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# Cover, Contents, Acknowledgments, and Introduction, Humanizing the Exploding Metropolis

Rutherford H. Platt

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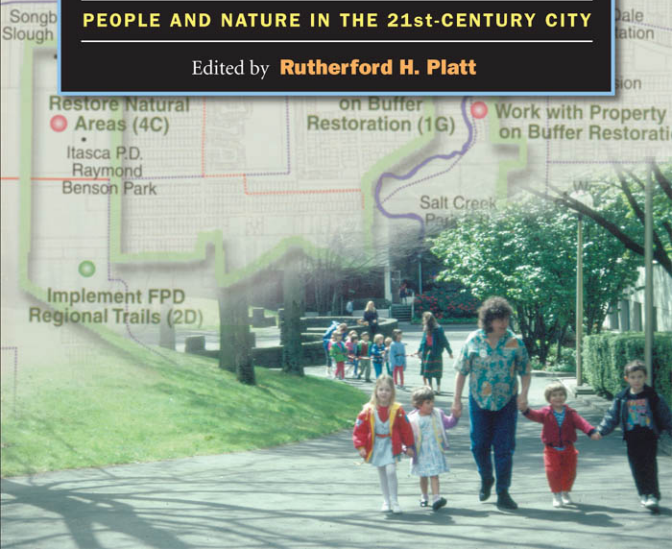
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# The Humane Metropolis

PEOPLE AND NATURE IN THE 21st-CENTURY CITY

Edited by **Rutherford H. Platt**



# **THE HUMANE METROPOLIS**

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# **THE HUMANE METROPOLIS**

## **People and Nature in the 21st-Century City**



Edited by Rutherford H. Platt

University of Massachusetts Press • Amherst & Boston

*in association with*

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To the editor's father,

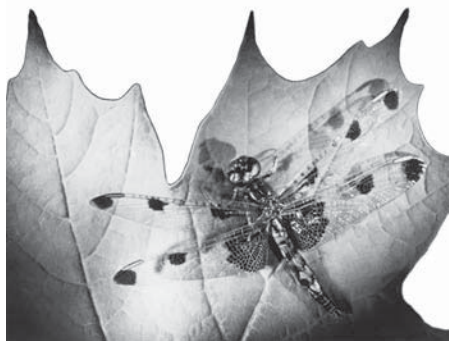
**RUTHERFORD PLATT (1894–1975)**

Author, Photographer, Naturalist

*This winter morning I took an hour's walk in Gramercy Park in the heart of New York. Some fifty well-groomed trees are the asset of this park for the shade they cast in summer, and for raising rents when apartment windows look out on them. But I have never seen anybody look at the trees in winter; they receive no more attention than black dead sticks. People on the benches were working the cross-word puzzles in the Sunday paper. In an atmosphere of so much indifference, one feels a little foolish staring at the trees and reaching for a twig to pull it down and examine the end buds.*

*But it makes a good hour's diversion. The clues were all there—just as they are out in the country. The silver tam-o'-shanters of the dogwood buds; the long varnished pyramids of the poplar; the bright red tridents of the red maple; the fat buds of the magnolia as furry as a cat's paw; and the crumpled black wells of the locust in which the buds are hidden. One by one I told off their names, and checked the answer with*

*the bark and twigs and branches. It's marvelous how the potencies packed in a tiny seed had imprinted each vast structure with the clear-cut resemblances of its kind, and equipped it perfectly to the minutest detail.*



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From *This Green World* (Dodd Mead first printing, 1942; awarded John Burroughs Medal, 1945)

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*Rutherford H. Platt*

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# **THE HUMANE METROPOLIS**

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## Introduction

### Humanizing the Exploding Metropolis

*Rutherford H. Platt*

#### A Subversive Little Book

“This is a book by people who like cities.” Thus began William H. Whyte Jr.’s introduction to a subversive little book with the polemical title *The Exploding Metropolis: A Study of the Assault on Urbanism and How Our Cities Can Resist It* (Editors of *Fortune* 1957, hereinafter cited as TEM). Drawing on a roundtable of urban experts convened by two prominent magazines, *Fortune* and *Architectural Forum*, the book in six short essays reexamined the nature of cities and city building in the postwar era. The book also defined future agendas for “Holly” Whyte (as he was fondly known by his friends) and fellow editor Jane Jacobs.

Whyte had recently gained fame for his sociological critique of postwar business culture and suburban lifestyle, *The Organization Man* (Whyte 1956/2002). His 1957 *Exploding Metropolis* essay titled “Urban Sprawl” (perhaps the first use of that term) deplored the senseless loss of farmland and rural amenities due to suburban development, a theme expanded in his later book *The Last Landscape* (Whyte 1968/2002). Similarly, Jane Jacobs’s essay “Downtown Is for People,” which challenged conventional wisdom on urban renewal, foreshadowed her 1961 classic, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

It was somewhat ironic for *Fortune*’s editors to take the lead in condemning postwar urban renewal and urban sprawl as that magazine had helped foster both. According to environmental historian Adam Rome (2001, 34–35), *Fortune* “published dozens of articles in 1946 and 1947 on the housing shortage. In a rare editorial—‘Let’s Have Ourselves a Housing Industry’—the editors supported a handful of government initiatives to encourage builders to operate on a larger scale.” They even called for construction of public housing by government agencies, arguing that “if the government acted prudently to strengthen the housing market . . . the result would be the best defense against socialism, not a defeat for free enterprise” (Rome 2001, 35).

Congress rose to the challenge. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, it created a variety of new housing stimulus programs under the aegis of the Federal Housing Authority and the Veterans Administration. These programs helped fuel a construction boom of some fifteen million new housing units during the 1950s. Exemplars of these new white middle-class postwar suburbs were the two Levittowns

in New York and Pennsylvania, and Park Forest, Illinois (the home of Whyte's archetypal "Organization Man"). The expansion of white suburbia was further subsidized by the federal interstate highway system authorized by Congress in 1956 and by federal tax deductions for mortgage interest, local property taxes, and accelerated depreciation for commercial real estate investments (Platt 2004, ch. 6).

For those left behind in the central cities, Congress established the federal urban renewal program in the housing acts of 1949 and 1954 to clear and redevelop "blighted areas." The standard model for redevelopment was the high-rise public or subsidized apartment project loosely modeled on the French architect Le Corbusier's ideal town plan, *La Ville Radieuse*—decried by Whyte as "the wrong design in the wrong place at the wrong time" (TEM 1957, xi). Such projects offered rental but not ownership units. Occupants were thus ineligible for federal home ownership tax deductions, assuming they had income against which to claim deductions, and also lacked the opportunity to build equity in the rising value of an owned home. The best of these apartment complexes, such as Metropolitan Life's Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village in Manhattan, were privately sponsored with government assistance. The worst, such as the infamous Pruitt-Igoe project in St. Louis and the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago, both now demolished, were built by public housing authorities.

*The Exploding Metropolis* challenged both suburban and central city postwar construction on aesthetic and functional considerations. Prevailing patterns of land development on the urban fringe were ugly and inefficient, while redevelopment in the urban core was ugly and unsafe. Concerning the fringe, Whyte laments:

Aesthetically, the result is a mess. It takes remarkably little blight to color a whole area; let the reader travel along a stretch of road he is fond of, and he will notice how a small portion of open land has given amenity to the area. But it takes only a few badly designed developments or billboards or hot-dog stands to ruin it, and though only a little bit of the land is used, the place will *look* filled up.

Sprawl is bad esthetics; it is bad economics. Five acres are being made to do the work of one, and do it very poorly. This is bad for the farmers, it is bad for communities, it is bad for industry, it is bad for utilities, it is bad for the railroads, it is bad for the recreation groups, it is bad even for the developers. (TEM, 116–17)

And concerning central city housing:

The scale of the projects is uncongenial to the human being. The use of the open space is revealing; usually it consists of manicured green areas carefully chained off lest they be profaned, and sometimes, in addition, a big central mall so vast and abstract as to be vaguely oppressive. There is nothing close for the eye to light on, no sense of intimacy or of things being on a human scale. (TEM, 21)

Concern with the visual appearance of urban places, of course, did not begin or end with Holly Whyte. Since the City Beautiful movement at the turn of the twentieth century, urban aesthetics had been a prevalent concern of architects and ur-



banists. Later critics of the visual urban landscape included Peter Blake, Donald Appleyard, Kevin Lynch, Ian McHarg, Tony Hiss, and James Howard Kunstler. Few, however, have articulated the nexus between urban form and function in simpler, more direct terms than Whyte.

*The Exploding Metropolis*, though, was sadly deficient in recognizing the social injustice of urban sprawl, namely the preferential treatment of the white middle class over the nonwhite poor in federal housing and tax policies, as well as the use of exclusionary zoning by suburban communities. As historian Kenneth T. Jackson documented in his 1985 book *Crabgrass Frontier*, federal housing authorities practiced “redlining” of neighborhoods by race and income to ensure that most new units built with federal assistance were suburban single-family homes for the white middle class. Even Donald Seligman’s essay “The Enduring Slums” in *The Exploding Metropolis* blandly observed that “the white urban culture they [poor nonwhites] might assimilate *into* is receding before them; it is drifting off into the suburbs” (TEM 1957, 97). “Drifting off” is certainly a nonjudgmental way to describe the process of white flight in response to the *pull* of government incentives for suburban development and the reciprocal *push* of central city neglect. (Whyte in fact acknowledged that federal housing subsidies benefit “high-income people” in suburbia, whereas public housing programs benefit the poor in the cities, leading to a curious suggestion that the “middle class” also should be subsidized—to stay in the city [TEM 1957, 6]!)

During the 1950s, the central cities of the twenty largest metropolitan areas gained only 0.1 percent in population, whereas their suburbs grew by 45 percent (Teaford 1993, 98). Whether people “liked cities” or not was often secondary to whether they would pay the economic and emotional price of staying in them (especially if they had children) rather than fleeing to what a *New Yorker* magazine cover cartoon of December 10, 2001, slyly termed “Outer Perturbia.” Obviously, most chose the latter, whether out of choice or necessity. National policies tilted in that direction and further polarized the metropolis between haves and have-nots.

This myopia concerning race, poverty, and the underlying dynamics of urban sprawl was by no means limited to *The Exploding Metropolis*. With the exception of the early “muckraker” urban reformers like Jacob Riis (1890), most urban scholarship before the 1960s had focused on economics and technology, not social equity. Even the literature on “human ecology” by progressive urban sociologists at the University of Chicago in the 1920s complacently referred to “so-called ‘slums’ and ‘badlands,’ with their submerged regions of poverty, degradation, and disease, and their underworlds of crime and vice” and a truly racist flourish: “Wedging out from here is the Black Belt, with its free and disorderly life” (Burgess 1925, 54–56). As late as 1961, French geographer Jean Gottmann in his classic *Megalopolis* effusively described the northeast urban corridor from Boston to Washington, D.C., as “a stupendous monument erected by titanic efforts” (Gottmann 1961, 23). Concern-

ing poverty, however, he laconically wrote that “the labor market of the great cities still attracts large numbers of in-migrants from the poorer sections . . . especially Southern Negroes and Puerto Ricans, who congregate in the old urban areas and often live in slums” (Gottmann 1961, 66).

*The Exploding Metropolis*, however, was indeed revolutionary for its day in at least four respects. First, it rejected the conventional wisdom that suburbs are necessarily preferable to “real cities.” Second, it urged that cities should be thought of, in effect, as habitats for people, not simply as centers of economic production, transportation nodes, or grandiose architectural stage sets. Third, it challenged the prevailing notion that population density (“crowding”) is necessarily bad. Fourth, it established a precedent for more searching critiques of urban policies and programs in the coming decades, including but by no means limited to those of Holly Whyte and Jane Jacobs themselves. It marked the emergence of the nontechnician as self-taught “urban expert” and the rediscovery of the city as a “place,” not just a complex of systems. In short, *The Exploding Metropolis* fired an early salvo of the debate over the nature, purpose, and design of city space that continues to rage today.

### **“The Observation Man”**

On January 2, 2000, the *New York Times Magazine* in a series “People of the Millennium” profiled William H. Whyte (1917–99) as “The Observation Man” (a descriptor earlier applied to him by planner Eugenie Birch in 1986; see her essay in this volume). Norman Glazer (1999, 27) characterized him in the *Wilson Quarterly* as “the man who loved cities . . . one of America’s most influential observers of the city and the space around it.” Brendan Gill (1999, 99) in the *New Yorker* placed Whyte in company with other “learned amateurs”—Frederick Law Olmsted, Lewis Mumford, and Jane Jacobs—who became “our leading authorities on the nature of cities.” Posing a series of questions about cities, Gill wrote: “The person best fitted to answer these questions is himself a seasoned New Yorker . . . who has been subjecting the city to a scrutiny as close as that to which Thoreau—still another learned amateur—subjected Walden Pond and its environs. His name is William H. Whyte and his equivalent to Thoreau’s cabin is a narrow, high-stooped brownstone in the East Nineties.”

A native of the picturesque Brandywine Valley in eastern Pennsylvania, Holly Whyte graduated from Princeton in 1939 and fought at Guadalcanal as an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps (figure 1). As discussed in the next essay, he joined the editorial staff of *Fortune* in New York after the war and began to examine the culture and habitats of postwar suburbia. In part 7 of his 1956 book *The Organization Man*, “The New Suburbia . . .,” Whyte analyzed the social geography of young corporate families living in the planned postwar suburb of Park Forest, Illinois.



**Figure 1** William H. Whyte in the mid-1950s. (Photo courtesy of Alexandra Whyte.)

Literally mapping the patterns of social activities, parent-teacher association meetings, bridge games, and such, he determined that social interaction is promoted or inhibited by the spatial layout of homes, parking, yards, and common spaces, which in turn influenced the formation of friendships versus social isolation. He thus began a lifetime devoted to understanding better how the design of common or public spaces (e.g., parks, sidewalks, plazas) affects the lives and well-being of people who share them. This theme would later be further explored in *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (Whyte 1980) and his capstone book, *City: Rediscovering the Center* (Whyte 1988).

Whyte left *Fortune* in 1959 to pursue a broader array of urban projects. His first technical publication on conservation easements (Whyte 1959) became the model for open space statutes in California, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maryland (Birch 1986). As a consultant to the congressionally chartered Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, he wrote a report on “Open Space Action” (Whyte 1962). The commission chair, Laurance S. Rockefeller, would support Whyte’s work on urban land problems with a salary and an office in Rockefeller

Center for the rest of his career (Winks 1997). Whyte served as a member of President Lyndon Johnson's Task Force on Natural Beauty and chaired Governor Nelson Rockefeller's Conference on Natural Beauty in New York. His editorial help in re-writing the 1969 New York City Comprehensive Plan earned acclaim from the *New York Times* and the American Society of Planning Officials (Birch 1986).

The turbulent year of 1968 yielded a trio of environmental landmarks: Ian McHarg's *Design with Nature*, Garret Hardin's seminal article in *Science*, "The Tragedy of the Commons," and Whyte's *The Last Landscape*. Returning to the themes of his "Urban Sprawl" essay, *The Last Landscape* was Whyte's "bible" for the fast-spreading movement to save open space in metropolitan America. "Open space" was to conservationists of the 1960s what "anticongestion" was to early-twentieth-century progressives and what "sustainability" and "smart growth" are to environmentalists today. It embraced a variety of maladies from poorly planned development: loss of prime farmland, shortage of recreation space, urban flooding, pollution of surface water and groundwater, aesthetic blight, diminished sense of place, and isolation from nature. (Today we would add loss of biodiversity as well.) *The Last Landscape* offered a legal toolbox to combat urban sprawl, including cluster zoning, conservation easements, greenbelts, scenic roads, and tax abatements. Much of today's smart growth agenda was anticipated in *The Last Landscape* (which was republished in 2002 by the University of Pennsylvania Press).

If Whyte had confined himself to astute observation and witty commentary, his contribution would be notable but not lasting. What distinguished his legacy was his continuous agitation for practical improvement in urban design and land use, based on empirical observation and leading to measurable outcomes. For instance, Whyte helped reform the 1961 New York City's zoning provision that offered density bonus incentives to developers of new office or residential buildings in exchange for public amenities. With revisions suggested by Whyte, this approach to date has yielded more than five hundred privately owned and maintained public spaces, including street-level plazas, interior or covered public areas, arcades, and through-block gallerias. Planning lawyer Jerold S. Kayden (2000) has documented widespread problems with the accessibility and management of many of these spaces, yet in toto they make up an extraordinary legacy of shared spaces provided at private cost. (See Kayden's summary of his findings in his essay in this volume.)

Whyte's proudest accomplishment was the revitalization of Bryant Park in midtown Manhattan behind the New York City Public Library (Dillon 1996). By the late 1970s, the park had degenerated into a littered, seedy, and menacing space. Under Whyte's guidance as consultant and with funding from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the park was progressively restored, redesigned, replanted, and returned to its original use as a green oasis for the general public to enjoy. One of Bryant Park's most popular features is a plenitude of movable chairs, an idea bor-



**Figure 2** A lively downtown plaza in Oakland, California, at lunch hour: a quintessential Holly Whyte urban scene. (Photo by R. H. Platt.)

rowed by Whyte from the Jardin du Luxembourg in Paris (see figure 2 in Eugenie Birch's essay in this volume). Ongoing management of the park today is entrusted to a "business improvement district" (BID), which levies a tax on surrounding real estate and holds special events to pay for enhanced maintenance. Such a novel public-private partnership between the city and the BID is consistent with Whyte's optimistic pragmatism.

From Park Forest in the 1950s to New York City in the 1980s, Whyte was a die-hard urban environmental determinist. He believed that the design of shared spaces greatly affects the interaction of people who encounter one another in those spaces and their resulting sense of well-being or discomfort in urban surroundings. Such interaction in turn helps shape the "success" of cities and suburbs as congenial or alien environments for the millions who inhabit them (figure 2). As the *New Yorker* architectural critic Paul Goldberger wrote in a foreword to a compendium of Whyte's writings edited by Albert LaFarge (2000, vii): "His objective research on the city, on open space, on the way people use it, was set within what I think I must call a moral context. Holly believed with deep passion that there was such a thing as quality of life, and the way we build cities, the way we make places, can have a profound effect on what lives are lived within those places."

**U.S. Metropolitan Growth since the 1950s**

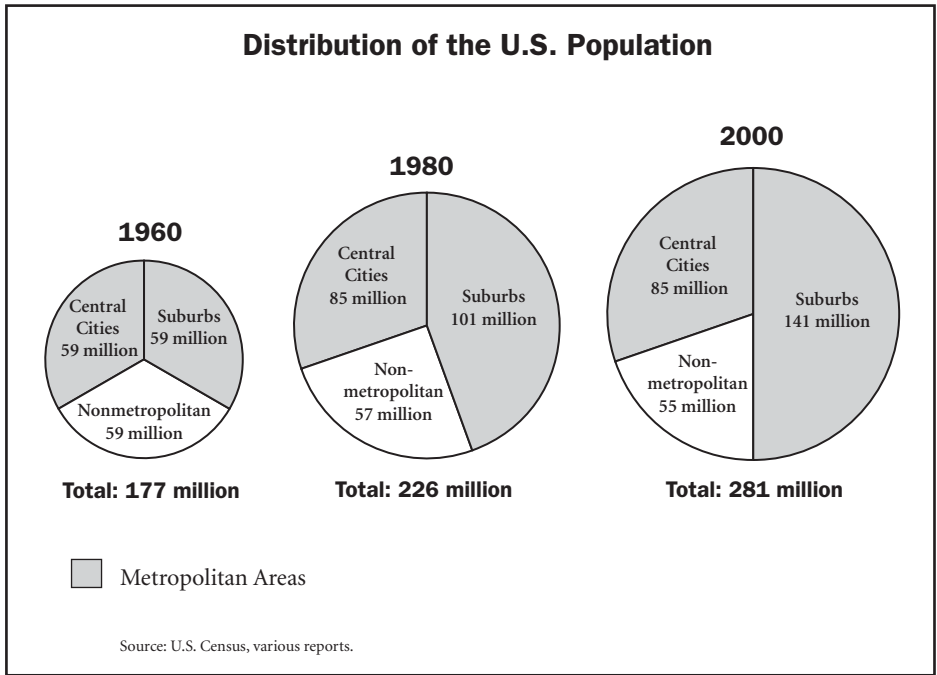
Metropolitan America at the dawn of the twenty-first-century has sprawled far beyond the wildest imaginings of *The Exploding Metropolis* authors. Between 1950 and 2000, metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) designated by the Bureau of the Census grew in number from 169 to 347, in population from 84 million to 226 million, and in size from 9 percent to about 18 percent of the land area of the conterminous United States (table 1).<sup>1</sup> “Suburbs” (areas within metropolitan areas other than central cities) grew from 55 million residents in 1950 to more than 141 million in 2000 and now are home to slightly more than one-half of the entire U.S. population. Metropolitan areas as a whole, including central cities, in 2000 accounted for four-fifths of the nation’s population. By comparison, in 1960, central cities, suburbs, and nonmetropolitan areas each represented about one-third of the nation’s population (figure 3).

Most metropolitan areas today are expanding spatially much more quickly than they are adding population. Between 1982 and 1997, the total extent of “urbanized areas,” as delineated by the Bureau of the Census, increased by 47 percent while the nation’s population grew by only 17 percent (Fulton et al. 2001). The Chicago area grew by 48 percent in population between 1950 and 1995 while its urbanized land area increased by 165 percent (Openlands Project 1998). Between 1970 and 1990,

**Table 1** Changes in Metropolitan America, 1950–2000

	1950	2000
U.S. population	152 million	281 million
No. of metropolitan areas	169	347
Metropolitan population	84 million (55% of U.S.)	226 million (80% of U.S.)
No. of metropolitan areas > 1 million	14	39 (1990)
Population of metropolitan areas > 1 million	45 million (30% of U.S.)	125 million (50% of U.S.)
Metropolitan % of U.S. land area	9%	18%
Average metropolitan population density	407 persons/sq. mile	330 persons/sq. mile
Central city population	49 million (32% of U.S.)	85 million (30% of U.S.)
“Suburban” population*	35 million (23% of U.S.)	141 million (50% of U.S.)

\* The Bureau of the Census does not use the term *suburb*. The term is colloquially used to represent all portions of metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) outside of “central cities” (now called “principle cities”).



**Figure 3** Distribution of the U.S. population among central cities, suburbs, and nonmetropolitan areas: 1960, 1980, 2000. (Source: University of Massachusetts Ecological Cities Project.)

the Los Angeles metropolitan population grew 45 percent while its urbanized land area expanded by 300 percent (table 2). Overall, the average density of urban America has declined from 407 persons per square mile in 1950 to 330 in 2000, but surprisingly, metropolitan expansion in the West is at higher average density (i.e., is less sprawling) than elsewhere in the United States, according to a Brookings Institution study (Fulton et al. 2001).

Between 1950 and 2000, “suburbs” tripled in population while central cities collectively gained only 73 percent. Even this comparison understates the actual shift away from older cities toward suburbs. The Bureau of the Census lists as “central cities” many new or greatly enlarged Sunbelt cities that are predominantly suburban in character, such as San Diego (75 percent population growth since 1970), Phoenix (145 percent), Los Angeles (27.9 percent), and Las Vegas (220 percent). These examples of “elastic cities” are defined by David Rusk (1999) as cities able to enlarge their geographic area through annexation of adjoining territory. The expansion in area and population of these elastic southwestern cities masks the heavy losses in the populations of many older northern cities whose boundaries are “inelastic.” Between 1970 and 1990, Chicago lost about 17 percent of its total

**Table 2** Expansion of Population and Urbanized Land Area in Four Metropolitan Areas, 1970–90

<i>Metropolitan Area</i>	<i>Change in Population (%) 1970–90</i>	<i>Change in Urbanized Land (%) 1970–90</i>
Chicago	+4	+46
Los Angeles	+45	+300
New York City	+8	+65
Seattle	+38	+87

Source: Porter 2000, fig. 2-3.

population, Minneapolis lost 19 percent, New York lost 6 percent, and Washington, D.C., shrank by nearly one-third.

*Race and Poverty*

When race is considered, the contrast is even starker. During the 1990s, the top one hundred cities in population experienced a 43 percent increase in Hispanic population (3.8 million people), a 6 percent increase in African American population (750,000 people), and a 38 percent rise in Asian population (1 million people). During the same decade, 2.3 million whites left those cities. In 1990, 52 percent of the combined populations of those one hundred cities was white; in 2000, that percentage had declined to 44 percent (Katz 2001). Journalist Ray Suarez in his book *The Old Neighborhood* summarizes experience in a few of the nation’s largest cities as follows:

Between 1950 and 1990, the population of New York stayed roughly level, the white population halved, and the black population doubled. As Chicago lost almost one million people from the overall count, it lost almost two million whites. As the population of Los Angeles almost doubled, the number of whites living there grew by fewer than ninety thousand. Baltimore went from a city of three times as many whites as blacks in 1950 to a city that will have twice as many blacks as whites in the year 2000. All this happened while the number of blacks in the United States has stayed a roughly constant percentage, between 11 and 13 percent. (Suarez 1999, 10)

Racial change is not necessarily bad if it results in greater access to decent housing and jobs for nonwhites. That, however, is not the case. To begin with, blacks are more likely to be poor than whites. In 1993, the percentage of white families below the federal poverty level was 9.4 percent, compared with 31.3 percent of black families. Both of these proportions had increased since 1979 when 6.9 percent of white families and 27.8 percent of black households were below the poverty level (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1995–96, table 752). Thus, with blacks making up a rising proportion of city population and poverty afflicting a rising proportion of



black households and individuals, it follows that black poverty is heavily concentrated in central cities.

Yet this situation does not translate into improved housing or economic opportunities for lower-income nonwhites by virtue of living in cities. Housing in “ghetto” neighborhoods is notoriously dilapidated but nevertheless costly to rent because poor tenants seldom have anywhere else to turn. David Rusk (1999, 70–71) quotes a bitter indictment by Oliver Byrum, former planning director of Minneapolis: “Low-income people and poverty conditions are concentrated in inner city areas because that is where we want them to be. It is, in fact, our national belief, translated into metropolitan housing policy, that this is where they are supposed to be. Additionally, they are to have as little presence as possible elsewhere in the metropolitan area. . . . *Cheap shelter is to be mostly created by the devaluation of inner city neighborhoods*” (emphasis added).

Furthermore, poverty itself is not colorblind. According to Rusk (1999, 71), poor whites in metropolitan areas about equaled the total of poor blacks and Hispanics combined in 1990. Yet although three-quarters of the poor whites lived in “middle-class, mostly suburban neighborhoods,” the same percentage of poor blacks and Hispanics inhabited inner-city, low-income neighborhoods.

Despite federal laws to protect civil rights, open housing, and equal opportunity, central cities are more racially and economically challenged than ever. Consider Hartford, the state capital of Connecticut, the wealthiest city in the United States after the Civil War and home to Mark Twain, Louisa May Alcott, Trinity College, and the Travelers Insurance Company. Hartford was recently described by the *New York Times* as “the most destitute 17 square miles in the nation’s wealthiest state, and a city where 30 percent of its residents live in poverty. Only Brownsville, Texas, has a higher figure” (Zielbauer 2002).

Adding to the downward spiral of older central cities, new jobs have been predominantly created in suburban locations, thus requiring inner-city residents to have a personal vehicle for an often-lengthy reverse commute. In the case of Atlanta, the central city’s share of the metropolitan job market dropped from 40 percent in 1980 to 19 percent in 1997. From 1990 to 1997, the central city gained only 4,503 new jobs, just 1.3 percent of all jobs created in the region during that period while 295,000 jobs, or 78 percent of all jobs, were added to Atlanta’s northern suburbs (Bullard, Johnson, and Torres 2000, 10–11). Furthermore, poor public transportation may impede residents of low-income neighborhoods from even reaching jobs “downtown” or elsewhere within their own cities.

### *Edge Cities*

Not only have jobs followed the white middle class to the suburbs, but much of the new economic activity outside the central city is likely to be concentrated in “edge cities” (Garreau 1991), also called “urban villages” (Leinberger and Lockwood

1986) or “mushburbs” (Platt 2004, 195). An edge city is a high-density complex of retail, office, hotel, entertainment, and high-end residential uses, typically situated near major interstate highway interchanges (e.g., the Burlington Mall area northwest of Boston), airports (the vicinity of Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport) or rapid transit stations (Ballston on the Washington, D.C., Metro Orange Line). Like Holly Whyte’s study of Park Forest in *The Organization Man*, Joel Garreau’s *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* explored the physical and human dimensions of this late-twentieth-century phenomenon. Using a definition of a newly developed cluster having at least five million square feet of office space and 600,000 square feet of retail space, among other criteria, Garreau identified more than two hundred edge cities in metropolitan areas across the United States. Astonishingly, he estimated that edge cities in 1991 contained two-thirds of all U.S. office space, thus eclipsing conventional urban “downtowns.” The edge cities of New Jersey contained more office space than the financial district of Manhattan. South Coast Mall in Orange County, California, did more business in a day than did all downtown San Francisco (Garreau 1991, 5, 63).

How would Holly Whyte have felt about edge cities? He might have accepted them in certain respects—high-density land coverage, mingling of people in quasi-public spaces, casual eating facilities (the ubiquitous “Café Square”), and convenient pedestrian access (once the SUV is stowed in the parking structure)—but they have no “streets” or street life, which he revered. Commercial space is leased by formula set in shopping mall bibles, with little freedom for unorthodox retail uses or groups of similar businesses (e.g., a fortune teller next to a TGIF outlet or a row of fortune tellers). Rents are high, which excludes most low-volume or specialty stores, although space for cart vendors is sometimes allowed. The overriding characteristic of edge cities that would have probably vexed Whyte, however, is their “privateness.” They represent the logical progression of the conventional shopping center where all space is managed directly or indirectly by the development company. It opens and closes at fixed times, it is usually clean and orderly, but free speech, unlicensed entertainment, odd behavior, and “undesirables” (Holly Whyte’s pre-PC term) are subject to expulsion. The entire place is relatively “new,” which means that it will all grow obsolete at the same time. Although buildings may be separately owned, the entirety is subject to an overriding master plan and there is no place for the unexpected. In short, *it is not a city*.

Nor is it even a town. Edge cities by definition are not governmental units and thus are private enclaves within larger units of local government. Involvement with that larger community, its schools and other civic life, may be very limited for edge city residents and employees. Although the edge city is likely a major source of property and sales tax revenue, it may be viewed by the local populace as an alien presence rather than as an integral part of “the community.” Local authorities seldom turn down proposals for new edge cities or their smaller cousins, however.

### *Gated Communities*

The trend toward privateness in U.S. metropolitan growth is nowhere more obvious than in the spread of “gated” residential communities. Gated communities are subdivisions surrounded by literal and legal walls. Whereas streets, bike paths, and recreation amenities in a traditional subdivision are conveyed to the local government and are open to the public, a gated subdivision retains control over these features and restricts access to them. Gated communities often include golf courses, tennis courts, and other membership amenities, funded out of homeowner assessments and user fees, and open only to residents and their guests.

In their pioneering study of gated communities, planners Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder (1997, 7) estimated that there were by 1997 “as many as 20,000 gated communities, with more than 3 million units. They are increasing rapidly in number, in all regions and price classes.” They are most common in affluent outer reaches of Sunbelt metropolitan areas, but large concentrations also are found in wealthy suburbs of most larger cities. (See Blakely’s essay in this volume.)

The gated community is “anti-Whyte.” Its very gatedness and exclusion of the nonapproved flies in the face of the proletarian democracy of the street celebrated by Holly Whyte. Furthermore, the privateness of the home surroundings becomes extended to privateness in all aspects of life: private school, private clubs, private resorts, closely guarded places of work (in edge cities, perhaps), and a general distrust of the outside world.

With jobs and homes broadly scattered across the metropolis, public transportation systems have often atrophied for lack of passengers and revenue, if they existed in the first place. The metropolitan workforce spends a growing percent of its waking hours commuting (76 percent alone) on jammed freeways. In the Atlanta area, the average driver travels thirty-four miles a day and spends sixty-eight hours a year trapped in traffic gridlock, making Atlanta the fourth worst commuting region in the United States behind Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and Seattle (Bullard, Johnson, and Torres 2000, 12). Since 1970, the nation’s motor vehicles have nearly doubled in number (not to mention size) while the population has grown by 40 percent and road capacity increased by 6 percent (Seabrook 2002). The more affluent commuters repeat the ordeal on weekends to reach the Hamptons, Cape Cod, Maine, the Eastern Shore of Maryland, northern Michigan, the Sierra foothills, and other supposed refuges from the “madding crowd.”

Meanwhile, Whyte’s beloved downtowns (except Manhattan and a few other twenty-four-hour city centers) are conspicuously deserted at night. Although there are many more plazas, mini-parks, and other social spaces, the daytime office crowd vanishes to the suburbs and beyond on evenings and weekends. In many cities, revival of downtowns has focused on attracting suburbanites and tourists through megastructures such as sports stadiums, conference centers, casinos, and

“festival marketplaces” such as Boston’s Quincy Market, Baltimore’s Inner Harbor, and San Francisco’s Embarcadero. Although these areas offer economic benefits, they often represent a reversion to urban gigantism in the spirit of urban renewal that was early decried by Whyte and Jacobs. Although the outdoor marketplaces (as in San Diego’s Horton Plaza) may offer some sense of urbanity and spontaneity, their indoor elements in general are private downtown malls. Even in Manhattan, many public spaces lack users owing to design or management deficiencies (Kayden 2000). (See Kayden’s essay in this volume.)

Suburbs have, of course, changed in many respects and today are unlikely to resemble the lily-white “organization man” suburbs of the 1950s (except that many are still white). Even Whyte’s archetype Park Forest, Illinois, experienced deliberate racial change in the 1960s; today with its counterparts around the country it is a diverse community sociologically, if not economically (as documented by a recent film on Park Forest by James Gilmore, *Chronicle of an American Suburb*). Suburbs are also more diverse in terms of lifestyle and household status: the stereotypical nuclear family of television sitcoms in the 1950s like *Ozzie and Harriet* has been supplanted in many suburbs by increasing numbers of singles, elderly people, and gay and single-parent families. Both *Ozzie and Harriet* have jobs, if they are lucky, and may be divorced or separated with some sort of shared custody of the children. Suburban nonfamily households—mostly young singles and elderly living alone—outnumbered married couples with children according to the 2000 census (Frey and Berube 2002).

Another outdated stereotype, in more affluent communities at least, is the image of the vapid cultural life and humdrum retail and entertainment opportunities of suburbia. David Brooks in *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (2000) satirizes the proliferation in suburbs of trendy coffee bars, health food outlets, multicultural galleries, and other services loosely associated with “urbanism.” Yet although Starbucks and its ilk are solidly established in America’s upscale suburbs and shopping malls, a mall is still a mall. Although they gain more ethnic flavor and cater to the wider diversity of suburbia itself, malls remain private enclaves where commercial occupancy and personal behavior are highly regulated and where the uniform building design, controlled climate, and background “elevator music” are similar from coast to coast.

When private malls are combined with gated residential compounds, private transportation, private schools, and private recreation clubs, there is little left in the contemporary metropolitan area that is “public” or “community-based.” Robert D. Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* (2000), which depicts the loss of “community” in America’s cities and suburbs alike, stands in counterpoint to Whyte’s Park Forest of the 1950s. Organization life at least offered a kind of togetherness, a temporary substitute for the traditional urban neighborhoods celebrated by Jane Jacobs and Ray Suarez, and the proverbial small towns of Norman Rockwell and the Archie

comics. Yet even that is now diminished, as Brooks (2000, 238) observes: “Today few writers argue that Americans are *too* group oriented or *too* orderly. They are not complaining about Organization Man or the other-directed joiners. On the contrary, today most social critics are calling for *more* community, *more* civil society, *more* social cohesion.”

### **Toward a More Humane Metropolis**

All is not lost, however. Even as metropolitan America has become more populous, more sprawling, more exasperating, and more stratified, a subliminal countervailing trend is beginning to stir. In cities and suburbs across the United States, in both red states and blue, myriad local efforts are under way to make urban communities more amenable to people and nature, in short, to make them more “humane.” This book and the conference that gave rise to it sample a few of these efforts as harbingers of the humane metropolis. This concept (a deliberate play on “The Exploding Metropolis”) draws from and expands upon the work of William H. Whyte, in company with that of Jane Jacobs, Ian McHarg, Kevin Lynch, Ann Louise Strong, Charles E. Little, Tony Hiss, Ann Whiston Spirn, and many others. The phrase “humane metropolis” as used in this book means urban places that are more *green*, more *healthy and safe*, more *people friendly*, and more *equitable*.

Today, efforts to preserve and restore nature within urban regions are breaking new ground, so to speak. Some ecologists are finally beginning to specialize in urban ecology (Daily 1997), as in the long-term ecological research programs in Baltimore and Phoenix funded by the National Science Foundation (Collins et al. 2000; Grimm et al. 2000). American Forests, a nongovernmental organization based in Washington, D.C., is documenting the benefits of preserving tree canopy in the urban environment. The U.S. Forest Service and the Conservation Fund are promoting the concept of “green infrastructure.” New forms and uses of city parks are documented in a thorough study by Peter Harnik for Trust for Public Land and the Urban Land Institute (Harnik 2000, summarized in his essay in this volume). Urban gardens are appearing in surprising places, such as on the roof of Chicago’s City Hall. A joint project of Rutgers University and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden is testing ecological ways to cover landfills. (See the essay by Clemants and Handel, this volume.) Some suburban lawns are being relandscaped with native vegetation. Urban watersheds like the Mystic and Neponset in Boston, the Milwaukee River, and the San Diego River are being ecologically rehabilitated, at least in limited segments. Urban vacant lots are sprouting gardens in New Haven under the auspices of the Urban Resources Initiative, a joint venture of the Yale School of Forestry, the City of New Haven, and neighborhood organizations. The National Audubon Society is creating urban environmental education centers in Prospect Park in Brooklyn and Debs Park in Los Angeles in partnership with local public and private

interests. A group named ARTScorpsLA under the guidance of artist Tricia Ward has created a beautiful neighborhood eco-park in Los Angeles called *La Coulebra*, turning discarded concrete rubble into art forms decorated by neighborhood children. Experience in European cities with urban greening is described by planner Timothy Beatley in *Green Urbanism* (Beatley 1998, summarized in his essay in this volume). And so on!

The Ecological Cities Project ([www.ecologicalcities.org](http://www.ecologicalcities.org)) is a program of research, teaching, and outreach on the greening and social revival of urban communities based at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. William H. Whyte had influenced my interest in cities and greenspaces since my early days as a staff attorney with the Openlands Project in Chicago. I invited him to be keynote speaker at a conference several colleagues and I held in Chicago in 1990, which led to the “pre-quel” to this book, *The Ecological City: Restoring and Preserving Urban Biodiversity* (Platt, Rowntree, and Muick 1994).<sup>2</sup> After Whyte’s death in 1999, it was natural for our newly established Ecological Cities Project to celebrate Whyte’s work and its echoes in contemporary urban places today. With nary a pompous syllable, he laid the foundation for what would later be termed growth management, sustainable development, smart growth, New Urbanism, and a host of other buzzword movements. We were successful in persuading the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, one of the world’s leading land use research and education centers, to support the project, with additional support provided by the Wyomissing Foundation, the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and Laurance S. Rockefeller.

On June 6 and 7, 2002, approximately three hundred urban design practitioners, writers, ecologists, grassroots activists, and students gathered in New York City for “The Humane Metropolis: People and Nature in the Twenty-First Century—A Symposium to Celebrate and Continue the Work of William H. Whyte.” The conference was held at the New York University Law School in collaboration with several units at that university. Other New York cooperating organizations included the Municipal Art Society, the Project for Public Spaces, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, and the Regional Plan Association. Keynote speakers included Amanda M. Burden, chair of the New York City Planning Commission; Adrian Benepe, New York City Parks Commissioner; and Carl Anthony of the Ford Foundation. Several of Holly’s friends and associates, as well as his daughter, Alexandra Whyte, expressed personal tributes.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the University of Pennsylvania Press released a new edition of *The Organization Man* at the symposium.

The rest of the two-day conference explored a series of present and proposed initiatives around the country that perpetuate or expand on Holly Whyte’s ideas on people, nature, and cities. Some of the initiatives were represented there and in this book. Urban greening and revitalization projects at various scales from inner-city gardens to regional parks and habitat restoration programs were presented by speakers from the New York area as well as Chicago, Milwaukee, Boston, Durham,

N.C., Portland, Oregon, and elsewhere. Other sessions examined such topics as ecological restoration, environmental education, and regreening the built environment. Although a number of topics such as green roofs, urban gardens, and brown-field remediation were not part of Whyte's own palette of topics, we assumed that if he were to rewrite *The Last Landscape* today, he would applaud and document such new issues and approaches.

The conference was a success according to comments received. Among our favorite was the following from Peter Harnik, director of the Trust for Public Lands' Green Cities Initiative (and contributor to this volume):

I tend to be slightly on the critical, hard-to-please side of the analytical spectrum, so it's even more meaningful when I say that the "Humane Metropolis" was one of the best conferences I've ever attended. . . . The speakers were consistently terrific, the audience was wonderful, and the audio-visual was taken care of flawlessly. Most important, you are on the cutting edge of an up-and-coming topic that is given almost no attention by anyone else—since urban experts rarely talk about nature, and conservationists virtually never talk about cities.

We believe Holly Whyte would say "Amen"!

## Notes

1. As of the 2000 census, MSAs other than in New England were designated as clusters of one or more counties anchored by a core consisting of one or more cities or an "urbanized area" containing at least fifty thousand inhabitants. Using counties as the building blocks of MSAs leads to inclusion of much nonurban land where counties are very large, as in Southern California. In New England, MSAs consisted of clusters of cities and towns instead of counties. Metropolitan area terminology and classifications have since been revised. (See Frey et al. 2004.)
2. Unfortunately, that book did not include a Whyte paper owing to his poor health at the time.
3. Holly Whyte's widow, the indomitable Jenny Bell Whyte, attended the entire symposium despite health issues; she passed away three months later on September 1, 2002.

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