



Fannie Mae Foundation Census Note 06 (June 2001)*

“Boomburbs”: The Emergence of Large, Fast-Growing Suburban Cities in the United States

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Introduction

A new type of large, rapidly growing suburban city (or “Boomburb”) emerged in the latter part of the 20th century along with the Sunbelt and the suburban-dominated metropolis. When late 19th and early 20th century satellite cities reached a large scale, they developed as dense urban cores. But as Boomburbs grow into big “cities,” most remain essentially suburban in character. Just as satellite cities reflected the dominant urban pattern of their time, Boomburbs may be the ultimate symbol of the sprawling postwar metropolitan form.

Boomburbs are defined as places with more than 100,000 residents that are *not* the largest city in their metropolitan areas and have maintained double-digit rates of population growth in recent decades. The United States currently contains 53 Boomburbs: four top 300,000 in population, eight surpass 200,000, and 41 exceed 100,000 people. This *Census Note* follows these important but seldom recognized places, which accounted for over half (51 percent) of 1990s’ growth in cities with between 100,000 and 400,000 residents. Boomburbs now contain a quarter of all people who live in such places.

While Boomburbs may be found throughout the nation, they occur mostly in the Southwest, with almost half in California alone. Many Boomburbs, especially in the West, are products of master-planned community development and the need to form large water districts. Even a relatively small metropolis such as Las Vegas, with its expansive master-planned communities and desert surroundings, contains two Boomburbs. By contrast, no big region in the Northeast and Midwest, except Chicago, has a single Boomburb. Even most large and rapidly growing Sunbelt metropolitan areas east of the Mississippi, such as Atlanta, lack Boomburbs. Thus a region can boom and still wind up without Boomburbs.

The South’s suburbs are comprised of mostly small, fragmented municipalities that capture tiny fractions of metropolitan population. The different municipal structure in the east and west Sunbelts has important policy implications. The East’s fragmented municipalities will likely produce more fragmented responses to regional problems. If, as many now argue, regional cooperation is becoming more essential to take on such problems as sprawl, then the South’s lack of Boomburbs may put the region at a disadvantage.

Because of their exceptionally fast growth rates, the Boomburbs face extreme degrees of development-related problems, such as traffic congestion, strained public services, and sprawl. However, because of their large size and their potential to cooperate with other large municipalities, Boomburbs may prove well-positioned to participate in comprehensive regional solutions to these problems.

Boomburbs—Bold New Metropolis, or Updated Satellite Cities?

Boomburbs are fast-growing suburban cities.¹ They typically develop along the interstate beltways that ring large U.S. metropolitan areas. At highway exit ramps and major intersections gather the commercial elements of the new suburban metropolis: the office parks, big-box retail, and, most characteristically, strip development. Beyond these strips lie subdivisions, dominated by large-lot, single-family homes.

Some may question whether Boomburbs are merely updated satellite cities. Business, particularly manufacturing, has been decentralizing for many decades. For example, in a 1915 publication titled *Satellite Cities: A Case Study of Industrial Suburbs*, economist Graham Taylor described an emerging metropolitan pattern in which heavy industry was rapidly shifting to the suburbs in search of more space and lower costs. More than 75 years ago, sociologist Ernest Burgess noted that there was already business growth at Chicago's edge, which he characterized as being "centralized-decentralized" in structure (Burgess 1925).

Early 20th century "satellite" and "centralized" suburbs mimicked big cities, although at slightly lower density and scale. Satellites had all of the places that defined a city: a main street shopping area, high-density residential neighborhoods, and, by the late 19th century, factory districts (Borchert 1996). In the 1920s, it was even typical for larger satellite cities in the New York region, such as Newark, New Jersey, to have a signature art deco office tower, representing an already decentralizing service economy.

Boomburbs, by contrast, do not resemble traditional central cities or, for that matter, older satellites. While Boomburbs possess most elements found in cities, such as housing, retailing, entertainment, and offices, they are not typically patterned in a traditional urban form. Boomburbs almost always lack, for example, a dense business core. Boomburbs can thus be seen as distinct from traditional cities—not so much in their function, but in their low density and loosely configured spatial structure. Boomburbs are urban in fact, but not in feel.

However, Boomburbs in regions such as Phoenix, Dallas, and Las Vegas are similar to their newer and less traditional Southwestern U.S. central cities. Cities such as Mesa, near Phoenix, and Arlington, near Dallas, have comparable density and urban form to their respective core cities—except for missing a large downtown. Boomburbs in these metropolitan areas are an extension of the auto-dependent city building that has dominated the spatial structure of many Sunbelt metropolitan areas.

¹ The emergence of these large suburban cities has recently come to the attention of the popular press (see El Nasser and Overberg 1997).

The emergence of Boomburbs that resemble their newer central cities shows that satellites tend to follow the general urban form of their metropolitan area. In this respect, Boomburbs are updated satellite cities—provided that they ring newer, auto-based central cities. They are touchstones of the new suburban-dominated metropolis.

Urban scholars have been attempting for the past three decades to characterize the big suburban cities that are referred to here as Boomburbs. As Sharpe and Wallock (1994) note:

In the early 1970s, as concern about the inner-city crisis waned and the decentralization of the metropolis reached new proportions, “the urbanization of the suburbs” suddenly became a topic of national interest. The ensuing flurry of articles and books introduced neologisms such as “outer city,” “satellite sprawl,” “new city,” “suburban ‘city,’” “urban fringe,” and “neo city” to describe this phenomena (p. 4)

Despite years of effort to label the new suburban form, there remains no single name for it. Instead, as Sharpe and Wallock note, observers use an inventive array of names suggesting that planners, developers, journalists, and academics do not yet understand it. Part of the problem is that we are bound by a language that hierarchically ranks living space—urban, suburban, exurban, rural—when the old ladder-image no longer applies (Lang 1996).

But properly naming the new suburban form is an important step in better understanding it. As Lewis (1995) argues: “Language is important. We cannot talk about a phenomena unless we possess the vocabulary to describe them, and many observers still cannot agree on what to call this new amorphous form of urban geography” (p. 61).

Boomburbs, as defined in this analysis, correspond to what urban historian Robert Fishman (1987, 1990, 1994) refers to as “Technoburbs.” Fishman defines Technoburbs as “a hopeless jumble of housing, industry, commerce and even agricultural uses” (Fishman 1987, 190). In his view, today’s sprawling suburban metropolitan areas can no longer be judged by the standards of the old metropolis. This is due, in part, to the fact that the new suburban form “lacks any definable borders, a center or a periphery, or clear distinctions between residential, industrial and commercial zones” (Fishman 1990, 25).

Yet while large parts—and in many cases the entirety—of Boomburbs may fit what Robert Lang (2000, 2002) refers to as “Edgeless Cities,” several also contain “Edge Cities” (Garreau 1991), which represent some of the few metropolitan focal points that exist outside the urban cores and older satellite suburbs.

Methods

Selecting the Cities

Boomburbs were identified by a two-step process. The first step identified cities with more than 100,000 people that are not the largest central city in their metropolitan areas. The second step screened out places that did not experience double-digit (10 percent or more) population growth rates in the ten-year periods between the censuses in which they appeared since 1950.

The final list includes 53 Boomburbs that had 2000 populations ranging from Mesa, Arizona with nearly 400,000 residents to Westminster, Colorado with just over 100,000. Altogether, Boomburbs now contain 8,798,765 residents. (The complete list of Boomburbs is provided in a table and discussed in the **Results** section.)

Measuring Population Change

Population data for Boomburbs are from the decennial censuses of 1950 to 2000. The percentage and numerical change is calculated for each place. The comparison shows the extent to which Boomburbs have grown over the past 50 years.

Many Boomburbs did not exist in 1950, so the census following their date of origin was used as the basis for measuring their growth. Boomburb growth measurement starts from the first census in which they had reached the 2,500-population urban place threshold.² Thirty-one Boomburbs had passed the urban threshold by 1950. By 1960, another 12 Boomburbs had crossed this mark, followed by three in 1970, five in 1980, and two in 1990.

To facilitate comparisons of growth rates across Boomburbs that do not appear in the same number of postwar censuses, we calculate an annual equivalent growth rate for all 53 cities. This annual equivalent growth rate assumes a constant annual percent increase in the population of each city during the period for which census observations are available.

To illustrate, Gilbert, Arizona, first exceeded the 2,500 urban threshold in the 1980 census, with a population of 5,717. Over the next two decades, it grew by 410 percent and 276 percent to reach a 2000 population of 109,697. If the constant annual equivalent growth rate of 16 percent is applied to Gilbert's 1980 population for 20 years, the same 2000 population of 109,697 is obtained.

Methods Issues

Most Boomburbs are not only more populous than they were several decades ago, but because of annexations, they are also physically larger. Data on land area are available for the 43 Boomburbs that existed in 1960. Between 1960 and 1990, the average size of these cities increased from 15 square miles to 50 square miles.³ Comparisons across time can be somewhat tricky because the places annexed usually contained population.

San Bernardino, California illustrates how annexations added population to some of the Boomburbs. San Bernardino annexed land in both the 1950s and 1960s. The 1950s annexations added 12,803 people to San Bernardino's 1960 population and the 1960s annexations increased the city's 1970 population by 6,092 people. The problem is that it cannot be determined how many of these people were there to start with and how many moved into the annexed parts of San Bernardino after the land was added to the city.

² Because Boomburbs have different origin dates, a decision was made to standardize their starting point based on the first postwar census in which they crossed the urban place threshold of 2,500 residents.

³ These are the types of municipalities that David Rusk (1993) refers to as "elastic" in that they can expand their boundaries to capture new growth.

This issue does not significantly impact most Boomburbs because their current land area, even if it is considerably larger than the original town, was often substantially unoccupied in 1950. Therefore, most of their population growth is through actual gains rather than annexed households.

Some late-starting Boomburbs were formed through combination of existing towns or unincorporated places. Sometimes this resulted in a large initial population. For example, Chesapeake, Virginia, was created in 1963 as the result of a merger between the City of South Norfolk and Norfolk County (City of Chesapeake, Virginia 2001). The new city had an estimated population of 78,000 in 1963 and an enumerated population of 89,580 at the time of its first decennial census in 1970.

We did not track the pre-Boomburb growth rates for areas that eventually became parts of Boomburbs. However, it is safe to assume that most of these places were experiencing fast growth rates, which in many cases precipitated their incorporation into an existing Boomburb or their merger to form a new Boomburb. For example, Fremont, California, was formed from several unincorporated towns that joined together in 1956 because the postwar boom was transforming them from small independent villages into one extended suburban city.

Results

Population Change

As table 1 shows, all Boomburbs grew quickly over the past several decades. Some places saw explosive growth. Of the Boomburbs that had reached the 2,500 urban threshold by 1950, Dallas's suburb, Irving, grew by a spectacular 7,211 percent. Henderson, Nevada, and Chandler, Arizona, also showed impressive gains, growing by 4,714 percent and 4,548 percent, respectively, in the ensuing five decades. Plano, Texas, which didn't cross the urban threshold until 1960, exhibited even more spectacular growth, increasing in size by 5,909 percent in just four decades.

Annualized Average Growth Rates

At almost 9 percent, Phoenix had the fastest annualized growth rate (AGR), averaged across its Boomburbs, for any Southwestern metropolitan area. Dallas and Las Vegas also registered fast average AGRs, with both exceeding 7 percent. Denver's average AGR followed at 5.6 percent. California Boomburbs grew slower with AGRs of 5.4 percent in San Diego, 4.5 percent in Los Angeles, and 4.4 percent in San Francisco. Salt Lake City lagged the region with a 2.1 percent Boomburb AGR. Outside the Southwest, the four Florida Boomburbs experienced a 5.6 percent average AGR.

TABLE 1.

THE BOOMBURBS

Boomburb	State	Metro Area	Year Started	Starting Population	2000 Population	% Change
Chandler	AZ	Phoenix	1950	3,799	176,581	4,548
Gilbert	AZ	Phoenix	1980	5,717	109,697	1,819
Glendale	AZ	Phoenix	1950	8,179	218,812	2,575
Mesa	AZ	Phoenix	1950	16,790	396,375	2,261
Peoria	AZ	Phoenix	1960	2,593	108,364	4,079
Scottsdale	AZ	Phoenix	1960	10,026	202,705	1,922
Tempe	AZ	Phoenix	1950	7,684	158,625	1,964
Anaheim	CA	Los Angeles	1950	14,556	328,014	2,153
Corona city	CA	Los Angeles	1950	10,223	124,966	1,122
Costa Mesa	CA	Los Angeles	1960	37,550	108,724	190
Fontana	CA	Los Angeles	1960	14,659	128,929	780
Fullerton city	CA	Los Angeles	1950	13,958	126,003	803
Irvine	CA	Los Angeles	1980	62,134	143,072	130
Lancaster	CA	Los Angeles	1950	3,594	118,718	3,203
Moreno Valley	CA	Los Angeles	1990	118,779	142,381	20
Ontario	CA	Los Angeles	1950	22,872	158,007	591
Orange	CA	Los Angeles	1950	10,027	128,821	1,185
Oxnard	CA	Los Angeles	1950	21,567	170,358	690
Rancho Cucamonga	CA	Los Angeles	1980	55,250	127,743	131
Riverside	CA	Los Angeles	1950	46,764	255,166	446
San Bernardino	CA	Los Angeles	1950	63,058	185,401	194
Santa Ana	CA	Los Angeles	1950	45,533	337,977	642
Santa Clarita	CA	Los Angeles	1990	110,642	151,088	37
Simi Valley	CA	Los Angeles	1970	56,676	111,351	96
Thousand Oaks	CA	Los Angeles	1960	2,934	117,005	3,888
Chula Vista	CA	San Diego	1950	15,927	173,556	990
Escondido	CA	San Diego	1950	6,544	133,559	1,941
Oceanside	CA	San Diego	1950	12,881	161,029	1,150
Daly City	CA	San Francisco	1950	15,191	103,621	582
Fremont	CA	San Francisco	1960	43,790	203,413	365
Santa Rosa	CA	San Francisco	1950	17,902	147,595	724
Sunnyvale	CA	San Francisco	1950	9,829	131,760	1,241
Aurora	CO	Denver	1950	11,421	276,393	2,320
Lakewood	CO	Denver	1960	19,338	144,126	645
Westminster	CO	Denver	1960	13,850	100,940	629
Coral Springs	FL	Miami	1980	37,349	117,549	215
Hialeah	FL	Miami	1950	19,676	226,419	1,051
Pembroke Pines	FL	Miami	1970	15,589	137,427	782
Clearwater	FL	Tampa	1950	15,581	108,787	598
Naperville	IL	Chicago	1950	7,013	128,358	1,730
Henderson	NV	Las Vegas	1950	3,643	175,381	4,714
North Las Vegas	NV	Las Vegas	1950	3,875	115,488	2,880
Salem	OR	Portland	1950	43,140	136,924	217
Arlington	TX	Dallas	1950	7,692	332,969	4,229
Carrollton	TX	Dallas	1960	4,242	109,576	2,483
Garland	TX	Dallas	1950	10,571	215,768	1,941
Grand Prairie	TX	Dallas	1950	14,594	127,427	773
Irving	TX	Dallas	1950	2,621	191,615	7,211
Mesquite	TX	Dallas	1960	27,526	124,523	352
Plano	TX	Dallas	1960	3,695	222,030	5,909
West Valley City	UT	Salt Lake City	1980	72,378	108,896	50
Chesapeake	VA	Norfolk	1970	89,580	199,184	122
Bellevue	WA	Seattle	1960	12,809	109,569	755

Metropolitan Distribution

Table 2 summarizes Boomburb metropolitan data. Only one Boomburb, located in the Chicago metropolitan area, exists outside the South and West. Further, just nine, or 17 percent, of Boomburbs lie outside the Southwestern states stretching from Texas in the east to California in the west. Los Angeles, Dallas, and Phoenix alone contain 32, or 60 percent, of Boomburbs. The Southeast, other than South Florida, contains few Boomburbs. Only one Boomburb with a population above 200,000 (Hialeah, Florida) exists east of the Mississippi River. Clearly, Boomburbs are mostly a western Sunbelt phenomena.

TABLE 2.

BOOMBURB METRO SUMMARY

	State	Region	No.	Boomburb Population	Metro Population	Percent
1	AZ	Phoenix	7	1,371,159	3,251,876	42.2
2	CA	Los Angeles	18	2,963,724	16,373,645	18.1
3	CA	San Diego	3	468,144	2,813,833	16.6
4	CA	San Francisco	4	586,389	7,039,362	8.3
5	CO	Denver	3	521,459	2,582,506	20.2
6	FL	Miami	3	481,395	3,876,380	12.4
7	FL	Tampa	1	108,787	2,395,977	4.5
8	IL	Chicago	1	128,358	9,157,540	1.4
9	NV	Las Vegas	2	290,869	1,563,282	18.6
10	OR	Portland	1	136,924	2,265,223	6.0
11	TX	Dallas	7	1,323,908	5,221,801	25.4
12	UT	Salt Lake City	1	108,896	1,333,914	8.2
13	VA	Norfolk	1	199,184	1,569,541	12.7
14	WA	Seattle	1	109,569	3,554,760	3.1
	Total		53	8,798,765	62,999,640	14.0

Los Angeles, with 18, has the highest number of Boomburbs and biggest cumulative Boomburb population. But metropolitan Los Angeles is so large that its Boomburbs account for less than one in five residents. However, at nearly 3 million, the Boomburb total approaches Los Angeles (3.7 million) in size.

At 42.2 percent, Phoenix has by far the highest percentage of its metropolitan population living in Boomburbs. Phoenix, with seven (tied with Dallas), follows Los Angeles in the number of Boomburbs. The region also contains the second highest number of residents living in Boomburbs. Phoenix's 1.37 million Boomburb population slightly exceeds that of its central city.

Boomburb Share of City Growth in the 1990s

Boomburbs total 53 of the 199 U.S. cities that have population between 100,000 and 400,000. They also account for about one quarter (25.7 percent) of these cities' total population. However,

they captured fully *half* of the 1990s population growth in these cities.⁴ Cities in this size class gained 4.1 million new residents during the 1990s, 2.1 million of whom live in the Boomburbs.

Boomburbs are even more important to population growth among cities that have between 200,000 and 400,000 residents. They account for 12 of the 48 cities in this size class and 24 percent of the total population living in these cities as of 2000. But they grabbed 60 percent of total population growth in these cities during the 1990s.

Boomburb Share of State Population Growth, 1950s–1990s

By the 1990s, Boomburbs also accounted for a significant share of their respective state's population growth. Among states with more than one Boomburb, the shares ranged from 33.6 percent in Arizona to 5.2 percent in Florida. The share of growth during the 1990s also increased when contrasted with the 1950s. The share jumped from 8.6 to 33.6 percent in Arizona and from 9.2 to 16.9 percent in California. In the other states with multiple Boomburbs, the share of state population growth increased by 4 percentage points or less from the 1950s to the 1990s.

Boomburbs versus Traditional Cities

Another way to grasp just how big many Boomburbs have become is by comparing their current populations with those of some better-known traditional cities. Mesa, the most populous Boomburb at 396,375 residents in 2000, is bigger than such traditional large cities as Minneapolis (382,618), Miami (362,470), and St. Louis (348,189). Arlington, Texas—the second biggest Boomburb with 332,969 people—falls just behind Pittsburgh (334,536) and just ahead of Cincinnati (331,285). Even such smaller Boomburbs as Chandler, Arizona, and Henderson, Nevada, with 176,581 and 175,381 residents respectively, now surpass older mid-sized cities such as Knoxville, Tennessee (173,890); Providence, Rhode Island (173,618); and Worcester, Massachusetts (172,648).

Analysis

While some observers (such as Abbott 1995) have noted the role large suburban cities play in Sunbelt development, most focus either on metropolitan areas as a whole or their central cities. Many urban analysts also assume that Sunbelt urban growth varies little east and west (Gottdiener 1994). For example, metropolitan areas such as Atlanta and Phoenix are described as sharing a similar growth pattern (Brookings Institution 2000).

But recent research shows that Atlanta and Phoenix have widely divergent urban forms (Lang 2001). They also vary in the number of Boomburbs—Atlanta has none, while Phoenix has seven. Atlanta boomed, but has no Boomburbs; nor do other fast growing southeast metro areas such as Charlotte and Nashville.

⁴ Interestingly, in a recent study by Glaeser and Shapiro (2001) looking at the 1990s' growth rates of places above 100,000, cities identified here as Boomburbs actually accounted for 3 of the top 5, and 11 of the top 25 fastest-growing municipalities.

Phoenix—Land of Boomburbs versus Atlanta—the Fragmented Metropolis

Metropolitan Phoenix provides a good contrast with Atlanta and other major metropolitan areas of the South (see table 3). During the 1990s, Phoenix and Atlanta registered the largest percentage gains among the nation’s biggest metropolitan areas, growing 45.3 percent and 38.9 percent respectively (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001).

TABLE 3.
COMPARING THE ATLANTA AND PHOENIX METROPOLITAN AREAS

Atlanta Metropolitan Area (Eight Largest Cities or Places)			
	Population (2000)	Land Area (1990 square miles)	Density (1990, people per square mile)
Atlanta	416,474	131.7	2,991
Roswell	79,334	32.6	1,472
Marietta	58,748	20.4	2,166
Smyrna	40,999	11.4	2,725
East Point	39,595	13.8	2,501
Alpharetta	34,854	19.0	684
Peachtree	31,580	23.3	816
Griffin	23,451	13.1	1,630
Metro Area total	4,112,198		
Eight-city total	725,035	265.2	2,280
Eight-city share	17.6		
Seven-city total (minus largest city)	308,561	133.5	1,579
Seven-city share	7.5		
Seven-city average		19.1	
Phoenix Metropolitan Area (Eight Largest Cities)			
	Population (2000)	Land Area (1990 square miles)	Density (1990, people per square mile)
Phoenix	1,321,045	419.8	2,343
Mesa	396,375	108.6	2,654
Glendale	218,812	52.2	2,838
Scottsdale	202,705	184.3	706
Chandler	176,581	47.5	1,904
Tempe	158,625	39.5	3,591
Gilbert	109,697	27.1	1,075
Peoria	108,364	61.5	824
Metro Area total	3,251,876		
Eight-city total	2,692,204	940.5	1,980
Eight-city share	82.8		
Seven-city total (minus largest city)	1,371,159	520.7	1,687
Seven-city share	42.2		
Seven-city average		74.4	

Note: Density figures are based on 1990 population.

Phoenix, a region with 3.25 million people, has seven Boomburbs. The city of Phoenix and its Boomburbs combined have 2.69 million people and 83 percent of the region's population (see table 3). To have just eight municipalities account for so large a share of their metropolitan population is very unusual (Morrison Institute 2000). Atlanta, by contrast, has just 18 percent of its population living in the eight largest cities. All of Atlanta's seven largest suburbs add up to a far smaller population than Mesa, Phoenix's most populous Boomburb.

Also note that Atlanta's municipalities are physically smaller than Phoenix's.⁵ Roswell, Atlanta's most populous suburb, is just 32.6 square miles. Meanwhile, Mesa spreads over 108 square miles. Gilbert, the physically smallest Boomburb in the Phoenix metropolitan area, would rank second in land area and first in population were it a suburb of Atlanta.

Interestingly, the seven big suburbs of Atlanta and the seven Boomburbs of Phoenix have similar total density, with 1,579 and 1,687 people per square mile respectively. It appears that the large size of Phoenix's Boomburbs allow them to capture so much growth and account for a major share of the region's population.

Given that Phoenix's largest eight cities contain over four-fifths of the metropolitan area's residents, regional action requires only that the leaders of these places work together. The mayors of Atlanta's big cities could also cooperate, but it would impact less than a fifth of the region's residents. Thus, the emergence of Phoenix's Boomburbs gave it a distinct advantage for regional solutions over Atlanta, where municipal fragmentation greatly complicates metropolitan-level action.

Why Are Boomburbs Most Common to the West?

Boomburbs do not happen randomly. Rather, they are mostly a product of a western Sunbelt development that favors the establishment of physically large suburban municipalities. Two factors foster Western Boomburb growth: large master-planned communities and water districting.

The West is home to enormous master-planned communities that are located within a single town. These communities gobble up unincorporated land as they grow. The land and its new residents are added to municipalities, turning what were once small towns into Boomburbs. Also, the public lands in the West that surround big metro areas are often transferred to developers in very large blocks (Abbott 1993). By contrast, eastern master-planned community builders must assemble their land from mostly smaller, privately held parcels.

Western water districts also play a role in promoting Boomburbs. The West is mostly dry and places seeking to grow must organize to access water (Lang 2001). Bigger incorporated places are better positioned to grab a share of water supply. This provides an incentive for fragmented suburbs to join in a large incorporated city.

⁵ All land area and population density statistics in this section and table 3 are based on 1990 census data. At the time this *Census Note* was prepared, land area data from Census 2000 were not available.

Key Issues

Homeowners Associations

The master-planned communities that dominate many Boomburbs are organized into numerous homeowners' associations. These associations act as small private governments that deliver services to residents ranging from recreation to trash collection (Barton and Silverman 1994). Homeowners' associations may be so common and comprehensive in Boomburbs that they, to a large extent, take the place of municipal government (Guterson 1992). The main political dynamic in Boomburbs is often between city hall and the homeowners' associations (McKenzie 1994). Homeowners' associations press city hall to reduce the cost and reach of most municipal services, such as parks, that they are providing to residents as part of their association fees.

Class and Race Diversity

In part because of their large size, Boomburbs often contain a more diverse population than smaller suburbs. While most are affluent, few are exclusive. Some lower-income neighborhoods exist within virtually all Boomburbs. Boomburbs may also attract people of diverse racial and ethnic background.

California Boomburbs in particular are increasing their minority population. In a recent study looking at racial change in the nation's largest cities based on the 2000 census, Berube (2001) found that the top two cities with the largest percentage loss in non-Hispanic whites were Anaheim and Riverside, California, which dropped 20.8 and 15.7 percent respectively. Boomburbs in Southern California and South Florida may also contain a large share of foreign-born population. In 1990, Santa Ana and Anaheim in northern Orange County, California had 50.9 and 28.4 percent foreign-born populations respectively (Hall and Gaquin 1997). Hialeah, a suburb northwest of Miami, had a whopping 70.4 percent foreign-born population in the same year.

The foreign-born figure in these three Boomburbs correlates with (and perhaps causes) a high population density. In 1990, Santa Ana, Hialeah, and Anaheim respectively maintained densities of 10,839, 9,792 and 6,014 people per square mile (Hall and Gaquin 1997). The first two figures (for Santa Ana and Hialeah) approach the population density in large, older Northeast cities such as Philadelphia and Boston. Anaheim's density approaches such older Midwest cities as Cleveland and St. Louis.

Boomburbs at Build Out

While many Boomburbs have annexed ample land to expand their populations, others are landlocked and near build out. The simple fact is that most Boomburbs are horizontal cities that grow out rather than up. Landlocked Boomburbs, such as Tempe, Arizona, now have nowhere to go but up. Tempe's number of new housing permits has dropped to a few dozen, while its non-landlocked Boomburb neighbors of Chandler and Mesa are issuing permits by the thousands. Landlocked Boomburbs are at a crossroads: If they want to keep growing they must change their

land use patterns to accommodate higher-density development, but their original competitive advantage has been their greenfield development opportunities.

The infill market remains untested in most Boomburbs. Many now have the scale and the economic assets that technically make them central places, but their mostly centerless form does not offer the type of dense urban environments that attracts citiphile consumers of infill housing (Danielsen, Lang, and Fulton 1999). The future of built-out Boomburbs may depend on the success of urban design movements, such as the New Urbanism, that introduce more traditional city-like development into the suburbs.

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