The U.S. Urban Reform Movement
And Metropolitan Government

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Draft; <u>not</u> for quotation

There are a number of ideas and institutions that we associate with the urban

reform movement in the United States. These include the council-manager form of

government, the commission form, at-large elections, and non-partisan elections.

Metropolitan government has been an ideal of the urban reform movement, but it has not

been as central as the above institutions, for a number of reasons.

What, exactly, is meant by reform? Finegold, using a specific definition, sees

reform as "the attempt to change what is systematic about government, rather than, or in

addition to, what is transitory."

[1] In a broader sense, reform, in the urban context, refers to a specific movement which

began early in the 20th century. That movement aimed at the evils of machine politics. In

contrast, to the machine, reform was an impersonal style of governance, rooted in a

modern outlook.[2] The change from machine politics to reform was, at its roots, a clash

between traditional and modern values. In addition to their belief in the rational values of

mangerialism and professionalism, reformers argued that a unitary public interest guided

decisions in all cases. Related to this conception of the public interest, reformers wanted

to see consolidation of authority.

In creating an area-wide government to replace multiple units, metropolitan

reorganization provides another way of consolidating authority.   It is easier for voters to

hold one politician accountable than it is to find accountability in a multitude of

[1] Kenneth Finegold, Experts and Politicians: Reform Challenges to Machine Politics in New York, Cleveland, and Chicago (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p 3.

[2] This discussion follows Clarence N. Stone, Robert K. Whelan, and William J. Murin, Urban Policy and Politics in a Bureaucratic Age (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979), Ch. 6, Ch. 10. In reference to metropolitan government, see G. Ross Stephens and Nelson Wikstrom, Metropolitan Government and Governance: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Analysis, and the Future (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp 31-33.

overlapping jurisdictions. Further, if officials represent broader constituencies, they will have a broader view of community needs. The argument would be that metropolitan government has a set of common interests, and that these interests can be represented in a unified and authoritative fashion.[3] Reformers worked to insulate decision-makers from partisan and word-based administrators, while creating a set of expert professional administrators, running city agencies.

Over the years, the values used to delineate and to evaluate the "metropolitan problem" have been remarkably constant. Writing in 1970, Robert Lineberry saw four dimensions to the metropolitan problem: externalities, political nonresponsibility, a lack of coordination, and fiscal and service inequalities.[4] Writing a few years later, Ken Young suggested that we could assess the consequences of metropolitan institutional change by examining the integrative effects, the distributive effects, and the performance effects.[5] More recently, Benjamin and Nathan see four values as driving the revival of interest in metropolitan governance in the 1990's. These are: efficiency, economic competitiveness, equity, and community.[6]

This paper proposes to examine urban reforms and its relation to metropolitan government in the U.S. in three eras: ca. 1900- ca.1930, ca. 1930- ca. 1970, and 1970- present. In each era, I will look at the theory, the practice, and challenges to either

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[3] Stone, Whelan, Murin, Op. Cit, pp 73-74.

[4] Robert Lineberry, "Reforming Metropolitan Governances; Requiem or Reality?" Georgetown Law Journal 58(March- May), 675-718.

[5] Ken Young, " 'Metropology' Revisited: On the Political Integration of Metropolitan Areas", in Ken Young (ed), Essays on the Study of Urban Politics, (London, Macmillan, 1975), pp 152-156.

[6] Gerald Benjamin and Richard P. Nathan, Regionalism and Realism: A Study of Governments in the New York Metropolitan Area (Washington D.C.: Brooklyn Institution, 2001), PP 38-50.

theories or practice. It should be noted throughout the activities and publications of the National Municipal League, and especially its journal, the <u>National Civic Review</u> have been a consistent voice on behalf of metropolitan reform.[7] There is no other political group or academic journal which has been as steadfast as the National Municipal League.

I. <u>The Age of Reform, I: 1900-1930</u>

It is appropriate to begin a paper on metropolitan government with the ideas of that great futurist, H.G. Wells. In a paper presented to the Fabian Society in 1903, Wells decried the lack of efficiency and political responsibility in local government in the London area. As a solution, Wells suggested a governing area covering much of Southeast England, with one governing body elected by local constituencies. This body would replace local and county councils, among other institutions.[8]

Wells's, speech reflected metropolitan governmental reform occurring in major world cities in that era. In 1899, the London Government Act established 28 metropolitan boroughs, while recognizing the separate existence of the City of London. In 1898, New York City was consolidated into its current five boroughs, five county form by New York State legislative action. The best known historians of New York City, Edwin Burrows, and Mike Wallace, see this consolidation as key to the city's 20th century success.[9]

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[7] Stephens and Wikstrom, <u>Metropolitan Government and Governance</u>, pp 32-33.

[8] H.G. Wells, "A Paper on Administrative Areas Read Before the Fabian Society" in Arthur Maass (ed.), <u>Area and Power</u>: <u>A Theory of Local Government</u> (Glencoe, IL: Free Press. 1959), Appendix, pp 206-221 [originally published as Appendix to Wells's <u>Mankind in the Making</u>, 1903]

[9] Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, <u>Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp 1224-1236. No one doubts the success of New York. Many of the city's

During this era, governmental consolidation was not the main focus of urban reform. Historian Kenneth Fox has pointed out the pivotal role of the federal Bureau of the Census in the national urban reform movement "by designing and publicizing statistical definitions of urban areas and urban populations that emphasized the similarities of cities large and small."[10] In the census of 1910, the Bureau introduced the concept of Metropolitan district. This was defined as cities of 100,000 and greater population and surrounding jurisdiction within ten miles or contiguous to the city. Fox suggests that this created consensus about the character of our metropolitan areas, while annexation and other governmental changes were more conflicted. Fox further notes that the New York consolidation was the last with the willing cooperation if the jurisdictions involved. Between 1909 and 1914, Los Angeles annexed communities in the surrounding areas by threatening to deny access to the water supply. Since then, there have been few annexations or governmental consolidations by coercion in the U.S. urban system. Fox observes that the "metropolitan district was an ideal conceptual substitute for formal metropolitan consolidation. It allowed the people most enthusiastic about metropolitan unity, such as commercial, financial and real estate interests, to promote area-wide development without threatening the political independence of suburban cities and towns.[11]

There were many developments in public administration, which indirectly impacted metropolitan governmental reform. The establishment of the New York Bureau

accomplishments were the work of entities other than the city government, such as the Port Authority, the Triborough Bridge as Tunnel Authority, etc.

[10] Kenneth Fox, Metropolitan America: Urban Life and Urban Policy in the United States, 1940-1980 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), p 28.

[11] Fox, Metropolitan America, p 30.

of Municipal Research in 1907 is often viewed as a key event. The formation of professional organizations, such as the International City Managers Association in 1913, helped the process of spreading knowledge, and creating support for urban reform.

Another research organization which emerged in the 1920's was the Brookings Institution. As a Brookings staff member, W.F. Willoughby, a leading figure in the development of academic public administration, conducted applied research studies for several state governments. To give an example, Willoughby prepared a detailed report for the state of Mississippi. The report addressed the state's revenue system, the methods of financial administration and control, and the organization and operation of state and local government. Recommendations for county consolidation were made. These included the consolidation of Hines, Madison, and Rankin counties (in the Jackson metropolitan area), and the consolidation of Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson counties (the counties along the Gulf Coast, which are the second major population base).[12] Not surprisingly, the metropolitan governance recommendations were never implemented.

Leading textbooks of the era reflected this interest in metropolitan government. Writing in 1923, Harvard professor William Bennett Munro believed that the 20th century would be an era of metropolitan communities. Given the economic unity of metropolitan areas and the waste resulting from a multiplicity of local governments, Munro thought "out of all this is sure to arise, in due course, some movement for unification, complete or partial, such as will ensure the broad treatment of metropolitan problems by a centralized

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[12] Institute for Government Research, Brookings Institution, Report on a Survey of the Organization and Administration of State and County Government in Mississippi (Jackson, Mississippi: Research Commission of the State of Mississippi, 1932), p 928.

authority."[13] While there would be resistance from smaller jurisdictions, Munro felt that metropolitan unity was inevitable.

Munro thought there were three ways in which unification could be achieved. The first was municipal federalism, in which local units retain their existence, while the central authority, deals with broader, regional problems. Munro's example of this was the London of his era, with the boroughs and the London City Council. A second approach was to annex, extinguish local governments, and turn then into arrondisements (neighborhood districts) of the greater city. Paris, in Munro's time, had grown by utilizing this approach. A third possibility was a compromise or hybrid of the two above approaches. New York City, as it was constituted after 1898, was an example. New York's consolidation weighed heavily in favor of the city government, with the boroughs retaining little power. In Munro's view, the boroughs were "mere ghosts of local self-government."[14]

Reform institutions were adopted by many cities in the early decades of the 20th century. By 1918, nearly 500 cities had changed to a commission form of government.[15] The commission began as an emergency response to a devastating 1900 hurricane in Galveston, Texas. In a similar vein, the council-manager plan became the most common form of government, in the United States in less than 50 years.[16]

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[13] William B. Munro, Municipal Government and Administration: Volume I, Government (New York: Macmillan, 1923), p 437.

[14] Ibid., p 438. The decision comes from pp437-438.

[15] Bradley R. Rice, Progressive Cities: The Commission Government Movement in America, 1901-1920 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977) p xiv

[16] Alan L. Saltzstein, Governing America's Urban Areas (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003), p 113.

Larger urban areas, however, were less likely to adopt reform institutions. Political machines and machine-style politics remained a hardy challenge for reformers, on a daily basis, in many large cities. Machines were dependent on a web of relationships of party organizations, officeholders, and private individuals and favors seeking favors from them. Machine politics was personalized and traditional; at the same time, it was often highly conflicted. In the purpose of this paper, we should note that machine politicians who were in control of a Boston, a Chicago, etc would be extremely reluctant to expand government into a wider suburban area, in which "reform" victories might be facilitated.

II. The Age of Reform II, 1930-1970

In the years from 1930 to 1970, much reform thinking continued in the traditional vein. In the latter part of the era, reform thinkers were increasingly concerned with equity- both in terms of fiscal equity, and in terms of sharing social problems (e.g., sorting of low coast housing) throughout a metropolitan region. On a practical level, the postwar era saw most of the major metropolitan consolidation; Baton Rouge- East Baton Rouge Parish, Miami- Dale County, Nashville- Davidson County, Indianapolis- Marion County, and Jacksonville- Duval County. The federal government encouraged metropolitan co-operation in a number of "Great Society" programs of the 1960's. In an intellectual sense, the reformist ideal of metropolitan unification was challenged by public-choice theorists, in the latter part of the era. In the late 1960's, African-American politicians began to attain significant power in cities. The combination of minority

elected officials in the central cities, and white suburban office holders, kept metropolitan government advances to a minimum.

One of the best examples of changing views of metropolitan government appears in the work of Robert Wood. Wood, an academic noted for such books as <u>1400 Governments</u>, also served as Undersecretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development after its creation in the 1960's. Writing in 1959, Wood noted the fragmentation of government in metropolitan areas. Wood was critical of academic urbanists whose reform efforts in the last twenty years aimed at consolidation and enlargement of political jurisdictions.[17] Wood's conclusion was that we tended to apply functional criteria in metropolitan reorganization. In this field, as in so much or public administration, "the norm of efficiency came to predominate."[18] From Wood's perspective, such values as liberty, equality, and broader citizen participation needed great emphasis on dealing with the problems of metropolitan areas. Wood thought that the only identifiable metropolitan political community was to be found among commuters. Wood suggested a number of possibilities for the management of metropolitan transportation affairs. These included a cooperative arrangement among local entities in a metropolitan area, a state agency within the framework of state government, or a special district with direct citizen participation and control.[19]

The classic public administration view of the metropolitan government problem remains that of Luther Gulick. Gulick saw three basic reasons for local inability to act in

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[17] Robert C. Wood, "A Division of Powers in Metropolitan Areas" in Maass (ed.), <u>Area and Power</u>, p 55.

[18] <u>Ibid</u>., pp 59-60.

[19] <u>Ibid</u>., pp 67-68.

the fact of such problems as slums, traffic congestion, education, and crime. These reasons were: first, problem areas are broader than local government boundaries. In Gulick's words, "Once an indivisible problem is divided, nothing affective can be done about it."[20] Second is the fiscal problem. How do you pay for things that need doing? Third is the political problem, which comprises the core of Gulick's lectures.

In Gulick's opinion, there were three major shortcomings of local government in metropolitan areas. The first was a <u>service</u> problem. High-quality governmental services needed to be delivered to residences and businesses. Second was the failure to develop area-wide goals and programs through our normal democratic processes. Third was the failure to "develop teamwork machinery for the metropolitan area, founded on a broad constituency and guided by local leaders and appropriate representative institutions."[21]

The post-Second World war saw the major consolidations that are in effect today. The consolidation of Baton Rouge- East Baton Rouge in 1947 was modified by the adoption of a metropolitan council (elected at-large) with mayor-president in 1985. This arrangement limited suburban sprawl for a long time. On the negative side, police services are still fragmented. Nashville is a city which has grown substantially since its consolidation. With two major league franchises, and as the center of the country music industry, Nashville is now a tourist destination city. To what degree this is due to governmental consolidation is unknown. Jacksonville, like Nashville, is now a "major league" city with a successful economy. The consolidation clearly prevented African-American domination of the city's politics. Indianapolis-Marion County, consolidated in

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[20] Luther Halsey Gulick, <u>The Metropolitan Problem and American Ideas</u> (New York; Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p 24.

[21] <u>Ibid</u>., p 165.

1970, has had some successes. Like Nashville, Indianapolis has two major league teams. Sports have provided a focus for downtown revitalization. Again, the relationship of governmental consolidation to development politics is unclear. In Miami, the creation of Metropolitan Dade County in 1957 was followed in very short order by the arrival of immigrants fleeing Castro's Cuba. This created a very different political dynamic. Still, metro Dade is considered to be a successful example of a federative metropolitan government.

While a few localities adopted metropolitan governments, most did not. Thus, several federal initiatives in the postwar era represented the major efforts in this field. Section 701 of the Housing Act of 1954 provided federal matching funds for regional planning efforts. The Model City program, enacted in 1966, required an areawide agency to review a broad range of federal grant applications from local governments. In Circular A-95 of 1969, the Official Management and Budget (OMB) expanded the number of federal programs which had to be reviewed by state and regional clearinghouses.[22]

Textbooks of the era reflected the above concerns. Bollens and Schmandt's text, The Metropolis was one of the first to be published after urban problems rose on the national agenda, and urban studies courses became part of university curricula in the mid-to-late 1960's. In a fourteen chapter book, Bollens and Schmandt devote two chapters to governmental reorganization. A third chapter considers the politics of metropolitan

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[22] For a good summaries of the development, see Ralph Conant and Daniel Myers, Toward a More Perfect Union: The Governance of Metropolitan America (Novato, Ca: Chandler and Sharp, 2002), pp134-153, and Myron Orfield, American Metropolitics: The New Suburban Reality (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2002) pp140-145.

reform. Other chapters include the governmental pattern (emphasizing fragmentation),

the intergovernmental web, and urban planning (emphasizing metropolitan planning).[23]

Thinking in the mid-1960's about the "metropolitan problem" was captured very

well by a report of the Committee on Economic Development (CED). The CED was

funded by business to make recommendations on public policy matters. In July, 1966,

the CED issued its report, Modernizing Local Government: To Secure a Balance

Federalism.[24] A number of the "giants" of public administration were involved with this

report. Wallace Sayre, Alan Campbell, James Fesler and Charles Gilbert, among others

were members of the Committee for Improvement of Management in Government

(CIMG) Advisory Board. This committee produced the report. Luther Gulick and

Donald Stone were advisors to the CIMG.

The committee included the following major recommendations concerning

metropolitan areas:

1. In a one county metropolitan area, a reconstituted county government should
    handle area-wide problems.

2. In multi-county metropolitan areas, multi-county federations should be created for
    coordinated planning, and enforcement of solutions to area-wide problems.

3. In New England, towns should be consolidated or federated to create metropolitan
    governments.

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[23] John C. Bollens and Henry J. Schmandt, The Metropolis: Its People, Politics and Economic Life, 4th
citation (New York: Harper and Row, 1982). The original edition of the book in 1965 devoted four chapters
out of sixteen to metropolitan government issues.
[24] Committee for Economic Development, Modernizing Local Government: To Secure a Balanced
Federalism (New York: Committee for Economic Development, 1966)

4. Congress should enact legislation that would facilitate creation of join authorization to work on interstate problems.

5. Neighborhood districts should be created within large metropolitan areas, each with small councils to adopt service to neighborhood needs.[25]

These recommendations are not new. Indeed, some idea of neighborhood (or borough or <u>arrondisement</u>) presence in the context of wider regional governance has been around since the earliest writers on the subject.

The political context in the 1960's was not favorable to the advance of metropolitan government. Numerous 1960's metropolitan initiatives were defeated. In the 1968 California Democratic primary, Eugene McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy debated the paradoxical ideas of "opening up the suburbs" vs. "gilding the ghetto." The question of aiding people or places as a strategy was never resolved. In the late 1960's, the first wave of African-American majors was elected- including Carl Stokes in Cleveland and Richard Hatcher in Gary.

Let me give just one example. In the mid-1970's, a group of Atlanta power brokers proposed that all territory inside the I-285 perimeter highway be subsumed into an Atlanta metropolitan entity. This is a multi-county area. Maynard Jackson had been elected on Atlanta's first African-American mayor in 1973. In addition, several Atlanta area legislators were elected from African-American majority districts (e.g. Julian Bond). Minority legislators from Atlanta allied with suburban colleagues. In exchange for their votes supporting statewide banking, the metropolitan consolidation bill disappeared. The topic has not been discussed seriously since.

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[25] <u>Ibid</u>. pp 44-47.

Along with political developments in metropolitan areas, the public choice

approach emerged as a major challenge to traditional public administration ideas. In their

examination of American local government from a public choice perspective, Ostrom,

Bish and Ostrom suggest there are a number of reasons for being skeptical of the one-

community, one-government solution. These include: inefficiencies of bigness (ex., New

York City), popular resistance to metropolitan reform, changing spatial patterns, and

increasing demands for community control and neighborhood government.[26] In

summarizing, the authors note that there are few economies of scale with most public

service, and that citizens appear to want more (rather than less) control of local services.[27]

III. An Age of Little Reform: 1970-present

In the United States, scholars and practitioners have, by and large, given up on

achieving the ideal of metropolitan government. Instead, recent literature emphasizes the

concept of governance, or "new" regionalism- i.e., governments working together

cooperatively on a voluntary basis to address problems of a regional nature. There is a

recent substantial body of literature on this topic, much of it produced since 1990. In the

academic literature, scholars such as Todd Swanstrom, Hank Savitch, and Ron Vogel

have made significant contributions. Moreover, there are a number of "cross-over"

figures- practitioners who appeal to an academic audience who have brought attention to

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[26] Vincent Ostrom, Robert Bish, Elinor Ostrom. Local Government in the United States (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1988), pp 71-81.

[27] Ibid., p 78.

these issues. They include Bill Dodge, Anthony Downs, Myron Orfield, and David Rusk.[28]

On the governmental side, there has been one major consolidation in recent years: that of Louisville, Kentucky with suburban Jefferson County in 2000. Much has also been made of a number of other positive advances in metropolitan governance. These include: the regional growth boundary, transportation planning and the metro council in Portland, Oregon; regional tax-base sharing and the metropolitan council in the Twin cities (Minneapolis- St. Paul) region, the use of metropolitan planning organizations to distribute monies under the last two major transportation acts (ISTEA and TEA-21), and "smart-growth" legislation in many states. It is easy to agree with Nelson Wikstrom's assessment that "given the rise, recognition and institutionalization of regional governance, the concept on desirability of comprehensive metropolitan government has become a somewhat archaic intellectual relic, identified with the past century."[29]

One might ask if recent efforts in Canada are an exception to this assertion. I would argue that recent Canadian efforts at amalgamation and consolidation may have been influenced by this tradition, but that these efforts are much more in the vein of regional governance than in the vein of comprehensive metropolitan government. For example, the recent Montreal mergers created a South Shore "megacity" in Longueuil, let

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[28] See for example, Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf and Todd Swanstrom, Place Matters: Metropolitics for the Twenty-first Century (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001), especially Ch. 6, pp 173-200; H.B. Savitch and Ronald K. Vogel, (eds) Regional Politics: American in a Post-City Age (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996); William R. Dodge, Regional Excellence: Governing Together to Compete Globally and Flourish Locally (Washington: National League of Cities, 1996); Anthony Downs, New Visions for Metropolitan America (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1994); Myron Orfield, American Metropolitics: The New Suburban Reality (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2002); and David Rusk, Inside Game Outside Game: Winning Strategies for Saving Urban America (Washington, Brookings Institution, 1999).

[29] Nelson Wikstrom, "The City in the Regional Mosaic" in H. George Frederickson and John Malbandian (eds), The Future of Local Government Administration (Washington, D.C.: International City/County Management Association, 2002), p 36.

a long-existing merger in Laval stand, and kept much of the Montreal economic region

outside of any mega-city. A Montreal "megacity" was, indeed, created, but this can

hardly be called comprehensive metropolitan government.[30]

At the same time, metropolitan government efforts in the United State have met

practical political challenges. Suburban proponents of NIMBY politics and large-lot

zoning fear the intrusion of crime, low-cost housing, and fiscal responsibility for the

problems of the inner city. Minority majors and other vested interests in city politics (e.g.

public sect or bureaucracies) fear the diminution of hard-won powers.

Figure One:

	Main Theme	Practice	Challenges
Era of Reform, I 1900-1980	efficiency	some consolidation, but main emphasis on council-manager, commission forms	machines
Era of Reform, II 1930-1970	efficiency equity (in latter part)	most major consolidation date from post-war era	voter resistance public choice theory (in latter part)
Age of little reform 1970 present	governance efficiency	Few consolidations; many regional governance agreements	urban and suburban political coalition

Conclusion

In all three eras, efficiency has been a primary concern of academic and

practitioner advocates of metropolitan reform. Concerns have been diverse, include

economies of scale, and matching functional areas with problem areas. In the last forty

years, there has been a concern with equity issues. Making suburbanites pay for city

services used, and having some sort of regional sharing of tax base and low-income

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[30] Recent Canadian development, a review in Andrew Sancton, "Beyond the Municipal: Governance for Canadian Cities" Policy Options (February 2004) p 26-31.

housing are recurring themes. Recently, academics and practitioners have taken a results-oriented approach, emphasizing urban governance.

The practice of metropolitan reform has varied greatly. In the early part of the twentieth century, there were few consolidations. Most of the major governmental consolidations occurred between World War II and the early 1970's. These include Miami, Nashville, Indianapolis, Jacksonville, and Baton Rouge. Louisville is the major recent consolidation, as the latest wave of reforms has stressed regional cooperation other than government consolidation.

In all eras, there have been political challenges to the ideal of metropolitan government. Opponents of metro included urban machines (historically), and minority politicians, and suburban officials more recently. In an intellectual sense, public choice theorists have provided the major challenge to metropolitan government. Reform thinkers and practitioners first put forward the idea of metropolitan government, and have done much to keep the notion alive. Present day reformers, such as Myron Orfield and the Portland Oregon people have targeted their reforms, and their political strategies.