

Cities Rebound—Somewhat

By Bruce Katz and Alan Berube

The release of the 2000 census results created an almost euphoric mood among many longtime observers of Ameri-

grants are now bypassing cities altogether in favor of suburbia. Racial and ethnic minorities currently make up more than a quarter of suburban populations, up from 19 percent in 1990.

As people go, so do jobs. Suburbs are no longer just bedroom

Cities may be recovering, but the 2000 census still showed suburbs of America's largest cities growing twice as fast as central cities.

can cities. Cities long left for dead actually registered population gains. New York topped 8 million people for the first time in history. With many refurbished downtowns providing visible signs of prosperity, and immigrants spurring neighborhood revitalization, cities are now enjoying a hard-won optimism.

A closer look at the data, however, shows that the dominant U.S. population trend continues to be a decentralization of economic and residential life—not a return to core cities. While many cities have recovered from their nadirs, most continue to lose ground to their suburbs, and rapidly developing new communities on the far fringes of metro areas are capturing the lion's share of the nation's new employment and population growth.

Specifically, the 2000 census shows that the suburbs of America's 100 largest metro areas grew more than *twice* as fast as their central cities during the 1990s. This pattern held for all types of cities, whether the total population was falling, stagnating, or growing. Philadelphia lost 68,000 people in the 1990s; its metropolitan area grew by 179,000. Atlanta, often touted as a "turn-around city," gained 23,000 people in the 1990s; its surrounding area grew by 1.1 million. Even booming sunbelt cities like Phoenix, Dallas, and Houston grew more slowly than their suburbs.

There were some stark regional differences. The fastest-growing cities in the 1990s were in the West—their combined population rose by over 15 percent during the decade, though that still lagged behind the growth of their suburbs (21 percent). The fastest-expanding suburbs were in the South—suburban population in the region zoomed up 26 percent during the decade, far outpacing the growth in Southern cities (11 percent).

Northeastern and Midwestern cities grew much more slowly, and many actually suffered declines. Yet their suburbs still prospered. While the cities of the Midwest netted a collective population increase of only 186,000 people over the decade (with nearly half showing declines), their suburbs gained 2.9 million new residents. And while New York and Boston showed significant population gains, fully two thirds of Northeastern cities lost residents in the 1990s. The fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the Northeast were in central and southern New Jersey, places entirely suburban in character.

Amid these differing regional patterns of growth and decline, all types of households—in all parts of the country—are choosing suburbs over cities. Suburbs attracted even childless and single-person households faster than cities did. Many immi-

communities for workers commuting to traditional downtowns. Rather, many are now strong employment centers serving a variety of economic functions for their regions. In our 100 largest metro areas, only 22 percent of all people work within three miles of the city center. In cities like Chicago, Atlanta, and Detroit more than 60 percent of the regional employment is now located more than 10 miles from the city center.

And cities continue to house the nation's very poor. Urban poverty rates, though falling, remain twice as high as suburban poverty rates. Distressed cities like Baltimore, Richmond, and St. Louis continue to be burdened with heavy welfare caseloads.

These trends suggest that the competitive strategies many cities pursued in order to bolster themselves during the 1990s—like stadium building, hotel construction, downtown revitalization—are not the ticket to economic vitality. The "basics"—good schools, safe streets, competitive taxes, efficient services, a functioning real-estate market—determine where businesses invest and where people choose to live. And in America's cities, especially those in the Northeast and Midwest, which continue to lose families, the "basics" still need fixing.

Yet city-only solutions will not suffice. Federal and state transportation, tax, and regulatory policies have given impetus to people's choices to move further and further away from the hearts of metropolises, while federal housing policy has served to concentrate poverty rather than enhance access to opportunity. If urban revitalization is to be real and sustained, cities must be part of larger efforts to slow decentralization and promote urban reinvestment.

Ironically, many suburbs are already leading calls for such reform. Older suburbs in the Northeast and Midwest are facing some of the same challenges that cities have struggled with for decades. Rapidly developing suburbs in every part of the country are finding that sudden growth has come with the heavy, unanticipated price of traffic congestion and overcrowded schools.

In short, urban policy cannot be just about cities. By forging new alliances with their surrounding suburbs, on issues from infrastructure spending and regional governance to reinvestment and affordable housing, cities must look beyond their own borders—and think and act truly metropolitan.

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Rural Politics Tip the Balance

By Jerry Hagstrom

Rural America, often described by urbanites as uniformly white, middle class, and conservative, is in fact much more complex. The northern and southern Plains, the Corn Belt, the Rockies, Appalachia, the Deep South, small town New England, the Southwest, and the interior of California all have their own peculiar geographical, historical, racial, ethnic, economic, and religious characteristics. But these rural areas also share many common characteristics, including some that can provoke contradictory voting patterns. In general, rural Americans are more culturally conservative than urbanites, but they also have lower incomes and are more dependent on the federal government.

Take North Dakota and South Dakota. They have backed a

tary home of the poor and the chosen home of the pleasure seekers, producing a rural ghetto and a rural playground.”

The fierce desire of middle-class rural Americans to maintain their communities often results in contradictory political attitudes. Farmers, long-time supporters of free trade, are increasingly concerned that new trade agreements may allow other countries to send more products to the U.S. than they are allowed to export abroad. Almost all Republican members from rural areas voted this fall to grant President Bush trade negotiating authority, but most rural Democrats voted against it, and for southern rural Republicans with textile interests it was a hard vote that could make re-election difficult.

The economic problems of rural America have also made it nearly impossible for the Republican Party to eliminate farm

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Republican for President every year since 1968, and in the early 1980s both states were represented in the Senate by two Republicans. But in 1986, voters in North Dakota threw out Republican Senator Mark Andrews in favor of Kent Konrad, and South Dakota voters replaced James Abdnor with Tom Daschle. These and other elections of Democrats in western and southern states allowed the Democrats to take control of the Senate that year. The main issue behind the turnover was a farm crisis. Despite their conservative leanings, enough rural citizens will vote the Democratic ticket out of economic self-interest to make a difference in an election.

Parts of rural America are under pressure from agricultural mechanization, low commodity prices that stem partly from increased international competition, and a shortage of economic alternatives to agriculture. The 2000 census showed the country's biggest population drops occurring in agricultural counties in the Plains region that stretches from the Dakotas and Minnesota south to Texas. One of the most successful economic adaptations in these areas has been plentiful and inexpensive college education—so each year, the universities of the Plains region export thousands of graduates to nearby cities and the coasts. As a result, population declines in the rural Midwest have not been as traumatic for individuals as they have been for communities.

As Karl Stauber, president of the Northwest Area Foundation in St. Paul, Minnesota has written, “The middle class are leaving many parts of rural America, particularly the isolated and low-amenity, resource-dependent areas. They are leaving because they cannot find the opportunity they want to support their families. Many don't want to leave. They want to stay for moral and cultural reasons—small towns are a great place to raise kids, they can count on their neighbors to help, they are part of a community. Without the middle class, rural America will become the involun-

subsidies. Republicans have long resisted farm subsidies as a waste of taxpayer money and an interference in free markets, but their razor-thin majority in the House of Representatives now depends on re-election of members from Plains and southern districts that produce commodities like wheat, corn, cotton, rice, and peanuts.

After the 1990 and the 2000 censuses, northern cities lost congressional districts while many new congressional districts were created in the South and West in areas that are combinations of farmland and suburbs. Thus, a case can be made that even while agriculture becomes a smaller and smaller portion of our economy, the number of congressional districts in which agriculture is a factor has grown. At this point, most rural congressional districts are represented by Republicans. The exceptions are the southern districts represented by black Democrats and the odd district where a combination of factors leads to the election of a Democrat.

Clinton administration appointees in the U.S. Department of Agriculture were furious with the 2000 Gore election team for initially ignoring rural America. They organized themselves as teams to campaign in rural areas of critical states. Steve Crawford, a Democratic aide in the Pennsylvania state legislature, claims this effort delivered Pennsylvania for Gore by targeting the state's rural north (which generally votes Republican) with assurances that Gore would, for instance, avoid taking hunting weapons away from them. Democrats hadn't even hoped to win many rural areas, but they did reduce the GOP's share of the vote—allowing urban totals to swing the state in their direction.

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