

CITIES AND AMERICA'S FUTURE

Luis Ricardo Fraga
Stanford University

I. What is the primary cause for the persistence of opportunity segmentation in metropolitan areas of the U.S.? Political arrangements, i.e., public institutions and public policies that structure incentives, interests, identities, and capacities in American metropolises today.

- a. *Challenges of scale* within a system of democratic governance
 - i. American federalism: sense of empowerment and adaptability
 - ii. Each city has an incentive to maximize competitive advantage: each city in competition with every other city in their metropolitan area
 - iii. Federal Home Mortgage Assistance, Interstate highway system: suburbanization and urban sprawl
 - iv. Mismatch of needs and resources: urban-suburban disparity, inter-suburban disparity, such as in tax base, education, health care, employment
 - v. No infrastructure of public authority with sufficient capacity to address consequences resulting from market inefficiencies: states have little incentive, regionalism is limited, and national government depends on presidential priorities and political possibilities
 - vi. *Crisis of governing capacity*
- b. *Challenges of citizen choice* within a system of market decision-making
 - i. Exclusion is the prime commodity structuring the market; especially in housing and public education
 - ii. Class, racial, and ethnic residential segregation become ever present
 - iii. Social mobility and economic gain available to those with access to financial and political capital, and no need for individuals to consider the collective consequences of their private choices
 - iv. *Crisis of civic capacity*

II. What principles might guide us in fashioning policy solutions, i.e., restructuring our incentives, interests, identities, and capacities, to eliminate the extent that race, class, and geography structure opportunity in the U.S.?

- a. *Interwoven destinies* across governmental units
 - i. The interests of central cities must be linked directly to the interests of suburbs and especially to the national interest
 - ii. To the extent that regional governments provide new opportunities to promote cross-jurisdiction cost sharing, cities must cede some of their authority

- iii. State governments must take a more active role since they define all substate jurisdictions and their authority
- iv. The national government must play a key role in targeting investment to lesser resourced areas
- v. Major challenges of power-sharing that will not be easily resolved
- vi. Political leadership at all three major levels of government is key

b. *Interwoven destinies* across neighborhoods, families, and individuals

- i. Committing ourselves to developing a greater sense of linked fate with broader cross-sections of our citizenry
- ii. Engaging in the development of “an informed public interest”: informed by difference, informed by the need for unity; know that as we focus more and more on our differences we find more and more of what we share in common
- iii. As voters, push all of our political leaders to go beyond our narrow self-interest; transforming our expectations
- iv. Allow ourselves to gain from “political learning” and the unbounded possibilities of “positive constraints”: we must learn from BOTH successes and failures; overcome the “trust deficit” based on evidence
- v. Not easy and may place children at risk; but balanced by the risks to our children of not acknowledging the social costs of our private decisions

III. Why might it be possible for us to address the perennial problems of opportunity segmentation in our society? The initial and continued responses of local, state, and national governments and related leaders should give us great pause.

- a. It is within the best traditions of American society: regain the spirit of the possible
 - i. We have sometimes strived to build communities of physical proximity and interest connectedness
 - ii. Madison in Fed. 10 refers to “the permanent and aggregate interests of the community”
 - iii. Alexander Hamilton pointed to “the deliberate sense of community” that should guide America’s promise
 - iv. Alexis de Toqueville eloquently referred to “self-interest, properly understood” as a key component to why America’s civic identity could value both the individual and the community

- b. It is instructive that it was nature that provided us this chance to engage in the hard work of reconsidering the political arrangements, i.e., the institutions and policies, that structure our individual and collective incentives, interests, identities, and capacities, to limit opportunity segmentation in our society. I certainly hope that it will not take another act of God to push us to work toward building communities of interwoven destinies that are inclusive socially, viable economically, and responsive politically. I do know that time will tell.