Enthusiasm for metropolitanism as a solution to urban problems is at least a century old. The last round of interest in the 1950s and 1960s spawned a large policy literature, numerous commissions, and reports but not much action. Apart from a limited number of city-county consolidations and continuing annexation in the Southwest, metropolitanism remained largely a planners’ vision—localism dominated politics. The current revival of interest in metropolitan solutions to urban poverty and decline stems in part from frustration with the results of the community-oriented approaches that have dominated policy for the past three decades. Advocates of metropolitanism argue that city-suburb integration, alliances, or cooperation are not only more essential to cities and poor urban communities today than ever before, but also that city-suburb alliances are more politically feasible than in the past.

This paper analyzes the literature about metropolitanism as a solution to urban problems, focusing on the current arguments but highlighting earlier studies and experience where relevant. I first discuss what is at stake in different arguments about the causes and desirability of metropolitan fragmentation, including debates about centralization and decentralization. I then briefly discuss the legacy of conflicts over localism and regionalism in the 1950s-1970s. The third section considers contemporary arguments favoring regionalism, evaluating claims about the benefits of metropolitanism to poor urban communities and assessing the political feasibility of such approaches in light of the role that racism has played in creating city-suburb divisions in the first place. Each section considers how theories of change and historical versus individual approaches affect the vision of reform and the types of policy proposed. The final section discusses policy interventions and research questions related to metropolitanism.

The paper suggests that the current period presents new developments -- most importantly, the deterioration of inner suburbs and the new wave of sprawl on the outskirts of
metropolitan areas -- that make a politics of regionalism more plausible than in the past. But, I argue, many of the claims about the benefits of metropolitanism for poor urban communities are overstated because they pay little attention to mobilizing minorities and the poor as an essential part of the metropolitan project. Some forms of metropolitanism, such as city-county consolidations, can shore up city budgets without assisting low-income communities at all. Even tax base sharing among localities does not guarantee that benefits reach low-income communities. Moreover, while emerging efforts to build city-suburb coalitions are intriguing, elements of metropolitanism have progressed the furthest in the most racially homogeneous metropolitan areas. We need to understand how distinctive racial histories and contemporary conflicts affect the prospects and objectives of such coalitions in different metropolitan areas. Thus, metropolitanism offers no “magic bullet,” but some of its elements, particularly when combined with activation of low-income communities, may help to stem the trend of increasing polarization that has made community building efforts such an uphill battle.

I. Race, Democracy, and Metropolitan Fragmentation: What is at Stake?

Arguments about metropolitanism do not fall neatly onto conventional left-right dimensions. Public choice theorists and advocates of political decentralization -- often on different ends of the political spectrum -- both oppose metropolitanism, especially when it seeks formal joining of city and suburb. On the other side, a range of technocratic elites and left liberals have at different times and for different reasons supported metropolitanism.

Public choice arguments place a premium on individual choice. In the metropolitanism literature, this approach generally ignores race and takes a highly individualized view of how fragmentation occurs. The locus classicus for this position is Charles Tiebout’s 1956 argument that fragmentation of metropolitan areas allows individuals to choose the package of benefits and taxes that best fits their needs.1 In this economic model, individual demand drives everything from the creation of political jurisdictions with different benefits and taxes to movement across metropolitan areas as “consumer voters” relocate to the political jurisdiction that best fits their
needs. A wide variety of local political jurisdictions allows individuals to “vote with their feet.” Clearly a stylized economic argument, Tiebout’s work has nonetheless been enormously influential in defenses of fragmentation of local government on efficiency grounds.2

Political decentralists defend metropolitan political fragmentation on the grounds of local democracy. Smaller political jurisdictions, attachment to local community, and defense of local decision-making have been defended as the essence of American democracy from Tocqueville to the present.3 Advocates of local autonomy span the political spectrum. Such arguments underlie defenses of racial and class exclusion in different neighborhoods and political jurisdictions but they have also been used to defend minority political power.4

The movement for community control in the late 1960s drew very much on this line of thinking, which was also evident in concern about the effects of metropolitanism on minority political power in the same period. In the 1960s and early 1970s, some observers were suspicious that metropolitanism aimed to dilute black political power, which was emerging as a strong force in many cities. Writing in The New Republic in 1967, academic activists Francis Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward expressed fears that metropolitan government would promote the advancement of new black elites but would simply reinforce the fundamental disempowerment of the mass of black citizens. Their fear was that national Democratic politicians, anxious to avoid black political challenges, were promoting metropolitanism as an administrative process to supplant politics.1 Others, including state legislators Willie Brown and Julian Bond, argued that the effects of metropolitan government on minorities would depend very much on how districts were drawn, what guarantees there would be for equal representation, and the strength of minority political organization in different areas.2

The literature favoring greater centralization and metropolitanism is both more historical and structural than the public choice literature. It is generally more attentive to the role of racism in creating both extreme sprawl and the concentration of poor minorities in central cities. There is by now a large historical literature on the discriminatory practices of the various federal agencies, such as the Federal Housing Administration, that at least until the 1960s, promoted
fragmentation and racial segregation. There is also a historical literature on the openly
discriminatory practices of the builders of new suburbs, such as Levittown.³ Analyses of
particular metropolitan areas highlight a variety of tools used to promote fragmentation and to
exclude African-Americans from suburbs. For example, Gary Miller's book Cities by Contract,
analyzes the creation of the Lakewood plan in Los Angeles County in 1954, which allowed local
political jurisdictions to contract with the county for public services.⁴ Because the resulting
economies of scale in service provision allowed smaller jurisdictions to be fiscally viable, there
was an explosion in the number of local political jurisdictions after the Lakewood plan was
approved. Miller shows that white efforts at racial exclusion were one of the key reasons for
creating new political jurisdictions--minorities, especially blacks, ended up in the deteriorating
cities and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County. Miller focuses on individual behavior
but such behavior occurs within a context of political boundaries and constraints on movement
that are racially constructed.

Defense of larger political jurisdictions has come from several directions. Prior to the
passage of the Voting Rights Act amendments, there were some supporters of creating larger
cities through annexation as a way to keep major cities majority white. These arguments declined
as such practices were ruled illegal instances of minority vote dilution.⁵ Liberals generally focus
on the administrative and economic equity benefits of centralization. Such arguments have been
made for over half a century. In 1937, the National Resources Committee's report, Our Cities
argued that the boundaries of the political city should be "stretched to include its suburban and
satellite industrial and residential colonies..." because
"no community in the democratic society can long remain a sound functioning
organism, if those among its members who gained the greatest benefits from that,
escape from most of the obligations communal life imposes, and if those who
attain the least returns in the way of the necessities and amenities of life are left to
bear the burden of civic responsibility and taxation."⁶

Economists concerned about efficiency have deplored jurisdictional fragmentation in
metropolitan areas because it cannot deal with spillovers and externalities, creating a variety of
NIMBY problems. As Raymond Vernon put it in 1963, what exists in metropolitan areas is not land-use planning but "a complex game of chess among localities, each attempting to palm off the undesirable applicants for space upon their neighboring communities. This is warfare, not planning." On the equity side, critics of fragmentation point to the exclusionary practices that allow suburbs to shield themselves from costs and place the greatest social burdens on cities. From the 1960s on these arguments pointed to racism, often defended as localism, as the most salient factor in preventing a more equitable distribution of people and economic activities across metropolitan areas.

II. “Authoritarian Government” and Technocratic Advice: Metropolitan Regionalism in Practice

Despite the failure of metropolitanism to reshape urban areas in the 1960s, some forms of metropolitan regionalism did take root. But regionalism assumed a largely apolitical and, indeed, undemocratic shape. The two most salient forms were special districts and Councils of Government.

Special districts are a selective form of regional governance that have existed for over a century. Generally set up for a single purpose, special districts (also called public authorities) promote economies of scale and make it easier to address problems that cross political borders. Because they are often given the power to issue bonds (and in some cases have taxing powers), they provide a way to get around state imposed debt limitations. Long ignored in the study of urban politics, there has recently been a resurgence of critical interest in the role that special districts play in metropolitan areas. It seems clear that their role vis-a-vis poor minority communities has been largely negative for two reasons. First, by taking over many functions that are best performed at the metropolitan level, regional authorities make it possible for fragmented general-purpose governments (like cities and suburbs) to exist. Yet the scope of regional problems addressed by special districts is one-sided: there are special districts for transportation, stadiums, mosquito abatement, for water and for parks but there are no special districts for affordable housing, education, or, with the exception of the Twin Cities, are there any for
mitigating fiscal disparities among local governments. In the evolution of special districts, poverty, education, and low fiscal capacity have not been defined as regional issues. A second criticism is that special authorities are undemocratic. Generally run by appointed bodies, it is difficult for the broader public to influence -- and many times even to learn about -- the activities of special districts. Yet these entities often make decisions about infrastructure and transportation that shape the fundamental features of metropolitan development for decades to come.

In a discussion of regionalism in the Boston area, Robert Wood has characterized the consequences of rule by special district as “authoritarian government,” arguing that public authorities came "to constitute almost a fourth branch of government" after World War II. Divided into 101 local governments, the Boston area had no mechanism for deliberating and acting at a regional level. He notes: "when progress has been made since then, it has been in the context of existing regional authorities carried out under the threat of court orders. Gridlock in terms of fixed local boundaries and the resort to federal and state regulation became the way of public life." 40

Regional Councils of Government are a second kind of regional entity, which grew largely as a consequence of federal action. Beginning with planning grants in the 1954 Housing Act, the federal government sought to promote comprehensive regional planning. The biggest boost to Councils of Government came with the passage of the Demonstrations Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966, which required that an area-wide agency review federal aid proposals in the context of a comprehensive regional plan. By 1974, more than 140 grants were subject to these provisions, called the A-95 reviews. But Councils of Government were typically weak organizations, with no authority to override the objections of the local governments who were their members. Moreover, as with special districts, issues related to inequality and poverty were not subject to regional evaluation. As a consequence, "most metropolitan planning and review agencies ignored exclusionary zoning, the availability of low-cost housing, and the accessibility of jobs to lower income workers in evaluating applications for federal aid which would be spent in the suburbs." 41 In The Politics of Exclusion, Michael
Danielson provides a survey of the fair share initiatives for affordable housing that did develop in some metropolitan areas in the 1970s. They were plagued, he notes, not only by racially motivated suburban resistance but also by suspicion on the part of most mayors, who saw such proposals as a drain on housing funds that would otherwise go to cities. (Mayors Stokes in Cleveland and Maier in Milwaukee were exceptions.)\(^\text{12}\) Efforts to make federal housing grants contingent on “opening up the suburbs” aroused enormous controversy in the suburbs and the federal government’s short foray into this area was dropped by 1974. When the Reagan administration abolished the A-95 review in the early 1980s, the Councils of Government were left with few formal responsibilities; many continue to exist primarily as research organizations.

In 1967, Piven and Cloward had worried that the federal government was creating a new metropolitan level of authority that would be impervious to political control and would undermine minority political power. What occurred instead was the development of a largely powerless administrative planning apparatus that operated alongside a more locally-rooted political process. The legacy, as George C. Hemmens notes in his study of the Chicago area, is that "side by side, at the same time, with minimal interaction, there is a highly rational, civil, public process working on regional infrastructure decisions, and a highly political, combative, political process working on regional infrastructure decisions."\(^\text{13}\) The same could be said for most metropolitan areas: to the extent that key regional decisions are even in the public domain they are largely fought out politically in state legislatures, not in regional planning entities.

### III. The Current Revival of Metropolitanism: Can (and should) Cities and Suburbs Be Linked?

In the 1990s, new interest in metropolitanism emerged as city decline continued in many areas and the federal government showed no sign of resuming its former support for cities. Current arguments for metropolitanism advocate a variety of approaches: some still propose joining cities and suburbs into the same political jurisdiction, while others look to more targeted measures to ensure that resources and burdens are shared more equitably throughout the
metropolitan region. Several different approaches can be distinguished in the current literature: political, administrative, and civic. These strategies are by no means mutually exclusive but each takes a distinctive focus for reducing the isolation of the urban poor and limiting the ability of suburbs to shield themselves from costs. An altered political, demographic and economic landscape--more poor and minority suburbs combined with extensive suburban sprawl of high income residents and commercial activities--creates a new context for the debate but many of the old questions remain about the role of low-income minority communities in shaping a new regionalism and about how they will benefit from it.

A. Political Coalitions for Metropolitanism

The two most influential proponents of regional approaches to urban problems in recent years have been David Rusk, the former mayor of Albuquerque in his book Cities without Suburbs and Myron Orfield, a Minnesota state legislator and author of Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability.14 Reflecting the pullback of the federal government from urban issues, its limited authority over land use issues, and the important role of the state governments in metropolitan areas, both Rusk and Orfield focus on the states as the key political arena.

Rusk’s central argument is that large political jurisdictions where “suburbs” are contained within urban boundaries fare better on a number of economic and social measures than do smaller cities surrounded by politically independent suburbs. He contrasts the “inelastic” cities of the East and Midwest -- those whose boundaries did not change to accommodate growth -- with the “elastic” cities of the South, Southwest, and West whose boundaries have expanded to include the areas of new growth. Rusk's analysis of the problems of resource constraint in older inelastic cities is compelling but his enthusiasm for large jurisdictions is less convincing. Rusk's claim that inelastic central cities average only 59 percent of their suburbs income levels, while the elastic central cities essentially have income levels equal to their suburbs is tautological -- and it says nothing about poverty in these elastic cities.
Large jurisdictions are no guarantee against the emergence of neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. Paul Jargowsky's analysis of urban poverty in the 1980s shows that three of Rusk's very elastic cities (Dallas, Houston, and Memphis) were among the top ten metropolitan areas with the most black ghetto residents (living in census tracts with poverty rates of 40 percent or higher) in 1990.\textsuperscript{15} Larger jurisdictions create the possibility for a larger public pie because they have a larger tax base but in themselves ensure nothing about whether there will be a generous public sector or how the pie will be distributed. Rusk provides no evidence that poor minority neighborhoods are better off in elastic cities. In fact, good public services in poor neighborhoods require substantial mobilization of the poor -- something that is often difficult in these large political systems, particularly in sunbelt cities with a legacy of progressive reform, which stifled political participation.\textsuperscript{16} This criticism holds true for other large “elastic” political jurisdictions that Rusk praises, such as Indianapolis. From 1970 to 1990, the number of black residents living in high poverty areas increased 130 percent in Indianapolis; in Chicago, an “inelastic” city whose boundaries have not grown in recent decades, the increase was nearly identical, 127 percent.\textsuperscript{17}

Rusk’s claims about the possibilities for racial integration in elastic cities may be more plausible. He presents evidence that there is 25 percent less racial segregation in his elastic cities. The absence of political boundaries may well mean fewer barriers for minorities who want to move to new neighborhoods, since independent suburbs use their zoning powers to restrict entry in a variety of ways. The courts have repeatedly confirmed the right of municipalities to use their local zoning power to reject subsidized housing and to enforce “snob zoning” that segregates on the basis of class, often with important racial repercussions as well. Based on a study of Cook County (which includes Chicago) and Los Angeles County from 1960-1980, Gregory R. Weiher concluded that segregation by race, educational attainment, and occupation has come to be organized by city rather than neighborhood.\textsuperscript{18} In other words, political boundaries between jurisdictions are harder to cross than neighborhood boundaries within those jurisdictions. A historical perspective would shed more light on this issue -- the timing and size of black
migration to different cities may well affect these patterns. During the 1990s, patterns of minority (especially Latino) migration to suburbs raise questions about the ability of jurisdictional boundaries to prevent racial change.

Rusk lists a range of strategies to promote more elastic cities, including changes in state laws to make annexation and city-county consolidation easier, to limit the creation of new municipalities, as well as federal incentives to promote metropolitan reorganization and such metropolitan policies as tax base sharing and fair share affordable housing. While some of these measures are likely to benefit poor communities, if only indirectly, Rusk says very little about the politics of achieving these goals. There is no theory of political change in Rusk; indeed there is not much politics in his analysis at all. Thus, it is very likely that one of the reasons annexation was so acceptable in the West and Southwest for much of this century was that these low participation, weak public sector, and low taxing cities would place little burden on areas that were being annexed. In fact, annexation policies required city residents to underwrite the development of infrastructure in these outlying areas, which once annexed, faced only light tax burdens. Not surprisingly, as participation has risen and minorities have mobilized politically in sunbelt cities, liberal annexation laws in states like Texas are under fire from suburban legislators who do not want to be incorporated into the city boundaries. The lack of political analysis makes it difficult to understand the conditions needed to enact any of Rusk's proposals today. Why or how political actors and local interests, organized and unorganized, would build coalitions to support such solutions are not considered. It leads largely to a strategy of elite exhortation and technocratic policy-making.

It is precisely for this reason that the work of Myron Orfield -- both his political activities in Minnesota and his writing -- has attracted such interest. Orfield argues that it is possible to build political alliances for metropolitanism. In contrast to other analysts who have sought to show that the fate of the cities and suburbs are intertwined in a general way, Orfield argues for a specific kind of political alliance based on more proximate common economic interests: a coalition of cities, inner ring declining suburbs, and low tax base developing suburbs united
against the well-off developing suburbs.¹⁹ The glue that holds this alliance together are policy goals that aim to share resources and costs more fairly throughout the metropolitan area, such as sharing property tax bases, fair housing, land use planning, and transportation and transit reform. Although the primary coalition partners in favor of the new metropolitanism are united around their common economic interests, additional support is sought from groups, such as clergy, social justice organizations, and environmentalists who support metropolitanism for ideological reasons.

Two regional developments that Orfield identifies, and which are occurring across the country -- make the notion of city-suburb alliance more possible than in the past. The first is the decline of inner ring suburbs due to economic changes, including the decline of manufacturing employment, that have affected their taxes bases and the prosperity of their residents. At the same time, the residential profile of the inner ring suburbs has changed as more lower income minorities, especially Latinos, have left cities or immigrated directly to suburban locations. The initial response of many such suburbs is to resist the influx of poorer residents or to try to contain the costs they present. For example, a Chicago suburb, Mt. Prospect, sought to impose a special tax on an area of apartment buildings after they had attracted a substantial number of Latino families.²⁰ Strict enforcement of building codes and occupancy limits in apartments is another common tactic aimed to reduce the number of low-income Latino families in suburbs. But such tactics are likely only stopgaps: on their own, inner ring suburbs cannot control the powerful economic and demographic shifts that are weakening their tax bases and making their residents more needy. The second regional development that Orfield identifies is the growth of new “executive” suburbs on the far edges of metropolitan areas. These new suburbs are not only residential communities, they also boast some of the most important new commercial centers -- such as the Mall of America in the Twin Cities area -- that provide substantial local tax revenues.

By showing poorer suburbs that they and the cities are subsidizing the development of infrastructure in the richer developing localities, a new commonality of interest is possible. These well-off suburbs use public resources to launch development that allows them to reap a
disproportionate share of the region’s wealth; their status as separate political jurisdictions allows them to escape the costs of burdens, such as high poverty populations, borne by other localities. Orfield’s success in bringing together such a coalition in the Twin Cities area has shown that such alliances can be forged in the real political world, even though the achievements of the coalition have limited in important ways by the vetoes of the Republican governor. Orfield’s successes raise questions both about the applicability of his model to other metropolitan areas as well as to the benefits that this strategy will reap for low income minority neighborhoods. Some of the most important factors that may differ across metropolitan areas and affect the prospects for regionalism include racial, institutional, and political differences.

The biggest question is how metropolitan areas with greater racial diversity, more sharply drawn black-white divisions, and histories of bitter racial antagonism will approach city-suburb coalition-building. Orfield notes that the Twin Cities area has become much more diverse in recent years, yet a history of black-white conflict may have a different impact, casting a long shadow on regional cooperation efforts as suburban officials find that playing the race card is their most powerful political tool. An “irrational” politics of race may appeal more to politicians than a “rational” pursuit of common economic interests.

These racial differences are likely to be more difficult to overcome depending on institutional differences that make metropolitan alliances more or less plausible. Perhaps the most striking feature of the Twin Cities metropolitanism is the existence of a tax base sharing or fiscal disparities policy enacted in 1971. The policy creates tax base sharing in which 40 percent of all increases in the commercial and industrial tax base from the six county area covered by the Metropolitan Council is pooled and redistributed to communities in the region according to need. The majority of communities have come out as winners in this process, with a minority as net losers. For example, in 1995, of the 187 communities in the tax base sharing pool, 138 benefited from the transfer. The long experience with this mechanism for reducing fiscal disparities provided important background for Orfield’s coalition-building efforts in the 1990s, making it easier to build trust across community boundaries. The big question for efforts
to reduce fiscal disparities among communities in other metropolitan areas is whether the lack of
ready institutional mechanisms and wide experience with them will pose major obstacles to
coalition-building. Orfield notes that the creation of the Metropolitan Council and the passage of
the fiscal disparities legislation was by no means preordained in Minnesota: it took a hard
political fight to enact the measures.²³ His point is that there is nothing so distinct about
Minnesota that such legislation could not be enacted elsewhere. But the racial and, as I discuss
below, political context in which the fiscal disparities legislation first got enacted in Minnesota
has few counterparts today.

The third set of challenges are political. Traditions of partisan conflict between cities and
suburbs are much stronger in many metropolitan areas than in the Twin Cities. Many of the inner
suburbs of the Twin Cities had been traditionally Democratic, which made coalition-building
easier. Indeed, Orfield repeatedly notes the difficulty he had in attracting Republican votes for
the various pieces of legislation he proposed, even among the few Republicans representing
declining suburbs.²⁴ In many other metropolitan areas, such as Chicago, the history of
Democratic party dominance in the city and Republican dominance in the suburbs pose a much
less favorable climate for coalition-building. The challenges such partisan differences present are
even more significant today when the Republican party has embraced a pro-growth, low tax,
free-market approach with fewer moderate or pragmatic Republicans than in the past. (A
moderate Republican state legislature passed Minnesota’s original fiscal disparities legislation.)
While Orfield was strikingly successful in building alliances across city-suburb lines among
Democrats, his efforts to press the metropolitan agenda were limited by opposition from
Republicans legislators and from Republican Governor Arne Carlson, who vetoed several of the
key measures that the Democratic legislature did pass. The ideological opposition of most
Republicans to metropolitan-oriented measures suggests the need for Democrats to mobilize in
the suburbs and the need to reinvigorate party politics in areas that have been dominated by one
party for many decades. Where there has been significant new black and especially Latino
suburban settlement, this may be more possible than at any time in recent decades.
The way race intersects with geography and partisanship in different state legislatures needs to be better understood. Where there are cities with large minority populations represented in state legislatures, there is no guarantee that the Democratic party will remain united on policy issues. Coalitions in state politics may fall along racial lines, with white Democrats splitting from Black (and Latino) Democrats. Illinois politics has taken this form on some issues in recent years. Democrats representing white areas of the city or mixed city/suburb districts may seek to suppress the minority agenda for fear of losing swing whites whose votes, they believe, will determine which party controls such districts, and sometimes which party will control the legislature. As I note in an analysis of the Illinois legislature in the early 1990s, Democrats “adapted to the newly unfavorable terms of politics by embracing fiscal austerity and distancing the party from programs for the urban poor.” The Democratic House speaker agreed to eliminate the General Assistance program; only the strong pressure of the Black Caucus saved GA from outright elimination and allowed the creation of a much smaller “Earnfare” program. The question is whether a metropolitan agenda, uniting city and suburban interests, can triumph over a more familiar conservative suburban agenda that offers little to poor urban residents, even among Democrats. Answering this question requires further attention to how race -- both racism as a political tool and the different policy orientations and needs of low-income minority communities and suburban white communities -- affects coalition-building in state politics.

Another set of challenges to metropolitan coalition-building in state legislatures concerns the relationship of individual legislators to their districts. In many states, that relationship is now quite attenuated as legislators rely on campaign funds from interest groups and from state legislative leaders. These practices give legislative leaders extraordinary influence in many state legislatures and because of the leaders’ ties to interest groups, the power of interest groups has grown as well. We need to know much more about how these relationships, which now govern legislative behavior in many states, affect the ability to build cross-boundary coalitions. How accountable to their districts are legislators and how do they understand accountability? Metropolitanism is founded on building coalitions around common self-interest of cities and
some suburbs, but these new forms of politics may allow legislators to be very successful politically by relying primarily on ideological appeals, including racism.\textsuperscript{26} They may also affect minority politicians’ interest in metropolitan approaches: if they can easily get elected with symbolic appeals or targeted patronage, why take the risk on approaches whose benefits for their constituents are at best likely to be indirect or long-term?

The final set of issues about Orfield’s metropolitanism that must be addressed is how these initiatives -- including fiscal disparities (tax base sharing) legislation, fair share affordable housing, and growth boundary limits -- are likely to benefit poor minority communities even if they could be enacted. Fiscal disparities legislation has the advantage of being relatively easy to implement since it just requires a transfer of funds. The benefits of such legislation are likely to be particularly important for low-income minority suburbs with very limited tax bases, such as the suburbs south of Chicago.\textsuperscript{27} But the benefits to poor communities ultimately depend on how the additional resources are used. In many cities and suburbs, where there is stiff political competition for public resources, community mobilization (such as that currently exists around Community Development Block Grant allocations) is likely to be necessary to ensure that low-income communities benefit.

Fair share housing is more complicated. Clearly expanding the supply of affordable housing throughout the suburbs is an important policy goal, given the lopsided growth of entry-level jobs in suburbs. Orfield stresses that it is possible for cities to build coalitions with lower income suburbs around affordable housing, when it is the richer suburbs that will have to bear the burden of providing the additional affordable housing. Yet, suburban resistance to affordable housing is formidable, even when legislation or court orders have mandated it. Massachusetts has had an Anti-Snob Zoning Act in place since 1969, which allows the state to overrule local zoning decisions that block construction of low and moderate income housing in communities with less than 10 percent of their housing in the affordable category. Yet, because of state unwillingness to challenge local decisions, the power has rarely been used.\textsuperscript{28} The decades long battle over affordable housing after the Mt. Laurel decision in New Jersey reveals the deep
resistance provoked when affordable housing means racial integration to white suburbanites. After a prolonged political struggle, it was decided that suburbs could fulfill their housing obligations through regional contribution agreements, in which they contribute funds to build affordable housing in cities in order to avoid its location in the suburbs. As a way of making suburbs pay for some affordable housing, Mt Laurel has ultimately had some success ($75 million had gone from suburbs to cities for affordable housing by 1994). But “opening up the suburbs” has proved much harder. Small programs like Gautreaux in Chicago have been successful but even minor efforts that involve racial integration can attract outsized political controversy, as HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros found when HUD tried to implement its “Move to Opportunity” program in 1994. The program, modeled on Gautreaux, provided vouchers for a limited number of public housing residents to move to suburban locations. After bitter opposition by white working class Baltimore county residents, HUD curtailed the program.

In addition to the difficulties in implementing fair share housing -- even after political agreements have been reached -- there are questions about whether people in low-income minority communities want to move to the suburbs. The aims of dispersal may conflict with the desires and needs of low-income minority community members to remain in supportive community settings. Both cultural and socio-economic reasons (such as access to family support for child care and other support--even more important under the new welfare law) may make suburban locations less attractive to minority community members. Judith Martin notes that in Minneapolis the dispersal strategy -- partly the result of a Hollman v. Cisneros, a Gautreaux style law suit (not the weak affordable housing law that was passed) -- has been met with mixed enthusiasm by minorities. Southeast Asian immigrants, in particular, have objected to being removed from their communities.

B. Programmatic and Civic Metropolitanism

As support for devolving federal social programs has grown so have voices arguing for metropolitan approaches to implementing social programs, including housing, job training,
and welfare. Analysts have begun to consider the inclination and ability of nonprofit organizations, such as Community Development Organizations, to make connections across political boundaries. They have also examined the role of administrative boundaries in federal programs, arguing for reorganization along regional lines.

There is a long history of “civic metropolitanism” in the United States, mainly consisting of business elites and planners, who have viewed regionalism as a rational and reliable approach to development. Elite business groups in the Progressive era, such as the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco and the Commercial Club of Chicago, advocated comprehensive regional planning in the name of economic efficiency. Some of these groups have once again become active around the issue of regional planning. For example, recently, the Commercial Club of Chicago issued a report on *Chicago Metropolis 2020* taking a regional approach and advocating the creation of a supergovernment agency to deal with problems of regional growth. Some observers, who believe that political obstacles will never allow the creation of metropolitan governments, see the increased the regional activity of nonprofits, business, and civic organizations as the core of a new civic regionalism. They stress the emergence of cross-sectoral alliances in which a range of groups participate around problem solving in the region. The emphasis is on informal structures, networks, and flexibility.

This renewed interest in regionalism on the part of civic elites is playing an important role in propelling such ideas into the public debate. Yet, historically, these organizations have no history of inclusive, democratic decisionmaking. The highly rationalistic approach to planning does not put much emphasis on the messy and complex processes of democratic decisionmaking. The dangers to minority communities of such planning processes are readily apparent from the history of urban renewal, which initially bulldozed minority neighborhoods in the name of the greater good of the city. A metropolitanism consisting of regional chambers of commerce and other elite organizations would threaten to repeat that history.

It is imperative, therefore, that civic metropolitanism be broadly inclusive. This requires mobilization on the part of low income and minority communities to participate in these regional
forums. The kind of flexible informal cooperation envisioned in civic metropolitanism tends to include those who are already in networks; deliberate efforts to expand networks are more difficult due to lack of information or lack of will. Symbolic inclusion of poor and minority groups is a particular danger. Self-mobilization of low-income communities to search for the openings to participate in such informal alliances is the only way to forestall the dangers inherent in civic metropolitanism.

As metropolitan areas have grown and, especially as employment opportunities have shifted to the suburbs, policy analysts have begun to study the way the “administrative geography” of social programs imposes burdens on and limit the opportunities open to residents of low-income urban communities. The goal of this form of metropolitanism is to identify some of the ways that administrative arrangements limit the access of urban residents to the resources in the suburbs. Housing has received the most attention. Historically, the right of municipalities to reject or accept public housing concentrated such housing in cities. The role of racism in the location of public housing has been well-documented. Although vouchers are associated with portability, the move to Section 8 certificates and vouchers in the 1970s and 1980s as the primary form of housing assistance did not promote as much mobility as it might have because the benefits (especially certificates) are controlled by local public housing authorities, requiring separate waiting lists and interagency agreements. Since the early 1980s, job training -- under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) -- has been organized by fragmented Service Delivery Areas, in which “suburban SDAs have no program incentives to place participants from outside their administrative area--namely, residents of central cities or counties--into “their” jobs.” In the new job training legislation being considered by Congress there are advocates for creating regional jobs councils as a way to address this problem. Finally, the new welfare law, which devolves responsibility to the states raises many questions about administrative geography. The states have considerable leeway in how they administer the program but it is clear that the counties will bear great responsibility in many states. Yet, because of the great unevenness in job opportunities and welfare case loads across counties, cooperation across counties is essential. We
need to know much more about how states are promoting or hindering such cooperation.

The one piece of recent federal legislation that has explicitly sought to promote regionalism is the Intermodal Surface Transit Efficiency Act (ISTEA), first enacted in 1991 and renewed in 1998. ISTEA gave metropolitan planning organizations more power and resources to shape transportation decisions in metro areas. The devolution of more responsibility to MPOs was accompanied by federal requirements that MPOs open up the decisionmaking process to stakeholders across the metropolitan region, not just the usual transportation interest groups. Initial studies of ISTEA show that MPOs have made more outreach efforts than in the past but that they are far from being inclusive decisionmaking bodies. In a General Accounting Office survey of MPO operations under ISTEA, MPOs cited difficulties in encouraging public interest in their decisionmaking and particularly noted difficulties in getting input from low income and minority communities.

In addition to the activities of MPOs under ISTEA, interest in regionalism has been spurred by the emergence of the “smart growth” movement. In 1999, Al Gore embraced the idea as part of his presidential campaign. The idea’s popularity was also evident in the 1998 elections when voters approved 72 percent of the local and state measures related to smart growth. As a policy idea “smart growth” has the virtue and vice of meaning different things to different people. Its current popularity stems from suburban quality of life concerns as growth has extended the suburbs further out, eating up farmland and open space, and increasing traffic congestion. The meaning of smart growth for low income and minority communities depends very much on what aspects of it are enacted. Some elements of smart growth include urban growth boundaries, infill development and brownfields development, and farmland and open space protection.

The greatest danger in these measures is that they will stem growth and in the process raise the price of housing for low income households without providing them any benefits in return. This suggests that growth controls, such as urban growth boundaries, must be accompanied by measures to promote low cost housing. Key among such measures is the power
of some regional entity to override local exclusionary zoning decisions. In Oregon, the only state with a strong version of local growth controls in place since the early 1970s, the regional authority realized early on that the success of its comprehensive growth control plans required it to protect and increase the supply of affordable housing. To do so it would have to (and it did) strike down local zoning restrictions. In recent years, the tremendous economic growth in the Portland, Oregon area has led to spiraling housing prices despite these measures. According to one estimate, the median home price in Portland grew nearly 50 percent between 1993 and 1998. More aggressive and targeted measures may be needed to ensure that affordable housing remains available in hot markets.

The experience of smart growth thus far suggests two conclusions. First, much of the recent interest and support for smart growth reflects only half the pie: suburban quality of life issues have been far more prominent than measures to promote equity across metropolitan boundaries. The growth-related referenda that voters recently approved concentrate on preserving open space and providing incentives rather than outright regulation. For example, in New Jersey Governor Whitman proposed a comprehensive package of growth controls, job promotion, affordable housing brownfields and city-suburban equity. In 1998, voters overwhelmingly approved the financing for conservation but the broader equity-oriented elements of the package were not on the ballot. The fate of these measures is less clear. In early 1999, the legislature passed a more aggressive brownfields law, designed to promote urban development. But recent proposals in the state legislature to end New Jersey’s existing program for affordable housing (under the Mt. Laurel agreement) suggest limited support for the entire city-suburban equity package.

The second conclusion is that building support for comprehensive approaches to metropolitan regionalism, in which cities and suburbs both benefit, is an ongoing political project. The interests surrounding development and the pressures for sprawl are strong; and the pattern of relatively unchecked development combined with localistic NIMBY-style approaches to land use serves the interests of the most powerful actors. The metropolitan regionalism
approach requires the capacity for persistent political mobilization, creative coalition-building, and the ability to alter the policy agenda as new problems arise.

These features of policy and politics help explain the success of Oregon’s land use planning. In Oregon, state planning agency initially focused on stopping development in rural and agricultural areas but it quickly realized that effectiveness on this issue required that development be free to occur in other areas. Thus, the commission began to press for the removal of barriers to development within urban growth boundaries. This meant directly challenging local efforts to establish large-lot zoning, building moratoria, and other measures designed to limit development.44

Moreover, from the start, Oregon’s law required grassroots political engagement. When Governor Tom McCall, who spearheaded the legislation, left office in 1975, he helped to create a nonprofit organization, 1000 Friends of Oregon, to monitor the implementation of land use legislation. Since its inception, 1000 Friends of Oregon has functioned in a wide range of arenas to defend and expand the scope of land use legislation and to build political support for it. One of its major activities has been to file law suits strategically aimed to establish precedents that strengthen and extend the law. But its activities have not been confined to the legal arena. 1000 Friends also mobilizes grassroots support, lobbies the legislature, provides timely studies designed to bolster its arguments, and assists localities in drawing up their land use plans.45

The support behind Oregon’s law made it increasingly effective, which in turn, helped to curb the political power of potential opponents. The urban growth boundary has helped to stem speculative development in the suburbs and, as a consequence, has “discouraged the emergence of suburban ‘super developers’ with overwhelming political clout.”46 At the same time, deliberate political compromises further strengthened support for the legislation. 1000 Friends of Oregon played an important role in pressuring local governments to eliminate restrictions on development and in the process won the support of the homebuilding industry.47 This ability to create common interests through a political process is one of the most striking features of the implementation of land use law in Oregon. It has allowed the law to withstand 5 major
challenges in state-wide initiatives.

Oregon’s experience and the more recent smart growth proposals underscore the importance of viewing these policies in political perspective. Unless there is broad active involvement including minority communities and the development of new coalitions to support planning, smart growth is likely to remain little more than a slogan.

IV. Policy and Research Questions

I have discussed some policy and research questions in earlier sections; here are some additional issues.

How have community organizations representing low-income minority communities been involved in the decisionmaking of metropolitan planning organizations since passage of ISTEA? What have been the barriers to access and influence in different metropolitan areas?

The implications for low-income minority communities of housing and education vouchers needs more attention. Vouchers are likely to be on national, state, and local policy agendas in the coming years. More thinking about how different voucher programs are designed and what the implications are for movements throughout the metropolitan region of different groups is essential.

What are the distinctive obstacles and levers for inclusive regional organizing in different metropolitan areas? What are the salient features of metropolitan areas that affect this? For example, how important are the organization and involvement of the business community and organized labor; the organizational legacy of different political styles (reform vs. machine); the size and diversity of the minority communities?

Throughout this paper, I have mentioned Latino movement to the suburbs as an important change of the past decade. We need to know much more about the implications of this migration for regional politics. Are these groups being mobilized into politics? If so, on what terms? How does their suburban location affect prospects for coalition-building? How does political incorporation of Latinos differ in different metropolitan areas?

We need some way of assessing and characterizing regional decisionmaking that currently does take place. In the 1960s, there was a literature on “the power elite” in different cities. While that literature often exaggerated the power of business, it did at least identify key behind the scenes influences on decisionmaking. We have nothing comparable for metropolitan regions -- are suburban developers now the key influences? It would seem important to have a power analysis of metropolitan areas (what groups exercise power and in what arenas--special districts, counties, state legislatures,
individual localities?) both to assess the divisions among business around metropolitan development but also to highlight the lack of accountability in this process.

What is the federal role in promoting metropolitanism? Federal grants have in the past provided carrots and sticks to promote metropolitanism--what are the barriers at the federal level to reinvigorating this role?

How do the property tax limitation laws operating in many states affect the prospects for various types of legislation that aim to promote metropolitanism?

How do minority politicians view metropolitan regionalism? What affects their views?


3 Kenneth Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (Oxford University Press, 1985);


10 Robert C. Wood et al., Eastward Ho: Issues and Options in Regional Development for the Metropolitan Region (University of Massachusetts, Boston: John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs, September 1997).


17 See Rusk, Cities without Suburbs, p.93; author’s calculations from Jargowsky’s statistics, Poverty and Place, pp.235-36.


19 For the general argument and evidence that cities and suburbs are interdependent see H.V. Savitch, David Collins, Daniel Sanders and John P. Markham, “Ties that Bind: Central Cities, Suburbs and the New Metropolitan Region,” Economic Development Quarterly 7 (November 1993), pp.341-57. This argument has been criticized--correctly in my view--for equating the correlations it presents with causality: many other factors may account for the correlations they observe. See Edward W. Hill, Harold L. Wolman, and Coit Cook Ford III, "Do Cities Lead and Suburbs Follow? Examining Their Economic Interdependence," Paper Prepared for the Conference "Rethinking the Urban Agenda," sponsored by the Sydney C. Spivack Program, American Sociological Association, Belmont Conference Center, Maryland, May 20-22, 1994.
For a stronger analysis of city-suburb links, testing the relationship between metropolitan income growth and poverty, see Manuel Pastor, Jr., E.P. Clapp, J. Eugene Grigsby III, and Marta Lopez-Garza, Growing Together: Linking Regional and Community Development in a Changing Economy (International and Public Affairs Center, Occidental College, April 1997), chapter 3.

20 See Philip Franchine, “Mt Prospect Debates Plan for ‘Crime Tax,’” Chicago Sun-Times (September 20, 1993), p.6; the plan was ultimately defeated by the owners of the apartment buildings.

21 For an account, see Orfield, Metropolitics, pp.143-44. Orfield notes that the legislation was launched by a Republican from a low-tax capacity suburb, who was able to win support from Republicans representing some rural areas and similar suburban areas. Republicans representing wealthy suburbs bitterly opposed it as “Robin Hood” and “community socialism” legislation.


23 Orfield, Metropolitics.

24 Ibid., pp.116-17, 118.

25 Margaret Weir, “Big Cities Confront the New Federalism,” in Alfred Kahn and Sheila Kammerman.


30 One of the most liberal Senate Democrats Barbara Mikulski (Md.) played a key role in discontinuing the further years of the program-- an indication of how attentive white politicians are to the racial fears of white constituents. See John Mollenkopf, “Urban Policy at the Crossroads,” in The Social Divide: Political Parties and Policymaking in the 1990s Margaret Weir (ed.) (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press/New York: Russell Sage Foundation

31 Martin, “Renegotiating Metropolitan Consciousness,” p.28.; on the weakness of the law see Orfield, Metropolitics, pp.152-54.


33 See Pastor et al., Growing Together; see also Bennett Harrison and Marcus Weiss, Esq. Networking Across Boundaries: CDCs and CBOs in Regionally Engaged Workforce Development Alliances (July 7, 1996).


36 See Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier; Danielson, The Politics of Exclusion.

37 See Hughes, “Administrative Geography.”

38 Ibid. p.13.


42 Victoria Griffith, “Portland Holding the Line in Battle against Urban Sprawl,” Financial Times April 28, 1999, p.7. Opponents of growth controls like to point out this increase in the price of median housing in Portland. But the median housing price does not give precise enough information on the availability of affordable housing. Moreover, it is unclear that metropolitan areas without growth controls but with comparable growth have done any better with regard to housing prices.

43 See Phyllis Myers, Livibility at the Ballot Box, p.16.

