

necessarily available to those parts of metropolitan areas that are most in need. Aggregate information for all metropolitan areas, or for a single area in its entirety, is suggestive but does not tell the whole story. A closer inspection is needed to determine the distribution of people and of economic resources within metropolitan areas.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DISPARITIES

A basic distinction within metropolitan areas is that between the central city and the suburbs. Typically, these are very different kinds of communities. On the one hand, the word "city" suggests bustling streets with a mixture of factories, offices, apartments, and homes crowded together amidst heavy traffic, noise, dirt, and excitement. "Suburb" conveys an impression of a uniformity of quiet, tree-lined streets, with spacious lawns between single-family houses, two cars in every garage, sprawling shopping centers, cleanliness, quiet, and monotony. Governmental differences also abound. While the central city is usually governed by a single, tightly organized "strong-mayor" system, the suburbs are governed by many relatively small units, including numerous special districts, as well as by counties that continue to reflect a rural orientation. These differences imply that the city dweller and the suburbanite are very different sorts of persons, with divergent tastes, attitudes, needs, and social and economic status.

Politically, differences are apparent in the conflict between central cities and their surrounding suburbs, conflict which is often highly articulated in the State legislatures. The two kinds of communities compete there for shared tax revenues; for financial aid for schools, welfare programs, and highways; for legislation which may benefit one metropolitan segment more than the other. Cities and suburbs confront each other directly at the local level in arguments over who is subsidizing whom in matters of transportation services, zoning policy, health and welfare services, water pollution, and so on. It often seems that the only common meeting ground lies in their reluctant partnership as the two halves of a statistical identity—the metropolitan area.

This competition and contention stem in part from a public image that magnifies central city-suburban differences in economic and social characteristics even beyond existing realities. The central city is viewed as the only home of the poor, nonwhite, undereducated, unskilled, unstable, and unhealthy, while the suburbs are assumed to accommodate almost exclusively the happy, healthy, middle class, "average" American family. The very rich, it is believed, live in both places, but they can afford to. While the economic interdependence of these two dichotomous parts is acknowledged (exemplified by the fact that most suburbanites work in the city), a social and political community of interest over the metropolitan area as a whole is frequently denied.

These widely held beliefs about central city-suburban differences have been reinforced by several striking and observable trends of recent population change in the larger metropolitan areas. While the suburbs of these areas have grown rapidly and have attracted a broad cross section of the population, many large central cities lost