METROPOLITICS: A REGIONAL AGENDA FOR COMMUNITY AND STABILITY. By Myron Orfield. Washington DC: Brookings & Cambridge MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1997. xvi + 290 pp. $28.95. (hardback). ISBN 0-8157-6640-8.

Metropolitics comes highly recommended with a foreword by David Rusk, a successful former mayor and author of *Cities Without Suburbs* who understands that the only way to eliminate our metropolitan excesses of poverty and inequality and all their attendant woes is, indeed, to find regional solutions. For these erstwhile urban problems have now spread from the inner cities notorious for them to first-ring suburbs that were formerly blue-collar working-class. These are in even worse shape than central cities since they lack the resiliency central cities derive from their institutions—government, universities, social amenities—and housing built to last with some upscale and gentrified neighborhoods.

While Orfield's work is concentrated on his home case of the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area, he has been able to draw widely applicable principles and practices from it. The first of these is the choice of political arena: the state legislature, of which he is a member. This, we need to recognize, is the level at which regional solutions must be engendered. For without the stick of state authority and the carrot of its resources, its selfishly willful and forever squabbling city and county offspring will never join together for their common benefit. The second is his pioneering use of brilliant color maps which enable any and all vividly to see what's happened and what's threatening to happen further. The compellingly graphic power of these maps mobilized a great diversity of metropolitan constituencies (producing an "Alliance for Metropolitan Stability" that included churches, environmental groups, communities of color, community development agencies, and other good government groups) and, ultimately the media which saw his regional plan as "logical"—they, after all, draw their customer base from across the whole region--and editorialized on behalf of this plan. This broad support enabled him, in turn, to gain support in the legislature.

The regional nature of today's urban problems is really a polarity of "push-pull": central city and first-ring suburb represent the "push"—the concentrated need, while the further-out suburbs, the favored quarter every metropolitan area has, represent the "pull" of the concentrated resources existing there. These favored areas exercise their political power to put up barriers—zoning that prohibits affordable priced housing--which keeps poorer people from moving in and taking the entry-level jobs going unfilled there. This long-familiar "disconnect" between available jobs and affordable housing is the most basic problem. The "reverse transit" mechanisms that might alleviate this problem have not been applied; instead transportation funds go to those favored quarters to build more, bigger, and better, highways for their commuters (in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area 75 percent of the billion-plus spent over the last decade went there).

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Orfield has attacked this complex of problems with a "regional agenda" that comprises six substantive and one structural reform. The first three—fair housing, property tax-base sharing, and reinvestment—ensure socioeconomic stability; the second three—land planning and growth management, welfare reform and public works, and transportation and transit reform—reinforce and allow the first three to operate efficiently and sustainable. The structural reform, finally, is to get rid of all the disincentives to doing these things, chiefly the proliferation of more and more exclusive municipal creations with their differing and discriminating land use practices.

To create regionalism, then, you need to: unite central cities with the declining suburbs; show them that tax-base sharing lowers their taxes and improves their services, particularly schools; and convince them that fair housing will limit their commitment to poor citizens who'll be spread over the region and that'll stabilize their communities. This is no mean feat, but Orfield shows that it can be done.

Fair housing can be accomplished by passing barrier-reduction legislation and by establishing a metropolitan fund for housing and redevelopment. This can be "sold" as good pro-business policy—a HUD study produced under Kemp, "Not in My Backyard," supports this approach, and barrier reduction has a nice "de-regulatory" ring to it. Regulatory barriers such as large lot sizes, prohibitions on multiple-family housing, and assorted fees hurt the natural marketplace for affordable housing, as the building industry has long argued. And, as Anthony Downs has demonstrated, if only 5 percent of new development were subsidized, perhaps by such a metropolitan fund, this would allow 12.7 percent of poor urban households in his 40-city sample to move to job-rich communities (in cities with the most concentrated poverty this figure ranges from 30 percent to a staggering 82 in Atlanta). Incentives to abide by these new rules would include resources for infrastructure construction. Communities that didn't want to go along could do so but would not get these added resources.

Property tax base sharing is likewise best accomplished through state-level "encouragement" because without it any community that can increase its tax base and limit its social responsibilities will naturally do so—zoning for huge houses and lots that allow only folks who can fully pay their own way to live there. That's also how we get sprawl. Minnesota long ago instituted a tax base sharing system under which cities contribute 40 percent of the growth of their commercial industrial tax base acquired after 1971 to a regional pool whose proceeds are distributed on the basis of inverse net commercial tax capacity. As a result regional tax base disparities have dropped from 50 to 1 to roughly 12 to 1. To do more one would need a higher proportion than 40 percent, and to include high-value residential property as well (otherwise one ends up with purely residential suburbs which actually get money from the system precisely because they have no commercial property). This requires a regional master plan and targeting the neediest areas until they're stabilized.

Orfield's "metropolitics" has achieved notable successes on these fronts. Beginning with studies and maps it moved on through mayoral associations, the

state legislature, and the governor's office, forging an increasingly effective coalition issue by issue, bill by bill. In three years it "moved the council from a $40-million-a-year regional planning agency, with loose supervisory control over regional agencies, to a $600-million-a-year regional government directly operating regional sewers and transit systems." This created the largest, most powerful regional government in the U.S.—all they didn't get was elected leadership.

Elected leadership, Orfield continues to stress, would best facilitate such metropolitan reform since elected regional councils mean not only more effective governance because of their legitimacy and accountability but also because elections tend to publicize issues and to make area residents think in regional terms. And competing governments are less likely to usurp power from elected bodies than from appointed ones, as we have seen in the Metropolitan Council, because elected officials are backed by their constituents and more concerned to protect their turf.

So can such regional coalitions work elsewhere? Yes, as demonstrated by Portland, which has duplicated "the Twin Cities coalition-building regional model." What they and other aspirants to metropolitan reform must keep in mind are some of the lessons in coalition building with which he concludes: make maps—people will look at those; get personal and build inclusive coalitions; "it's the older suburbs, stupid"—get rid of that old, now mythical city/suburb conflict; stress that fair housing is about allowing individuals to choose; get the churches to introduce that moral dimension; they and other groups, philanthropic and business, will provide respectability—and money; seek out the media when you have this coalition; and be ready to fight on several fronts—you're bound to win on some; but be willing to accept good compromises.

Orfield has accomplished a great deal in way of metropolitan reform. But he has done the even rarer thing of communicating his successes in "metropolitics" to the rest of us in a book that combines sound scholarship that's intellectually stimulating and proven applications that are downright inspiring into a self-help book of the very best sort. If you want to do something about problems in your metropolitan area—and three quarters of us live in these—here are all the precepts and examples you'll need.

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