

From the struggles over metropolitan consolidation of the late 19th century to contemporary debates about urban sprawl and city/suburban disparities, the question of what scale is best for key functions of urban governance has been a constant source of political controversy. Exactly 100 years ago, for example, the push for metropolitan consolidation led to the creation of New York City as we know it today. During the 1950s and 1960s, efforts were made in numerous U.S. regions to create new, general-purpose metropolitan governments, but nearly all met defeat in referendums. More recently, there has been considerable debate about alternative methods of capacity building at the regional scale. At the same time, secession movements have broken out in a few regions, with portions of several central cities seeking to become independent suburbs themselves.

Not surprisingly, Taubman Center researchers have been monitoring and contributing to these debates. This year's Taubman Center Report highlights several of their contributions. I lead off with some observations based on my work over the past two years as co-chair of a National Research Council committee on Metropolitan Governance and the Future of U.S. Cities. Richard Briffault discusses the important policy issues raised by the formation of more than 1,000 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) since the mid-1980s, while Howard Husock reflects on the urban secession movements. Edward Glaeser

reports on recent economic research that seeks to quantify the costs of ghettos, both for those who occupy them and, more generally, for the regions in which they are located. Finally, Paul Peterson discusses the "school choice" movement, including opportunities for poor inner-city children to escape the dismal schools now open to them in favor of private as well as alternative public schools.

The Taubman Center itself, let me emphasize, endorses no policies or ideological positions (not even the director's). Rather, it seeks to stimulate informed public deliberations about significant issues of state, local, and intergovernmental affairs, and to provide a forum in which scholars and practitioners with divergent views are encouraged to interact with civility and genuine openness to new learning. So it should not surprise anyone that the authors included in this year's report sometimes disagree with one another. The criterion for their inclusion has not been consensus, but rather the prospect that they might stimulate readers to think about the issues addressed in new ways. I hope you will agree with me that the articles that follow — not just those on urban governance, but also those on environmental protection, rail transit, educational reform, and innovation in American government — satisfy this criterion in spades.

— Alan Altshuler
Director

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