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The title of William Colman's book leads one to anticipate a narrowly conceived monograph devoted to the nuts and bolts of urban government and finance, an expectation reinforced by an introduction that dryly emphasizes the functional, fiscal, and legal aspects of state and city government. In fact, however, Cities, Suburbs, and States provides a wide-ranging examination of the present trials and tribulations of metropolitan America, an examination that relates institutional and fiscal problems to more familiar issues of housing, education, crime, unemployment, health care, and racial discrimination. This general approach will offend experts in the field who will accuse Colman of sometimes making lists rather than arguments while he purchases comprehensiveness at the price of superficiality. Interested laymen, however, will find the book well worth reading as an intriguing, often provocative consideration of modern urban problems.

The author attributes most problems of urban government to the failure of large cities to expand their boundaries in order to capture middle class tax-payers who have escaped to the suburbs. While the costs of maintaining a decaying city and providing social services to a relatively poor inner city population dramatically rise, tax revenues flow increasingly to independent suburban communities that view the city with a mixture of fear, contempt, and indifference. Determined to protect their independence, suburbs zone out the poor and black and opt out of cooperative strategies to ameliorate problems affecting the entire metropolitan area.

Colman argues that suburbs are becoming increasingly self-sufficient economically. Retailers move out with their consumers, and manufacturers are attracted by cheap land, tax incentives, access to major highways, and the excellent quality of suburban services.

Unchallenged by weak county governments, protected by state "home rule" laws, and defended by their growing number of political representatives, suburbs have come to assume many characteristics of ancient city-states.

Meanwhile, the cities are dragged down by a series of interlocking problems - inferior education, high unemployment, unsafe neighborhoods, tense race relations, and the cost of providing services to a population that is poorer and older than the residents of an average suburban community. Many expensive federal programs such as FHA loans, highway projects, and subsidies for the construction of waste treatment plants and waterworks have helped suburbanites more than city dwellers, and some well-intentioned policies aimed directly at inner city problems, such as busing of school children to achieve greater racial integration, have speeded the white flight to the suburbs.

Colman insists that cities must have help from larger units of government. From the federal government should come greater expenditures for individual health and welfare as well as court reform and national anti-pollution standards. States need to offer more funds for education, mass transit, and housing along with laws to amend restrictive building codes that prevent mass production of homes. And, finally, Colman recommends various means to transcend the metropolitan maze of independent jurisdictions (Chicago alone has 1,100 separate units of government). He would strengthen urban counties, utilize special districts and authorities, and encourage state or federally sponsored, areawide comprehensive planning.

In the concluding (and most interesting) section of the book, Colman considers two alternative strategies for dealing with major urban problems. One is to continue recent efforts to revitalize the city - to restore its traditional residential, commercial, and industrial functions. This has been the intent of most federal urban policies

since the late 1940's, but such efforts have done little to reverse trends toward rapid suburban growth and the socioeconomic decline of central cities. Supporting these trends have been racial, political, and functional forces all but impossible to counter. The white middle class has fled from old urban centers that are decreasingly viable in an age of cars, trucks, and airplanes, and, as the population of the inner city has declined, so too has the political power of the people left behind.

Assuming then that large-scale federal expenditures for the restoration of cities is doubtful, perhaps even unwise, Colman proposes instead that various levels of government should work with present trends rather than against them. People should be helped to settle in the suburbs if that is where they wish to live. The poor could be dispersed proportionally into outlying communities - an emphasis on "model suburbs" rather than model cities. Meanwhile, decaying central city residential property could be converted to commercial and recreational use or into accommodations for childless middle and higher income people who wish to live near their downtown jobs. Government money could be used in the suburbs to expand essential services and to provide rent subsidies to the poor, while in the inner city funds could be channeled into areas and activities that show the greatest promise for survival and growth.

As Colman admits, there are many problems in implementing these policies, problems of compensating inner city property owners, of overcoming suburban hostility to an influx of poorer residents, and of calming black political leaders who will see dispersal of the Negro poor as an effort to dilute their political power. Yet, his proposals have considerable appeal, particularly if one agrees that most urban problems are basically intractable. Colman's book is unique - few writers these days manage to turn defeatism into a strategy for survival.

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