



Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability

Myron Orfield

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Metropolitan communities across the country are facing the same, seemingly unsolvable problems: the concentration of poverty in central cities, with flashpoints of increasing crime and segregation; declining older suburbs and vulnerable developing suburbs; and costly urban sprawl, with upper-middle-class residents and new jobs moving further and further out to an insulated, favored quarter. Exacerbating this polarization, the federal government has largely abandoned urban policy. Most officials, educators, and citizens have been at a loss to create workable solutions to these complex, widespread trends. And until now, there has been no national discussion to adequately and practically address the future of America's metropolitan regions. *Metropolitix* is the story of how demographic research and state-of-the-art mapping, together with resourceful and pragmatic politics, built a powerful political alliance between the central cities, declining inner suburbs, and developing suburbs with low tax bases. In an unprecedented accomplishment, groups formerly divided by race and class--poor minority groups and blue-collar suburbanites--together with churches, environmental groups, and parts of the business community, began to act in concert to stabilize their communities.

The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul believed that they were immune from the forces of central city decline, urban sprawl, and regional polarization, but the 1980s hit them hard. The number of poor and minority children in central-city schools doubled from 25 to 50 percent, segregation rapidly increased, distressed urban neighborhoods grew at the fourth fastest rate in the United States, and the murder rate in Minneapolis surpassed that of New York City.

These changes tended to accelerate and intensify as they reached middle- and working-class bedroom communities, which were less able to respond and went into transition far more rapidly. On the other side of the region, massive infrastructure investment and exclusive zoning were creating a different type of community. In white-collar suburbs with high tax bases, where only 27 percent of the region's population lived, 61 percent of the region's new jobs were created. As the rest of the region struggled, these communities pulled away physically and financially.

In this powerful book, Myron Orfield details a regional agenda and the political struggle that accompanied the creation of the nation's most significant regional government and the enactment of land use, fair housing, and tax-equity reform legislation. He shows the link between television and talk radio sensationalism and bad public policy and, conversely, how a well-delivered message can ensure broad press coverage of even complicated issues.

Metropolitix and the experience of the Twin Cities show that no American region is immune from pervasive and difficult problems. Orfield argues that the forces of decline, sprawl, and polarization are too large for individual cities and suburbs to confront alone. The answer lies in a regional agenda that promotes both community and stability.

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