past actions.

Consider the long-term results of defensive incorporation. As Cashin observes, “fragmented political borders were . . . the result of economic, social, and racial differentiation—a locational sorting process” that protects the “favored quarter” in our metropolitan areas.\textsuperscript{112} These borders also enable local governments to engage in regulatory behavior with significant, negative, cross-border spillover effects. For example, past acts of defensive incorporation enable enterers to enact exclusionary land-use policies that limit economic mobility within metro regions, thereby shielding themselves from the fiscal and social burdens that plague center cities.\textsuperscript{113} Especially when the local government’s motives—for the original incorporation, for the current land-use regime, or both—are suspect, these policies may become more difficult to defend.\textsuperscript{114}

\textbf{B. The Utilitarian Case Against Fragmentation}

Of course, the regionalist critique is grounded on more than exiters’ responsibility to and for their urban neighbors. Many scholars argue that the current system of fragmented and overlapping local authority is irrational and inefficient for a number of related reasons. According to critics, the fragmentation of local power among dozens, if not hundreds, of municipalities within a metropolitan region guarantees that local decisions will adversely affect other localities within a region. Arbitrarily drawn local boundaries enable localities to impose costs on their neighbors: exclusionary zoning forces poorer cities to shoulder the burden of housing low-income individuals,\textsuperscript{115} competition for new development fuels suburban sprawl,\textsuperscript{116} and environmental and natural resource problems transcend mu-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} \textit{Id.} at 2014–15; \textit{see also} Orfield, \textit{supra} note 98, at 5 (describing the “favored quarter”).
\item \textsuperscript{113} \textit{See} Briffault, \textit{supra} note 57, at 1134–36; Briffault, \textit{supra} note 101, at 9; Cashin, \textit{supra} note 57, at 2015; Frug, \textit{The Geography of Community}, \textit{supra} note 99, at 1070–71.
\item \textsuperscript{115} \textit{See, e.g.,} Briffault, \textit{supra} note 57, at 1136–37 (describing the use of exclusionary zoning to maintain high service-to-tax ratios); Cashin, \textit{supra} note 57, at 1993–95 (describing the effects of exclusionary zoning); Fennell, \textit{supra} note 114, at 177 (discussing the use of exclusionary zoning in intermunicipal competition).
\item \textsuperscript{116} \textit{See} Nicole Stelle Garnett, \textit{Trouble Preserving Paradise?}, 87 \textit{Cornell L. Rev.} 158, 163 (2001) (summarizing the literature).
\end{itemize}
Suburbs as Exit, Suburbs as Entrance

117. See, e.g., Briffault, supra note 57, at 1132–33, 1147–50; Briffault, supra note 101, at 3; Cashin, supra note 57, at 2043.


119. Gillette, supra note 105, at 204–06 (discussing accountability problems raised by special purpose authorities).


121. See, e.g., Fischel, supra note 55, at 207–08; John D. Donohue, Tiebout? Or Not Tiebout? The Market Metaphor and America’s Devolution Debate, 11 J. Econ. Persp. 73, 74 (1997) (“Diverse policy regimes can cater to heterogeneous preferences.”); Robert P. Inman & Daniel L. Rubinfeld, The Political Economy of Federalism, in PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC CHOICE: A HANDBOOK 73, 83–85 (Dennis C. Mueller ed., 1997) (arguing that interjurisdictional competition will increase efficiency in the production of public goods); Richard E. Wagner & Warren E. Weber, Competition, Monopoly, and the Organization of Government in Metropolitan Areas, 18 J.L. & Econ. 661, 684 (1975) (“[A]n increase in the number of competing and overlapping governments will lead the public economy more closely to perform as a competitive industry.”); see also, e.g., Mark Schneider, The Competitive City: The Political Economy of Suburbia 63–69 (1989) (purporting to find that tax rates and government expenditures are lower in more fragmented metropolitan areas); cf. Fennell, supra note 114, at 177 (“Tiebout’s ideas cannot be fully appreciated without taking into account the place of exclusion both as an attractive item . . . available to consumer-voters and as a constraint on the choice sets that consumer-voters encounter.”).

122. ALBERT O. HIRSCHMAN, EXIT, VOICE AND LOYALTY: RESPONSES TO DECLINE IN FIRMS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND STATES (1970).


124. Fischel, supra note 55, at 87–88 (discussing such studies).
The ambitious task of weighing the costs and benefits of interjurisdictional competition is far beyond the scope of this Essay. It may be impossible to know whether, within any given metropolitan region, the benefits of fragmentation necessarily outweigh the costs. But it is reasonable to assume that many enterers are (or believe themselves to be) net beneficiaries of interjurisdictional competition. Enterers are, in some ways, prototypical consumer voters: their participation in Tiebout’s competition is evidenced by their decision to select their current home from a range of regional, or even national, options. As the probable beneficiaries of fragmentation-driven competition, enterers may also tend to favor cooperative over coercive means of achieving interjurisdictional burden sharing. Thus, at the very least, the entrance account provides another political barrier to regional government proposals, adding enterers’ resistance to metropolitan solidarity to the long list of public choice impediments to local government reforms. Such impediments include the reluctance of local officials to relinquish power and the complex constitutional questions that regional elections raise.

C. Transitional Fairness

Finally, efforts to curb suburban growth and channel new development into center cities and older suburbs raise both distributional and transitional-fairness questions that deserve careful consideration. These transitional-fairness problems are especially acute, because the final chapter of the exit story is a minority success story.

The debate over the distributional consequences of growth-management and regional-governance strategies is familiar. Skeptics’ concerns stem from a very simple economic calculus: restricting land for development will increase its price. And if the price of land rises, the price of things built on it—including, importantly, housing—will rise as well. Michael Schill succinctly summarized the problem: “[t]he Achilles’ heel of the ‘smart growth’ movement is the impact that many of the proposals put forth by its advocates would have on affordable housing.”

Regional government proponents respond that centralizing control over development policy might actually increase the affordability of regional housing, both by curtailing local governments’ exclusionary tendencies and by incorporating planning

125. See, e.g., Fischel, supra note 55, at 219–20 (discussing historical opposition to metropolitan government); Garnett, supra note 116, at 181 (discussing local government opposition to regional growth management).


127. Metropolitan fragmentation undoubtedly permits local governments to dress up exclusionary zoning in a growth-management gown. After all, limits on all new development serve the double purpose of excluding disfavored land uses (and questionable new neighbors) and making existing homes a scarcer, and therefore more valuable, resource. See, e.g., Vicki Been, Impact Fees
tools (such as housing linkage, inclusionary zoning, density bonuses, and impact-fee waivers) designed to increase the supply of affordable housing.128

Still, centralized growth-management policies could exacerbate the price effects of restricting suburban growth. Importantly, local growth controls tend to promote, rather than curb, suburban sprawl, because the exclusion of new growth by wealthier inner suburbs tends to push development outward.129 One benefit of this pattern is that new growth on the suburban fringe may mitigate the price effects of growth controls in inner suburbs. Sprawl, in turn, promotes the housing filtering process by which a wealthier individual moving to a larger house sets off a “chain of successive housing moves” that increases the availability of quality housing for poor and moderate-income individuals.130 We might therefore expect comprehensive growth management, more than local controls, to increase overall regional housing prices.131 Moreover, policymakers may lack the political will to implement affordability-promotion tools on a large enough scale to counter the regressive effects of growth management.

While empirical evidence on the price effects of existing regional planning programs is mixed,132 the transitional-fairness questions raised by...
suburban growth restrictions are not limited to concerns about regional housing affordability. Even if a regional development strategy succeeded in holding constant the overall cost of housing, most affordable housing will likely continue to be found in center cities and older suburbs. After all, regional growth-management strategies aim to channel new development into built-up areas. Yet as Robert Bruegmann highlights in his recent history of suburban sprawl, urban life has always been most difficult for the poor. Today, smokestacks and overcrowding are no longer poor city dwellers’ primary concerns—crime, education, and employment are. As a result, suburbs still represent the urban poor’s hope for a better life, as suburbs have throughout the modern industrial age. The reality is that suburbs offer the good schools, economic opportunities, and environmental amenities that wealthy urban dwellers can afford to purchase and poorer ones cannot.

Moreover, and, in my view, most importantly, there is something slightly unseemly about dramatically curtailing suburban growth at a time when racial minorities are responsible for most new suburban population gains. For example, anti-immigration groups have jumped on the antigrowth bandwagon, some going so far as to run adds linking immigration with sprawl (and suggesting immigration limits might solve the sprawl problem). Efforts to channel development into the urban core could also jeopardize the promising trends toward suburban racial diversity. This risk is especially pronounced, because many of the most diverse neighborhoods have characteristics that draw the ire of sprawl opponents: they are located in low-density metropolitan areas in the West and Southwest and are filled with relatively low cost “starter homes.” It is difficult to avoid concluding that changing the rules of the development game at this time is tantamount to pulling the suburban ladder out from under those late exiters who previously were excluded from suburban life by economic circumstance, exclusionary zoning, and intentional discrimination. A new regime may directly benefit many individuals who have perpetrated, or at least benefited from, this past exclusion: current suburban homeowners will enjoy the economic and environmental amenities that attend growth management.

on the price effects of Oregon’s comprehensive growth management program); Nelson et al., supra note 131, at 117, 134–58 (reviewing empirical literature suggesting that rising housing prices in Portland are not linked to growth management but acknowledging the risks of such programs). See also Bruegmann, supra note 5, at 209–12.

134. See Schill, supra note 126, at 104.

135. See Bruegmann, supra note 5, at 26–29.


137. See Frey, supra note 3.

138. See Jones-Correa, supra note 61, at 194 (discussing this controversy).

139. See Been, supra note 127, at 164 (“[N]ew neighborhoods of starter homes are more racially mixed than established neighborhoods”).
IV. COMPETITIVE CITIES AND CONVERGING SUBURBS

In previous work, I have suggested reforms to urban land-use policies as an alternative to legal restrictions on new suburban development. Especially in light of growth controls’ possible regressive effects, proponents of intrametropolitan equity should, in my view, seek to maximize city competitiveness without restricting suburban growth. Specifically, I have argued that cities can best compete by capitalizing on urban distinctiveness and have questioned the wisdom of prevailing land use policies, especially zoning laws that prevent mixed use environments. This argument runs counter to the assumptions of the Tiebout model’s critics, who argue that cities cannot compete for new development because metropolitan fragmentation systematically disadvantages them. While there is no guarantee that cities will compete successfully with suburbs, they should, in my view, follow the economic theory of comparative advantage and concentrate on what they are least bad at doing. As Jane Jacobs observed four decades ago, and today’s new urbanists seek to remind us, cities are different—and in some ways better—than suburbs. Importantly, the mix of land uses that characterizes the traditional urban form generates a unique kind of community (what Iris Young has called the “being together of strangers”) that suburbs cannot offer.

My assertion that cities should ensure their land-use policies let them be cities assumes that some people, including some current suburbanites, are energized by the complexities, and occasional disorder, of urban life. Admittedly, the entrance story complicates this argument for the same reason that it partially undercuts the normative arguments favoring regional government: while exiters’ memories of the old neighborhood may help them understand the attraction of city life, enterers’ vision of the “good life” is entirely formed by the suburbs. And the suburbs have long been decidedly antiurban places. Not only do suburban zoning laws prohibit mixed land uses, which generate vibrant street life, but for decades, subdivision regulations have prohibited suburban neighborhoods from mimicking traditional urban ones. As early as 1936, the Federal Housing Administration (“FHA”) rejected grid street patterns and, backed by the power of the purse (that is, the threat to withhold mortgage guarantees), endorsed subdivision regulations that mandated cul-de-sacs and curvilinear streets. Over the next few decades, with the full support of the building industry (which feared the proliferation of local subdivision standards), the FHA achieved its goal of...


141. See, e.g., Briffault, supra note 57, at 1136–37 (“Less affluent localities are nominally free to compete . . . but if they start out having less to offer in terms of high quality services or low taxes there is, in practice, relatively little they can do to attract the affluent or increase their per capita tax base.”).


uniform subdivision regulations. These ubiquitous regulations mandate what is today conventional suburban design: commercial land uses concentrated on major arterial roads, separated from residences that are tucked safely away on cul-de-sacs and curvilinear streets. As a result, even the physical layout of traditional cities may strike enterers as foreign, odd, and incorrect.

But the entrance story does not undercut all hope for city competitiveness. On the contrary, in recent years, many major cities experienced substantial population increases (following decades of losses): the 1990s was the best postwar decade in that regard for those American cities that had previously suffered the most devastating population losses. Moreover, the population growth of many downtowns—the most “urban” areas—outpaced overall population growth in many cities. Some cities saw their downtown population grow despite city population losses. The increased preference for urban living is also reflected in the fact that many downtown areas have been gaining white residents, even in cities that continue to lose them.

Enterers’ affinity for urban life may also be informed, over time, by changing suburban land use patterns. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the decentralization of urban areas in the United States peaked between the 1920s and the 1950s, and many suburbs are now becoming denser. Not only are bigger houses being built on smaller lots, but suburban development is increasingly characterized by a diversity of housing types. Manufactured housing, condominiums, and multifamily apartments are becoming more common. And land recycling efforts—including infill and teardowns—are intensifying suburban land uses. Joel Kotkin recently argued that “we need to look at current suburbia not as a finished product, but something beginning to evolve from its Deadwood phase.” Kotkin expressed his hope that our suburbs can learn from “our ancient sense of the city . . . about the need for community, identity, the creation of ‘sacred space,’ and a closer relation between workplace and home life.” For reasons practical and, perhaps, philosophical, many suburbs are beginning to


147. Id. at 70–71.

148. Bruegmann, supra note 5, at 65.

149. Id. at 58–59.

150. Id. at 67.


152. Id.
incorporate more “urban” features. Moreover, the growing influence of new urbanism is “changing the look, if not the underlying character, of sprawl.” Even in the most far-flung entrance points, suburbia has begun to assume a more urban flavor.

None of this suggests, of course, that all cities can compete effectively with their suburbs (or, for that matter, with cities and suburbs throughout the country). The urban comeback is a decidedly complex phenomenon. For example, the fastest-growing cities are car friendly, sprawling, and (unsurprisingly) located in the fastest-growing regions—the West and Southwest. Many denser, public-transit-oriented northeastern cities continue to lose population, although at a slower rate than in previous decades. Many center cities are gaining wealthy residents but losing the middle class. It is unclear whether the development strategies producing these demographic shifts—particularly efforts to turn center cities into playgrounds for wealthy young professionals—can produce long-term urban success. Over a century ago, H.G. Wells worried that cities were drifting away from their traditional function as centers of economic life and assuming the role of a “bazaar, a great gallery of shops and places of concourse and rendezvous.” Perhaps, as Joel Kotkin has argued, this more “ephemeral” role is unsustainable: to survive and thrive, perhaps cities, like suburbs, must be places where people choose to make their lives and raise their families.

Nor does urban success signal an end to metropolitan inequity. Concentrated urban poverty declined dramatically in the 1990s, but at the same time American suburbs became poorer. These two trends might be either hopeful indicators that poorer residents are overcoming barriers (including exclusionary zoning) to intrametropolitan mobility or harbingers of the inner-suburban decline that concerns many regional government scholars. Indeed, the changing demographics and economics of suburbs may be blurring the traditional distinction between city and suburb. Many older suburbs, including many of those absorbing minority exiters and immigrant enterers, arguably

153. _Id._ (noting efforts to revitalize town centers of Naperville, Illinois; Fullerton, California; and Bethesda, Maryland); see also Robert Lang & Edward Blakeley, _In Search of the Real OC: Exploring the State of American Suburbs_, NEXT AM. CITY, Summer 2006, at 18.

154. _Bruegmann_, supra note 5, at 153.

155. Glaeser & Shapiro, supra note 86, at 18.


158. _Kotkin_, supra note 109, at 151 (quoting H.G. Wells, _Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought_ 32 (1902)).

159. _See id._ at 150–53.


161. _See, e.g._, Frug, supra note 98, at 156–58.
have more in common with central cities than with their outer-ring suburban
counterparts. And as Richard Briffault recently noted, these older suburbs
also may lack “the business districts, housing stock, and cultural amenities”
that give older cities a chance at competing with suburbs.162 The decline in
these suburbs may result from a new wave of exit—from older suburbs to
newer ones—that is morally problematic for the same reasons as urban exit.

CONCLUSION

Debate over the current distribution of local government authority fre-
quently fails to note that American suburbs have become places of entrance
to, not exit from, urban life. The exit story is historically powerful and rhet-
orically appealing, but it is a story that has reached its denouement. There
remain strong reasons to worry about fragmented local authority, but recog-
nition of the entrance story, and a more nuanced understanding of modern
suburban demographics, demands careful reconsideration of both the bene-
fits and costs of metropolitan fragmentation.

162. Richard Briffault, Beyond City and Suburb: Thinking Regionally, 116 YALE L.J. POCKET
2007).