

A HISTORY OF THE U.S. POLITICAL SYSTEM

Ideas, Interests, and Institutions

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Editors

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The City in American Political Development

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The history of the United States is characterized paradoxically by both rapid urbanization and a political culture ambivalent if not hostile to large cities. This ambivalence is in some ways perplexing given the seeming propinquity between a national government clearly created to foster commercial development and early cities that functioned as commercial associations. The origins of the modern city reside, as Max Weber put it, in the "fusion of market and fortress." Castles provided protection and peace within which market activity could flourish, resulting in permanently settled populations whose livelihoods were increasingly dependent on trade and who increasingly demanded new rights from their rulers. Membership in early modern cities was based on freeman status, which included the right to trade and often the right to participate politically in the municipal corporation, and which often did not require living within the geographic boundaries of the city. In both the old and new worlds these early municipal corporations served such functions as regulating entry into vocations, setting up penalties for various forms of profiteering, maintaining marketplaces, hosting annual fairs, and financing docks and warehouses.

While they would thus seem to fit well in a commercial republic, there was little space for cities in the social contract theory of government that served as the chief legitimating device for the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution. The notion of social contract that inspired the founding documents of American government was of

one between citizens and the state. Intermediary organizations such as cities or political parties that possessed more power than mere individuals but had no formal authority were conceived as grave threats to individual freedom and the common good; James Madison famously referred to them as "factions" in his *Federalist* 10, "united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community." Yet much like the political parties that flourished despite George Washington's denunciation of them, at least twenty-five towns became chartered municipal corporations between 1775 and 1789.

Beyond any theoretical discrepancies over their role in social contract theory, many citizens of the new republic were evidently either highly suspicious or openly hostile to big cities. The wealthy Virginians who figured so prominently in the founding period shared with many Americans an almost innate antiurbanism and a belief in the inherent virtue of an agricultural society, an attitude evident in one letter from Thomas Jefferson to physician and statesman Benjamin Rush, in which he noted, "I view great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man" (Bergh 1907, 173). Jefferson was one of the driving forces behind locating the capitol in the marshland along the Potomac, yet he certainly was not alone in his opinion that the nation should be headquartered outside a major city. At the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia during the summer of 1787, for instance, Massachusetts delegate Elbridge Gerry commented

(according to the notes kept by James Madison) that he "conceived it to be the genl. sense of America, that neither the Seat of a State Govt. nor any large commercial City should be the seat of the Genl. Govt" (Madison 1787)

More so than the location of the capitol, many of the compromises struck in the drafting of the Constitution can be seen to include an anti-urban bias. The compromise between the Virginia and New Jersey plans, for instance, provided for a powerful Senate with representation based on statehood rather than population, thus providing disproportionately greater representation to rural areas. The three-fifths compromise likewise provided greater representation to agricultural regions in the South, the least urban region of the new country.

Americans certainly had good reasons to hold their cities suspect. First, cities were national anomalies in an overwhelmingly rural country. Of the 3,929,214 people living in the United States in 1790, only 5 percent of them (or 201,655 people) lived in the 24 communities that had populations greater than 2,500. Second, cities were remarkably dangerous places for a variety of reasons. They were giant fire hazards, and when they did not nearly burn to the ground—as did Charleston in 1740, Boston in 1760, and New York City in 1776—there were constant conflagrations that took down single houses or public buildings, such as Boston's Faneuil Hall in 1761. Cities were also centers for disease epidemics, the most famous of the eighteenth century being the 1793 yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia that killed approximately 4,000 people and brought the federal government (then located in the city) to a standstill.

Cities were also perceived as centers of moral depravity for several reasons. First, rampant and open prostitution made possible by urban poverty and population density threatened traditional notions of female virtue and thus threatened the established moral order. Second, cities were centers of the emergent American medical profession, a suspicious practice that, much like prostitution, threatened the moral sanctity of the body. Indeed, in the largest American riot in the eighteenth century, the New York City "Doctors' Riot" of 1788, hundreds if not thousands of residents stormed a medical school and adjacent hospital in response to rumors that the school had been robbing graves to gain cadavers. Two subsequent riots in New York, the "bawdyhouse riots" of 1793 and 1799, were aimed at houses of prostitution. The instability engendered by such riots was yet another strike against early American cities.

City government evolved to address new problems brought about by population growth. Even before the

Revolution, cities were beginning to shed their commercial functions, and in doing so they followed the lead of New England. Unlike Mid-Atlantic municipalities that followed institutional forms from the Old World, the New England town reflected a conscious effort to avoid what were seen as unfair restrictions on trade. In Boston, for instance, voting rights were based not on one's status as a freeman or freeholder, as they were in Philadelphia and New York, but on payment of a poll tax. Whereas New York and Philadelphia raised revenues primarily by various taxes on trade, Boston's local government raised money through a property tax. The Boston town government concerned itself primarily with issues of public health and safety, including street cleaning and control of wild dogs and pigs, and it had no control over vocations, no public market, and established no common weights and measures, which were all functions of the more traditional municipal corporations.

Throughout the eighteenth century, American municipalities gradually relinquished their authority over commerce and took greater responsibility for maintaining public health and safety. Larger populations—Philadelphia is estimated to have grown from 5,000 people in 1720 to 30,000 people by the eve of the American Revolution—forced cities by necessity to take on greater public responsibilities and also made it increasingly difficult to enforce restrictive trade privileges. Commercial restrictions were in any case falling out of favor by the late eighteenth century, as evidenced by such celebrations of free trade as Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, first published in 1776. The revolution and establishment of an independent republic was a further stimulus toward the transformation of cities from commercial associations to local providers of residential public services. Republican rhetoric was deployed in every city where membership was open only to freemen and government was conducted by a board of aldermen often appointed to lifetime terms. By the first decade of the nineteenth century white male taxpayers in every city had been granted the right to vote, and in many cities the board of aldermen had been stripped of judicial and executive powers, which, aping the Constitution, were vested in other branches.

The increasing threat of fires, disease epidemics, street crime, prostitution, and increasingly violent riots, were all at least in part a function of increasing population size and density in American cities. At the first Census in 1790 only five cities had populations greater than 10,000 people: New York (33,131 people), Philadelphia (28,522), Boston (18,320), Charleston (16,359), and Baltimore (13,503). By 1800 the populations of New York City, Baltimore, and Boston had all nearly

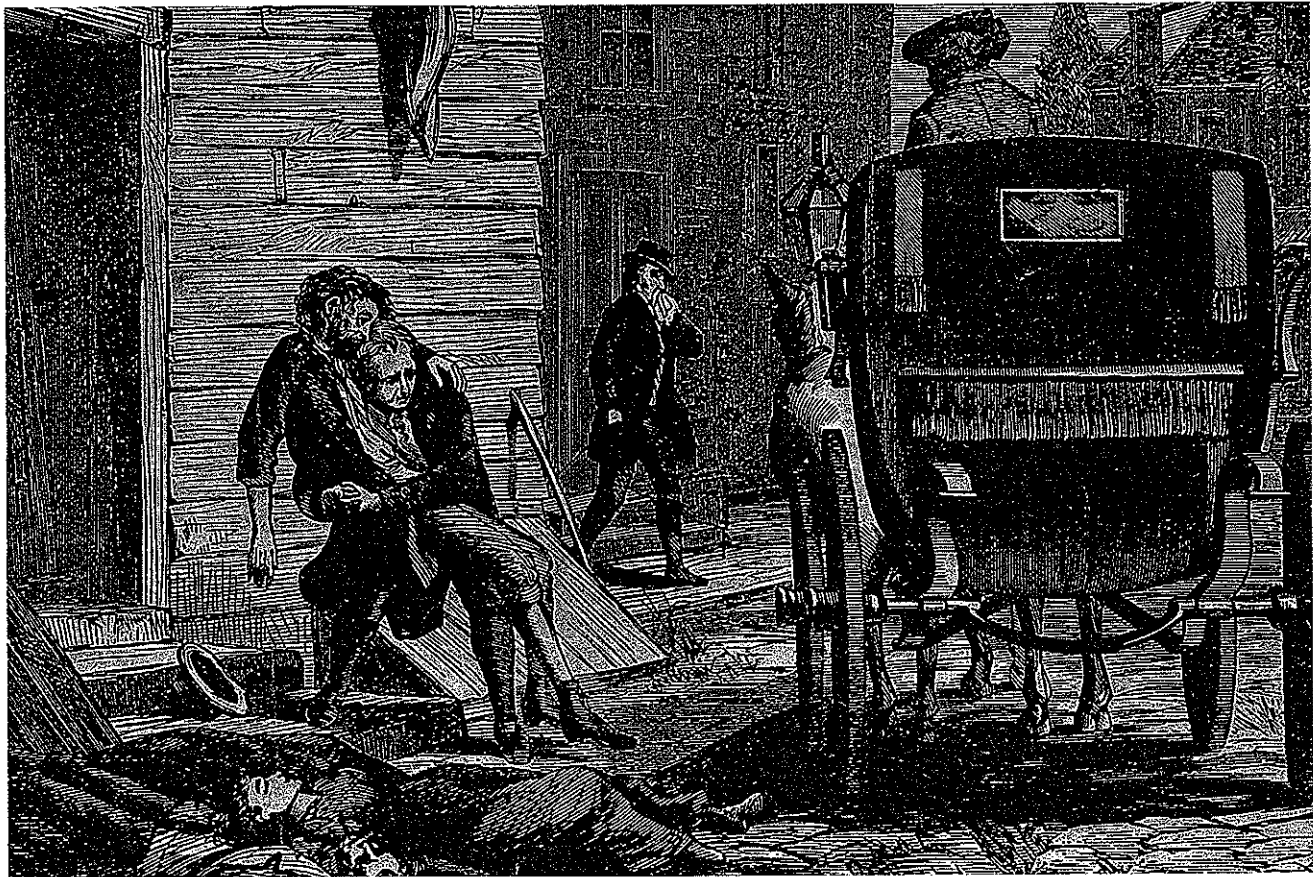
doubled. City populations were not only growing, but were doing so more rapidly than the country overall, with the result that, by 1800, the 33 communities with populations over 2,500 accounted for more than 6 percent of the nation's people, up by 1 percent from 1790.

Persistent and devastating fires and disease epidemics led cities to support technological innovation, most notably in the case of waterworks. In 1798 yellow fever epidemics struck most major American cities. Based on miasmatic theories that attributed the causes of disease to generally dirty conditions—as Benjamin Rush noted in the case of Philadelphia, the fever hit especially hard “in places where there was the greatest exhalation from foul gutters and common sewers” (Rush 1805)—the 1798 epidemic elicited a general call for ample supplies of water for the purposes of street cleaning and for residential use. The Philadelphia common council engaged the expertise of a young engineer, Benjamin Latrobe, to design and oversee the construction of an innovative system that utilized two technologically advanced steam engines to pump water from the Schuylkill River into a distributing system of wooden pipes, construction of which began in the spring of 1799. The project

was completed in 1801, giving Philadelphia the distinction of having the first municipal waterworks in the United States.

In contrast to Philadelphia, New York City opted for a privatized water system. New York's common council initially sent a bill to the legislature in Albany requesting authority to raise money for building an aqueduct from the Bronx River in northern Westchester County. In Albany, state senator Aaron Burr redrafted the bill to provide for the creation of a private corporation, the Manhattan Company, whose ostensible mission was to supply the city with water, but which included a clause giving the company the right to use its “surplus capital” in any way it saw fit. Thus the Manhattan Company, whose name survived until 2000 in the form of the Chase Manhattan Corporation, could also serve as a bank.

Burr directed his bill successfully through the state legislative process and thus created a bank with the most generous and expansive charter that had ever been passed in New York State up to that time. The Manhattan Company was to serve both commercial and political purposes; its expansive charter all but



Depiction of the yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia in 1793. Stephen Girard, a leading citizen, banker, and advocate for the indigent is shown on an errand of mercy. (Bettmann/Corbis)

guaranteed that it would be profitable, but it was also designed to assist the emergent Democratic-Republican Party. At the time of the Manhattan Company's incorporation, Federalist and New Yorker Alexander Hamilton was Secretary of the U.S. Treasury, in which capacity he had significant sway over New York state banks. The Manhattan Company would be independent of the power of Hamilton and could provide financing for merchants who wanted to support the Democrat-Republicans. The Manhattan Company could also lend money to tontine associations, collectives set up to purchase property in part to qualify for the right to vote in the city and state.

If Philadelphia's waterworks reflects a functional government response to an obvious problem, the Manhattan Company—which was never very successful at supplying the city with water—shows how urban policy might be perverted for the sake of individual political and financial gain. It is notable as well that Burr has been credited as the first “boss” of the country's first “machine,” the Society of Saint Tammany, better known as Tammany Hall, a fraternal order founded by revolutionary veteran William Mooney in 1789, the original purpose of which was to have a republican organization as a counter to more upper-class societies that threatened to establish an American aristocracy, such as the Society of the Cincinnatti, whose first presidents were George Washington and Alexander Hamilton. Within the first decade of its existence Tammany became an almost explicitly partisan, republican organization, serving as the organizing vehicle for Burr and playing an important role in the coalition with Jefferson that would eventually result in the modern Democratic party.

Beyond New England and the Mid-Atlantic, the role of cities in the more Southern states was transformed by the Revolution, prior to which the Southern elite were based in plantations and relied for much of their intercourse with the civilized world on agents in London—“factors”—who represented the planters in trading their farm products on the international market, and who also operated as purchasing agents for things that were needed back at the plantations. After the break with England, a new industry of such agents grew in the Southern cities, which thus increased in commercial importance, though political power in the South remained based in the countryside. Still, population data shows the growing relative importance of Southern cities. In 1790 Charleston and Baltimore were the only Southern cities to rank among the ten largest cities in the country, while five of the largest cities were in New England (Boston, Salem, Newport,

Providence, and Marblehead). By 1820, four out of the ten largest American cities were located in the South (Baltimore, Charleston, Washington, and New Orleans), while only two of the top ten (Boston and Salem) were in New England.

Large Southern cities in the early nineteenth century were a diverse lot. Washington was relatively unique as the capitol; New Orleans dominated commerce in the “cotton belt”; Baltimore had greater connection to trade in wheat; and Charleston, the traditional eastern port for Southern agriculture, was the “old South” city of the lot. All Southern cities were also distinct from the region in that they were centers for free blacks, especially New Orleans and Baltimore.

By 1820 the number of communities with populations greater than 2,500 had increased to 61, the residents of which made up a small (less than 7 percent) though increasingly significant proportion of the country's population. As cities increased in number and size, their hazy legal status required clarification, one of the first steps coming with the 1819 Supreme Court decision *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, in which chief justice John Marshall argued that private corporations were protected from state legislative interference by the contract clause of Article I, section 10 of the Constitution, whereas public corporations, which included cities, were not. Though still somewhat murky, Marshall's clarification of the differences between public and private corporations would serve as the basis by which cities would eventually be understood as appendages to state government.

The 1820s marked the greatest increase yet of the nation's urban population. Between 1820 and 1830, the number of communities with populations over 2,500 increased from 61 to 90, and the proportion of the national population living in those communities jumped to 8.8 percent. The populations of Philadelphia and Baltimore increased by roughly a quarter during the 1820s, both reaching approximately 80,000 people by 1830, while Boston's population increased by more than 40 percent during the same period, reaching more than 60,000 people. New York City, by contrast, increased in population by 64 percent during the 1820s, reaching a population of more than 200,000 by 1830. The dramatically different growth trajectory of New York City compared to other Eastern seaboard cities is most likely explained by the completion of the Erie canal in 1825, which revolutionized transportation and commercial trade between the seaboard and the interior, and which made New York City the premier commercial port in the country. Reflecting as well the greater penetration of the economy into the interior of

the continent, the 1830 Census records the first time that a western city, Cincinnati, joined the ranks of the nation's ten largest cities. Unlike the relatively modest population growth of most eastern cities, Cincinnati's population had increased 157 percent between 1820 and 1830, from 9,642 to 24,831 people.

By 1830, Boston was the only New England town to rank among the ten largest urban places in the country, and as it distinguished itself by its rapid growth in the 1820s, it also found the town meeting to be an increasingly cumbersome and disorderly way of making public decisions. Attendance became erratic, with either low turnout or high turnout with disruptive crowds, and the town had already shifted to ward-based elections for some offices. Thus in 1822 Boston became the first town in New England to adopt a municipal charter authorizing a representative form of government.

Nine years after Boston's incorporation as a municipality the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville traveled through the United States. In the classic book he wrote about his trip, *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville made a special point of praising the virtues of the New England town, which he said was "to liberty what primary schools are to science; they put it within people's reach; they teach people to appreciate its peaceful enjoyment and accustom them to make use of it" (Lawrence and Mayer 1966, 63). He was somewhat less generous in describing the country's major cities, calling them

a real danger threatening the future of the democratic republics of the New World, and I should not hesitate to predict that it is through them that they will perish, unless the government succeeds in creating an armed force which, while remaining subject to the wishes of the national majority, is independent of the peoples of the towns and capable of suppressing their excesses. (Lawrence and Mayer 1966, 278n1)

Augur that he was, Tocqueville correctly predicted that increasing urban populations would ultimately require new institutions to maintain public order, namely professional police forces, the first of which was established in Boston in 1837. Law enforcement was traditionally handled by sheriffs and constables who worked mostly on a fee basis, and the night watch, a duty that at least in theory was the responsibility of all able men over the age of 18. All of these forms of law enforcement and order maintenance had proven themselves relatively ineffective during the first half of the nineteenth century, and thus the new form of police

force involved men paid a flat salary, whose job was to patrol the streets, with the explicit purpose of preventing crime. New York City established a similar police force in 1845, and Philadelphia followed suit in 1854.

Notably different events in each of the nation's largest cities served as the catalysts for establishing modern, professional police forces. In Boston, it was the "Broad Street Riot" of June 1837 that started with a fight between volunteer firemen and members of an Irish funeral procession and ended with numerous badly injured and thousands of dollars in property damage; in New York, it was the brutal, widely publicized, and ultimately unsolved murder of a young woman in 1841 that sparked public concern over the system of constables and sheriffs; in Philadelphia, the prevalence of gang violence combined with the city-county consolidation of 1854 provided the opportunity for institutional change in law enforcement that established a modern police force.

The backdrop against which all these events occurred was a noticeable increase in urban violence during the 1830s and 1840s, a function of the early stages of industrialization, the beginnings of massive European immigration, and a more strident abolitionist movement. During the 1830s, 599,125 immigrants came to the United States, more than a fourfold increase from the 1820s. More than one-third of these new arrivals came from Ireland and more than one-quarter of them came from Germany. Most landed and settled in the large seaboard cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, where they were met with strong anti-immigrant sentiment and, with the Irish in particular, anti-Catholic sentiment (especially among Protestant Irish). The panic of 1837 and the ensuing depression, when approximately a quarter of the country's banks closed and businesses suffered, hit urban working classes particularly hard, just at the point when they had to contend with the influx of labor from immigration. Finally, the 1830s witnessed the rise of a new, more strident abolitionist movement that called for an immediate end to slavery and denounced Southern slaveholders in strong terms, thus raising the specter of freed slaves coming north to compete for jobs, and of a loosening of the ties between Southern agriculture and Northern urban industry.

Immigration, depression, and abolitionism proved to be a potent mix that led to a notable increase in public disorder by the mid-1830s. At least 24 major riots erupted throughout the United States in 1834 and at least 24 more in 1835. Race riots and labor riots broke out in relatively small towns in Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, and Pennsylvania, yet the majority

occurred in the big cities—twice in Baltimore, once in New Orleans, five times in New York City, and three times in Philadelphia. In Boston, the most dramatic anti-Catholic upheaval occurred in 1834, when a crowd of thousands burned a convent to the ground. The following year a mob broke up an anti-slavery meeting, and, discovering the famous abolitionist and publisher of the *Liberator* William Lloyd Garrison, dragged him through the streets until he was nearly dead.

In New York City, riots often began in theaters where the audience took a dislike to an English actor, such as happened at the Bowery Theater in 1834, where the crowd went on to sack the house of the well-known abolitionist Lewis Tappan, and over the next few days also damaged an African American church. A similar disturbance at the Astor Opera House in 1849 drew a crowd of some ten thousand, with the result that the police called the state militia, who opened fire, killing eighteen people. One New York newspaper mentioned in 1840 that there had been 19 riots over the previous ten months.

In Philadelphia in 1838, anti-abolitionist mobs set fire to a black orphanage and succeeded in burning to the ground an abolitionists' meeting hall. A race riot between blacks and Irish in 1842, in which Irish rioters attacked and severely beat the city's sheriff among others, precipitated a shift in the focus of violence, away from abolitionists and blacks, toward more recent immigrants. Public order collapsed entirely in the summer of 1844. In what still rank as the most violent attacks upon the American Catholic community, large crowds fought with the state militia as they attempted to burn down Catholic churches or bombard them with cannon fire.

Rioting and violence in rapidly growing cities threatened the political stability of the new nation. In reference to a black man chained to a tree and burned to death by a mob in 1838 in Saint Louis—whose population had increased more than 330 percent between 1830 and 1840, from 4,977 to 16,469 people—a young Abraham Lincoln spoke ominously in one of his earliest speeches of “the increasing disregard for law which pervades the country; the growing disposition to substitute the wild and furious passions, in lieu of the sober judgment of Courts; and the worse than savage mobs, for the executive ministers of justice” (Basler 1953). Similar to Saint Louis, San Francisco experienced explosive growth during the 1840s, and in particular was inundated by tens of thousands of new residents as a result of the 1849 gold rush, creating massive disorder. Haphazard buildings burned down during six large fires between 1849 and 1851, capped

off by a crime epidemic that resulted in the establishment of the 1851 Committee of Vigilance, created under a constitution signed by 777 city residents who effectively seized by coup control of the city and carried out public executions by hanging until they deemed the place cleaned up, and then disbanded. A similar vigilance committee formed five years later.

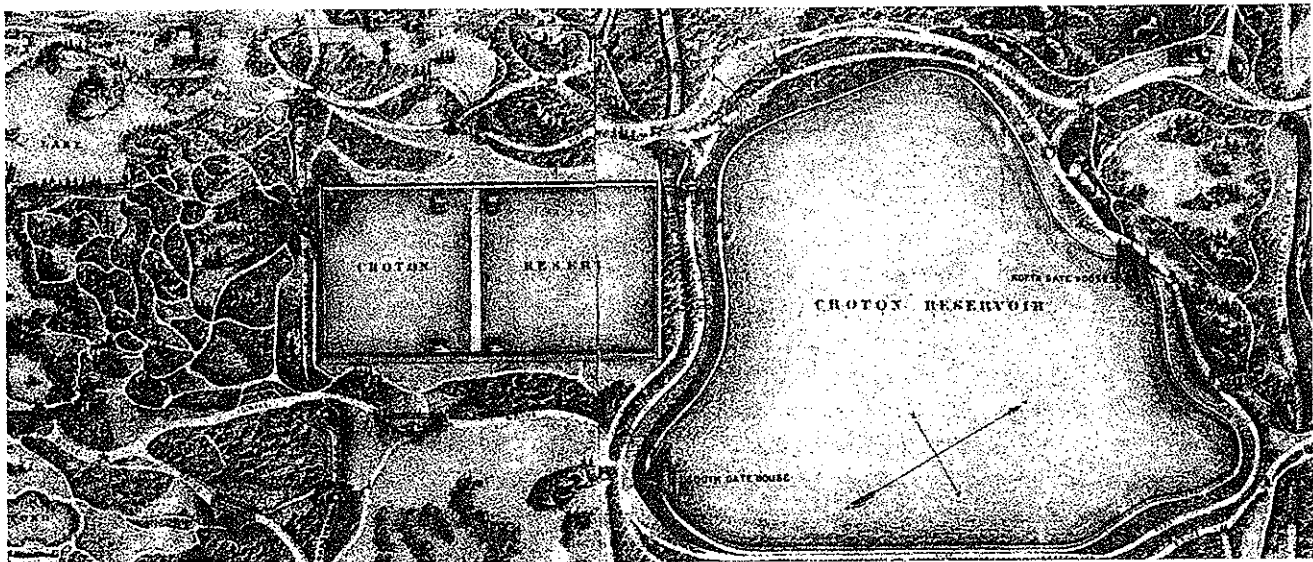
Cities also viewed education as an important means of maintaining a peaceful populace, and thus urban public schools systems began to emerge around the same time as the establishment of municipal police forces. Reflecting the more traditional public orientation of its towns, public schools had long been a mainstay in New England, the earliest and most famous likely being Boston Latin, founded in 1665. Massachusetts was also the first state to make school attendance compulsory, in 1852. Philadelphia's civic leaders have been credited with establishing the first public high school, Philadelphia Central, in 1836, under the auspices of an 1834 state law that required local communities to establish free school systems, and Pennsylvania passed a compulsory school attendance law in 1895. Other cities established free primary schools in the antebellum period, at times notably coincident with rising public disorder. In San Francisco, for instance, the common council established a system of free schools funded in part through property taxes in the same year, 1851, as the establishment of the first Committee of Vigilance.

While the beginnings of modern municipal government are thus evident before the Civil War, the American city was still in its institutional infancy. The early public school systems were often relatively haphazard collections of district schools with little in the way of standard curriculum. The early police forces and volunteer fire companies were often indistinguishable from street gangs, and the street gangs themselves were often adjuncts of warring party factions. Early infrastructural development such as the construction of municipal waterworks—after Philadelphia, public water supplies were established in Columbia, South Carolina (1823), Pittsburgh (1826), Wilmington, Delaware (1827), and Richmond, Virginia (1830)—were often used just as much to consolidate political power through kick-backs to contractors and other forms of corruption as they were used for fire protection and sanitation. Indeed, the most impressive of the public water supply systems built in the antebellum years, New York's Croton Aqueduct system (which began supplying water in 1842), was both an engineering marvel and a lucrative enough source of graft that the city and state government were constantly battling for control over construction.

Demand for increasingly comprehensive infrastructure systems, especially public water, gas street lighting, and street pavements, increased with the pace of urban population growth. The 1840s witnessed the most dramatic growth in urbanization the country had yet seen. The number of places with 2,500 or more people more than doubled, from 131 in 1840 to 237 in 1850, and the percentage of the country's population living in those places increased by 4.6 percent, to 15.4 percent. New York's population grew much faster than other cities, and indeed much of this population growth had spilled over into neighboring Brooklyn, which was first listed as one of the nation's ten largest cities in 1840, with a population of 36,233, and which had a population of 96,838 by 1850. By the 1850s, cities were also gaining populations through annexation. Brooklyn, for instance, annexed the neighboring towns of Williamsburgh and Bushwick in 1855, which caused it to jump from being the seventh largest American city in 1850, to the third largest city in 1860, with a population of 266,661. The city of Philadelphia consolidated with its county in 1854, causing its land size to increase from 2 to 130 square miles and its population to increase from 121,376 in 1850 to 565,529 in 1860. A city-county consolidation that expanded the size of San Francisco in 1856 resulted in the peninsular city vaulting from total obscurity to become the 15th largest city in the country in 1860. St. Louis nearly tripled its land size in the same year, as did Boston, Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, and Pittsburgh during the 1850s and 1860s. As a result of all this expansion, by 1860, nearly

one-fifth of the American population lived in places with populations over 2,500.

The rapid urbanization of the country and the expansion of cities posed a threat to state governments, where rural interests almost always predominated, in part because the "one person, one vote" principal of electoral districting had not yet been established (and wouldn't be for another century) and thus rural counties often had as many representatives in the legislature as did highly populated cities. A telling example of how states curbed the power of their cities comes from New York, where in 1857 the state legislature passed a new charter for the city that shifted much of what had been local patronage resources—including the port, construction of the new city hall, Central Park, and street improvements—to state-appointed, non-elective commissions. In a separate act passed the same year, the legislature also created a metropolitan police force, governed by a state-appointed board, and disbanded the municipal police force that had been controlled by the mayor. In retaliation, New York City's mayor, Fernando Wood, sued the metropolitan police commissioner, Simeon Draper, on the grounds that the commissioner had no right to assume an office that violated the state constitution. The resulting case, *People v. Draper* is significant for embodying in its decision and dissent the conflict over the powers of cities that would come to define later legal opinion. While one dissenting judge argued that the state was an "aggregate" of local governments and thus exercised co-equal powers with them, the court decided that the state



Frederick Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's winning entry in the competition to design Central Park in New York, about 1858. (Archive Photos/Getty Images)

had the authority to establish a metropolitan police commission, and that such a commission did not threaten the existence of any local government even as it altered its powers.

Fernando Wood is perhaps the best known of New York City's antebellum mayors, primarily for three things. First, he spearheaded the creation of Central Park, which some contemporaries referred to as his "one creditable act." Second, he resisted the metropolitan police by re-establishing the municipal police as a personal force within the mayor's office, with the result that, for much of 1857 New York City had two separate police forces, who fought a famous battle outside City Hall. Finally, Wood is also well known for his proclamation to the city council in January 1861 that New York join South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas in seceding from the Union, so as to continue its lucrative trade with the southern states.

Wood's comments regarding secession certainly had some popular support, indicated not only by violence against abolitionists, but also in the strong support for the Democratic Party, which was true of most other Northern cities. Indeed, the Free-Soil party found the vast majority of its electoral support in the rural areas of the Northeastern and Midwestern states, as did the Republican Party. Certainly the devastating draft riots in New York City were additional evidence that Fernando Wood's sentiments had some popular support. While government spending precipitated an economic boom early in the war, by 1863 inflation was rapidly eroding working class incomes, just at the time the national government also authorized a lottery for mandatory service in the Union Army. When the draftees reported for service in mid-July of 1863, the city's monolithically Democratic working class marched to the marshal's office and burned it down. The insurrection spread, and thousands of rioters, mostly Irish, beat and murdered police, any African Americans that could be found, and trashed the homes of wealthy Republicans, among other structures. The riot lasted four days, resulting in at least 119 dead, thousands more injured, and millions of dollars in damage to property and city infrastructure.

Reaction to the 1863 conscription act in American cities varied and New York City is somewhat unique. Second only to New York were the draft riots in Detroit, which was by 1860 the 19th largest city in the country with a population that had more than doubled over the previous decade, from 21,019 in 1850 to 45,619 in 1860, and which probably contained more than 50,000 people by 1863. The Detroit riot lasted one

day, resulted in two deaths, and at least 30 destroyed properties. The Boston draft riot began with a crowd of women attacking two marshals. Learning from New York's earlier draft riot, Boston's police were more prepared, and the riot was more successfully repressed, lasting for only one day. There was no riot in Philadelphia, in part because of an effective police response that limited the impact of any small skirmishes resulting from the draft law, but also because Philadelphia was more supportive of the Republican cause; the city had, after all, hosted the first Republican national convention, in 1856.

Cities continued to expand dramatically during the Civil War. Even the largest Southern cities showed no signs of slowing. Baltimore's population increased by approximately one quarter from 1860 to 1870, as did the populations of smaller Southern cities, such as Charleston and Savannah. And while New Orleans increased in population at the slowest rate of the nation's ten largest cities, its growth was comparable to New York City's. The really dramatic growth was in the West. Saint Louis nearly doubled in population while the number of people residing in both Chicago and San Francisco increased by more than 160 percent.

It was the period immediately after the Civil War that saw the firm legal foundations laid for state control over cities in what came to be known as "Dillon's rule." As a member of the Iowa Supreme Court, Judge John F. Dillon, in deciding a case regarding the City of Clinton's challenge to a state law that granted the Missouri River Railroad the right to seize city streets without compensation, stated in 1868 his famous opinion that municipal corporations had no rights independent of state law, and thus no property rights. Four years later (by which time he had become a federal circuit court judge) Dillon's *Treatise on the Law of Municipal Corporations* appeared, and remains today probably the most important treatment of the legal status of American cities.

At the same time as Dillon was clarifying the legal powerlessness of cities, city government was actually reaching a new level of functional maturity. First, it was during the decades after the Civil War that cities began to adopt on a large scale the technological systems of service delivery that still define them today. By 1907, of the 158 American cities with populations over 30,000, 74 percent had municipal water supply systems. The average year that those cities either built or otherwise acquired their water systems is 1871. A few cities, such as Brooklyn and Jersey City, had enough foresight to build combined water and sewerage systems. For most cities, the demand for better sewerage

came after the introduction of a waterworks and the resultant increase in wastewater overwhelmed cesspools and privy vaults. In New York City, for instance, the city council authorized the financing and construction of a comprehensive sewerage system in 1865, twenty three years after completion of its waterworks. It was after the Civil War as well that cities began to experiment with new types of street pavement, including asphalt and creosote-soaked woodblock.

The new capital projects were financed largely through municipal debt, which grew tremendously after the Civil War, especially in smaller cities. Municipal bond issues hit a new high in the late 1860s and early 1870s, followed by large scale defaults as a result of the financial panic of 1873 and the resultant depression. While there had been only three municipal bond defaults in the United States up to 1854, there was at least one default a year every year after that, save for 1867 and 1869.

Along with the technical maturity of cities came the functional maturity of city government. Mayors gained increasing powers of veto and appointment. Other administrative officers, notably comptrollers and city solicitors, also became more important offices, less likely to be staffed by party loyalists than by trained professionals. Yet at the same time as the administrative offices of city government were gaining new responsibilities and becoming more professional, so were the political parties. It was the period after the Civil War that saw the emergence of genuine political machines.

Much as the industrial machinery that obliterated craft production was a dehumanizing force, so did the mass-based political "machine" dehumanize the more elite-driven politics of earlier decades (at least to the elites). And both industry and the political machine were helped significantly by the onset of mass immigration from Europe. The 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s saw a relatively steady stream of immigrants, between 2.3 and 2.8 million per decade. The new arrivals still came mostly from Germany, Ireland, and England, though there were increasing numbers from Eastern Europe, Austria-Hungary, Norway, Sweden, and China. After the 1870s there was a veritable explosion in the number of new arrivals: 5,246,613 during the 1880s, 3,687,564 during the 1890s, 8,795,386 during the 1900s, 5,735,811 during the 1910s, and 4,107,209 during the 1920s. The most dramatic increases in terms of places of origin were Eastern Europeans and especially Italians, whose numbers increased from 651,893 in the 1890s to 2,045,877 during the 1900s.

The new arrivals settled overwhelmingly in cities and thus contributed mightily to the urbanization of

the nation. The 1880 Census was the first to provide a specific definition of urban areas, namely any incorporated area with a population of 8,000 or more. By this definition, a bit less than one-quarter of the population qualified as urban. By 1910, reflecting the broadening footprint of these urban areas, the Census invented "metropolitan districts," defined as central cities with populations over 200,000 and all "minor civil divisions" with population densities greater than 150 people per square mile, lying within a 10 mile radius of the central city. Increasingly broader definitions of "metropolitan" increased the number of these areas from 29 in 1920 to 96 in 1930 and 140 in 1940. Going by the traditional measure of "urban" being people living in communities of 2,500 or more, the United States became a majority urban nation in 1920.

Immigrants fed the increasing need for a low-wage industrial workforce whose increasingly wretched living conditions were documented by the likes of Upton Sinclair, Jacob Riis, and Jane Addams. They also fed the new political machines, which had them rapidly naturalized so they could vote, and which bought their votes with free turkeys at Christmas, free drinks on election days, and financial support for funerals. Reform-minded writers as diverse as Jane Addams and the British scholar and statesman James Bryce agreed that the political machines preyed upon the new immigrants, who had come predominantly from the European countryside and whose poverty and ignorance meant that they could be placated with small favors.

Though he didn't coin the terms, Bryce provided the definitive definitions of "machine," "ring" and "boss" in his classic 1888 treatise *American Commonwealth*. The "machine" referred to the web of interlocking managing and nominating committees that defined the national party structure, and which were immensely democratic in nature since they provided, in form at least, all rank-and-file members of the parties a say in the nomination of candidates. Yet the large number of candidates to be nominated, the frequency of elections, and the general absence of interesting issues deterred most people from participating, and the nominating process was thus left in most instances to regular party workers. In small towns, these party workers were kept honest by the fact that everyone knew who they were and would notice if particularly odious people were nominated for office. In large cities, where people didn't know one another, there were less informal social controls, especially because the "leading men" were all preoccupied with business and paid little attention to government, and thus the party workers could form an invidious "ring," led by a "boss" and rely on

their manipulation of the "vast population of ignorant immigrants" to maintain electoral control.

Later authors questioned Bryce's contention that the failure of city government lay in the preoccupation of "leading men" with business. Indeed, Lincoln Steffens's popular *Shame of the Cities* (1904) argued that it was precisely business interests, rather than immigrants, that corrupted cities. Yet the political machines have always been associated with ethnic groups, most notably the Irish, and for some good reason. By the 1890s Irish politicians dominated political systems in San Francisco, Buffalo, New York, Brooklyn, Albany, and Jersey City. Irish bosses formed alliances with business interests, but they still presented the notably ethnic face of urban politics by the turn of the twentieth century.

Ethnic political machines only further differentiated cities from the countryside and provided state legislatures more excuses to infringe on municipal powers. Utility companies, railroads, and real estate investors, lobbied legislators in the hopes of gaining special advantages in the city. Legislatures then established such boondoggles as "improvement commissions" that had the authority to issue bonds for the purposes of grading, paving, and laying pipes in the streets of a certain section of a city. Legislators would get to appoint the commissioners while the municipality was made to secure the bonds—a practice that proved disastrous for many cities during the economic downturn of the 1870s.

Cities retaliated against state interference with home rule charters. While first adopted as state laws in Iowa in 1858, the first state to establish municipal home rule as a constitutional principle was Missouri, in 1875, authorizing cities with populations greater than 100,000 (making only Saint Louis eligible at the time) the right to draft a city charter which, once approved by the voters in a referendum, could only be altered by approval of a three-fifths majority vote in subsequent elections. California adopted a similar constitutional provision for its cities in 1879, mostly at the behest of representatives from San Francisco. Similar home rule charters were passed during the nineteenth century in Washington State, at the behest of Seattle, and in Minnesota, at the behest of Minneapolis. These early home rule charters effectively protected cities from state interference, but they also locked the cities themselves into legal structures that restricted their ability to respond to increasing growth. The next wave of home rule provisions to state constitutions, starting around 1900, made it easier for cities to amend their charters.

Home rule was part of the progressive reform movement's commitment to preventing corruption by changing the institutional structure of local government, which included as well promotion of the commission system (first adopted in Galveston in 1901, it created a government of commissioners each elected at-large, with no city council), civil service laws, primary elections, voter registration, and city planning. Good government groups proliferated in cities across the country during the early 1890s, with two hundred of them linking together nationally through the National Municipal League, founded in 1894, which survives today as the National Civic League.

There was clearly something of the remnants of the nativist movement in the reform politicians who campaigned against the ethnic machines—politicians such as Seth Low in New York, Hazen Pingree in Detroit, William Thompson in Cleveland, and James Phelan in San Francisco. The nativist sympathies simmering in the early reform period began to find expression in a series of laws in the first decades of the twentieth century that severely restricted immigration. By 1910, nearly 15 percent of the country's population was foreign born, a fact alarming enough to the United States Senate that they established a study commission in 1907, and a decade later passed the Immigration Act, establishing a literacy test for immigrants, and later the National Quota Law (1921), limiting the number of immigrants from any country to 3 percent of their total population already in the United States; and then the National Origins Act (1924), lowering the number of allowable immigrants from any country to 2 percent of the population already in the country at the time of the 1890 Census.

Even before the 1917 Immigration Act, the flow of newcomers from abroad had been abruptly curtailed by the blockade of Europe during World War I. Thus, while more than 1 million newcomers landed on American shores in 1914, less than 400,000 came in 1915. The decrease in the labor supply provided a new opportunity for African Americans in southern states where the agricultural economy had been hit hard by the boll weevil and then by devastating floods in 1916. Between 1900 and 1910, every major northern city experienced significant growth in their black populations, from a 17 percent increase in Boston to more than a 50 percent increase in New York City. Still, by 1910 African Americans made up only small fractions of the populations of Northern cities—a bit more than 5 percent in Philadelphia, and 2 percent in both Chicago and New York.

During the 1910s, however, the "great migration" of Southern blacks to northern cities began in earnest.

Between 1916 and 1920 an estimated half million African American southerners moved to northern and western cities. They were met in many instances with violence. Between 1917 and 1921 there were major race riots in at least fourteen cities. The best evidence suggests that those cities that had experienced the most recent population growth (whether of whites or blacks), which had attracted the most skilled black workers, and which had the highest homeowner rates, were most likely to have a riot.

Prospects for blacks in both northern and southern cities were actually more influenced by peaceful forms of racism such as racial covenants in deeds prohibiting the sale of a house to a non-Caucasian. Racial covenants built upon the foundations of urban residential racial policy established by segregationist zoning, which had been adopted in several southern cities during the 1910s (Baltimore, Richmond, Winston-Salem, Atlanta, Louisville, Saint Louis, and Dallas) but which had been declared an unconstitutional infringement on property rights in the 1917 Supreme Court case *Buchanan v. Warley*. Racial covenants were especially predominant in white neighborhoods nearest to black neighborhoods, and in newer suburbs. Thus the increasing number of black newcomers to northern and western cities—estimates are that close to 1 million emigrated from the south during the 1920s and some 1.6 million moved from the south during World War II alone—were funneled into only a few neighborhoods that were thus increasingly defined by race. In New York, by 1930 more than 60 percent of all black residents lived in Harlem.

One result of residential segregation was the changing nature of race riots, from white violence against blacks to black violence against signs of white domination in black neighborhoods. And increasingly the official response to such riots was not so much to quell the rioters as to contain the riot to the black neighborhood. Thus in Harlem major riots broke out in 1935 and 1943, in both cases sparked by rumors of police abuse, and in both cases the response of the police was to keep the riot in Harlem.

The irony that confronted the massive migration of African Americans from the South was that they moved to the big cities at precisely the time that other people were leaving. This was in part no coincidence. As the African American population of cities swelled in the 1950s—Washington DC's population went from 35 to 54 percent black; Chicago's from 13.6 to 23 percent, and Detroit's from 16.2 to 28.9 percent—and as the Supreme Court began to chip away at institutionalized racism—banning enforcement of racial covenants in

Shelley v. Kraemer (1948) and most importantly declaring school segregation unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)—white residents responded by moving out to racially homogeneous suburbs in increasing numbers.

Yet despite the fact that it came to be known as "white flight" race was only one of a constellation of factors that came together to create the exodus from cities to suburbs that marks American urbanization after World War II. Suburbs in the United States have been around as long as their neighboring cities and they have been promoted at least since the late nineteenth century as pastoral enclaves offering proximity to urban life without suffering its noise, industry, crime, or racial and ethnic diversity. Yet it was only after World War II that suburbs began to grow at the expense of cities. The populations of most major cities either stagnated or declined slightly during 1930s, yet they all made up for it in the 1940s, with the result that the 1950 Census recorded their largest populations ever—7,891,957 people in New York, 3,620,962 in Chicago, 2,071,065 in Philadelphia, 1,970,358 in Los Angeles, 1,849,568 in Detroit, and 949,708 in Baltimore. It turned out, however, that 1950 marked the high point of population for most cities. Except for New York which had a brief gain in population during the 1960s, and Los Angeles which has gained in population every decade of the twentieth century—a harbinger of the growing Sunbelt—every major American city continued to lose population into the 1980s.

While cities were declining in population, the metropolitan regions of which they were a part were actually still growing. In 1940, nine of the ten largest American cities contained the majority of the populations within the larger metropolitan districts. The one exception was Boston, a uniquely small city in terms of land size which was surrounded with far denser outlying communities, such as Cambridge and Somerville. Despite Boston, of the 140 metropolitan districts in 1940, the Census counted 42,796,170 people living in central cities and 20,169,603 people living in what might reasonably be considered the suburbs. In 1950, under new measurement guidelines established by the Census Bureau and other federal agencies, within the nation's 168 "standard metropolitan areas," 49,412,792 people lived in central cities and 35,087,888 people lived in the suburbs. By the time the 1970 Census recorded that the majority of the nation's metropolitan dwellers lived in the suburbs, central cities had descended into a crisis of increasing poverty and crime, decreasing employment and retail sales, and devastating riots—a set of pathologies known collectively as the "urban crisis."

The urban crisis had deep roots that only began to become visible during the Depression and World War II. First, in order for city residents to abandon their cities, more residential suburbs had to be built that could remain viably independent of central cities that would otherwise annex them. Technological developments in service delivery infrastructure during the latter half of the nineteenth century in sewerage, street pavement, and waterworks provided increasingly smaller communities the means to become independent municipal service providers, and thus reduced their need to join with the city to receive services. By the 1890s, suburban developments came with comprehensive, modern water and sewerage systems pre-installed.

Second, the Depression brought about changes in home financing that made it relatively easier for people to buy homes in the suburbs rather than in cities. In response to massive defaults on home loans, the federal government established the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) in 1933. In the process of refinancing more than 1 million at-risk mortgages, the HOLC also established new lending standards by increasing the typical repayment period to twenty years and instituting standardized appraisal criteria that consistently downgraded notably non-Caucasian central city neighborhoods while favorably evaluating the newer outlying, and more uniformly white, suburbs. The HOLC was disbanded in 1936, and in its place the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) became the federal government's premier agency for homeowners though its massive mortgage guarantee program. The standard 30-year mortgage was established under the FHA, as was a rating system that made mortgages relatively cheaper for newly constructed homes, most notably in the newer suburbs.

Third, the dispersion of the city's population into outlying suburbs required increased means of transportation. As early as the 1950s some companies were beginning to relocate in the suburbs, starting possibly with the General Foods Corporation, which moved its central headquarters from Manhattan to White Plains in 1954. Yet downtown was still the commercial hub of the metropolitan region and new suburban residents needed to get to work everyday, not to mention go shopping at the department stores and go out to the theater at night. Since at least the end of the Civil War elite suburban residents could travel into the city on railroads that traveled along the tracks that extended out from every major city. By the end of the nineteenth century the electric trolley provided a more affordable means of transit to and from work and thus hastened outlying housing development and

population dispersion. Yet the real revolution lay with the automobile, and especially the introduction of mass produced affordable cars such as the Model T, of which more than 15 million were produced from 1908 to 1927.

Like horses, cars freed their owners from dependence on the fares and schedules of train and trolley operators. Yet the car was better than the horse since it didn't succumb to fatigue, it cost less to fuel, and it didn't pollute the city with manure and the flies that followed. The popularity of the automobile is evident in its rapid diffusion: In 1905 there were 8,000 cars and trucks registered in the United States, in 1935 there were 22,567,827 registered, and in 1955, 52,135,583. Along with the rise of the automobile came the rise of Detroit, the center of automobile production. The city ranked as the ninth largest in the country 1910 and the fourth largest in 1930.

With increasing automobility came an increasing demand for more and smoother roads that connected more places. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, cities and states built increasing numbers of limited access "parkways" restricted to cars. At the federal level, the Highway Act of 1916 provided funds for road building but prohibited the use of those funds for road construction in cities with more than 2,500 people. Congress lifted the population limit during the Depression for the sake of providing money to urban areas. The Highway Act of 1944 provided that urban areas be granted 25 percent of all highway appropriations, and authorization of the interstate system in 1956 really brought the highway to the city, in large part because heavily traveled urban roads provided the gas tax revenues necessary to finance rural parts of the system.

Finally, the traditional industrial American cities were also losing ground due to national shifts in population growth and industrial development away from the Mid-Atlantic and toward the Southwest, resulting in the rise of the Sunbelt cities—most notably Los Angeles, San Diego, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, and Phoenix, all of which were among the ten largest cities in the United States by 1990. Part of the increasing popularity of these emergent big cities lay in lower tax rates, non-unionized workers, and less visibly corrupt government. Indeed, while reformers were always battling entrenched machines in the Rustbelt cities, it was reform government that became entrenched in the Sunbelt, where progressive staples such as commission governments and city managers flourished.

The post-World War II institutional transformation of metropolitan regions wrought by automobility and

the suburban housing boom in the context of suburban municipal autonomy was captured by the economist Charles Tiebout's suggestion in the 1950s that local government provision of public services could overcome what other economists had claimed was a "dilemma" in government-supplied goods and services. Governments typically provide services, such as national defense, that are "public" in the sense that no one can be excluded from their benefits once they have been supplied. Because everyone will realize their benefits regardless of whether or not they paid for them, everyone has an incentive to avoid paying, and thus government services are undersupplied or governments run budget deficits trying to meet demand. Tiebout suggested that this dilemma could be resolved by local governments. The residents of institutionally fragmented metropolitan areas have a range of choices of municipalities where they could conceivably live, and each municipality provides a somewhat different mix of public services, such as more police or better schools. When residents choose to live in a specific municipality they are signaling their "true" preferences

for public services and they can thus be taxed accordingly.

Ironically, Tiebout conceived of the proliferation of municipalities in metropolitan areas as a way of privatizing otherwise public services during an era of unprecedented federal support for cities. It was the period after the Depression that city officials began organizing nationally for the purpose of lobbying the federal government for support, starting with the organization of the United States Conference of Mayors (USCM) in 1933, which lobbied Congress and the Hoover Administration to approve a relief package for cities, resulting in \$1.5 billion worth of federal loans for that purpose. It was also with the help of the USCM that cities got a generous portion of the funds administered by such New Deal agencies as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Civil Works Administration, and the Public Works Administration. The success of the USCM inspired other urban associations, most notably the National League of Cities and the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, to also become active lobby groups at the national level.



Civil Works Administration (CWA) workmen cleaning and painting the gold dome of the Denver Capitol, 1934. (National Archives and Records Administration)

Reflecting the partisan composition of its membership, the "urban lobby," as it came to be known, tended to do better during the administrations of Democratic presidents. During the Truman Administration their major achievement was the 1949 Housing Act, the chief provisions of which were for "slum clearance"—providing cities the authority to clear land and sell it to developers, with the federal government making up the difference between the cost of clearing land and the sale price to developers—and for public housing construction. Indeed, it was the 1949 Housing Act that provided the initial money for many of the high-rise public housing projects that later appeared to exacerbate the problems of geographically concentrated poverty and which were later razed, starting with the demolition of Saint Louis's Pruitt-Igoe homes in 1972.

After the interregnum of the Eisenhower Administration, the urban lobby gained unprecedented access and attention during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, culminating in the 1966 Model Cities program, part of Johnson's larger War on Poverty initiative. Based in part on dissatisfaction with earlier redevelopment programs that involved little community participation while displacing entire neighborhoods of poor city residents, Model Cities incorporated the principle of "maximum feasible participation," meaning that money spent on urban development and social services programs were required to involve community input in the planning process. The unfortunate coincidence of the implementation of Model Cities with the riots that hit most cities during the "long hot summers" of the late 1960s and early 1970s, combined with dissatisfaction on the part of city officials who had lost some of their control to citizen participation, resulted in the program being widely perceived as a failure, and conceivably played some role in legitimizing the emergent ideological position of the Republican party that government intervention in social problems often creates more problems than it solves.

By the 1970s, at just the moment the federal government was beginning to roll back its involvement in urban issues, a critique of Tiebout's model of local service provision emerged in the form of the "social stratification-government inequality" thesis, which made the point that metropolitan residents didn't just choose to live in municipalities based on public services; they also chose to live in communities composed nearly exclusively of people from their own economic class and racial groups. Metropolitan fragmentation turned not only public services, but also race and class, into commodities. As a result, government fragmentation led to greater social stratification, where some

cities, often outlying suburban municipalities, became middle- and upper-class enclaves, while other cities, often the older ones that form the central core of a metropolitan region, became repositories of the lower-class.

By the 1990s the negative effects of metropolitan fragmentation found a new voice in a wide-ranging "new regionalist" literature by authors such as former Albuquerque mayor David Rusk and former Minnesota state legislator Myron Orfield. Unlike the previous literature that focused more exclusively on the notion that metropolitan fragmentation exacerbated socioeconomic inequalities, the regionalist literature since the 1990s has focused more on local interdependencies within metropolitan regions, the metropolitan-wide effects of geographically concentrated poverty, and the possibilities for interlocal metropolitan cooperation.

As much as the discussion of the American city's proper role and functions has evolved over the past few centuries, the views of Tiebout and the new regionalists still reflect the conflict inherent in the coming together of the New England town and the commercial association. Embedded in the new regionalist view of metropolitan fragmentation as the institutional and spatial expression of larger socioeconomic inequalities is a sense of civic responsibility that harkens back to the New England town—when, for instance, towns were responsible for the care of their poorer residents, even when those residents had moved to other towns. Yet the Tiebout model also has a Puritan hue, even as it casts local governments as vehicles of privatization and thus harkens back to their role as commercial associations. Tiebout shared with Tocqueville the belief that local government—and in particular the New England town—was an important building block for a free nation. For Tocqueville, local government was important because it taught the practices and principles of democratic participation and self-governance. For Tiebout local government was important because it provided consumer choice and thus economic freedom. Residents don't express their preferences through public participation; they participate in the public sphere by making private consumer choices.

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