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ST. LOUIS BLUES: THE URBAN CRISIS IN THE GATEWAY CITY

COLIN GORDON*

The housing crash and subsequent recession returned our collective attention to the dismal state of American cities. The last six years have reminded us of the precarious state of our inner cities, and of the failed public policies and predatory private policies that got us to that point.¹ And they have pushed that failure and misery into the suburbs—making more visible and more universal the experience of urban crisis or decline.² Abandoned or half-finished suburban tracts on the fringes of Las Vegas or Fort Lauderdale mark a new frontier for that crisis, but it has been with us now for over half a century.

Over that span, the American urban crisis has been defined by a common set of conditions or circumstances. Those conditions and circumstances, in turn, were (and in some respects remain) more pronounced in St. Louis than almost anywhere else.³ “St. Louis is not a typical City,” noted one observer in the late 1970s, “but, like a Eugene O’Neill play, it shows a general condition in a stark and dramatic form.”⁴

First, the American urban crisis is marked by a pattern of general, but locally uneven, demographic and economic decline. It is not so much that “cities” declined, as that central cities (and later inner suburbs) declined

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1. See Paul Taylor et al., *Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs Between Whites, Blacks and Hispanics*, PEW RESEARCH CTR. (July 26, 2011), http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2011/07/SDT-Wealth-Report_7-26-11_FINAL.pdf; Tatjana Meschede et al., *The Racial Wealth Gap Increases Fourfold*, INST. ON ASSETS AND SOC. POL’Y (May 2010), available at <http://www.insightcced.org/uploads/CRWG/IASP-Racial-Wealth-Gap-Brief-May2010.pdf>; KATRIN ANACKER ET AL., NAT’L CMTY. REINVESTMENT COAL., *THE FORECLOSURE CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES OF COLOR* (Sept. 2011), available at http://www.ncrc.org/images/stories/pdf/research/ncrc_foreclosurewhitepaper_2011.pdf.

2. See Emily Garr & Elizabeth Kneebone, *The Suburbanization of Poverty*, BROOKINGS INST. (Jan. 2010), http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2010/1/20%20poverty%20kneebone/0120_poverty_paper.pdf.

3. See COLIN GORDON, *MAPPING DECLINE: ST. LOUIS AND THE FATE OF THE AMERICAN CITY 10* (Glenda Gilmore et al. eds., 2008); *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the American City*, HARVARD WORLD MAP, <http://worldmap.harvard.edu/maps/866> (last visited APR. 22, 2014).

4. GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 8.

relative to the rest of the metropolitan region of which they were a part.⁵ Of our fifteen largest central cities in 1950, eleven saw their peak population in that year—the only exceptions being New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Houston.⁶ And the others didn't just stop growing: nine of those cities lost more than a quarter of their population over the next fifty years, and five (St. Louis, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and Cleveland) lost more than half.⁷

Consider St. Louis. In 1930, the metropolitan area encompassed four counties (two in Missouri, two on the Illinois side) and a population of about 1.3 million—of which over 60 percent lived in the City of St. Louis.⁸ In 1970, the metro area included two more counties on the Missouri side, and growth was confined to the suburbs: the City claimed barely a quarter of the metropolitan population (620,000 of 2.36 million).⁹ By 2010, the metro area sprawled across seventeen counties and the City claimed just 10 percent of the metro population (now nudging 3 million).¹⁰ Population density, about 1,000 persons per square mile in 1960, was less than a third of that (322 persons per square mile) by 2010. In 1950, St. Louis was the eighth largest city in the nation; it is now the fifty-third largest.¹¹

Second, this decline—but more importantly its unevenness—yielded an increasingly stark pattern of concentrated poverty and racial segregation. Alongside the shared prosperity of the postwar boom and the slow but steady gains of the postwar civil rights movement, central cities seemed to drift in the opposite direction—becoming poorer, more deeply segregated, and more isolated over time.¹² Nowhere was this truer than in St. Louis, a city whose postwar demographics were starkly biracial (those identifying themselves as

5. KENNETH T. JACKSON, *CRABGRASS FRONTIER: THE SUBURBANIZATION OF THE UNITED STATES* 4 (1985).

6. *Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, tbls.18, 19 (May 12, 2012) [hereinafter *Population of the 100 Largest*], <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html>.

7. *Population of the 100 Largest*, *supra* note 6, at tbls.18, 22.

8. *USA Metropolitan Area & Core Cities Population Trends: 1930-1940*, DEMOGRAPHIA, www.demographia.com/db-metro1940.htm (last visited Apr. 22, 2014).

9. *Major US Metropolitan Areas: Core City & Suburban Population 2000-2008*, DEMOGRAPHIA (Sept. 27, 2009), <http://demographia.com/db-msacore.pdf>.

10. *St. Louis City QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (June 27, 2013), <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/29/2965000.html>.

11. Charles D. Schmitz, *St. Louis is a World-Class City*, ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH (June 30, 2010), www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/article_e07eb3b8-73b2-5a69-8893-3497c1756bf2.html.

12. See DOUGLAS S. MASSEY & NANCY A. DENTON, *AMERICAN APARTHEID: SEGREGATION AND THE MAKING OF THE UNDERCLASS* 4–5 (1993); DOUGLAS S. MASSEY, *CATEGORICALLY UNEQUAL: THE AMERICAN STRATIFICATION SYSTEM* 52 (2007); MICHAEL B. KATZ, *WHY DON'T AMERICAN CITIES BURN?* 51–52 (2012).

black or white made up 99 percent of the metro population every census year until 1990, and still make up more than 95 percent) and whose local housing patterns have marked it as one of the nation's "hypersegregated" metropolitan areas.¹³

All of this is evident not just in racial occupancy patterns, but in race relations as well. Racial transition in American cities in the 1930s and 1940s yielded a nasty pattern of segregation and discrimination enforced and sustained by restrictive deed instruments, private realty, federal housing and mortgage policies, local zoning, and an enthusiasm for urban renewal that equated black occupancy with blight.¹⁴ Again, St. Louis stood out. It was no accident that St. Louis—a city whose organization of property followed the pattern of most northern settings but whose race relations were essentially southern—was ground zero for virtually all of the key legal battles over race and property in the modern era.¹⁵

Third, decline brought with it dramatic disinvestment—even abandonment—in older residential and commercial areas.¹⁶ This occurred despite (and sometimes because of) the urban renewal programs that were meant to save the cities.¹⁷ And, as property fell in value (or off the tax rolls entirely), local fiscal capacity collapsed—further undermining the public services and goods (streets, schools, sewers) that made neighborhoods viable.¹⁸ Local government, flush with federal redevelopment and highway funds,

13. See Heather I. Macdonald, *Mortgage Lending and Residential Integration in a Hypersegregated MSA: The Case of St. Louis*, 35 URB. STUD. 1971, 1973 (1998) (discussing the St. Louis patterns); John Farley, *Race, Not Class: Explaining Racial Housing Segregation in the St. Louis Metropolitan Area, 2000*, 38 SOC. FOCUS 133, 137 (2005); Douglas S. Massey & Nancy A. Denton, *Hypersegregation in U.S. Metropolitan Areas: Black and Hispanic Segregation Along Five Dimensions*, 26 DEMOGRAPHY 373, 388 (1989); Robert E. Mendelson & Michael A. Quinn, *Residential Patterns in a Midwestern City: The St. Louis Experience*, in THE METROPOLITAN MIDWEST: POLICY PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE 151, 158–60 (Barry Checkoway & Carl Patton eds., 1985); DAVID LASLO, A BRIEF DEMOGRAPHIC AND SPATIAL HISTORY OF THE ST. LOUIS REGION: 1950–2000, at 11 (2003).

14. PRESTON H. SMITH, RACIAL DEMOCRACY AND THE BLACK METROPOLIS: HOUSING POLICY IN POSTWAR CHICAGO 212 (2012).

15. See *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1, 23 (1948) (holding state enforcement of race restrictive deed covenants to be unconstitutional); *Jones v. Mayer*, 392 U.S. 409, 449 (1968) (holding the Civil Rights Act protects private real estate transactions); *United States v. City of Black Jack*, 509 F.2d 1179, 1182 (8th Cir. 1974) (discussing an early exclusionary zoning case).

16. ALAN MALLACH, BROOKINGS INST., FACING THE URBAN CHALLENGE: THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND AMERICA'S OLDER DISTRESSED CITIES 6 (May 2010), available at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2010/5/18%20shrinking%20cities%20mallach/0518_shrinking_cities_mallach.pdf.

17. *Id.* at 16–17.

18. MYRON ORFIELD, METROPOLITICS: A REGIONAL AGENDA FOR COMMUNITY AND STABILITY 84–85 (1997).

became a sort of centrifuge that flung people, employment, and tax capacity to the suburban fringes.¹⁹

In St. Louis, these patterns were exaggerated by underlying economic weaknesses (deindustrialization hit earlier and harder than it did in even the rest of the rustbelt²⁰), by the unusually fragmented structure of local government,²¹ and by state and regional patterns of zoning and land use which placed few restraints on sprawl.²² As a result, population, development, and infrastructure sprawled west—leaving some North St. Louis neighborhoods largely deserted, the remaining houses scattered like tombstones across untended swaths of vacant land.²³ What was commonly labeled “white flight” was, in greater St. Louis—black flight as well, as African-Americans moved steadily out of the City and into the postage-stamp municipalities of north St. Louis County.²⁴

CIRCUMSTANCE, CONSEQUENCE, AND CAUSE

In the broader economic context of the last century, St. Louis faced some tough odds. But it is a mistake to ascribe urban decline to the immutable market forces of suburbanization, deindustrialization, and globalization and leave it at that. There was nothing inevitable about the scale or severity or character of St. Louis’ urban crisis—all of which were shaped as much by public policy and political choices as they were by secular economic and demographic changes. It is not necessary to revisit all of those policies and choices here.²⁵ But I would like to underscore two important factors that—especially in combination—fundamentally shaped the St. Louis experience.

A. Race

As St. Louis and its suburbs navigated the last century, race relations indelibly colored the motives and the consequences of public policy. The

19. MALLACH, *supra* note 16, at 8.

20. See Scott Cummings, *Racial Inequality and Development Disparities in the St. Louis Region*, in ST. LOUIS METROMORPHOSIS: PAST TRENDS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS 99, 104–07, 112–14 (Brady Baybeck & E. Terrence Jones eds., 2004).

21. See Anja Kurki, *Measuring Metropolitan Government Structure and its Impact on Income Distribution in Metropolitan Areas* (paper presented at the American Political Science Meeting, Atlanta, 1999), http://localgov.fsu.edu/readings_papers/form%20of%20govt/Kurki_Metropolitan_Inequalities.pdf.

22. See ROLF PENDALL ET AL., BROOKINGS INST., FROM TRADITIONAL TO REFORMED: A REVIEW OF THE LAND USE REGULATIONS IN THE NATION’S 50 LARGEST METROPOLITAN AREAS 12–19 (2006), available at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2006/8/metro_politanpolicy%20pendall/20060802_pendall.pdf.

23. See Cummings, *supra* note 20, at 100–01, 104.

24. See GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 23, 25.

25. See generally *id.*

desire to regulate and limit African-American occupancy animated the earliest efforts at land-use planning—including the profusion of private streets in the city's early residential development.²⁶ From 1915 to 1916, long before conventional urban zoning was even a consideration, city planners pressed for a racial zoning ordinance that would have confined African-Americans to the Ville neighborhood in North St. Louis and a scattering of nonresidential tracts along the river or the rail beds running inland.²⁷ The ordinance passed, but its implementation was stalled by the Supreme Court's back-handed admonition (in *Buchanan v. Warley*) that such laws deprived white property owners of the right to sell or convey their property as they saw fit.²⁸

In the wake of the 1917 ruling in *Buchanan*, and in the shadow of the East St. Louis race riot the same year, local real estate interests moved to implement the restriction by other means.²⁹ These included an “unrestricted zone” (closely resembling the footprint of black occupancy contained in the 1916 ordinance) enforced by the St. Louis Real Estate Exchange, which effectively outlawed sales to African-Americans in most of the city.³⁰ This was accompanied by a profusion of race restrictive deed covenants which established more explicit and enforceable neighborhood schemes of segregation.³¹ These agreements, numbering almost 400 in the city by the early 1940s, covered large swaths of largely white South St. Louis and surrounded the Ville in North St. Louis.³² And these agreements were standard issue in the early suburban development west of the city, effectively barring African-Americans from all but a few enclaves in St. Louis County and beyond.³³

These restrictive instruments were important both for the ways in which they shaped the urban landscape in the years before conventional zoning and land use planning, and for the ways in which they were incorporated into—and perpetuated by—the public policies that followed. When the city and its suburbs moved forward with modern zoning ordinances in the 1930s and 1940s, they did so with the explicit intent of sustaining racial restrictions.³⁴ In St. Louis, where land zoning was implemented after the fact, city planners protected white neighborhoods with single family designations while lumping

26. *Id.* at 69.

27. *Id.* at 70–71.

28. See *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 U.S. 60 (1917); Roger Rice, *Residential Segregation by Law, 1910-1917*, 34 J. S. HIST. 179, 194 (1968)

29. See GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 71; HARPER BARNES, *NEVER BEEN A TIME: THE 1917 RACE RIOT THAT SPARKED THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT* 69 (2008).

30. See GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 73, 75.

31. See *id.* at 73.

32. *Id.* at 73.

33. See *id.* at 73, 75.

34. See *id.* at 83.

virtually identical neighborhoods on the North side into multifamily zones.³⁵ When the Home Owner's Loan Corporation risk-rated St. Louis neighborhoods for New Deal-Era housing policies (including new long-term mortgages backed by the Federal House Administration), they turned to local real estate interests who—unsurprisingly—used patterns of black occupancy and the presence (or absence) of restrictive deed covenants as the primary determinant of neighborhood prospects.³⁶

To add insult to injury, the policies intended to arrest urban decline proceeded from exactly the same assumptions. Urban renewal programs, including “slum clearance” projects in St. Louis and its suburbs, consistently equated black occupancy with “blight.”³⁷ Public housing, erected to warehouse those displaced by urban renewal, hardened patterns of local segregation—in part because suburban municipalities and counties, for most of this era, refused to even create public housing authorities.³⁸ Public improvements, including the urban highway infrastructure, skirted white neighborhoods and bulldozed across black neighborhoods.³⁹ By the end of the 1970s, one in ten St. Louis families—the overwhelming majority of them African-American—had been displaced by urban renewal or highway development.⁴⁰

The development of Greater St. Louis was shaped by both the “Berlin Wall” of the city’s western border and by the “Delmar Divide” that split the city itself down the middle.⁴¹ The confluence of private and public policies—animated and motivated by racial anxiety or animus—led to radically different developmental trajectories in St. Louis and in its suburbs, and in North and South St. Louis.⁴² The consequences are lasting and sustained. The disinvestment that followed from discriminatory federal and state and local policies only ensured that neglected neighborhoods would fall further behind—and harden the view that they posed a threat to public safety, public finance, and property values. And, because that discrimination was attached so firmly to property (the primary source of family and intergenerational wealth), it ensured that African-Americans would make little economic progress, even as the legal edifice of “Jim Crow” and its Northern variants slowly collapsed.⁴³

35. *See id.* at 124–25.

36. *See* GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 88–91.

37. *See id.* at 205.

38. *See id.* at 99–100.

39. *See id.* at 206.

40. *See id.*

41. GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 125, 131.

42. *Id.* at 145–46.

43. *See* William J. Collins and Robert A. Margo, *Race and the Value of Owner-Occupied Housing 1940-1990* (LEVY ECON. INST. Working Paper No. 310, 2000); William J. Collins & Robert A. Margo, *Race and Home Ownership: A Century-Long View*, 38 *EXPLORATIONS IN ECON. HIST.* 68, 68–69 (2001). *See generally* SIGNE-MARY MCKERNAN ET AL., *URB. INST.*, LESS

B. Political Fragmentation

The other major factor shaping the development of Greater St. Louis was political fragmentation. In one respect, American cities and municipalities are notoriously undergoverned. Most municipal functions and responsibilities flow from the police power to safeguard public welfare and safety.⁴⁴ In many areas (think transportation or schools), cities are simply the political and fiscal handmaidens of state and federal policy. But, in another important respect, American metros are over-governed, their key responsibilities fragmented across scores, sometime hundreds, of overlapping and competing jurisdictions.⁴⁵ This jurisdictional disarray alone has had enormous implications—most of them negative—for local land use, zoning, economic development, and fiscal capacity.⁴⁶ Each metropolitan area represents an organic economic, social, and demographic unit. It has its assets, challenges, and liabilities. But, carved up into a patchwork of competing fiefdoms, local governance becomes a scramble to hoard the assets, shirk the challenges, and press the liabilities onto some other municipal fragment.⁴⁷

In Greater St. Louis, this fragmentation invited and encouraged local governments to engage in the forms of racial discrimination and segregation sketched above. Local zoning—including the prevalence of large lot single-family zones, a virtual prohibition on multifamily housing in the central outer suburbs, and the inability or unwillingness of the city and the inner suburbs to accomplish either of these restrictions—intentionally and effectively sorted the metropolitan population by class and race.⁴⁸ Similarly, the erection of public housing—dense on the margins of the city's urban renewal projects, and virtually non-existent elsewhere in the metro area—ensured a distribution of poverty (and its costs) according to political calculation and political capacity.⁴⁹

The perils of fragmentation are also evident in the distribution of economic resources. Deindustrialization devastated many central cities, but metropolitan economies—even in as troubled a setting as St. Louis—continued to grow. So while the market might be blamed for some of the losses—the industrial wreckage on the riverfront, the shuttered plants running along the city's rail

THAN EQUAL: RACIAL DISPARITIES IN WEALTH ACCUMULATION (Apr. 2013), available at <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412802-Less-Than-Equal-Racial-Disparities-in-Wealth-Accumulation.pdf>.

44. Richard Briffault, *Our Localism: Part I—The Structure of Local Government Law*, 90 COLUM. L. REV. 1, 95 (1990).

45. *Id.* at 73.

46. *Id.* at 60.

47. NEIL LITTLEFIELD, METROPOLITAN AREA PROBLEMS AND MUNICIPAL HOME RULE 2–3 (1962); ORFIELD, *supra* note 18, at 5–6; Briffault, *supra* note 44, at 10–11.

48. LITTLEFIELD, *supra* note 47, at 4.

49. Briffault, *supra* note 44, at 100.

corridors—the durability of those losses, and the fact that the gains were hoarded elsewhere, was all driven by politics and policy.

Indeed, much of the economic growth in St. Louis County and the outer suburbs came at the expense of the city. The inner suburb of Clayton reinvented itself as a corporate park, using zoning and economic incentives to poach the city of much of its central business district in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵⁰ When General Motors closed its plant in North St. Louis in the early 1980s, it moved production to nearby Wentzville and to Bowling Green (Ohio)—both sites prepared to offer substantial tax incentives for the move.⁵¹ In 1948, the combined private sector job base of St. Louis and St. Louis County was about half a million—and almost 95 percent of those jobs in the City of St. Louis. Fifty years later, that job base had almost doubled—but less than a third remained in the city.⁵²

There was nothing natural or inevitable about this shift. Suburban municipalities did everything they could to pick off the city's assets (and each other's), luring most of the region's office space, retail space, and production facilities to the urban fringe by the 1980s.⁵³ Local governments played musical chairs with economic development, pushing subsidized shopping malls west into the cornfields and all but abandoning those built just years earlier.⁵⁴ This strategy was abetted by municipal fragmentation, by Missouri's peculiar sales tax system (which allowed local governments to declare themselves "point of origin" cities and keep the taxes generated within their borders), and by the loose interpretation of urban renewal law (which allowed local governments to label anything on which the paint had dried as "blighted").⁵⁵ As with the parallel demographic shifts, the metropolitan economy did not decline—but it thinned out, and became both more uneven and more unequal.

THE STAKES

None of this would matter much—at least as a political issue—if different policies would simply have yielded a different distribution of winners and losers. But it's pretty clear that *everyone* lost; that St. Louis today is a lesser

50. GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 131, 145–47.

51. *Id.* at 131, 138.

52. Earl Kersten & D. Reid Ross, *Clayton: A New Metropolitan Focus in the St. Louis Area*, 58 ANNALS OF THE ASS'N OF AM. GEOGRAPHERS 637, 644–46 (1968).

53. Greg LeRoy & Sara Hinkley, *Opportunities for Linking Movements: Workforce Development and Smart Growth*, GOODS JOBS FIRST (2000), <http://www.goodjobsfirst.org/sites/default/files/docs/pdf/workforce.pdf>.

54. See Colin Gordon, *Blighting the Way: Urban Renewal, Economic Development, and the Elusive Definition of 'Blight,'* 31 FORDHAM URB. L. J. 305, 319 (2004).

55. EAST-WEST GATEWAY, AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS AND FISCAL IMPACTS OF THE USE OF DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES IN THE ST. LOUIS REGION, FINAL REPORT 29 (Jan. 2011), available at <http://www.ewgateway.org/library/reports/reports-pg2/reports-pg2.htm>.

city—in qualitative and quantitative terms—than it might have been. The victories, such as they were, were temporary. St. Louis County fought tooth and nail with the city over basic development and planning issues for decades, much of this with the goal of insulating the county and its municipalities from the perceived costs of more inclusionary policies.⁵⁶ The result? Disinvestment and fiscal troubles in the city pushed migration west into the county—where the clear majority of the metro’s African-Americans now live.⁵⁷ The line between urban crisis and suburban affluence is moving steadily west.

And local victories, such as they were, invariably came at the expense of the region as a whole. If two outer suburbs battled over who landed the next Target or Walmart, the result was predictable: a spanking new retail store (often accompanied by closing of another one) that paid little if any local taxes for the foreseeable future.⁵⁸ If those suburbs sat out the contest, they might not be able to control where in the metropolitan region that new store would be built—but it, and its taxable value, would show up somewhere. A local government might crow about landing episodic new investment, but—across the metro, and in the long run—the benefits dissipated. Local tax breaks shaped the distribution of new investment across the metropolitan region, but not its level.⁵⁹ In the bargain, they shaped the distribution of the tax base but actually reduced its returns.⁶⁰ And the persistence of this competition meant that all such investments were less durable, and unlikely to outlive their tax abatements.

Even more importantly, we have—in allowing our cities to decline—squandered a precious political and economic resource. Cities drive the economy (our top 100 metros, on merely 12 percent our land area, account for at least three-quarters of GDP).⁶¹ Historically and currently, our metropolitan regions are home to the best jobs and opportunities—and to the institutions, including private and public sector trade unionism, that help to sustain job quality. This combination of union density and residential density discourages competition on wages and encourages competition on efficiency and quality: it blocks the economic low road and paves the high road. This benefits workers and their employers, for whom the benefits of the high road settings (a well-trained workforce, easy access to suppliers and consumers, decent public goods) far outweigh the costs.⁶²

56. Gordon, *supra* note 54, at 305, 319.

57. EAST-WEST GATEWAY, *supra* note 55, at 29–30; Gordon, *supra* note 54.

58. See GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 181–84.

59. EAST-WEST GATEWAY, *supra* note 55, at 30–31.

60. *Id.*

61. *Id.*

62. See ALAN BERUBE, METRO. POL’Y PROGRAM, BROOKINGS INST., METRONATION: HOW U.S. METROPOLITAN AREAS FUEL AMERICAN PROSPERITY 32 (2007), available at <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2007/11/06-metronation-berube>.

Cities house our best schools and our leading cultural institutions. Cities are, by any measure, green and cleaner than sparser forms of economic or residential development.⁶³ And cities, by virtue of their density and diversity, nurture inclusive and progressive politics. Perhaps the starkest determinant of the presidential vote in 2012 was population density: across red and blue states, 98 percent of the most densely-populated counties went to Obama, and 98 percent of the least densely-populated counties went to Romney.⁶⁴ The takeaway would seem to be this: People who live close to one another are more tolerant and empathetic; they are more likely to know someone of a different color, a different income group, or a different sexual orientation.⁶⁵ They rely upon and appreciate the provision of public goods and public services (transit, parks, garbage collection)—even as they consume fewer public dollars than their red state counterparts.⁶⁶ And they have a deeper appreciation of the regulatory standards (guns, labor conditions, food, public health) that promise us a modicum of safety and security.⁶⁷

Yet, for all of their natural advantages and assets, metropolitan areas like Greater St. Louis are in real trouble. That trouble stems not from the viability of the American cities in the new global economy, but from the unequal distribution of economic assets and rewards within those cities. While racial segregation, in St. Louis and elsewhere, has eased somewhat,⁶⁸ economic segregation has hardened in the last generation. In 1970 only 15 percent of families lived in neighborhoods that could be considered as either affluent (those where median incomes were greater than 150 percent of median income in their metropolitan areas) or poor (those where median incomes were less

63. DANIEL LURIA & JOEL ROGERS, *METRO FUTURES: ECONOMIC SOLUTIONS FOR CITIES AND THEIR SUBURBS* 13 (1999).

64. LURIA AND RODGERS, *supra* note 63, at 15. *See generally* ORFIELD, *supra* note 47; Colin Gordon, *The Lost City of Solidarity: Metropolitan Unionism in Historical Perspective*, 27 *POL. & SOC'Y* 561 (1999).

65. Richard Florida, *Why Bigger Cities Are Greener*, *ATL. CITIES* (Apr. 19, 2012), <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/jobs-and-economy/2012/04/why-bigger-cities-are-greener/863/>.

66. Colin Gordon, *How the Density of Your County Effects How You Vote*, *ATL. CITIES* (Apr. 1, 2013), <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/politics/2013/04/how-density-your-county-affects-how-you-vote/5066/>; *See Federal Taxes Paid vs. Federal Spending*, TAX FOUND. (Oct. 19, 2007), available at <http://taxfoundation.org/article/federal-taxes-paid-vs-federal-spending-received-state-1981-2005>.

67. Sage R. Myers et. al., *Safety in Numbers: Are Major Cities the Safest Places in the United States?*, 62 *ANNALS OF EMERGENCY MED.* 408, 415 (2013).

68. JOHN LOGAN & BRIAN J. STULTS, *US2010 PROJECT, THE PERSISTENCE OF SEGREGATION IN THE METROPOLIS: NEW FINDINGS FROM THE 2010 CENSUS*, at 6 (Mar. 24, 2011), available at <http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010/Data/Report/report2.pdf>.

than 67 percent of metropolitan median income).⁶⁹ By 2007, twice the share of families—over 30 percent—lived in such neighborhoods.⁷⁰

These patterns of local inequality are starker in settings (like St. Louis) with deeper histories of racial segregation, and they are starker in settings (like St. Louis) where law and politics pose few obstacles to sprawl. In 1950, American cities encompassed about 70 million in persons and about 13,000 square miles.⁷¹ Fifty years later, the urban population had doubled but its footprint—at over 50,000 square miles—had increased fourfold.⁷² The population of the St. Louis metro, as we have seen, grew much more slowly (from about 1.3 million to about 2 million over the same span), while the urbanized area increased almost sixfold.⁷³ All of this exaggerated the background conditions—racial and economic segregation, political and jurisdictional fragmentation—that have shaped the modern history of greater St. Louis. And all of this sustained and deepened the erosion of the natural solidarities—schools, churches, unions, community groups—that might have made a difference.

This is not, in the end, really about “urban decline” at all. American metropolitan regions have prospered, and their importance to our polity and to our economy has grown over time. But the distribution of resources and opportunities within those metropolitan regions have been (and remain) dramatically and intentionally uneven. In this sense, American cities—St. Louis foremost among them—focus our attention on the larger challenge of pervasive and growing inequality. The problem is not urban decline, but inequality that is organized and embedded and sustained in local geography.

69. SEAN F. REARDON & KENDRA BISCHOFF, US2010 PROJECT, GROWTH IN THE RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION OF FAMILIES BY INCOME 1970-2009, at 1 (Nov. 2011), *available at* <http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010/Data/Report/report111111.pdf>.

70. *Id.*

71. U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS OF POPULATION AND HOUSING, 1950: NUMBER OF INHABITANTS IX, XVIII tbl.E, XXXIII (1950), *available at* <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/deccennial.html>.

72. U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2000 CENSUS OF POPULATION AND HOUSING, pt. 1, at 2, 11 tbl.8 (Nov. 2002), *available at* <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/phc-1-1-pt1.pdf>.

73. *Id.* at 42 tbl.9.

