# THE NEW URBAN SOCIOLOGY

We live in an urbanizing world. Today, an estimated 54.5% of the world's population—3.9 billion persons—lives in an urban area. By 2030, two-thirds of the global population will reside in this type of settlement space. Most of this increase will occur in the developing world, in mega cities in Africa and Asia, where many, if not most, people will live in shantytowns and with incomes below the poverty level (United Nations, 2016). This will be the first urban century in human history. The well-being of our families and households and human society more generally will depend on our ability to create a safe and just urban environment—something that human populations have not been particularly adept at doing. A beginning point in this very significant challenge is the study of urban sociology. Urban sociology gives us the tools for understanding how urban regions grow and develop according to the law of uneven development. This book will help us understand the impact of urban life on persons living in cities, suburbs, and metropolitan regions, the greater impact of world urbanization on human societies and the natural environment, and the possibilities for change in our urban society.

## URBAN REGIONS

People often speak about the city or the suburban town they live in but rarely about the region. Yet the best way to understand urban growth is to appreciate that it is regional in scale. We might say that we are from a place called "Arlington Heights," but we work, shop, attend schools, go to churches, synagogues, or mosques, and pursue recreation in an increasing variety of locations, all within an expanding metropolitan area. Urban texts in the past have addressed this issue, but they do not take it to heart as the central organizing principle of the discussion as this text does. In Eric Bogosian's brilliant film *Suburbia*, actress Parker Posey portrays an LA record promoter on tour who grew up in the affluent southern California suburbs. When asked by a group of small-town teenagers where she

is from, she replies, "I come from an area." Just as she does, we need to understand that the words *city* and *suburb* fail to connect with the more contemporary reality of daily life.

The metropolitan regions of the United States contain an incredible array of people. Our life opportunities vary according to social class, race, gender, ethnicity, age, and family status, among other factors. These important social variables, which are often treated as the traditional subject matter of sociology, in reality, interact with locational, or spatial, factors such as the clustering of homes according to family income, the journey to work or school, the diverse ways people pursue a specific lifestyle, the particular patterning of our social networks, and the regional search for cultural experiences. In this text we will capture the reality of contemporary urbanism by studying the patterns of everyday life embedded within urbanized settlement spaces; what we call the *multicentered metropolitan region*, or MCMR. These settlement spaces are given special cultural meanings and value by the people living in them. Discovering the formation of these regions, specifically the role that economic, political, and social institutions play in creating and changing them, and the processes by which these areas are given meaning by local inhabitants are all part of the *sociospatial perspective* of the new urban sociology. This perspective is necessary if we are to understand and explain our urban society as a "total social phenomenon," as well as to think about possibilities for change in the immediate future.

If we flew over our metropolitan regions, we would be struck by the immensity of scale. Urbanized development characteristically extends for one hundred miles or more around our largest cities. The built-up region contains a mix of cities, suburbs, vacant space, industrial parks, intensely farmed agricultural land, shopping malls, and recreational areas—all of which are interconnected and bridged by communication and commuter networks including highways, rail, telecommunications, and satellite or cellular-based links. The satellite image of the United States at night (Figure 1.1) shows the extensive regional development of urban areas across the country. Along the eastern seacoast, the Boston–New York–Washington megalopolis described by Jean Gottman is clearly visible. Similar urban agglomerations can be seen at the southern end of Lake Michigan (the Milwaukee–Chicago–Gary region), and the coastal urban developments in Florida (Miami to Jacksonville along the east coast, Naples to Tampa on the west coast). The population of these urbanized areas numbers in the tens of millions. Interestingly, most of the people residing in MCMRs live in suburban communities outside the large central cities. The dominant position of the suburbs relative to the central cities has been in existence since at least the 1970s when census figures brought this change to our attention. At present, some 90% of all Americans live in metropolitan regions. But this pattern of urban growth, and the dominance of the suburban region, was not characteristic of cities in the past.

FIGURE 1.1 Satellite image of the United States at night showing metropolitan areas. SOURCE: Photo courtesy of NASA.

At one time, cities were compact spatial forms with a distinct center (the central business district) that dominated, in both an emotional and economic sense, the urbanized area surrounding them. Once the inhabitants went outside the city, they would be traveling in the countryside. As the famous urban historian Lewis Mumford observed in *The City in History*, cities served as both huge magnets and containers that concentrated people and economic activities or wealth within well-defined, bounded spaces. These boundaries were constructed by political fiat; they are not natural lines of transition. Table 1.1 lists the fifteen most populated cities in the United States. Many of the figures are impressive, such as more than 8.5 million persons for New York City and 3.9 million for the city of Los Angeles.

The numbers demonstrate the great variability and uneven nature of urban growth. From 2000 to 2010, Houston's population grew by about 145,000 persons, while the population of Phoenix increased by about 120,000 persons. Not listed in Table 1.1 is how the population of New Orleans decreased by 140,000, and Detroit lost more than 237,000 persons. But these numbers alone do not

**TABLE 1.1** Most Populated Cities in the United States, 1980–2016

| | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 | 2016 | 1990–2000 | % change | 2000–2010 | % change | 2010–2016 | % change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| New York City | 7,077,000 | 7,323,000 | 8,008,000 | 8,175,133 | 8,537,673 | 686,000 | 9.4 | 167,123 | 2.1 | 362,550 | 4.4 |
| Los Angeles | 2,967,000 | 3,485,000 | 3,695,000 | 3,792,621 | 3,976,324 | 209,000 | 6 | 97,801 | 2.6 | 183,703 | 4.8 |
| Chicago | 3,005,000 | 2,784,000 | 2,896,000 | 2,695,598 | 2,704,965 | 112,000 | 4 | −200,418 | −6.9 | 9,367 | 0.3 |
| Houston | 1,595,000 | 1,631,000 | 1,954,000 | 2,099,451 | 2,304,388 | 323,000 | 15.1 | 145,820 | 7.5 | 204,937 | 9.8 |
| Philadelphia | 1,688,000 | 1,586,000 | 1,518,000 | 1,526,006 | 1,567,872 | −68,000 | −4.3 | 8,456 | 0.6 | 41,866 | 2.7 |
| Phoenix | 790,000 | 989,000 | 1,321,000 | 1,445,632 | 1,615,041 | 332,000 | 33.6 | 124,587 | 9.4 | 169,409 | 11.7 |
| San Antonio | 876,000 | 997,000 | 1,145,000 | 1,327,407 | 1,492,494 | 147,000 | 14.8 | 182,761 | 5.7 | 165,087 | 12.4 |
| San Diego | 876,000 | 1,111,000 | 1,223,000 | 1,307,402 | 1,406,622 | 112,000 | 10.1 | 84,002 | 6.9 | 99,220 | 7.6 |
| Dallas | 904,000 | 1,007,000 | 1,189,000 | 1,197,816 | 1,317,942 | 182,000 | 18.1 | 9,236 | 0.8 | 120,126 | 10.0 |
| San Jose | 629,000 | 783,000 | 895,000 | 945,942 | 1,025,373 | 112,000 | 14.2 | 50,999 | 5.7 | 79,431 | 8.4 |

fully illustrate the variability and massive growth of metropolitan areas and multi-centered urban regions in the United States. Compare Table 1.1 with Table 1.2, which shows the metropolitan regions associated with these large cities. The New York metro region, for example, contains more than 20 million people, while the area around the city of Los Angeles is home to 13.3 million residents. Even cities that have lost population, such as Detroit, whose metropolitan population (4.2 million in 2010) was the thirteenth largest in the US despite no longer being one of the top twenty largest American cities, are part of expanding metropolitan regions, which allow these areas to continue to rank among the top population centers in the country.

Today the city has exploded. No longer is there any one focus or "downtown," as there was in the past. People live and work in widely separated realms. Most of the US population is urban, so most people live in or near some city. But fewer people each year live within the large central cities that were the population foci of the past. Instead, what we now call home is the expanding regions of urbanization associated with an ever-changing array of cities, towns, suburbs, and exurban areas. This new form of settlement space is called the *multicentered metropolitan region* (MCMR), and it is the first really new way people have organized their living and working arrangements since the beginning of the industrial age. In contrast to the characteristics of the bounded city, this new form of urban space can be typified by two features: it extends over a large region, spilling out across political, municipal boundaries; and it contains many separate manufacturing areas, retail centers, and residential areas, each with its own ability to draw workers, shoppers, and residents. The urban region can best be understood as composed of different *realms*. Realms are differentiated according to four factors: 1) physical terrain, 2) physical size, 3) the level and kinds of economic and social activities within the realm (most particularly the kinds of minicenters), and 4) the character of the regional transportation network. Commuting flows are particularly critical for the creation of metropolitan regions with many different centers and for the connection and interaction of people within the regions (Muller, 1981). In addition to the physical features of this new form of urban space, it is important that people living within each realm have a shared sense that they occupy an urban area that is different from other areas within the metropolitan region. And, for each region, there is a similar focus on relative uniqueness for it as compared to other MCMRs across the country. Perhaps this is best illustrated by rivalries among professional sports teams. If you live in the northeast, are you a Yankee, Red Sox, or Mets fan?

For example, according to Reynar Banham's (1971) classic study of Los Angeles, the region contains six distinct realms within an area of approximately fifty square miles and a metropolitan population in 2016 of more than 13 million persons. The six urban realms that comprise the Los Angeles region, shown in

TABLE 1.2  Most Populated Metropolitan Regions in the United States, 1990–2016

| | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 | 2016 | 2000–2010 % change | 2010–2016 % change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metro Area | 16,846,000 | 18,323,000 | 19,567,410 | 20,153,634 | 3.1% | 3% |
| LA-Longbeach-Anaheim | 11,274,000 | 12,366,000 | 12,829,000 | 13,310,447 | 3.7% | 3.8% |
| Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI Metro Area | 8,182,000 | 9,098,000 | 9,461,000 | 9,512,999 | 4% | 0.5% |
| Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington | 3,989,000 | 5,162,000 | 6,372,000 | 7,232,599 | 23.4% | 13.5% |
| Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD Metro Area | 5,436,000 | 5,687,000 | 6,372,000 | 6,070,500 | 4.9% | 1.8% |
| Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land | 3,767,000 | 4,715,000 | 5,947,000 | 6,772,470 | 26.1% | 13.9% |
| Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metro Area | 4,122,000 | 4,796,000 | 5,582,000 | 6,131,977 | 16.4% | 9.9% |
| Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL Metro Area | 4,056,000 | 5,008,000 | 5,565,000 | 6,133,552 | 11.1% | 10.2% |
| Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell | 3,069,000 | 4,248,000 | 5,269,000 | 5,790,210 | 24% | 9.9% |
| Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH Metro Area | 4,134,000 | 4,391,000 | 4,552,000 | 4,794,447 | 3.7% | 5.3% |

NOTES: MSAs are metropolitan statistical areas; CMSAs are consolidated metropolitan statistical areas; NEC 2010 MAs are New England county metropolitan areas, which are based on townships and require a separate way of aggregating areas in the metropolitan region.

SOURCE: Adapted from US Bureau of the Census.

TABLE 1.3  Population of the World's Largest Urban Areas

| Rank by population (2010) | Rank by population (2000) | Urban area | Population (in millions) 2000 | 2010 | Rate of change 2000–2010 | 2000–2025 | Population of urban areas as % of total population 2010 | 2011 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | Tokyo, Japan | 34.4 | 36.933 | 7.4% | 4% | 90.5% | 91.2% |
| 2 | 6 | Delhi, India | 15.7 | 21.935 | 39.7% | 45% | 30.9% | 31.3% |
| 3 | 2 | Mexico City, Mexico | 18 | 20.142 | 11.9% | 20% | 77.8% | 79.1% |
| 4 | 3 | New York, United States | 17.8 | 20.104 | 12.9% | 16% | 80.8% | 80.9% |
| 5 | 4 | Sao Paulo, Brazil | 17 | 19.649 | 15.6% | 16% | 84.3% | 84.6% |
| 6 | 7 | Shanghai, China | 13.9 | 19.554 | 40.7% | 41% | 49.2% | 50.6% |
| 7 | 5 | Mumbai (Bombay), India | 16.3 | 19.422 | 19.2% | 35% | 30.9% | 31.3% |
| 8 | 15 | Beijing, China | 10.1 | 15 | 48.5% | 45% | 49.2% | 50.6% |
| 9 | 13 | Dhaka, Bangladesh | 10.2 | 14.93 | 46.4% | 49% | 30.5% | 31.2% |
| 10 | 8 | Kolkata (Calcutta), India | 13 | 14.28 | 9.8% | 30% | 30.9% | 31.3% |
| 11 | 9 | Buenos Aires, Argentina | 11.847 | 13.37 | 12.9% | n/a | 91.0% | 91.1% |
| 12 | 10 | Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, United States | 11.814 | 13.22 | 11.9% | n/a | 80.8% | 80.9% |

SOURCE: World Urbanization Prospects (UN—2011, 2014); World Bank http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators#
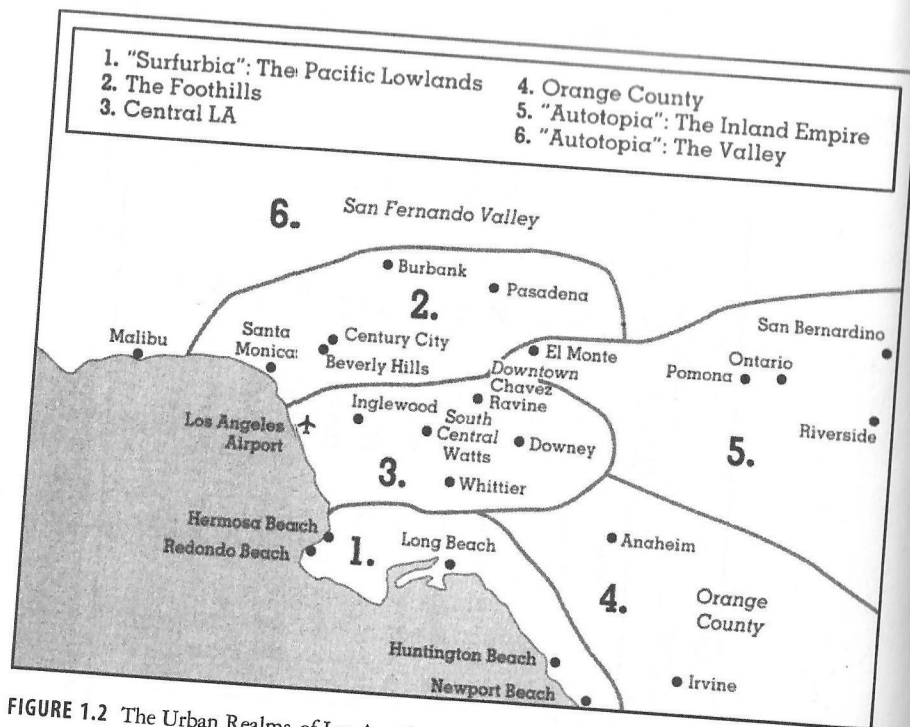
FIGURE 1.2 The Urban Realms of Los Angeles. SOURCE: Photo courtesy of the author.

Figure 1.2, are central Los Angeles (the old city center), the San Fernando Valley (the "valley"), the Pacific foothills (Santa Monica to Pasadena), the Pacific lowlands (Hermosa, Redondo Beach), eastern Orange County (a separate metropolitan region that is exclusively suburban), and the San Gabriel and Pomona valleys (extending eastward and including Pomona, Ontario, and San Bernardino).

## THE METROPOLITAN REGION

For much of US history, it was sufficient to report information about the population of the central city in the study of what was called "urbanism." Most economic and commercial activity was focused in and around the central business district. By the early 1900s, suburban and regional growth, including planned suburban communities, satellite cities, and other developments, began to challenge the dominant role of the city as employers sought to escape crowded conditions and resident activism, including union strikes. The increasing numbers of immigrants, confronted with housing shortages in the cities, began spilling over into the suburban communities. As early as 1920, the US Bureau of the Census sought to capture regional and

multicentered growth within metropolitan areas by using the term *metropolitan district* (McKelvey, 1968) (Box 1.1). For the 1950 census, a new category was created: the *standard metropolitan area* (SMA), which included a city with a population of at least 50,000 persons and the surrounding suburbs and towns. In 1959 this definition was expanded to better reflect the regional growth patterns that included population in centers in two or more counties. The *standard metropolitan statistical area* (SMSA) was defined as a county or counties with a central city of 50,000 or more (or twin cities with a combined population of 50,000 or more) as well as adjacent counties linked economically and socially with the central city.

In 1983 the SMSA was relabeled *metropolitan statistical area* (MSA). The MSA is determined by measuring the extent to which people in outlying counties travel to work to the designated territory. If enough people commute to work from outside city boundaries, the county they reside in becomes part of the MSA. While the number of MSAs in the United States continues to grow (the number increased from 254 to 388 between 1990 and 2015), two states, Wyoming and Vermont, do not contain any. In 2010, 80.7% of the US population resided in an urban area defined as an MSA. The seventy-three largest MSAs were designated *primary metropolitan statistical areas* (PMSAs). Because county boundaries vary widely across the United States (except in New England, where there are no counties), the usefulness of the MSA classification is questionable. According to the 2010 census, New Jersey was the most heavily urbanized state, with 92.2% of its population residing within an MSA. In contrast, Maine (61.3%) and Vermont (61.6%) were the least urbanized states. However, anyone who has visited New Jersey would be hard pressed to find a major city center that dominates it. New Jersey exemplifies the multicentric sprawl of multiple MSAs spread across the state.

The regional growth and the sociospatial integration of cities proved to be even more extensive than the social, economic, and political links suggested by the MSA concept. The US Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is responsible for defining MSAs, metropolitan divisions, micropolitan statistical areas, CSAs, and New England city and town classifications. The OMB created yet another term, the *standard metropolitan consolidated area* (SMCA), to better capture the expansion of the multinucleated urban regions. The SMCA was used for the first time in the 1980 census. It is defined as having a population of at least 1 million persons in two or more PMSAs *and* represents a higher order of integration for metropolitan areas that contain several adjacent urbanized places, such as the Los Angeles/Orange County/Riverside/San Bernardino complex in southern California or the New York/New Jersey/Connecticut complex on the east coast. The continual growth of metropolitan regions once again prompted the OMB to create the *core based statistical area* (CBSA). A CBSA refers to the number of two additional metropolitan classifications: the metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. In 2003, there were 560 micropolitan and 362 metropolitan statistical

areas. In 2015, the OMB announced that there were 945 micro and metropolitan statistical areas, 389 MSAs, 174 CSAs, in the US and Puerto Rico. As we can easily see, the city is secondary to the metropolitan area in our understanding of urbanization and urban life. The multiplicity of ways the OMB defines the metropolitan region is a prime illustration of the concept of the multicentered metropolitan region that is so important for the new urban sociology. All this definition making aids the local, state and federal governments in managing the built environment; however, it is essential to note constantly that these are *political* distinctions made about municipal and county boundaries. In contrast, our concept, the MCMR, attempts to capture the organic scale of development in and around our historical inner cities that has become regional in scope.

Table 1.2 reveals important aspects of metropolitan growth in the United States:

1) First, the urban system includes a significant number of metropolitan areas that have large populations rather than only one or two as is often found in developing nations.

2) Second, the population living in the suburban region is often much greater than that of the older central city. Philadelphia had a population of 1.57 million persons in 2016, but its metropolitan region contained some 6 million persons. The city-suburban population disparity is not simply an artifact of population decline in older industrial cities. We see a similar pattern in the relatively newer Sun Belt cities as well. For example, Phoenix had a population of 1.58 million in 2016, but the total metropolitan area included a population of more than 4.6 million, and Dallas had a population of 1.3 million, but its total metropolitan area included 7.2 million persons—more than five times that of the central city. (Atlanta, one of the most rapidly growing metropolitan areas in the country, had a metropolitan population of 5.3 million persons, but the population of the central city (472,579) does not rank in the top fifteen in the country.)

3) Third, while metropolitan areas across the northeast and midwest have grown slowly or even lost population since the 1970s, the metropolitan regions of the south and southwest grew rapidly during this period. This illustrates what is known as the shift from the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt. For example, the Los Angeles, Dallas, Houston, San Diego, and Phoenix metropolitan regions have seen double-digit population increases since 1970.

## MEGA-URBAN REGIONS AROUND THE WORLD

In 2017, the United Nations' *World Population Prospects* reported that the world's population will reach 7.6 billion persons and is expected to reach

9.8 billion persons in 2050. *In 2007, for the first time in human history, a majority of the world's population lived in urban areas.* Today, 54.5% of the population lives in an urban settlement space, and almost all of the global population growth has occurred and will occur in cities and metropolitan regions in the developing world. To put this unprecedented growth of cities into perspective, the number of persons living in urban spaces grew from 746 million in 1950 to 3.9 billion in 2014. There were 512 cities with at least a million people in 2016 (UN, 2016). The United Nations predicts that by 2030, there will be 662 cities with at least a million inhabitants, and by 2050, the world's urban population will increase by another 2.5 billion persons (UN, 2016). Migration from rural areas and the transformation of rural settlements into urban places will account for much of the increase.

What does it mean to be urban? Not every country in the world is experiencing the same mix of cities, suburbs, and multinucleated centers that is characteristic of regional metropolitan growth in the United States, but all countries are subject to a process of *uneven urban development* that produces gigantic cities and regional urbanization within which quality of life disparities are essentially important. These differences are the source of urban social problems and political issues everywhere.

The United Nations calculates the global population trends by compiling data about urban populations provided by countries around the world. As we can see from the information in Box 1.2, countries define their "urban" populations differently. In some cases, the definition of urban place is based on a population threshold, such as agglomerations or localities of 2,500 or more inhabitants (Mexico and the United States), although some countries have higher thresholds (10,000 or more inhabitants in Portugal, 20,000 in Turkey), while others have lower thresholds (just 200 or more inhabitants in Iceland and Greenland). In other cases, the definition of urban place is based on economic activity (agglomerations of 5,000 or more inhabitants where 75% are engaged in nonagricultural work in Botswana), political definition (administrative centers in Costa Rica, townships and town planning areas in Malawi), or combinations of political and population factors (communes of 10,000 or more inhabitants in Switzerland). The wide range of definitions presents some problems, as living in a town of 10,000 persons in Portugal may be very different from a community of 2,500 in Mexico.

Urban growth is distributed unevenly across the globe. According to UN census estimates, the largest urban agglomerations in the developed nations will grow slowly, whereas those in other areas of the world will experience explosive growth. In contrast, Africa and Asia will urbanize at a faster rate, although as a whole, Africa and Asia will remain mostly rural, and are expected to remain less urbanized than other parts of the world. In contrast, St. Petersburg (in Russia) is

**Box 1.1**

## Defining the Metropolitan Region

The term *metropolitan region* was first used by the US Census in 1920 to describe the growing cities and suburban areas; since that time, there have been many modifications to capture the dynamic forces at work within metropolitan regions.

**Standard metropolitan area (SMA)** was the first term used for official metropolitan areas, as defined by the then Bureau of the Budget in 1949 for the 1950 decennial census. It was replaced in 1959 with the term SMSA.

**Standard metropolitan statistical area (SMSA)** replaced SMA for the official metropolitan areas defined by the then Bureau of the Budget and was used until MSAs, CMSAs, and PMSAs were introduced in 1983.

**Standard consolidated statistical area (SCSA)** was a forerunner of the CMSA. An SCSA was a combination of two or more SMSAs that had substantial commuting between them and where at least one of the SMSAs had a population of 1 million or greater. SCSAs were first defined in 1975 and used until June 1983.

**Consolidated metropolitan statistical area (CMSA)** is a geographic entity defined by the Federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for use by federal statistical agencies. An area becomes a CMSA if it meets the requirements to qualify as a metropolitan statistical area (MSA), has a population of 1 million or more, if component parts are recognized as primary metropolitan statistical areas (PMSAs), and if local opinion favors the designation.

**Metropolitan statistical area (MSA)** is a geographic entity, defined by the OMB for use by federal statistical agencies, based on the concept of a core area with a large population nucleus, plus adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that core. Qualification of an MSA requires the presence of a city with 50,000 or more inhabitants, or the presence of an MA (see below) and a total population of at least 100,000 (75,000 in New England). The county or counties containing the largest city and surrounding densely settled territory are central counties of the MSA. Additional outlying counties qualify to be included in the MSA by meeting certain other criteria of metropolitan character, such as a specified minimum population density or percentage of the population that is urban. MSAs in New England are defined in terms of cities and towns, following rules concerning commuting and population density.

**Primary metropolitan statistical area (PMSA)** is a geographic entity defined by the OMB for use by federal statistical agencies. Metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) with a population of 1 million or more may contain one or more PMSAs if "statistical

*continued*

criteria are met and local opinion is in favor." A PMSA consists of a large urbanized county, or a cluster of such counties (cities and towns in New England) that have substantial commuting interchange.

**Metropolitan area (MA)** is a collective term, established by the OMB and used for the first time in 1990, to refer to metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), consolidated metropolitan statistical areas (CMSAs), and primary metropolitan statistical areas (PMSAs).

SOURCE: US Bureau of the Census

expected to fall below the 5 million-person threshold, indicating that urban growth is neither linear nor universal. The uneven growth of urban areas around the globe is punctuated by the rise of mega cities. Mega cities are cites with more than 10 million inhabitants. In 2016, about 500 million people lived in one of thirty-one mega cities. The UN also projects the number of mega cities to increase to forty-one by 2030, with an estimated combined population of 730 million. The growth of mega cities and mega regions is predominantly occurring in Asia, South America, and Africa. We prefer to use the term *mega regions* because it captures how these massive settlement spaces exist and are formed through complex networks that do not reflect patterns of urban growth emanating outward from a single central point, a characteristic of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century industrial city in Europe and America.

Although the potential benefits from urbanization cannot be overlooked, the speed and scale of what some have called the third urban revolution presents many challenges. The rapid growth and overwhelming sprawl of cities in the developing nations has been given a new term—*hyperurbanization*. New groups of policy makers and organizations are emerging to take up responsibilities of urban governance in developing nations around the globe. As national governments in many developing countries have decentralized their functions and reduced support for social programs, responsibility for poverty, health, education, and public services is increasingly being placed in the hands of untested municipal and regional governments. While the acceleration of urban growth in developing countries suggests staggering social costs for many persons around the world due to uneven social and economic development, the continuing growth of multicentered metropolitan regions in the United States and other developed nations also presents serious challenges for policy makers, governments, and those of us who live in the urban world.

## A NEW APPROACH TO URBAN SOCIOLOGY

How did these changes to where we live come about? What is daily life like in a multicentered metropolitan region? How do everyday activities there differ from those in the past? How has the city construction process, or *urbanization*, given way to the regional process of concentrated central city development, dispersed and relatively denser minicenters and sprawling suburbanization? What is metropolitan culture like in the new MCMRs, and how does it differ from the historical inner city life of the past? The answers to these and other questions are the subject of this book. Our discussion is about urban sociology, but it is not about the city alone, as is often the case in the urban sociology literature. In the pages that follow, we take an integrated perspective that complements the regional focus of the MCMR.

In contrast to other sociology approaches, the new urban sociology has three additional dimensions: the shift to a global perspective, attention to the political economy of pull factors (government policies including mortgage guarantees for lenders, tax deductions for homeowners, and the like) in urban and suburban development, and an appreciation for the role of culture in metropolitan life and in the construction of the built environment.

## GLOBAL CAPITALISM AND THE METROPOLIS

The patterns of everyday life that we observe in the contemporary metropolis are the consequence of the complicated and continuing interaction of economic, political, and cultural forces that have not always been studied in urban sociology. In recent years, urbanists have come to appreciate the importance of the link between cities or suburbs and changes in the economy. Prior to the 1970s, discussions about urban political economy assumed that the most critical influence on urban growth and development was the behavior of local businesspeople. A resident of a town might open up a store or factory. The local residents knew the owner and the owner knew them. Jobs would be created, and local residents would apply for and fill them. The products from factories might be sold nationally, but locals would take pride in the homegrown commodities and support the businesses of neighbors with their patronage, often because there was no place else to go. This was the way of life described in *Middletown*, the classic study of the American industrial town in the 1920s (Lynd and Lynd, 1929). But times have changed and seem to be changing even more quickly in the twenty-first century. Robert and Helen Lynd documented important changes in Middletown as local businesses came under the control of national companies—and their book *Middletown in Transition* (Lynd and Lynd, 1937) was published more than eighty years ago!

Increasingly, economic activity in metropolitan communities is controlled by decisions made at the global level. Businesses are owned and managed by people from distant locations. In any given electronics store, for example, we find televisions that come from a manufacturer, such as Sony, whose headquarters is in another country, say Japan. The television sets themselves may be assembled in Korea or Malaysia. The process of selling and repairing the television sets may be supervised by foreign representatives of the manufacturer living in the United States. Plus, the store itself is most likely part of a national chain whose corporate headquarters are located far from their warehouses! Reversing this example, many US companies, such as General Motors and Procter & Gamble, engage in manufacturing, marketing, and administrative activities overseas. US companies invested $256 billion in China from 1990 to 2017, and China is currently a $600 billion market for US companies. In short, economies today are linked across the globe, and the small, family-run business with connections to the local community has given way to the multinational corporation and the global flow of investment as the dominant economic forces.

The global perspective has important implications for the study of metropolitan regions. Prior to the 1970s, urban sociologists saw changes in the city as emerging from the interaction of many local interests in a shared and common space. The *ecological* approach, as it is called, meant that the organization of the city was not caused by "the planned or artificial contrivance of anyone" but emerged full-grown out of the "many independent personal decisions based on moral, political, ecological, and economic considerations" (Suttles, 1972:8). Today we possess a different understanding of urban organization as being caused by the actions of powerful interests, many of which have their home bases in places far removed from local communities. Their decisions, for example, to open a plant in one location, close one in another, buy up farms to build houses, or tear down existing housing to create mini malls or apartment buildings are all so important that they affect the well-being of the entire community.

The perspective adopted in this text, however, does not suggest that all important influences on metropolitan development derive from the global level. Important economic and political forces arising within local communities can account for change. In the following chapters, therefore, we will consider the contribution to metropolitan development of all sociospatial levels: the global, the national, and the local. It is the interplay of the forces from the different levels within the local space that is the most interesting.

Since the 1970s, urban scholars have paid increasing attention to the relationship between capitalism and the metropolis. Competition among businesses that may not have a direct effect on urban space has been overshadowed by the competition among different places for their share of global investment. Local populations and community well-being are also affected by changes in employment,

economic activity, and growing lifestyle disparities between low-skilled or semi-skilled workers and professionals living in the metropolis. All of these aspects constitute a new dimension to the study of urban sociology.

## STRUCTURAL FACTORS IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Prior to the 1970s, urban scholars looked at city and suburban growth as an expression of individual desires. For example, people moved from the city to the suburbs, it was believed, because they preferred the lifestyle in the suburbs. Or investors picked a particular plot of land to develop because they liked its size and location. Individual actions based on individually held beliefs or needs might be termed the *agent-side* of market activity because they express the ways in which people and business act on their own desires. Urban sociology prior to the 1970s viewed growth almost exclusively in this manner.

At present, we are aware of several factors that promote development in specific ways and thereby mold individual desires through incentives. These factors represent the *structural-side* of market activity resulting from individual choice. Powerful social forces can create opportunities that persuade people to follow courses of action that they otherwise might not. Two important structural-side sources of incentives in the development of metropolitan regions are government and the real estate industry.

## THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

### Suburbanization: Push and Pull Factors

The abstract model of capitalism represents economic systems as involving limited government intervention. This is not the case for modern economies. The United States, like other industrialized nations, has an economy that is influenced not only by government regulations but also by the direct spending of government tax dollars on particular public projects. The combined action of laws or regulations and direct investment provides incentives for both businesses and individual consumers to behave in certain ways.

When city dwellers who are renters decide that they want to move to the suburbs, they are expressing their personal preference. This decision may be occasioned by structural-side factors such as problems with the public schools and high rents that in effect push them out of the city. Our suburban movers likely have chosen a suburb with single-family homes that are affordable within their household budget. However, there is another dimension to this decision. Because of government tax incentives on mortgage payments, it pays to own your home

rather than rent. Therefore, government programs provide an enticement that *pulls* people in the direction of homeownership in the suburbs.

In every case the decision to move to the suburbs is a complex one that is prompted by both structural and agent-side factors. For years urban sociologists focused on individual decisions and neglected the structural-side factors. The housing crisis of the past decade has focused attention on the way government at the local, state, and federal levels has operated to create opportunities and incentives that channel behavior in specific ways. In subsequent chapters we will see how this "political economy," the linked actions of business and government in urban development, promotes the growth of the multicentered metropolitan region from this pull or supply-side perspective independent of individual desires.

### The Shift to the Sun Belt: Push and Pull Factors

Another major and recent change in the population distribution of the United States has been the rise of the Sun Belt. By the time of the 2000 population census, the majority of Americans lived in the Sun Belt and western states. This transformation represents a phenomenal shift of residential location. Historically, the midwest and the east coast contained the majority of the US population, and this remained true until the post-World War II period. Now the Sun Belt has a comparative advantage in population.

According to the old urban sociology, the shift to the Sun Belt would have been explained by technological factors, such as inexpensive airline travel and the popularity of the automobile, as well as push factors such as individual preferences for a mild climate and the escape from snowy winters. To be sure, these factors are part of the equation. However, the structural factors created by the political economy of the United States and its government spending cannot be ignored. These *pull* factors, in fact, are the *major* reasons for Sun Belt growth because this federal outlay created millions of jobs that provided the base for this massive and historically unprecedented demographic population shift. One aspect alone tells a good part of the story. Beginning with World War II, the United States spent billions of dollars on military installations in locations in the west and in the Sun Belt. California, Florida, Georgia, Texas, and New Mexico, among others, were recipients of vast sums of spending. Even Las Vegas, which had been growing as the country's gambling mecca after the war, benefited from large-scale government spending that created jobs—first, with the construction of Boulder Dam, and then with the placement of the gigantic Nellis Air Force Base with its yearly multi-million dollar payroll in the region. Later, the Korean and Vietnam wars reinforced this pattern. The states of Texas and Florida, as well the city of Hunts-ville, Alabama, benefited greatly from the NASA space program, as we know from the familiar names of "Houston Control" and "Cape Kennedy." The old

urban sociology simply ignored the effects of government spending and tax incentives—the *political economy* of urban development in the United States. But the sociospatial perspective considers these pull factors of government spending favoring the Sun Belt to be of central importance.

## THE ROLE OF THE REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY IN DEVELOPMENT

With some notable exceptions (Form, 1954; Hoyt, 1933; Hughes, 1928), early urban sociologists neglected the critical role the real estate industry plays in metropolitan development. Recall from the discussion above that at one time, urban organization was viewed not as the product of any particular interest but as the interplay of many separate interests (the ecological approach). Presently, we understand that the opposite is often the case. Special interests such as global corporations or even investment firms can make or break a town depending on where they decide to invest new capital. But the single most important source of special interests in the development of the metropolis is the real estate industry.

The real estate sector includes corporations and banks, as well as land developers and construction companies that invest in the development of land use and housing, including the land and the built environment themselves. The construction of new spaces proceeds through the actions of all those individuals, financial conduits, and corporations that make money from the change (or turnover) in land use. Because a great deal of money can be made through this type of activity, real estate interests are powerful special actors in the development of the metropolis, and their influence is greatly felt. We need only point to the rise and ultimate success of President Donald J. Trump, a self-defined "real estate mogul," and the ways in which he has amassed money through activities in that sector to prove our point.

At any given time and on any piece of land, real estate forces can converge to turn over the existing use and engage in development that changes the utilization of local space. All of this is done in the pursuit of profit that comes as a consequence of development. In recent decades, mortgages have been bought and sold as investments on national and even international markets as speculative investments called "derivatives," and the resulting collapse of these shady markets in 2007–2008 has led to the collapse of funding mechanisms for the auto industry, of international banking institutions such as the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, and the retirement funds of many pension plans, or municipal endowments of towns and cities across the United States. Thus, in addition to understanding the political economy of production, it is important to understand the political economy of real estate.

### What Does It Mean To Be Urban?

Countries define their urban populations in many ways, which makes comparisons across countries and regions very difficult. Here is a sampling of the definitions for "urban" used in Africa, North America, Europe, and Asia:

**Africa**

Botswana: Agglomeration of 5,000 or more inhabitants where 75% of the economic activity is nonagricultural

Equatorial Guinea: District centers and localities with 300 dwellings and/or 1,500 or more inhabitants

Ethiopia: Localities of 2,000 or more inhabitants

Malawi: All townships and town planning areas and all district centers

Sudan: Localities of administrative and/or commercial importance or with population of 5,000 or more inhabitants

Zambia: Localities of 5,000 or more inhabitants, the majority of whom all depend on nonagricultural activities

**North America**

Canada: Places of 1,000 or more inhabitants, having a population density of 400 or more per square kilometer

Costa Rica: Administrative centers of cantons

Cuba: Population living in a nucleus of 2,000 or more inhabitants

Greenland: Localities of 200 or more inhabitants

Honduras: Localities of 2,000 or more inhabitants, having essentially urban characteristics

Mexico: Localities of 2,500 or more inhabitants

**Europe**

France: Communes containing an agglomeration of more than 2,000 inhabitants living in contiguous houses or with not more than 200 meters between houses

Iceland: Localities of 200 or more inhabitants

Poland: Towns and settlements of an urban type, e.g., workers' settlements, fishermen's settlements, health resorts

Portugal: Agglomeration of 10,000 or more inhabitants

Spain: Localities of 2,000 or more inhabitants

Switzerland: Communes of 10,000 or more inhabitants, including suburbs

### Asia

**Cambodia:** Towns

**China:** Cities only refer to those designated by the state council. In the case of cities with district establishment, the city proper refers to the whole administrative area of the district if its population density is 1,500 persons per kilometer

**Indonesia:** Places with urban characteristics

**Israel:** All settlements of more than 2,000 inhabitants, except those where at least one-third of the households, participating in the civilian labor force, earn their living from agriculture

**Japan:** City (shi) having 50,000 or more inhabitants with 60% or more of the houses located in the main built-up areas and 60% or more of the population engaged in manufacturing, trade, or other urban type of business

**Turkey:** Population of settlement places, 20,000 and over

SOURCE: United Nations, *Demographic Yearbook, United Nations, 2005*, TABLE 6

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE IN METROPOLITAN LIFE

The discussion of urban issues often involves economic and political concerns. As we have seen, some of the more important aspects of the new urban sociology emphasize a greater attention to political economy. But this is not all there is to the new approach. People live in a symbolic world that is meaningful to them. They possess sentiments and ideas and attempt to communicate with others using common concepts.

Social interaction in human societies is organized through the direct use of spoken or written language. We employ expressive symbols that are used to convey meanings and make life meaningful. One of the principal sources of symbolic life involves aspects of the built environment. Cities and suburbs are the sites of many subcultures—ethnic, religious, racial, gender specific, and age related. For example, there are Italian or Irish neighborhoods within the metropolis that can readily be identified by the signs in front of restaurants, bakeries, specialty shops, and religious institutions. Furthermore, designs of architectural facades are often used to convey images of power and wealth, and in the United States, government buildings using classical architecture are intended to display democratic ideals (see Figure 1.3). People use such signs to orient themselves as they engage in metropolitan life. They help define a sense of place and an urban culture.
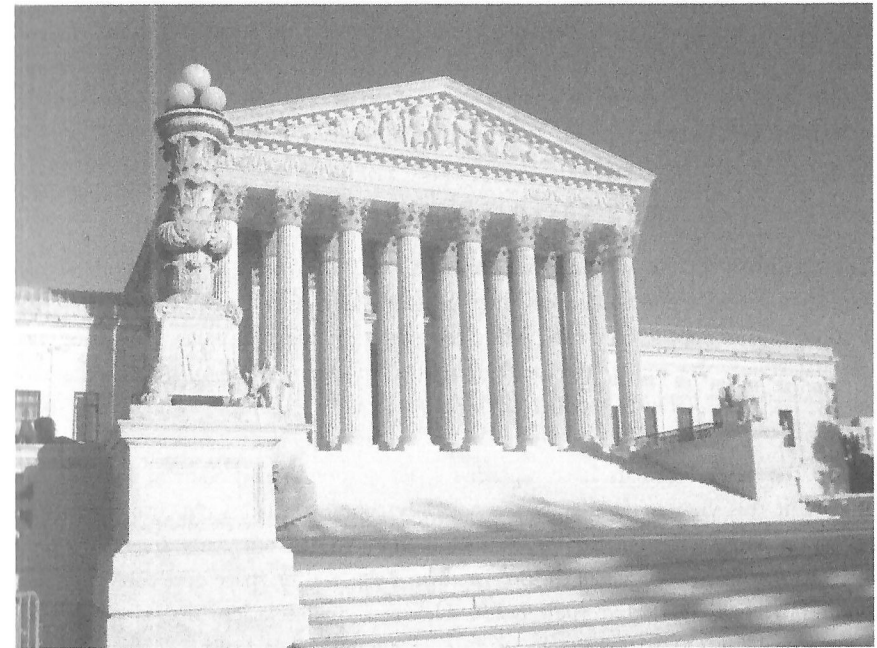
**FIGURE 1.3** Urban Semiotics and the Built Environment. Many government buildings in the United States make use of architectural elements from Classical Greek architecture and are meant to recall ideas of Athenian democracy. Learning how to read the urban environment is an example of urban semiotics. As shown in the photograph above, the United States Supreme Court building, situated on a hill with an entry reminiscent of the ancient Parthenon, is meant to convey an image of power and democracy (although the supreme court judges are not, in fact, elected officials). SOURCE: Photo courtesy of Heather Hutchison.

The study of culture and the role of objects as signs constitute a significant part of the new urban sociology. Sociologists have studied metropolitan life as culturally meaningful for some time. What is new and different is the way such meanings are associated with objects in addition to words. For example, cities often try to develop an image that boosts attention in order to attract investment and tourists. A variety of images have been used, such as signs of industry ("Motor City"), signs of regional growth ("the Twin Cities"), signs of vision ("the city of tomorrow"), and signs of prosperity and enjoyment ("the city of leisure") and signs of pleasure ("what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas"). Slogans such as these are often linked to images or objects, such as a skyline or a graphic logo of some kind. In this way, a particular symbolic identity is created for a place that gives the impression that it is special.

In the past, approaches to urban sociology have neglected culture and the symbolic aspect of space, although some interesting early exceptions exist (Wohl and

Strauss, 1958). The perspective we will follow integrates the symbolic nature of environments with more traditional factors that make up social behavior, such as class, race, gender, age, and social status. Space, then, is another compositional factor in human behavior. We call this new perspective on metropolitan life the *sociospatial* approach.

## THE SOCIOSPATIAL APPROACH

Typical urban sociology textbooks present several alternative ways of understanding sociospatial phenomena, or they present none at all and simply describe a succession of topics. Our text, while reviewing alternatives, takes a definite conceptual stand. We follow the Lefebvrian turn in urban studies—including geography, urban planning, political economy, and sociology—which we have developed as the "sociospatial approach" to urban sociology.

In the past, urbanists have regarded space as only a container of social activities. But this view is limited. Space not only contains actions but also constitutes a part of social relations and is intimately involved in our daily lives. It affects the way we feel about what we do. In turn, people alter space and construct new environments to better fit their needs. Hence, a dual relationship exists between people and space. On the one hand, human beings act according to social factors such as gender, class, race, age, and status within and in reaction to a given space. When a city converts a vacant lot into a basketball court, the type of activity and interaction of groups of persons within that space will change. On the other hand, people create and alter spaces to express their own needs and desires. Resident-sponsored renovations of depressed neighborhoods are an example. People may turn a vacant lot into a basketball court on their own as they may also paint murals that lift spirits in an otherwise declining section of the metro region.

The sociospatial perspective is developed around the study of everyday life in contemporary urban society. It recognizes that the urban and suburban settlement spaces that make up the built environment are situated within a larger metropolitan region. Their growth or decline are consequences of their connections to the political economy of global capitalism. Government programs, patterns of real estate investment, and individual business decisions are all involved. The characteristics of our perspective are summarized in Box 1.3.

The sociospatial perspective emphasizes the interaction between society and space. Within the multicentered metropolitan region, groups differ from one another with respect to lifestyle, attitudes, beliefs, and access to political power and influence, and consequently they have more or less influence on decisions about how social space is allocated and structured within and across the metropolitan region. To class, gender, race, and other social characteristics that define differences between and within groups in contemporary society we add the element

**Box 1.3**

### The Sociospatial Perspective

The sociospatial perspective focuses our attention on how everyday life in the multinucleated metropolitan region is affected by the political economy of urban life—the interplay of cultural, political, economic, and social forces both within and outside of urban communities:

1. The urban and suburban settlement spaces that comprise the built environment are part of a larger metropolitan region. It is necessary to adopt a regional perspective to understand the multinucleated metropolitan regions of the twenty-first century.
2. The multinucleated metropolitan region is linked to the global system of capitalism where decisions influence the well-being of local areas made from the metropolitan, the national, or even the international level.
3. Metropolitan development is affected by government policy and by developers, financiers, and other institutions in the real estate industry that create incentives and opportunities that mold the behaviors, preferences, and choices of individual consumers.
4. Everyday life is organized according to cultural symbols and material objects that are part of the built environment; these symbols and objects are likely to have different meanings to different individuals or groups. We call the study of these symbols and objects *urban semiotics*.
5. The spatial arrangements found in urban and suburban settlement space have both manifest and latent consequences. They influence human behavior and interaction in predictable ways but also in ways the original planner or developer may not have anticipated. But individuals, through their behaviors and interactions with others, constantly alter existing spatial arrangements and construct new spaces to express their needs and desires.

of space itself. The spatial arrangements found in urban and suburban settlement space have both manifest and latent consequences: they influence human behavior and interaction in predictable ways but also in ways the original planner or developer may not have anticipated. Individuals and groups, through their behaviors and interactions with others, their agency, constantly alter existing spatial arrangements and construct new spaces to express their needs and desires.

The sociospatial perspective connects the dual relationship between people and space with the social factors that are the bases of individual behavior. The most fundamental concept of this approach is *settlement space*, which refers to the built environment in which people live. Settlement space is both constructed and organized. It is built by people who have followed some meaningful plan for the purpose of containing economic, political, and cultural activities. Within it, people organize their daily actions according to the meaningful aspects of the constructed space. In subsequent chapters we will discuss how sociospatial factors determine the construction and use of settlement space. Over time we will also see how change has occurred and how the built environment is in turn molded by sociospatial factors.

---

**Box 1.4**

### Poverty, Racism, and Powerlessness: The Urban Public Health Crisis in Flint, Michigan

In 2014, it was reported that the water supply in Flint, Michigan, was contaminated with lead. Lead poisoning causes physical and permanent mental health problems, especially in children. Twelve people also died because the water was contaminated with the bacteria *legionella*, which causes inflammation of the lungs, and is commonly known as Legionnaire's Disease. The problem was confined to the city of Flint—the surrounding white suburbs were spared from drinking leaded water. Flint is a majority black city in the Rust Belt of Michigan, and a former major location for General Motors' automobile manufacturing. The closing of factories in the 1980s hit this city especially hard. Now, about 41% of all Flint residents live below the poverty line and its population declined 17% from 1970 to 2010, although many people remain because they can't sell their homes. As of this writing in late 2018, the state of Michigan has not fixed the public water problem, and Flint residents are still advised to drink bottled water even if exposure to lead has already affected some 10,000 children permanently.

How was a disaster like this possible in the twenty-first century in the richest country in the world? We can answer this question by applying the sociospatial approach.

Flint urbanized as an industrial city in the first half of the twentieth century, and was the original corporate headquarters of General Motors (GM). By the 1950s, GM was the nation's largest automobile manufacturer. Instead of building additional manufacturing plants in Flint, GM expanded outward into Genesee County, where land was cheap and readily available, and into the anti-union

---

"right to work" states located in the southern US. Assuming that GM's continued growth was good for the region and that more southward county expansion would harm Flint, the city used public funds to build the road infrastructure to the new manufacturing facilities. Flint's suburbs, however, kept the money from their new corporate tax base and reinvested it into housing developments, schools, and shopping centers, effectively constructing a new minicenter by abandoning its connection to the historical inner city itself.

The supply-side investments into Flint's suburban minicenter acted as a pull factor to attract white middle and upper-class residents, essentially splitting the region by race and class. The racial and class structure was spatial, as blacks were contained in the declining city that began struggling with unemployment, blight, and rising crime rates. At one point, 10% of all Flint homes were unoccupied. Urban renewal efforts consisted of demolishing a historic black neighborhood for a highway to connect the minicenter to the historic central business district.

The combination of deindustrialization and global capitalism compounded the problems found in racial segregation and the high concentration of poverty within Flint's municipal boundaries. GM shuttered most of the local workforce in Flint, over 70,000 jobs since the 1970s, as it continued to build publicly subsidized plants in anti-union states in the south. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Flint has predictably struggled with high levels of municipal debt, a fiscal problem due to the lack of a regional government, where the tax revenue is kept by each distinct political entity, thus favoring the suburbs of its home county, Genesee.

Flint's fiscal problems prompted steep austerity cuts in municipal services. After the Great Recession hit in 2007–2008, Michigan began assigning Emergency Managers (EMs) to fiscally distressed municipalities. An EM has the authority to make cuts and privatize public services. The legacy of structural racism that formed in the 1970s meant that the placement of EMs had a racial pattern. An African American living in Michigan had a 50% chance of living under an EM, whereas a white person living in Michigan only had a 10% chance of living under an EM. Under the direction of a series of EMs influenced by big business interests at the state level, Flint's water supply was switched from Lake Huron to the Flint River. With the Governor's support, supply was then privatized in 2014 when the EM contracted with the private company Veolia to manage Flint's water. In order to save money and increase their profits, Veolia switched the chemical additive from soda ash to the cheaper caustic soda that no longer prevented the lead from the water pipes chelating into the water.

Thus, there was a causal chain of events that began with structural changes of suburbanization and racial segregation that concentrated wealth, poverty, and racial

*continued*

groups into distinct social spaces; to the period of deindustrialization and job loss due to shuttered factories; and, then, further, to sociospatial effects of political corruption and the privatization of municipal services due to the anti-welfare state policies of Neoliberalism that subsequently created Flint's horrible public health crisis. The result was two separate cost cutting decisions, promoted at the state level and the Governor's office, that poisoned the water for Flint residents. The link between racism and powerful corporate interests cannot be understated, as GM was allowed by the Governor to switch its water supply back to Lake Huron because the lead in the water was corroding its car parts, while the city of Flint had to remain with the toxic flow of river water. Indeed, The Michigan Civil Rights Commission concluded, "We must come to terms with the ongoing effects of 'systemic racism' that repeatedly led to disparate racial outcomes as exemplified by the Flint Water Crisis. This can no longer be ignored." When the question was raised of why Flint could not have its water supply switched back, the answer from the Governor's office was that it "cost too much."

The terrible, humanitarian crisis in Flint, with a privatized water supply that is too poisonous to drink, could have been easily prevented if either the state of Michigan regionalized the tax base to the entire County of Genesee, or, if Michigan or the federal government decided to invest public money into infrastructure that would have removed lead pipes, instead of imposing austerity using privatizing strategies on this area already suffering from job loss, ignoring environmental protection laws. However, racism and disdain for people in need are major barriers to forming regional governments out of racially segregated social spaces and they support the refusal of the state to invest in public social welfare programs or implement environmental protection laws, especially since the 1980s when GM was using local space to maintain its profits by locating business in the suburbs. The crisis in Flint is the type of urban social problem that the sociospatial approach can explain and provide answers to regarding how to solve it, as discussed in this text.

SOURCE: Michigan Civil Rights Commission, 2017, *The Flint Water Crisis: Systemic Racism Through the Lens of Flint.*

Moore, Michael, *Fahrenheit 11/9* (film)

## SUMMARY

Our approach to urban sociology explains how the growth of cities and urban life more generally has been a discontinuous process, marked by the rise and fall of great cities and urban civilizations. Our survey of the field indicates that the events of the last several centuries, particularly the rise of industrial capitalism in the west and the European colonization of the globe, has resulted in a world system of cities with highly developed urban centers in many countries, while in many other countries people confront a continual struggle to meet the basic necessities of life: patterns of development that are discussed in the subsequent chapters.

We know that urban spaces are meaningful spaces, and that the earliest places of human habitation had important symbolic meanings. So too was the development of ancient and classical cities based on religious and social meanings, while the great cities of the Renaissance reflected a new sense of order, based on the rediscovery of perspective and a new science of urban design, often used to demonstrate the power and prestige of the government and monarchy. The industrial metropolis of the nineteenth century would be based on a new social and symbolic order, where the pursuit of profit would override the earlier religious and social order, and everyday life would run its course in the factories, workhouses, and tenements of the industrial city.

Throughout the book we will see that many of the ideas associated with modern life have their origins in observations made about industrial cities. The problem of uneven development—the graphic contrast between the wealthy and the poor, for example, and the contradictions between progress and misery—remains at the center of the urban dynamic in cities around the globe. On the one hand, the city represented hope to all those laboring under meager conditions in the countryside. It was the site of industrialization and the great dream of modernization and progress. On the other hand, the powerful forces of urbanism dwarfed the individual and crushed the masses into dense, environmentally strained spaces. In time, the built environment of the industrial city would replace the feudal town. The city rhythm, so unlike that of the country, would replace earlier cycles of life dominated by nature. Life was only worth as much as the daily wage for which it could be exchanged. The processes of urbanization and capitalism that created large cities in Europe during the nineteenth century also thrived in the United States at the same time, and in many ways, US cities were governed by the same dynamic.

Now, a new urban order has become dominant and one that also has changed the nature of sociospatial relations. Urbanization is regional in scope and structured as an MCMR with many minicenters that have, in part, taken over some of the functions which once were concentrated in the historical inner city. Furthermore, due to the characteristics of the global economy, more changes occur regularly. For example, as the MCMR developed, much retailing left the inner cities and relocated in large, suburban malls making it unnecessary for people to travel to large urban agglomerations in order to shop. Now, as the global capitalist system advances on the internet and in electronic modes of information flow,

people increasingly shop online without ever leaving their homes or place of business. Some formerly prosperous retailing centers outside the historical city have now become "ghost malls," while city retailing districts also suffer. In short, *the sociospatial perspective* of this text treats all these phenomena with the seriousness they deserve and with an understanding that is superior to more limited approaches, as we shall see in the following chapters.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

- An urbanizing world with increasingly more people living in city-like conditions also involves an expanding regional space where people are dispersed. Explain.
- Discuss one example of a growing urban region in the US. What are its characteristics?
- Discuss one mega region outside the US. What are its characteristics?
- What is meant by the sociospatial approach? Discuss its five main areas of emphasis.

# THE ORIGINS OF URBAN LIFE AND URBAN SOCIOLOGY

The rise of urban sociology as a distinct field within the broader discipline of sociology corresponded with the ascendance of capitalism and the dominance of the industrial city. The *scale* of and *concentration* of social groups in the nineteenth century city was historically unprecedented. The collection of scholars from a wide array of intellectual backgrounds that eventually made up the foundational thinkers of sociology wrote about cities the way they wrote about modern life. Modern urban life was typically contrasted to feudal life. The city was modern and complex while feudal life was premodern and simple. Inherent in this distinction were the assumptions of progress represented by the modern city, and the accompanying social problems of isolation and disorder that could be solved through rational planning and scientific advancements. Yet urbanization, in various forms and reflecting different cultural and economic systems, existed well before the industrial city and does not fit into the neat modern/premodern binary. What can we learn about ancient and medieval cities, how their cultures and economies organized distinct urban forms and created issues of security and autonomy that helped give rise to monarchies, empires, and ultimately nation-states? This also raises the bigger question of just how modern is contemporary urban life and what are the limitations of the early Chicago School of Urban Sociology?

## THE BEGINNING OF URBAN CIVILIZATIONS

Urbanization, or the building of and living in compact, densely populated places, appeared as early as 10,000 years ago. Continuously used, densely populated settlements can be found in the Middle East dating back over 6,000 years, the Indus River Valley in India dating back over 4,000 years, and the Yellow River Valley of China (circa 2000 BC). Lewis Mumford (1961:10) suggested that the first human settlements were cities of the dead—the *thanatopolis*. The dead were the first to have a permanent dwelling, in the caverns and mounds where