The Evolution of the American City
Urban Institute, John Foster-Bey, Robert I. Lerman

MR. NNAMDI: From WAMU at American University in Washington, this is Public Interest. I'm Kojo Nnamdi.

At the opening of the last century, the 20th century, America was mostly rural. Today, nearly all Americans live in or near urban areas, vastly different from the cities of 100 or even 50 years ago. This edition of Public Interest is first in a series exploring the changing face of American cities. Every month we'll be looking at cities in new ways, through the eyes of people living in urban communities across America, and from the perspective of those who study what's happening in America's cities today. In this series, produced in cooperation with the Urban Institute in Washington, we'll use ever-changing lenses to look at cities as places, as people living together, as economic engines and the centers of policies and centers of politics.

Today we begin by looking at the evolution of the American city, so to speak. And joining us in our Washington studio is Bob Lerman. He is director of the Urban Institute Human Resources Policy Center and professor of economics at American University. Good to have you here, Bob.

MR. LERMAN: Thanks, Kojo.

MR. NNAMDI: Joining Bob is John Foster-Bey. He is senior associate director of the Program for Regional Economic Opportunity at the Urban Institute's Metropolitan Housing & Community Center. Good to have you along, John.

MR. FOSTER-BEY: Thank you. Good to be here.

MR. NNAMDI: And joining us by phone from New York is Fred Siegel. He is author of the book, "The Future Once Happened Here: New York, DC, LA, and the Fate of America's Big Cities." Fred Siegel is also professor of history at Cooper Union in Manhattan. Fred, thank you for joining us.

MR. SIEGEL: Thank you.

MR. NNAMDI: Let me start by asking you, Bob, to explain exactly what the Urban Institute is and does.

MR. LERMAN: Well, the Urban Institute is a research center that was founded in 1968 in the aftermath of the passage of a number of Great Society programs and, of course, some of the problems in 1968 that surfaced with the riots in the urban areas. And so it was believed by the Johnson administration, especially key figures like Joe Califano, that there should be an institute, not within the government itself, that studied the direction of urban policy. At that time it was mainly focused on particular urban policies.

Over the last 30 years, the Institute has evolved into studying a wide range of topics, from health policy to population studies to human resources policy, and even international studies as well. So we've even had projects which look at the implementation of housing allowances in Russia, for example. So we've broadened out. We have now approximately 400 people at the Institute, and we get money from a range of foundation and government sources, the biggest project being something called the Assessing New Federalism project, which is studying the devolution of social policy in the health and income support fields.

MR. NNAMDI: You can join this conversation on America's cities by calling 1-800-433-8850. You can also E-mail us at pi@wamu.org. John Foster-Bey, what is the Program for Regional Economic Opportunity?

MR. FOSTER-BEY: It's a research program that specifically tries to look at equity issues in terms of regional and metropolitan development. There's a lot of interest now in putting the city and putting urban issues in the context of metropolitan development and regional development, but there's a concern that that new
emphasis is often overlooking issues of equity, what's happening to poor people in that context. And so what we're trying to do is look at that issue. Particularly we're looking at issues around access to economic opportunity.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Fred Siegel, you or any of our guests can answer any of the questions that will be coming up after this one. But let me start with you. When did the American city take on the physical presence with which we now associate it?

**MR. SIEGEL:** Well, we become essentially an urban nation at the turn of the century. By that I don't mean numerically urban, but the cities begin to dominate the culture. They change the chemical composition, so to speak, of the American identity. And between roughly the 1890s and the 1930s, cities helped define American culture in a way which would have been unthinkable in an earlier period.

**MR. NNAMDI:** So we're talking about around the turn of the century here.

**MR. SIEGEL:** Yes. What happens is, the fact that the cities are a conjunction of all the forms of transportation in the period—river, rail and road—means everything has to come together in the center. And as population grows through immigration and rural migration and the cities develop a distinct viewpoint, political and socially, we enter into really the urban era of American life.

**MR. NNAMDI:** As the nation was shifting from being agriculturally centered to industry, was there a coinciding shift in political clout as well?

**MR. SIEGEL:** Well, the shift to industry begins somewhat earlier. But there is a shift in political clout in the sense that cities like New York and Chicago will dominate their state. And they'll dominate, to some extent, even national politics. It's hard to imagine this, but in 1900 Buffalo is the fifth-largest city in America and New York contains one-fourteenth of the American economy.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Talk a little bit, Bob Lerman, about whether we need to be redefining cities today.

**MR. LERMAN:** Well, yeah, because I think the changes are taking place functionally; that is to say, different parts of the metropolitan area are serving different functions. And so what we're seeing is that, on the one hand, the traditional political boundaries of city government and suburban counties and suburban county government, those operate, to a great extent. But places are having to collaborate in various areas such as transportation, and now even in areas such as desegregation and other areas such as this. So I think that there is a change in the sense that there's going to have to be some functional sorting out of how metropolitan areas are governed. Of course, you do have this continuing increase in suburbanization, although that may have hit its peak.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Recently at the U.S. Conference of Mayors, John Foster-Bey, some of the mayors were complaining that they have a new kind of problem, that problem being prosperity, that they don't have enough skilled people to fill highly-skilled jobs, that they don't have affordable or available housing for the numbers of people who want to move into the city, and because so many people with high incomes want to move into the city, it's driving up the prices of housing in the city, leading to some of what I guess are the equity issues that you talk about.

**MR. FOSTER-BEY:** Yeah, that is really being heard all over the country. In a lot of the places that we're doing work, we're finding, surprisingly, that where there was a time when trying to get low-income people jobs was a critical issue because there weren't enough jobs, we're now finding that there seem to be enough jobs, but somehow we can't make the connection.

There is another issue, though, and this is something that we don't quite have a handle on yet, and that is, there seem to be an abundance of jobs, but there's still some question about whether the jobs that are available, particularly for relatively modestly-skilled, modestly-educated individuals, are going to pay them enough to keep them and their families out of poverty. And that, I think, is one of the big challenges. A lot of the concerns, really, when you look at cities, are at both ends. They're at the high end, inability to fill jobs at the high end, but there are also real problems filling jobs at the low end. And the speculation is a lot of that has to do with sort of a mismatch between the needs that people have for certain levels of income and the kinds of jobs that are available. But there are also just some problems that we're now looking at groups of people in many of these cities who have such poor labor market experience that they sometimes can't even make the connection to some of the most lower-skilled jobs that are available.

**MR. LERMAN:** If I could just jump in here.

**MR. LERMAN:** I think we have to recognize both a long-run and a short-run problem. The long-run problem is to greatly raise the quality of education of urban residents. And we all know about problems in schooling, and maybe you'll have a program on that in the future. The short-run problem is that something which we want to happen—that is, moderate and higher-income people to move back into the city—is beginning to happen. But that, in turn, by its nature, is going to raise rents, raise housing values. So we have a quandary.

Now, in the past, I think governments have done what I regard as a relatively unproductive kind of activity; namely, impose rent control, various kinds of special regulations. We're now doing some more constructive things such as providing housing vouchers that people can use in all parts of a community, so they can live in the suburban areas as well as the urban areas.

But there's a third thing which I think we've not done much with, and that is to provide a way of having
low-income people have some sort of equity, equity even in a rental dwelling, through some sort of insurance against price increases or other kinds of equity measures. In other countries there are things in between home ownership and rental, and we have to start thinking about things like that so that low-income people have actually an interest in the neighborhood improving, even if it does raise rents, because they would be protected.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Fred Siegel, I have a two-part question for you; one, I guess, historical. Was there ever a period that we might call the golden age of American cities? And, if so, is it coming back?

**MR. SIEGEL:** I don't know if we can talk about a golden age. We can talk about a period when the cities are politically and culturally and economically dominant. And those don't always quite overlap, because the very moment of the political dominance of cities, Roosevelt's election in 1936, is the moment when you can see this most clearly, his landslide re-election. It was urban-based. In 1932, he won essentially the western and southern base. In '36, he wins with the urban vote.

At that moment, the automobile is already kicking in, and the economic predominance of the city is already beginning. So what you can say is that roughly between the end of World War I and the middle of the 1950s, the cities are dominant.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Okay. And my second part of the question: Are we going into a brighter age, so to speak, of cities? The image of cities seems to be changing. I want you to talk a little bit about stewardship of cities, because you argue in the book "The Future Once Happened Here" that for a long time, cities were dominated by what you call riot ideology.

**MR. SIEGEL:** Well, I think we saw a little touch of this in the last few weeks with the wilding incident in Central Park and the riot at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, where the police essentially backed off for fear of creating more trouble. But just let me go back to the larger question. What's happening now is that a new generation of mayors came into power in the 1990s who were an enormous improvement over the people who preceded them; Dennis Archer in Detroit, Mike White in Cleveland, Rendell in Philadelphia, Giuliani in New York, Riordan in LA and so on; Goldsmith, Norquist.

These people focused on the basics. For many years, cities had seen themselves in the social policy business but hadn't provided basic services—police protection, cleaning the streets, repairing the roads. And this back-to-basics effort has paid off enormously for the cities.

The other thing that's happened that's made cities more viable is during the first phase of the tech revolution, the hardware phase, most of that tech phase took place in ex-urbia, what my friend Joel Kotkin likes to call "Nerdostans." And by that he means engineers like to live in neatly-groomed, well-organized places. But the second phase, the software phase, which involves creativity in a different sense, and providing content for the software, well, that takes place in cities or places like South End Market in San Francisco, Silicon Alley in New York, even Fells Point in Baltimore, and a little bit even in Washington, in Anacostia—very little bit—have given cities a new lease on life. This part of the tech revolution is happening in cities. It gives the cities a certain glamour. It makes cities attractive to twenty-somethings, who view the entire world as a giant dating block.

**MR. NNAMDI:** (Laughs.) Fred Siegel is the author of the book "The Future Once Happened Here." He joins us by telephone from New York. In our studio is Bob Lerman and John Foster-Bey, both with the Urban Institute. You can join us at 1-800-433-8850 or E-mail is pi@wamu.org. We'll be right back.

(Programming break.)

**MR. NNAMDI:** In case you're just joining us, this is the first in a series that Public Interest will be doing on a monthly basis, in collaboration with the Urban Institute, on America's cities. We'll be looking at cities as places to explore and places that are changing. We'll investigate what's happening to space in our cities, looking at how growth is affecting transportation, housing and services. We'll also look at how people live together in cities, changing populations, immigration patterns, neighborhoods, crime, schools, racial and ethnic relations. We'll see how cities shape and respond to economic forces, how cities become centers of opportunity and poverty. And we'll also be looking at city government that is solving problems and making some cities more enjoyable, attractive and prosperous places to live. You can join this conversation at 1-800-433-8850.

Bob Lerman, you wanted to add something.

**MR. LERMAN:** Yeah, I wanted to add something. It used to be thought of by economists that when you made a city very dense, that naturally raised the price of land. And if you could operate and build something outside in cheaper land, especially with transportation improvements, that would make economic sense. There's now a greater appreciation of what we would call economies of scale, economies of scope, in cities and of the interactions that people have in daily business life and in other aspects of life that make areas really quite productive. And with this greater appreciation has come the recognition that if those essentials are made correct—that is, if the place is equally safe, if the place is equally clean—the prices of land and the density will not necessarily discourage economic activity. Economic activity will proceed. But again, as I said before, we also need the basics, not only police and cleanliness, but also a good education.

**MR. FOSTER-BEY:** I also want to add one other thing. Another factor that really also seems to be driving the re-emergence of at least some cities is immigration. There's really—in several places there are new populations that have begun to move in and are bringing a different level of energy there, often going into some areas in the cities that have been thought of as being fairly depressed, and they are investing in different ways. And so that factor, the introduction of new populations, I think, also is a critical one. And that
So when you talk about cities beginning to re-emerge, beginning to do better, that's not all cities. Some cities are doing better, some of which have the kind of characteristics that Fred talked about, some which are magnets for immigration. But others are languishing behind. And, in fact, there's a report that HUD put out, I believe it was last year, which identified a whole number of cities, mostly small to mid-size cities, that continue to have very high levels of unemployment and very high poverty rates, despite the fact that in general, cities seem to be doing better.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Indeed, when we talk about cities, we need to be clear that we're not simply referring to New York, Chicago or Boston, but also the New Haven, Connecticuts and the Mobile, Alabamas, those smaller cities. In general, Fred Siegel, have cities of different sizes experienced sharply different histories?

**MR. SIEGEL:** Well, especially regionally, Kojo. If I look at the western cities, you know, a place like San Antonio now is far larger than Boston. Austin is larger than Boston. The fast-growing western cities have actually done fairly well. When we think about urban problems, we usually think about cities in older industrial areas of the country, Rust Belt areas in particular, where deindustrialization hit the cities hard.

If you look at the decline of manufacturing—the number of jobs, not output—over the last 25 years, that's almost entirely concentrated in the cities, the entire manufacturing job loss. But of the 20 largest cities over the last 20 years, only eight have lost population. But they're the places we think about—Philadelphia, Baltimore, Cleveland, et cetera, et cetera.

One other point about cities. We're very different than Europe by population. We're very different than Europe. We continue to create new cities. And our horizontal cities as a whole, not all of them, the kind of places like East St. Louis, the Camdens of the world, are doing terribly. But horizontal cities, by and large, mid-size cities, by and large, are doing quite well. That's where a horizontal city like Austin is doing extremely well. A place like Boise is becoming a major center, which it never was.

So it's very hard to generalize. Our country is so large with so many different regions. But, by and large, the post-industrial cities are doing fairly well and are likely to continue to do so.

**MR. NNAMDI:** The number to call is 1-800-433-8850. You can E-mail us at pi@wamu.org as we discuss the history and state of America's cities today.

**MR. FOSTER-BEY:** I'd just like to add one thing, though.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Sure.

**MR. FOSTER-BEY:** While those post-industrial cities are certainly growing and continue to grow, it's interesting, if you start to look at some of the equity issues in those places, those aren't—there are some real difficulties there. We find that some of the things that we've been doing in our research, we find that those cities often have much lower wage levels, much greater levels of inequality between different classes of workers than you have in the older—

**MR. NNAMDI:** Industrial—

**MR. FOSTER-BEY:** —industrial cities, if you will. So there's a sort of good news, bad news there, I think. And to a large extent it depends on what measure you want to use to determine what you want to call success.

**MR. LERMAN:** But one of the problems that we've had historically, in at least the last 50 years, 40 years, is that the federal government—we have not sorted out the roles very well. Cities should not particularly, in my opinion, be in the business of doing that much redistribution. That should be more of a federal or perhaps state role. When cities have to get into that kind of role—

**MR. NNAMDI:** What do you mean by redistribution?

**MR. LERMAN:** Well, focus on, let's say, something like rent control or special programs for low-income people, financed through city taxes.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Okay.

**MR. LERMAN:** That will then draw or keep a difficult mix in your own city, because ultimately, if you draw in more low-income people, it reduces the tax base. Then you draw in more low-income people, because when you've reduced the tax base, you've had to raise rates. And so you get into this kind of vicious circle if the city itself has to play the main role of redistributive entity, taking over what should be the federal and state role. And I'm hopeful that maybe things are getting more sorted out. We are having, for example, more federal money for child care and things like that, so that cities can work on what they do best, city governments, and federal and state governments can work on what they do best.

**MR. SIEGEL:** Let me pick up on Bob's point.

**MR. NNAMDI:** I know you want to.

**MR. SIEGEL:** Yeah. I think he's right, because if you ask the question, why did cities give up the time-honored task of creating new work—that was traditionally the job of cities, creating new work. People forget that the electronics industry in America began in lower Manhattan—there's not a trace of it now—or that Philadelphia had a thriving electronics industry in the 1950s. High costs essentially pushed innovative industry to the periphery. And that's my problem with density, to disagree a little with what Bob said. When you have density, you have politicization. I'm sitting in Brooklyn, so I know a little bit about density. Density
brings with it politicization and makes it difficult for local government to be responsive.

Part of what's driving the secession move in the valley, the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles, is they looked just beyond their borders, towns like Glendale and Pasadena, and they see how quickly government can respond to people's problems, where the Valley is caught up in the problems of Los Angeles, already a regional entity. That very density can produce a situation in which it is very difficult for a city government to perform its basic tasks because there are so many competing interest groups that have to be dealt with.

**MR. NNAMDI:** OK, Allow me to get to the telephone and start with Mark in Jacksonville, Florida. Mark you are on the air. Go ahead.

**CALLER:** Over the last 20 years Jacksonville has been cursed by or enjoyed explosive growth and we have a highly mediocre mayor who tells us what a great city we live in and then never misses a chance to bribe or pay subsidies to businesses to get them to move into the city. And he also does this with housing, to get people to move into the downtown area. Is this a good thing or bad thing?

**MR. NNAMDI:** I don't know, Bob. Do you want to get at that?

**MR. LERMAN:** I didn't hear the part about the housing. Could you—

**MR. NNAMDI:** Could you repeat that part, Mark?

**CALLER:** Yes, sir. He said that the downtown area, like most big towns, is kind of dead and run down. And to fix that, he's going to subsidize rich people housing, housing that costs over $250,000. He's going to subsidize that to get people to move down in there, and maybe businesses will follow. And if they don't, he will be give them subsidies, the businesses, to move down there anyway. And I think this is kind of a vicious circle, and I don't think it makes economic sense to take our taxpayer money and bribe people, essentially, to do these things that don't happen normally.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Let me get some responses for you. Bob?

**MR. LERMAN:** Yeah, it doesn't sound like a good idea to me, but I'd have to look at the specifics. I think part of the problem is that many areas have tried to have zoning that is single-use zoning. And in the beginning—and as a result, you have these business districts that are dead. And they didn't follow an approach which would allow a more free use of land for both housing as well as business and cultural purposes. So now they're left with a situation where things are dead, and I think better would be to, let's say, open up zoning and provide some, you know, help, subsidize some cultural activities that might act as a draw. And then the third thing would be the school issue and making sure that high-quality schooling is available so that people would be interested in moving back.

**MR. SIEGEL:** I would just point out—this is Fred Siegel. I'd just point out, Jacksonville's an unusual place. It's one of the few places in the country where the city and the county have consolidated. Jacksonville government and the Duval County government are the same thing. What happened was Jacksonville's government was famously corrupt. And after virtually the entire political class was indicted for corruption in the late 60s, the city was merged into the county as a way of cleaning it up. And you have a peculiar entity now. Jacksonville-Duval County still has an agricultural department, because there's still a fair amount of farming that takes place within its borders.

That said, Jacksonville is a much better place. And I agree with the general points Bob Lerman made. Jacksonville is a much-improved place over what it once was. But it's not a city in the sense we might think of as other places—a dense population, a consolidated population. It's a highly dispersed population.

**MR. NNAMDI:** John.

**MR. FOSTER-BEY:** Yeah, there are a couple of other cities that also fit that city-county consolidation. But I think the question that the caller raised is really about whether there is an appropriate use of subsidies that cities can make to try and stimulate development. And I think that's a much more difficult question. Certainly there's an awful lot of evidence which shows that cities have made very bad choices with their subsidy decisions. But I'm not sure that that means that no subsidies work under any circumstances at any time.

There are some people who have been doing some work and looking at that. It's clearly a very difficult issue to get a handle on, but I think that's what we really have to look at. We have to begin to ask, how do we assess whether the kind of subsidy investment that a city can make is really a reasonable one, given some set of objectives.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Mark, thank you very much for your call. This is Public Interest. I'm Kojo Nnamdi. Moving on to Harry in Prairie Village, Kansas. Harry, you're on the air. Go ahead, please.

**CALLER:** Yes, I have a couple of suggestions. I guess they're comments more than questions. I live in Prairie Village, which is right over the state line from Kansas City, Missouri, and, of course, about five or 10 miles south of Kansas City, Kansas, which is a national disaster area. I guess the first thing I have—I think, you know, all this discussion, these high-blown academic things, I would suggest—the Urban Institute, you know, has a lot of high-paid people—why don't they come down there and live in Kansas City, Kansas—I'm serious—and get a feel for it? There's some desperately poor areas in this metropolitan area. There's a white poverty area over between Kansas City, Missouri and Independence called Dogpatch. And I was the lifeguard at a wading pool over there in the 50s, and these people burned up my trash can in the 50s. They were really angry, and I guess they still are.
I think the question I have is, it's just a bunch of rhetoric. I think this Urban Institute ought to come to Kansas City—

MR. NNAMDI: In other words, Harry, there's nothing—

CALLER: and get the feel of it. And you don't talk to the oligarchy. Kansas City is primarily a greeting-card and a tax-preparation town.

MR. NNAMDI: Okay, let me get—

CALLER: I mean, you are so out of touch.

MR. NNAMDI: Let me get a response for you, Harry. You're going on ad infinitum. But Harry gives one the impression that he thinks it's hopeless.

MR. LERMAN: Well, we didn't get into what people normally talk about, which is still the case; namely, that cities do have a disproportionate share of poor people in them. And, you know, I've not been to Kansas City, Kansas; I have to admit that. But I am from Indiana, so we're not all from places right here in Washington DC. And we're quite well aware of the fact that poverty is heavily concentrated in cities. What we're talking about now is trends, how to go from here and so on. So, yes, there are some very critical problems, and I think over the course of the next set of programs, you're going to be dealing with the individual programs.

MR. NNAMDI: Fred Siegel, talk a little bit about what it is that both led to the deterioration of cities and what it has taken to turn some of those cities back around.

MR. SIEGEL: Well, one of the things—some of the trends that led to city deterioration are structural; simply the changes in technology, dispersion of economic activities, of the automobile, the telephone, the electric power grid, even before computers. But it's a question of how cities responded. Cities responded, particularly in the 60s, at the time when the Urban Institute was being created, by trying to become essentially social-service cities. This is a bit what Bob Lerman was talking about, getting into redistribution and getting into regulation. And the effect of that was that those cities that went furthest to the social services path ended up emptying themselves out the most, places like Hartford, Connecticut, which really is a shell.

What's happened now is—and mayors like Wellington Webb of Denver have led the way here—it's a kind of back-to-basics movement. If you don't provide a high quality of life, if you don't provide good institutions, you're going to lose the war for talent, because in this tech economy, it's talent that drives the economy. If you can't attract talented people, you're not going to be a player.

I just want to go back to the caller from Kansas City for one second, because I think he's a little unfair. I mean, Kansas City is doing much better now than it was 10 years ago. The north land, the northern portion of Kansas City, is growing; unusual for cities. There's a reconstruction of the old entertainment area, the Kansas City jazz area, which took a long time to get off the ground. That's taking place. AT&T has moved in. I mean, Kansas City is not in fabulous shape, but it's not in terrible shape. And its numbers are better than they were.

If you want us to recreate the cities of the 50s, it's not going to happen. And if you judge—well, I don't mean, you know, bad about Kansas City; I have to admit that. But I am from Indiana, so we're not all from places right here in Washington DC. And we're quite well aware of the fact that poverty is heavily concentrated in cities. What we're talking about now is trends, how to go from here and so on. So, yes, there are some very critical problems, and I think over the course of the next set of programs, you're going to be dealing with the individual programs.

MR. NNAMDI: Fred Siegel is the author of the book "The Future Once Happened Here: New York, DC, LA, and the Fate of America's Big Cities" He's also professor of history at Cooper Union. He joins us by telephone. Joining us in our Washington studio is John Foster-Bey, senior associate, director of the Program for Regional Economic Opportunity at the Urban Institute's Metropolitan Housing & Community Center; and Bob Lerman, director of Urban Institute's Human Resources Policy Center and a professor of economics at American University. You can join us by calling 1-800-433-8850 or E-mailing us at pi@wamu.org. We're going to take a short break. We'll be right back.

(Programming break.)

MR. NNAMDI: We're talking about America's cities, how they evolved. And we have quite a few callers on the line who have been waiting, so I think I should get to the calls immediately. But intriguing, we do have a call from Tricia in Kansas City, Kansas. And since we were just talking about Kansas City, Tricia, I guess your call should be first. You're on the air.

CALLER: Okay. I just want to—and I know you kind of covered this. I just kind of wanted to say, as someone working in Kansas City—and I do live out in the suburbs, but I work in the inner city here—that I don't think it's any worse than any other city. I mean, it's got—I think there are, you know, some negative things, but as far as—I've been in many other cities, and it doesn't seem to—I don't think that it was fair to say that it stands out in comparison to any other major metropolitan [area] in the nation. And, like your guest said, there are a lot of good things going on. And that is even in Kansas City, Kansas, not just Missouri. Business is looking up. Things are going, you know, in the right direction, just like everywhere else, you know, in a lot of ways. And that's all I really had to say.

MR. NNAMDI: Okay, Tricia, thank you very much for your call. Fred Siegel, I guess she's validating what you said earlier.

MR. SIEGEL: Yeah. I just want to correct one thing I said, Kojo. It's Sprint, not AT&T. And just to be specific, the jazz district is 18th & Vine, and that's become a major tourist attraction. Memphis, as well, has revived
the places where jazz and blues began and become tremendous tourist attractions to draw people into the city.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Indeed, Bob Lerman, what are some of the most—since we’re talking about jazz—some of the most important changes in cities over the last 40 or 50 years?

**MR. LERMAN:** That’s a big question. Well, I think we’ve talked about sort of the ups and downs. Back in the days that I remember, there were plenty of small areas where black business districts, other business districts of minorities, those then were superseded when there’s all kinds of rise in crime and other kinds of problems. And now we’re seeing the possible re-emergence of some of these areas as cities become safer and safer places. And I think, you know, we have actual data on this in the sense that, at least within the middle of center cities, housing prices have risen more rapidly in the centers of major cities than in other places. So there is a role for a type of urban living which is dense, which has a plethora of restaurants, cultural activities and so on. The thing is to build those and not to subsidize housing directly.

**MR. NNAMDI:** John?

**MR. FOSTER-BEY:** I think two other things that I would mention. One is, I think—and I think it’s not clear yet whether this is good or bad—but for a long time during that golden age, if you will, cities were, within their metropolitan region, the most dominant entity. That is changing in many places. And I can recall, you know, being in Chicago at the point when the city of Chicago no longer had the majority of jobs in the region. And that was a real sort of psychological jolt for people.

I think the other thing that I would raise is the issue of the concentration of poverty; that even with this renaissance going on, cities are still the place where the poor are primarily concentrated within most metropolitan regions.

**MR. NNAMDI:** And indeed, we got an E-mail along that line from Paul, who said that—he's talking about New Jersey, a series of court decisions called the Mt. Laurel decisions. In short, they state that zoning cannot be used to keep out the poor. They mandate the use of mixed-income developments. Slums—also known as public housing, he says—are just massive concentrations of the poor. They’re self-perpetuating slums. The jobs are elsewhere. Despair is one of the major components that they generate. We need to get the poor spread out over the cities. The poor we shall always have with us, but if you get them out into the world instead of segregating them into slums, they will have better role models than the local criminal, Paul says; peace.

Let’s get back to the telephones and go now to Dana in Washington DC. Dana, thank you for waiting. You're on the air. Go ahead, please.

**CALLER:** Hi. I’m calling about the topic of cities. I think one of the things that Kojo is really—and the lot of the media has been really good about it—

**MR. NNAMDI:** Hello? Dana? We seem to have lost Dana. I'll put Dana back on hold to see if she can come back with us, and stay in Washington for a second with Harold. Harold, you’re on the air. Go ahead, please.

**CALLER:** Yeah, you’ve already touched on part of my comment. I’m an urban planner and a native Washingtonian; third generation, in fact. So I have my own perspective. I want to go out and get this book, but I guess this is one of the few chances or opportunities I have as a planner and as a native Washington, and frankly as an African-American, to make the same point, and that is that I really think we’re headed to an urban America similar to what I think it was Neil Russ called Potemkin cities. Potemkin was this guy who basically went around marbleizing villages and trying to impress Empress Catherine in greater Russia that everything was fine in the countryside whenever she toured around. And, in fact, there was just grinding, miserable poverty behind these impressive fronts.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Do you think that’s what’s happening in Washington?

**CALLER:** And I certainly can speak knowledgeably, both as a planner and, again, as a native Washingtonian, that this is certainly what's happening in Washington. I mean, Anthony Williams and I think just anyone—I’m talking about Williams generically, not Williams the individual—but I think any current municipal leadership in a city like Washington, like Augustus with Rome, would find it in brick and leave it in marble and still leave all of these extreme pockets of poverty. So that’s my comment.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Okay.

**CALLER:** And that leads me to my question and I'll get out of the way. My question is, if either of your—you, Kojo, as well, but your guests as well—to the degree that what I said is at all true—I mean, we may differ on details—but to the degree it's true at all, what is the one policy change that has got to take place—our political leadership has got to find some guts, frankly—to actually make, to do something about this? Because I think basically we’re just going around in the same circle in the cycle. The pendulum will swing the other way, and we’ll be having this conversation 20 years from now.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Okay, Fred Siegel, allow me to have you answer that.

**MR. SIEGEL:** Sure. But if you had to say what’s the sine qua non, what’s the one essential thing cities have to have to revive, they have to reduce crime. If you look at the cities on the East Coast, what’s the city that's done the worst? Baltimore. What's the city that has been unable to bring its crime rate down, murder rate in particular, down one wit? It's Baltimore. If you don't reduce crime, nothing else is possible. It is absolutely essential.
One other point, Kojo, a point we made earlier about cities no longer being dominant. I think that's absolutely right. Baltimore is now the fourth-largest political jurisdiction in Maryland. Montgomery County is larger, has more jobs, for instance. If I go to Philadelphia, the two surrounding counties, Montgomery and Chester, now have a larger economy, more manufacturing jobs than Philadelphia. We have a dispersed economy, and that's not going to change.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Okay, let's—John?

**MR. FOSTER-BEY:** Just one point. I mean, if I were to look at a single policy—and I think I'm always cautious about imagining one silver bullet—but if you're talking about the issue of the concentration of poverty in a place like Washington, I really think we have to then address ways of helping low-income poor people begin to move out of the enclaves that they are stuck in at this point. And that is going to require an extremely large amount of political courage to begin to raise that issue, begin to talk about opening up surrounding areas to low-income people, and to try to find ways of doing that in ways that do not further reconcentrate them.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Fred in Syracuse, New York, your turn.

**CALLER:** Hello?

**MR. NNAMDI:** Hi, Fred. You're on the air.

**CALLER:** No, not me.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Fred?

**CALLER:** This is Chris in Syracuse.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Oh, well, whoever is in Syracuse is on the air. (Laughter.)

**CALLER:** Okay, sorry about that, Kojo.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Go ahead, Chris.

**CALLER:** The question I have, really, is actually two questions. One, is consolidation between city and county government always a good thing or a bad thing? I know Nashville is one of them, and also, like you mentioned, Jacksonville. Also, Syracuse downtown, we're having a very thriving area called Armory Square. But we don't have much of a residential area down there. They're trying to bring people downtown. But the thing is, the existing building codes kind of resist people from actually revamping these facilities. Is there some way city governments and states can say, "We can relax some of these codes"?

**MR. NNAMDI:** Okay.

**MR. SIEGEL:** Syracuse, as Fred said, Syracuse is an extraordinary place. Syracuse, to go back to a subject you made earlier, is the king of subsidies. No city has offered more subsidies to more people under more unwarranted conditions than Syracuse. And the downtown is safe and clean, and real estate values remain depressed. One out of every 40 homes are abandoned in Syracuse. I don't know what you do in Syracuse except to re-examine your own policies over the past 40 years. You have multiple development agencies that raise costs and actually make it difficult to bring in new business.

On the more general question of city-county consolidation, the oldest consolidation in the country is the most unsuccessful, Miami, Miami-Dade. What happens in Miami-Dade is the townships are constantly trying to secede. In Indianapolis, which is sometimes cited as a success, it's, in fact, been mixed at best. And we now have the Portland experiment. I think the judgment is out on the question. We don't really know yet how well these city-county consolidations are going to work. But, by and large, the evidence is mixed to negative.

**MR. LERMAN:** One of the issues that we haven't talked about, but it's a big issue in some cities, is understanding what land is available and under what circumstances it can be used. We've had a lot of problems in some cities because former manufacturing areas—it wasn't just that the manufacturing jobs and manufacturing facilities moved out. Where they moved out from was areas that we now call polluted and can't be used for anything else unless somebody cleans it up. No one wants to clean it up. So there's the whole issue of land assembly and land utilization.

And then you have other areas where there's abandonment and you can't put together—you don't even have an inventory in many places of what areas are abandoned, what areas could be assembled under what circumstances. So those cities that are trying to do a good job in that, they have their hands full. But they're going to make progress if they do it.

**MR. NNAMDI:** This is Public Interest. I'm Kojo Nnamdi.

**MR. SIEGEL:** Kojo, I just wanted to—

**MR. NNAMDI:** Sure, Fred.

**MR. SIEGEL:** I want to agree with what was just said. Pittsburgh, which has done more to alleviate brownfields, the problem of polluted sites, than any other, has really benefited from that. But it's very difficult, because environmentalists like the laws on brownfield cleanup to be written very vaguely so they can always go back into court, so they maintain control. So you have a difficulty in many cities of people not wanting to put the money into a brownfield cleanup for fear they're going to get caught in an endless judicial
process. It would have been much better if we had clear-cut regulations here as to what was and wasn't cleaned up. It would allow business to come in with less risk.

MR. NNAMDI: Okay, here's Deanne in Leawood, Kansas. Deanne, your turn.

CALLER: Yes, I just want to make a comment about the caller who called in about Kansas City, Kansas.

MR. NNAMDI: Yes.

CALLER: And then your guest responded to saying how the north land was doing really well. Well, that's in Kansas City, Missouri. And then he also responded that the jazz at 18th & Vine is doing really well, which is also in Kansas City, Missouri. And Sprint is located in Johnson County, Kansas, which is not Kansas City, Kansas. So Kansas City, Kansas, really isn't doing as well as other parts of the city.

MR. NNAMDI: It looks like we're having a sub-show here on Kansas City. (Laughter.)

MR. SIEGEL: Let me just disagree with the caller for a second. The north land is part of Kansas City, Kansas. It's not part of—it's not Kansas City, Missouri, number one. Number two, while the primary Sprint center is in Johnson County, Sprint has also brought a considerable number of jobs into Kansas City, Kansas per se.

MR. NNAMDI: Okay. And since we are talking Kansas, let's stay in Kansas. This is Grant, who is in Kansas City, Missouri. Grant?

CALLER: —City, Missouri. And I've been opposing all these redevelopment projects when they seize people's houses and businesses under the spurious blight theory of eminent domain. The city auditor finally audited 24 of these projects and found that only one of them was paying the taxes that they said they would. So we have opposed these for constitutional and economic reasons. And, you know, what it's supposedly—redevelopment is supposed to help the minority or depressed areas. There's only one project that you could say is over there, and they didn't repay their taxpayer loan. So, you know, we can't see what good these things are.

MR. NNAMDI: Okay, Grant, thank you very much for your call. I'm afraid if there is a response at all, it's going to have to be a fairly short one, because we're just about out of time. John?

MR. FOSTER-BEY: Well, the only thing I would say is that, again, that just underscores the issue that I tried to make earlier about how well the cities use their subsidies, how well they use their powers around economic development and other sort of development activities.

MR. LERMAN: And if we can build in some equity on the part of low-income people, so as things develop gradually, they participate, then we're on the right track.

MR. NNAMDI: And I'm afraid we're out of time. John Foster-Bey, senior associate director of the Program for Regional Economic Opportunity at the Urban Institute's Metropolitan Housing & Community Center, thank you for joining us.

MR. FOSTER-BEY: Thank you.

MR. NNAMDI: Bob Lerman, director, Urban Institute's Human Resources Policy Center and a professor of economics at American University.

MR. LERMAN: Thanks, Kojo.

MR. NNAMDI: Good to see you again. And joining us by telephone, Fred Siegel, author of the book "The Future Once Happened Here: New York, DC, LA, and the Fate of America's Big Cities." He's also professor of history at Cooper Union. Fred, thank you for joining us.

MR. SIEGEL: Well, thank you for having me.

MR. NNAMDI: Public Interest is produced by Graham Griffith, Terry Cross and John Haas and Diane Vogel. Our engineer is Jonathan Cherry. Dori Anismon is on the phones. You can visit the Public Interest Web site at www.WAMU.org or E-mail us at pi@wamu.org.

I'm Kojo Nnamdi. This has been Public Interest.

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