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## The Urban Predicament. Edited by William Gorham & Nathan Glazer

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## BOOK REVIEW

THE URBAN PREDICAMENT. Edited by WILLIAM GORHAM\* & NATHAN GLAZER.\*\* Washington, D.C. The Urban Institute. 1976. Pp. xix, 363. \$10.00, clothbound; \$4.95, paperbound.

*Reviewed by Herman D. Hillman\*\*\**

New York City, hovering on the brink of financial disaster for some two years, has dramatized the plight of American cities. This book comes at an opportune time, therefore, particularly at this transitional point in national political succession. The urban predicament, involving pervasive economic, social and political problems, has become a difficult situation, adopting a dictionary definition, seemingly susceptible of no satisfactory solution.<sup>1</sup> Such an impasse transforms the dilemma of urban areas into a matter of national concern in a nation of cities.

It has long been predictable that the dynamic changes in the urban condition telescoped in a relatively short span of time would generate fiscal and other crises beyond the capability of cities to resolve by marshalling their own local resources. Many studies<sup>2</sup> and prolific journalistic reporting<sup>3</sup> on the financial and social quandaries of the large cities have warned, if not of impending doom, of urban distress and acute disorder. Urban consciousness, however, has not been raised suddenly.<sup>4</sup> During the

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\*\* B.S.S., City College of New York, 1944; A.M., University of Pennsylvania, 1944; Ph.D., Columbia University, 1962. Mr. Glazer is presently a professor of education and sociology at Harvard University.

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1. WEBSTER'S SEVENTH COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY 669 (16th ed. 1969).

2. A bibliography of urban studies would completely preempt any possible space allotment in these pages. However, for a reasonable take-off point, see ADVISORY COMM'N ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS, URBAN AMERICA AND THE FEDERAL SYSTEM (Gov't Printing Office 1969); BUILDING THE AMERICAN CITY, REPORT OF THE NAT'L COMM'N ON URBAN PROBLEMS, H.R. Doc. No. 91-34, 91st Cong., 1st Sess. (1968).

3. A sampling of current press coverage reveals reawakened interest in urban policies. See, e.g., Weissman, *Beame's Staff is Listing Actions that Carter Can Take to Aid City*, N.Y. Times, Nov. 14, 1976, § 1, at 70, col. 2; Beame, *What the City Expects of Carter*, N.Y. Times, Nov. 14, 1976, § 4 (Week in Review), at 15, col. 2; Nathan, *An Agenda for the Cities*, N.Y. Times, Nov. 10, 1976, at 29, col. 1; *Nation's Mayors Bid Carter Establish an Urban Policy to Aid Cities*, N.Y. Times, Nov. 9, 1976, at 19, col. 1.

4. See, e.g., *6195 Municipal Defaults Tallied in U.S., and in Most Cases Creditors Got Paid*, N.Y. Times, Sept. 2, 1975, at 29, col. 4; *Next U.S. Recession Could Accelerate*

1930's depression era, cities had to deal with municipal bankruptcy and debt moratoria, unemployment, housing and slum conditions, crime, education, and welfare. That cities, by and large, overcame the predicaments of that era with the help of the federal government<sup>5</sup> and the courts<sup>6</sup> might now be expected to be an encouraging precedent. Yet, as the authors observe:

Confidence in our ability to frame solutions has declined as understanding of problems has grown. As explanations have become more tentative, so the proposals put forth these days are more modest than the programs launched with such high expectations in the 1960s. One can say—at least about the domestic sphere of government action—that we now know more than we did but, deprived of our hubris, are less confident in our ability to shape a future as we will.<sup>7</sup>

This erosion of confidence, with its chronic symptoms of uncertainty, indecision and conflict, is a startling change in the national mood.

The format of *The Urban Predicament* consists of an introductory essay by Professor Glazer of Harvard University and William Gorham, president of the Urban Institute, and five monographs on categorical topics. These comprise chapters on finance, housing, crime, education, and transportation. The topics were selected by the editors on the basis of their importance to people, their persistence, and the opportunity which they provide to present new insights into old problems and the consequences of tried or proposed solutions. The sections are authored, variously, by staff members of the Institute and Professors James Q. Wilson of Harvard University and James Coleman of the University of Chicago.

In the introduction, Messrs. Glazer and Gorham identify the trends which threaten the functioning of the older American central cities as (a) the decline of economic strength of the Northeast and North Central regions of the country accompanied by the economic growth and population increases of the so-called Sun-

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*Wave of State-Local Bond Defaults*, The Daily Bond Buyer, Aug. 5, 1971, at 1, col. 2; *Defaults of Municipal Bonds Scarce, But Dangers Seen in Fiscal Climate*, The Daily Bond Buyer, Apr. 20, 1971, at 1, col. 2.

5. See M. GELFAND, *A NATION OF CITIES: THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND URBAN AMERICA 1933-1965* (1975).

6. See Freilich, *Municipal Debt Adjustment: Historical Perspectives on a Current Crisis*, 7 URB. LAW. ix-xvii (1975).

7. P. 2.

belt Crescent, the South and Southwest, (b) the depletion of the core cities' middle class working population and its replacement by unacculturated urban newcomers, and (c) the durability of formidable enclaves of highly correlated poor and minority groups in the older central cities.<sup>8</sup> Although these trends are hardly new revelations, the essay clearly establishes that the root of the problem has been the failure to generate public policies in advance of foreseeable changes, in perspectives both of time and substance.

Both the selection and content of the individual monographs will generate controversy.<sup>9</sup> Since our urban problems derive their complexities from a total cross section of human experience in a pluralistic society governed by a federal political system, the clash of interests, perceptions, and value judgments are indeed endless, and curative policies are possibly incapable of consensus. The value of the book, therefore, must be in its contribution to an understanding of the selected urban problems and its assemblage of accumulated knowledge about the nature of urban trends, affording a basis for projection into the future.

The case is made, though perhaps insufficiently articulated, that the confluence of a host of urban problems, mainly in metropolitan cities incapable of achieving "home-rule" solutions, has transformed urban affairs into a matter of national concern demanding a national urban policy. In reviewing past experiences of governmental intervention into local affairs,<sup>10</sup> Gorham and Glazer believe that the limited problem of housing is almost solved; that the growth economy, not government intervention, played the largest role in the process; and that neighborhood decay and, relatedly, the phenomenon of housing abandonment, have become the more formidable problems. Planning is not envisioned as a pillar of strength in the revival of cities,<sup>11</sup> nor is a movement toward metropolitan government considered a realistic likelihood.<sup>12</sup> An institutionalized poverty program has come and gone. One of the few things that survives, according to the editors, is that the poverty workers, through the community actions programs, were introduced to new career opportunities that otherwise would not have been available.<sup>13</sup> Yet it would seem that

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8. P. 22.

9. Preface, p. xvii.

10. See note 5 *supra*.

11. P. 7.

12. P. 8.

13. P. 11.

something more survives—the lesson that community action can generate power, that it does not necessarily have to depend on institutional programming for legitimacy, and that the political process has not fully adjusted to the latent reality of its existence. Income support is not perceived as a technique to support urban resurgence because “[n]o level of income support consistent with maintaining a reasonable incentive to work would be high enough to make much of a dent in [urban] problems.”<sup>14</sup> Special and general revenue sharing are considered to have been too small to effect seriously a turnabout in the declining posture of cities.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, the authors conclude that government intervention is inevitable.<sup>16</sup> They advocate federal policies that would assume responsibility for welfare assistance and spread national spending activities more rationally to equalize regional economic aids for localities that are vulnerable to the effects of national recession. On the state level, they suggest the transfer of educational costs from local to state government. Surely, such expedients would stay the ultimate day of urban financial accountability, especially if the national economy were to effect a recovery sufficient to diminish unemployment rolls substantially. In the long run, however, redefinition of the functions of cities and regions in an era of economic and energy scarcity and technological and demographic change is a more realistic framework for the application of fiscal assistance to problem-impacted urban agglomerations.

The problems of cities are, of course, compounded by the structure of the federal system. The United States Constitution does not mention cities or metropolitan or regional areas. The vagaries of the political process, as a consequence, have produced the models of federal-urban relationships over the past several decades, and the spending power has been its operative instrument. The manifestations of these governmental programs have been tentative, sometimes contradictory, fragmented and insufficient.

A comprehensive federal policy on cities is now needed to arrest drift and indecision. Enunciation by statute of a federal policy for cities would strengthen the federal system. It would afford the judiciary a basis for formulating solutions to problems

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14. Pp. 12, 13.

15. P. 14.

16. P. 2.

that do not disappear simply because technical or prudential reasons bar substantive remedies.

Federal courts in recent years have tended to avoid intervention in local affairs such as zoning,<sup>17</sup> housing,<sup>18</sup> and education.<sup>19</sup> But solutions have been forthcoming where federal policy is explicit in a federal statute. Consider the following example. In a recent case involving the Detroit school system,<sup>20</sup> there was no federal statutory law to apply. The Supreme Court concluded that busing to achieve integration of schools on a regional basis could not be judicially imposed on school districts untainted by constitutionally impermissible conduct. But in a housing discrimination controversy,<sup>21</sup> the existence of federal law led to a different result. There the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was empowered by statute to deal with a total housing market area and to provide low and moderate income housing by direct action. This meant that HUD might apply these powers to the Chicago metropolitan area and, indeed, allocate housing assistance directly to areas outside the Chicago city limits. The Court concluded that it was within the discretion of the federal court to require that HUD's housing allocations take into account metropolitan housing needs to correct constitutionally impermissible, racially restrictive programming.<sup>22</sup>

The five chapters dealing with the specialized problem areas offer a wealth of information and incisive analyses of their particular significance in the formulation of urban public policy. George Peterson's chapter on finance, amply illustrated by charts and tables, describes the budgetary strain on cities resulting from eroding tax bases, inflationary costs of operation, overbearing indebtedness, and declining federal and state fiscal support.

There is a practical limit to budget balancing by means of

17. See, e.g., *City of Eastlake v. Forest City Enterprises, Inc.*, 96 S. Ct. 2358 (1976); *Warth v. Seldin*, 422 U.S. 490 (1975); *Village of Belle Terre v. Boraas*, 416 U.S. 1 (1974); *Construction Indus. Ass'n v. City of Petaluma*, 522 F.2d 897 (9th Cir.), cert. denied, 424 U.S. 934 (1975).

18. See *Reitman v. Mulkey*, 387 U.S. 369 (1967).

19. See *San Antonio Independent School Dist. v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973).

20. *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717 (1974).

21. *Hills v. Gautreaux*, 425 U.S. 284 (1976). See also *Village of Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Dev. Corp.*, 45 U.S.L.W. 4073 (U.S. Jan. 11, 1977), which upheld a municipal denial of rezoning, despite its admittedly unequal racial effect, for want of proof of decisional racial motivation. It is noteworthy that the Court left open the possibility of applying a federal statute, the Fair Housing Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601-3631 (1970), by remanding the case for that purpose.

22. *Hills v. Gautreaux*, 425 U.S. 284, 306 (1976).

expenditure reductions and increased taxes. Cities cannot "bootstrap" themselves out of their predicaments unless public policy changes materialize in the form of adequate external aid: from the national government and to some appropriate extent from the states, many of which are contending with their own fiscal crises. For example, a recurring proposal is that welfare costs might be assumed by the federal government. Additionally, territorial jurisdictional changes enabling cities to benefit from satellite growth occurring outside their boundaries would result in a realistic adjustment of function to finance.<sup>23</sup> Neither of these possibilities is within the competence of cities. However, Peterson's suggestion that the principle of statewide equalization of tax bases for all services, a principle recently adopted in a few states for school aid programs,<sup>24</sup> is an idea that seems ripe for exploration and implementation.

The chapter on housing, authored by Institute scholars deLeeuw, Schnare and Struyk, deals with costs, residential segregation by race, and the posture of poor households in the housing market, from the economist's perspective. Their conclusion, that there has been a general improvement in the quality of housing in the postwar period, may be more illusory than real.<sup>25</sup> Housing markets are local. Although substantial overall housing progress may be shown in national statistics, it is of no comfort to the cities that contain low-quality housing pockets, struggle with housing shortages, and suffer from the trauma of housing and neighborhood abandonment, that national housing statistics reflect improvement since the 1960 census.

Professor Wilson and Ms. Boland confront the problems generated by street crime in a chapter depicting the bankruptcy of public policies that seek to reduce crime. Their warning that failure to deal effectively with those convicted of crime may inevitably increase pressure to reduce the rights of the accused is an hypothesis of grave portent.

Racial segregation in education has increased in metropolitan areas since 1968.<sup>26</sup> The South, meanwhile, has experienced marked desegregation in the same period.<sup>27</sup> Coleman and Kelly, of the Urban Institute, consider this change more fundamental

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23. Pp. 72-84.

24. P. 118.

25. See H. AARON, SHELTER AND SUBSIDIES 23-28 (Brookings Institute 1972).

26. P. 247.

27. P. 244.

than the content of educational policy which, they say, "is in a state of disorganization and confusion."<sup>28</sup> Their chapter analyzes problems concerning authority over education, desegregation, educational finance, internal functioning of the school, and achievement. All are well documented in the tables and charts supplied.

In the transportation monograph, Institute staffers Kemp and Cheslow demonstrate skepticism of both the heavy capital investment in rapid rail transportation and the potential of new passenger carrying technologies.<sup>29</sup> Instead, they support more efficient use of existing highway and transit facilities, and transportation subsidies for the users rather than the providers. They recognize that the automobile is here to stay, largely as a function of consumer preference, but suggest the importance of change: Emissions must be reduced, safety features improved, and energy conservation effected.

It is impossible, in view of the complexities of the problems confronting cities, the older ones in particular, to wrap up solutions in neat packages of selected subjects. Nevertheless, the editors and authors have performed a useful service in providing a work which focuses on basic problems, avoids doctrinaire conclusions, and has the potential to influence the emergence of comprehensive national policies for the urban situation.

Yet, the real hope for the future of American cities and metropolitan areas lies in the restoration of national economic health. Only then can changes and reforms in traditional systems of funding local government, in the national policies governing the collection and redistribution of the internal revenue, in the redefinition of the functions of particular cities in a changing economic, demographic and technological age, be better calculated to improve the lot of American cities and the national well-being. These challenges are greater than the scope of the book.

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28. P. 231.

29. P. 317.

