

Beyond town and gown: university economic engagement and the legacy of the urban crisis

Margaret P. O'Mara

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Abstract University-driven land development and research into the amelioration of social problems are examples of the wider dimensions of economic engagement by large American research universities in metropolitan settings since 1949, and both dimensions are strongly conditioned by the experiences of universities and surrounding neighborhoods during the “urban crisis” of the 1960s. The rise of the modern American research university between 1950 and 1980 coincided with the economic decline of large American cities and the slide of their poorest neighborhoods into severe socioeconomic distress. The elite identification of the university as a force for economic and social change was a direct response to these urban upheavals, and the dynamics of its new role were fueled by the presumptions of postwar consensus liberalism. The urban crisis had an effect on town-gown relations that endured into the early twenty-first century, not least because it made local governments and universities allies rather than adversaries. Countering definitions of the role the university should take in economic development have arisen from a “town” comprised not of elected officials, but of community members from both within and outside of the university. The long shadow of urban crisis attests to the historical contingency of town-gown interactions and the usefulness of historical, case-based approaches to understanding the role of universities in urban and metropolitan economies.

Keywords Economic development · Urban crisis · Housing · Urban renewal · Race · U.S. politics

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M. P. O'Mara (✉)
Department of History, University of Washington, 315 Smith Hall, Box 353560, Seattle,
WA 98195-3560, USA
e-mail: momara@uw.edu

1 Introduction

“A University,” wrote Abraham Flexner in his 1930 treatise on higher education, *Universities: American, English, German*, “is not outside, but inside the general social fabric of a given era.” While expressing distress about the suitability of universities as sites of public service, he readily acknowledged that they were “expressions of the age” (Flexner 1930). In the case of large U.S. research universities, Flexner’s point has been proven repeatedly in the nine decades that have passed since he wrote these words. The ivory towers of academe have not stood apart from, but firmly in the middle of, the major social and economic transformations of the twentieth century. From the Great Depression to the Cold War to the Information Age, universities have reflected and responded to changing political priorities, cultural mores, and demographic imperatives through changes in curricula, shifts in administration, and degree of engagement with communities outside their campus.

At the same time, there has been continuing debate over the proper role of the university in society. Should it be an active agent of economic or social change, or should it refrain from becoming what Flexner termed a “weather vane” and instead focus on core research and teaching activities? Was it uniquely equipped to tackle society’s problems, or was it temperamentally unsuited to responding in a rapid and policy-relevant way? Could elite institutions bridge deeply rooted racial and class divisions, or did they perpetuate them?

These questions have been debated most fiercely in research-intensive elite universities located in large metropolitan areas.¹ Since World War II, these institutions experienced exponential growth, transformed their curricula and their admissions processes, weathered campus violence and community strife, and found themselves integral players in a post-industrial, knowledge-based economy. At the same time, many American cities have seen massive in-migration and out-migration of people and capital, shifted from being majority “white” to becoming home to large populations of minorities and immigrants from Asia and Latin America, experienced economic crisis and neighborhood renaissance, and become part of a much larger metropolitan web of city, suburb, and exurb. Especially in the urban neighborhoods where institutions of higher education have a large physical and political presence, the historical transformations of university and city since the mid twentieth century have been closely intertwined and interdependent.

In metropolitan areas, the university has not only been understood to be a force for social and economic improvement on a more abstract, national scale but it simultaneously has been recognized as a powerful catalyst for economic and social transformation in a geographically specific area. Universities are potentially “good neighbors” or “bad neighbors” for a “community” that may encompass a neighborhood, a city, or an entire metropolis. As economic anchors, educators, employers, and entrepreneurs, they relate to urban power structures and urban citizens on a number of dimensions and scales. One

¹ This category is best exemplified by what until recently have been known as “R1” institutions that have national and international research reputations and are located in the urban cores of Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) of more than one million people. A few prominent examples of the type include Columbia University and New York University in New York City, Yale University in New Haven, Harvard University and MIT in Cambridge (Boston), the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University in Philadelphia, Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, and the University of Chicago. Public flagship universities are more rarely located in urban cores (an unsurprising fact given many systems’ roots in the land-grant college network established by the Morrill Act of 1862 as well as the long history of state governments’ antipathy to their largest cities), but public examples in this category would include the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Washington, Seattle.

critical relationship is between universities and the elected leadership of the cities, towns, and counties in which they are located. Universities and cities simultaneously admire, mistrust, and misunderstand each other. Depending on time, place, economic conditions, and personal chemistry, the connection between locality and university can waver between wary goodwill and outright hostility, and it reflects fundamentally different organizational structures and institutional purposes. These relationships are strongly conditioned by past experiences and informed by policy feedbacks (e.g., Skocpol 1992). Feedback loops can constrain university-locality relationships and the economic development initiatives that they produce.

This article seeks to provide a window into these dynamics by considering university-locality conflict and collaboration in urban renewal and neighborhood revitalization between 1949 and 1980. During these three decades, the changing fortunes of both university and city forced the two into a different kind of relationship and generated fresh examination of the public service mission of higher education. I argue that the American “urban crisis” of this period—and the response of mainstream liberalism to that crisis—was not simply the context in which modern town-gown alliances were forged, but that it had such a powerful effect on such relationships that it continues to influence university-driven economic development efforts into the twenty-first century. Well into an era of postindustrial capitalism and “urban renaissance,” the upheavals of an earlier urban age influence how both town and gown approach both economic development and social amelioration.

The lasting legacy of urban crisis underscores the town–gown relationship’s multidimensionality and historical contingency. It indicates the degree to which the relationship is a product of broader factors that are difficult to capture in standard economic impact metrics: shifting urban conditions, institutional leadership, funding imperatives, and the dynamics of race and class.

2 The case for the historical approach

Being of immediate concern to academics and academic institutions, the debates over the economic and social purpose of the university have generated many thousands of pages of scholarly prose. Although throughout the modern era there has been remarkably consistent, if not universal, agreement that the university has an obligation to the larger society, the prescriptions of how this should be done have been wide-ranging. A robust literature on the history of American higher education has explored its relation to late nineteenth century industrial corporatism and Progressive reform (Diner 1980; Newfield 2003), state-building from the 1920s through the Cold War (Geiger 1986, 1993; Leslie 1993; Lowen 1997; O’Mara 2005; Nemeč 2006), and early twentieth-century global corporate capitalism (Brint 2002; Geiger 2004). The large body of work that has resulted from the perennial impulse to write hefty institutional biographies further adds to our understanding of universities’ relationship to the world beyond the ivory tower. The number of historical assessments of higher education has been met if not exceeded by more prescriptive studies (many written by former university presidents and administrators) that alternatively celebrate or lament the influence of American corporations, governments, and other interests upon university research and teaching (Klotsche 1966; Barzun 1968; Bloom 1987; Kerr 1968; Bok 2003).

A good portion of this literature focuses on universities’ “inside game” of academics, administrative structure, and relationship to funders. Those that focus on the “outside

game” of economic and social impact beyond the campus fall into two main categories. The first and most extensive is made up of studies of innovation, entrepreneurship, and the role of university-based research and technology transfer (including Rosenberg and Nelson 1994; Feldman 2003a, b) as well as the role of universities in the evolution of regional clusters of innovation (including Markusen 1986; Saxenian 1996; O'Mara 2005; Lécuyer 2006). These focus chiefly on the post-World War II era, with an overwhelming emphasis on the era after the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980. The second major strand focuses on universities' relationships to the human and built environments surrounding them and the teaching and research activities that respond to and interact with these environments. Often the focus is on universities' relationship to poverty populations and efforts at social amelioration (including Birenbaum 1969; Mitchell 1974; Murphy 1975; Diner 1980; Bender and University 1988; Harkavy and Puckett 1994; Rodin 2007). There is a growing focus on the university as a real estate developer and change agent in the urban built environment (O'Mara 2005, 2007; Perry 2005).

Because the majority of these studies have been written by academics, we know more about how universities have thought of themselves than we know about how outside institutions (governments, businesses, non-profits) have perceived and related to universities. This largely one-sided historical literature reflects the fact that university-community relations often have been crisis-driven. This author's experience with municipal and institutional archives across the United States has found that cities and universities have the most intense and well-documented interactions with one another around specific events. In times of economic prosperity and social calm, town and gown have little regular communication; in times of economic change and social upheaval, engagement increases. File boxes fill with materials describing controversial campus expansion projects, political protests, business incubation projects, or complaints about increased traffic and bad student behavior. The documentary record goes silent once the controversy has passed. Perhaps as a consequence, the role of the university as an economic anchor and political actor is relatively underexplored in American urban historiography (Gilfoyle 1998).

Only recently has the commercialization of discovery in the hard sciences and engineering become the primary focus of the relationship between university and regional economy. Large research universities have served multiple functions in the modern metropolis, but it has proved challenging to capture and measure the full spectrum of economic and social impacts of urban universities, in part because some of this data is best analyzed qualitatively rather than quantitatively. It also has been difficult to capture these multiple dimensions because universities and localities may not necessarily share the same priorities (see Table 1).

University economic impact reports began to proliferate in the United States and Europe in the late 1960s, reached a crescendo in the 1980s, and continued into the early twenty-first century. These studies often focused on two categories of activity: technology transfer and business incubation; and direct and indirect employment. Although the commercialization of research is perhaps the most easily measured dimension of university economic impact, it is only one of several ways that the activities of a large research university affect the metropolitan area in which it is situated. It also is relatively recent, coinciding with (1) the liberalization of federal and state intellectual property and technology transfer policies and (2) the late-twentieth-century growth of high-tech, telecommunications, and biotechnology sectors.

Universities are major urban employers, having grown their job base during a half-century period when jobs emptied out of American central cities. By the turn of the twenty-first century, it was estimated that universities and university-affiliated hospitals and

Table 1 Some dimensions of university-locality interaction, 1950–2009

Concerns of local governments	Concerns of research universities
University activities that maintain or increase local revenue streams	Local actions that support university revenue generation
Private-sector job growth	Political support for state and federal lobbying efforts (appropriations, technology transfer, tuition authority)
Increase in educated workforce	Private giving
Construction	Sponsored research
Growth of high-productivity, high-revenue, knowledge-intensive sectors	
Uses of university-owned and university-controlled property	Freedom to develop university-owned and university-controlled property
Neighborhood viability	Neighborhood viability
Increased traffic	Public safety
Economic stabilization	Aesthetics of built environment
Effect of student housing on residential housing market	Availability of student/faculty/staff housing
Behavior of members of university community	Behavior of non-university affiliates in the community
University as urban amenity and attraction	Community as an amenity and attraction for students, faculty, and staff
University expertise and human capital applied to local problems and/or resource shortages	Student educational experiences enhanced by service-learning

medical centers were the largest single employers in over one-third of American cities (Maurrasse 2001, p. 4). Indirect employment stimulated by university activity gives these institutions an even greater regional employment impact. Again, however, the significance of this indicator is somewhat recent, correlated with the increased significance of service-sector jobs in American metropolitan economies since the 1970s.

University economic impact reports have also often pointed out the economic and social impact of teaching students and granting higher degrees, but this is perhaps the slipperiest measure of them all. Aggregate impacts have proved difficult to estimate and—even more importantly—difficult to communicate in a politically compelling way to public audiences. University graduates earn more over their lifetimes, which translates into higher tax revenues, lower social service costs, and other societal benefits (Day and Newberger 2002). It is harder to pinpoint how this correlates geographically, and how this has played out over time. Demographic effects of universities come well in advance of economic ones (Florax 1992). The high spatial mobility of the American educated workforce makes it difficult to parse out the correlation between presence of university and higher per capita regional income. Some of it may come from the people the university educates; some may come from the people the university community attracts to the region. This is particularly true in the case of “national universities,” in the parlance of US News and World Report (US News 2009).

Two enduring dimensions of university economic impact that remain relatively untapped by university economic impact assessments and by the scholarly literature are university-sponsored real estate development and university-community partnerships around applied research and service learning. Both have economic *and* social outcomes.

The first has a clear economic impact, although it also has important social effects. The second is explicitly intended to have social impact and also can have economic spillovers. While neither has the obvious “bang for the buck” that research commercialization and employment figures convey, they nonetheless are important to our understanding of how universities and localities have related to one another. They also demonstrate the significance of policy—particularly federal policy—in shaping research universities’ perceptions about their public mission and in determining how both federal and local decision-makers have perceived “the uses of the university” (Kerr 1968).

Historical, case-based research may help close the gaps in our understanding of the full economic and social impact of universities in American urban areas because it can capture the complexity and contingency of the process by which gown affects town, and vice versa. It captures the significance of policy feedback mechanisms in conditioning policy approaches, expectations, and outcomes. Similarly, rooting the study of the university more firmly in social history and urban history—rather than considering these institutions as places apart and above—can explicate the choices universities and their leaders make and the impacts of these choices on the wider community.

3 The legacy of the urban crisis

The economic significance of the American research university corresponds with its high degree of urbanity. Despite popular discourses about campuses as pastoral and isolated spaces, American research universities are predominantly located in the central cities or suburbs of very large metropolitan agglomerations, and they have been for some time. The rapid growth of American cities between 1870 and 1920 led to a commensurate upswing in colleges and universities with urban campuses. By the 1920s, four out of every ten college students in the nation attended an urban-located university (Berube 1978, p. 46). Some of these institutions, such as many founded by the Catholic Church, functioned explicitly to educate lower-income and immigrant urban populations. Others were schools that had earlier built campuses in lightly settled suburban neighborhoods that quickly became overtaken by the ever-expanding city. Elite private institutions like Columbia in New York and the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia had deliberately moved away from the hurly-burly of downtown in the early nineteenth century only to see the city surround them once again in the twentieth (O'Mara 2005).

As of the 2000 Census, the 50 largest American metropolitan areas were home to 56 of the 96 most research-intensive institutions of higher education in the nation.² Of this group, 37 are located in the principal city or cities of the metropolitan region. The remaining 19 are in secondary cities and towns, ranging from postwar suburbs (Stanford University and SUNY Stony Brook) and postindustrial exurbs (UC-Irvine and UC-Riverside) to much older municipalities (Northwestern University, Harvard University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and industrial cities (Yale University). An additional 14 institutions in this tier are located in metropolitan areas that may not be among the 50 largest, but they are more than college towns, having diverse populations and economic bases that extend beyond higher education. The correspondence between universities and cities

² This data is derived from the 2008 list of institutions classified as “RU/VH” (doctorate-granting research universities with very high levels of research activity) by Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The “RU/VH” classification replaces the earlier “R1” classification (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 2009).

extends beyond those institutions with very high research activity. Today, seventy percent of *all* American research universities are in the nation's 100 largest metropolitan areas (Muro et al. 2008, p. 15).

However, the elite American research university has to a great degree physically and psychically separated its campus from the city. The feeling has tended to be mutual. As one midcentury academic observed:

The strategy of the universities has been characterized either by retreat before the advance of the city or by voluntary isolation from it. The tactics of the universities and their scholars have been limited to occasional sallies from their ivory towers to throw fine intellectual dust, verbal pebbles, and occasionally a useful critical rock at the follies of cities. For their part, city officials and most citizens hardly knew that the universities were there (Parsons 1963, p. 205).

The mutual antipathy has deep roots. American thinkers from John Adams to Henry David Thoreau forcefully declared that crowded and noisy cities were antithetical to scholarly study; some nineteenth-century state legislatures expressly forbade locating newly founded state universities in cities (Berube 1978, pp. 45–46; Turner 1987, pp. 101). Higher education's professed distaste for city life is closely related to a broader and enduring anti-urbanism in a nation that was founded by gentleman farmers and that continues to celebrate "small-town" values as authentically American. Although this discourse has often focused on the appearance, noise, and smells of the city, the fear of what nineteenth-century reformer Josiah Strong called "the perils of the city" (Strong 1876) has had less to do with urban built environments than it does the race and class of the people who live in them. The unique demographics of the research university campus—not only disproportionately young and well-educated but in many cases disproportionately white and middle-class—reinforced its status as a place apart and above.

Nonetheless, the intense urbanity of the American research university has given the development of its physical plant significant economic resonance to American metropolitan areas. Choices made by the university about land development—both the campus and its landholdings beyond the campus' real or metaphorical walls—have spurred collaboration, controversy, and had important economic and social effects (Wiewel et al. 2007). This was particularly evident in the period of American "urban crisis" during the 1950s and 1960s, when federally-funded urban renewal became a tool for both universities and cities to try and boost their economic fortunes and slow down rapid demographic change. The availability of federal urban renewal dollars served as a turning point in university-locality economic cooperation.

3.1 The postwar moment

In 1950, the United States was an urban nation. Over sixty percent of the American population lived in urbanized areas; more than 16 percent lived in the fifteen largest cities alone (US Census 1950). Downtown areas continued to be metropolitan areas' main employment centers and major retail destinations. The wartime mobilization and manufacturing growth of the early 1940s had pulled the nation out of economic depression and prompted a massive urban migration, swelling populations and straining infrastructure from Washington DC to Chicago to San Francisco.

Threats to the city's urban and political dominance, however, were emerging. Planners and politicians had articulated far-reaching schemes for urban redevelopment and renewal since the turn of the twentieth century; the prosperous 1920s had seen major,

City-Beautiful-inspired alterations to the urban fabric, from Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles to Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia. Depression and war put many of these initiatives on hold during the 1930s and 1940s, but by the postwar period urban leaders were eager to take action to replace aging infrastructure and housing. Residential suburbanization had been underway since the nineteenth century, but postwar home financing and real estate development practices vastly accelerated and democratized the process. The GI Bill and federal mortgage subsidy programs were making homeownership possible for young families of relatively modest incomes. Applying the techniques of mass production refined in wartime, developers seized the opportunity to sell to this new class of buyers by creating huge subdivisions of manufactured homes (Hise 1996; Jackson 1985). Downtown business leaders in many cities were already expressing deep concern about the retail threat posed by the suburbs and by Americans' increased automobility (Isenberg 2005).

Using slum removal funds provided by the Housing Act of 1949, cities and their business leaders were by 1950 starting up ambitious inner-city redevelopment plans to remove "blighted" areas. In their place, they hoped to build modern, traffic-friendly streetscapes, improved housing, and retail and commercial developments that would draw middle-class suburbanites back to the city. Large cities embarked upon this redevelopment with great optimism, echoed by urban observers in the national press. Writing about Pittsburgh, one of the first cities to execute urban renewal in a significant way, *Fortune* magazine wrote in 1950 that the city "is the test of industrialism everywhere to renew itself, to rebuild upon the gritty ruins of the past a society more equitable, more spacious, more in human scale" (quoted in Fitzpatrick 2000).

As large cities struggled to reinvent themselves, research universities were gaining new economic power and enlarged in size and prestige. Cold War geopolitics ushered in the age of what University of California Chancellor Clark Kerr later termed "the multiversity" and triggered unprecedented public investment in higher education. Federal investments in university-based research were on the rise, given institutional momentum by the establishment of the National Science Foundation in 1950 and provided a giant boost with the flurry of federal research and teaching investments in the wake of the 1957 launch of Sputnik. The GI Bill's educational provisions greatly enlarged student populations; the National Defense Education Act of 1958 further expanded teaching and research programs in the sciences, mathematics, and engineering. State governments, most notably California, invested in the expansion of public higher education systems, increasing opportunities for student education and faculty and staff employment. Much of the federal research largesse was concentrated in relatively few institutions, most of which were located in the nation's largest metropolitan areas (Murphy 1971). These universities enlarged their campuses, grew their employment base, and experienced significant spikes in their revenues. Institutions that had struggled financially prior to World War II found themselves vastly enriched by tuition revenues, federal dollars, and state appropriations. "The new university," Columbia Provost Jacques Barzun later wrote in his acerbic critique *The New American University*, was "a by-product of its own war effort" (1968, p. 7).

The way in which universities grew added layer upon layer of wider public obligation. The massive new streams of federal funding to universities were for research and teaching programs of national significance and scope. University faculty "followed the money" and turned their attention to national and global topics rather than local or regional ones. As universities strove to be world-class, local matters seemed increasingly parochial, academically marginal, and less worthy of reward and promotion. At the same time, student populations were growing significantly. Public institutions in particular were called to educate a broader swath of a state's middle class population and to make accessible and

affordable undergraduate education a central component of their institutional mission. In short, many universities became “national” research centers and “statewide” teaching institutions simultaneously.

As if these somewhat contradictory missions were not enough already, the growing research budgets and swelling student populations made universities into more significant local actors than ever before. Campus were bursting at the seams by the early 1950s, increasing pressure for the campus to extend its boundaries well into the surrounding neighborhoods. Growing campus populations also lengthened the universities’ shadow in the community of which it was a part; more businesses sprang up to cater to student and faculty needs, and the demand for rental housing grew.

3.2 Urban renewal

By the early 1950s, many of these newly exalted institutions found themselves in what one observer memorably termed “slummy” neighborhoods (Henwood 1994). The first impulse by some was to flee to the suburbs as well. Unlike homeowners and most businesses, the massive capital investments already made in urban campuses precluded these kinds of action for most institutions. Those universities that eventually suburbanized were younger and smaller.³

Unable to move, urban schools instead refocused their energies on growing to meet the demands of the Cold War economy and simultaneously maintain their viability amid urban settings that were undergoing rapid economic and racial change. Campus expansion—and further university control of neighborhood real estate—was the solution to both problems. Universities and colleges banded together to execute these strategies. Some of these alliances were local: in Philadelphia, the University of Pennsylvania spearheaded a coalition of higher education institutions, schools, churches, and hospitals in forming the West Philadelphia Corporation, whose activities focused on stabilizing neighborhood change and enlarging the residential population of university faculty and staff (Parsons and Davis 1971; O’Mara 2005). In Cleveland, five urban institutions joined forces to form the University Circle Development Foundation to coordinate and finance campus development and neighborhood stability (Stapleton 1995). Institutions also started comparing notes with peers in other cities. In 1957, the presidents of six elite private universities—MIT, the University of Chicago, Columbia, Harvard, Yale, and Penn—met to discuss how to stabilize their urban neighborhoods, starting a conversation and collaboration that continued over several years (Rodin 2007, p. 30).⁴ This being academia, a cottage industry of

³ For example, California’s private Pepperdine University moved from increasingly poor and African American South Central Los Angeles to the seaside community of Malibu in 1972. Long a small undergraduate college, Pepperdine had only gained university status with the addition of a school of law and other professional schools in 1971.

⁴ In communities on the urban fringe, institutional expansion posed different kinds of opportunities and challenges. Growing university campuses added prestige and boosted retail and housing activity in communities that were rapidly turning from farmland to suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s. As I have argued elsewhere, in the Santa Clara Valley of California the land development activities of Stanford University—not only an anchor institution but a major landholder in its own right—played a decisive role in drawing advanced scientific industry to the area and creating what became Silicon Valley (O’Mara 2005). Further down the California coast, the Irvine Company donated some of its extensive landholdings to the University of California for establishment of a branch campus in the hopes that it would lend distinction and community cohesiveness to the surrounding master-planned suburbs (Piggott 2009). Yet suburban campus expansion was not always welcomed. Associated industrial activity like research parks, while embraced and touted by local economic development officials, caused suburban homeowners to worry about increased

publications soon appeared analyzing the changing demographics of the neighborhoods and dissecting university-directed renewal initiatives.

At first, campus expansion projects were not received with much enthusiasm by universities' neighbors and the elected officials who represented them. Institutional encroachment itself was perceived as a further threat to neighborhood stability. White middle-class residents in particular were effective in making their displeasure known, and some mayors and councilmen saw a potent political advantage in characterizing the university as a soulless behemoth (Barzun 1968, pp. 26–27). Losing tax-paying businesses to the suburbs, city officials in some metropolitan areas voiced concern about the prospect of large tax-exempt institutions expanding their territory. Officials in areas with a preponderance of higher education institutions, like Boston, “warned that the city would not be able to provide the necessary services to its citizens if the uncontrolled expansion of tax-exempt institutions was permitted to continue” (Klotsche 1966, p. 74). Yet in other places alliances started to emerge between elite universities and local officials organically over the course of the 1950s, particularly in Rustbelt municipalities in search of a strong economic jolt and modern infrastructure. Cities with active city and regional planning communities already were home to a cohort of urban experts whose careers moved in and out of university settings. By the late 1940s, Northeast Corridor cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Washington DC had active city planning departments that relied upon universities for personnel and for both formal and informal technical assistance. The election of reform-minded mayors after decades of corruption further increased the willingness of university faculty to engage in local reform and redevelopment. Revisions to the Housing Act that expanded the urban renewal program in 1954 increased this level of activity and engagement.

In the first decade of the urban renewal, universities in the New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh regions became active participants and partners with local governments in urban renewal construction programs in or near their campuses (Parsons and Davis 1971; Nash 1973). Yet, as one contemporary noted: “these early city-university projects were beset with exceptional difficulties in a[an urban renewal] program loaded with ordinary difficulties” (Parsons 1963, p. 206). By the late 1950s, federal policymakers (especially legislators from Rustbelt states) and the American Association of Universities were lobbying for special treatment for university-city partnerships within the urban renewal program. For university-driven development to happen on a grand scale—and for universities to fulfill their potential as what federal urban renewal commissioner William Slayton termed “one of the great growth industries of our era” (1962, September 20)—there needed to be a systemic incentive for true university-locality collaboration.

Their lobbying succeeded; the 1959 revisions to the Housing Act added a specific provision permitting cities to count the costs of university campus expansion investments toward the local match for the urban renewal program. Known as Section 112, the program by 1962 was used to finance 34 separate renewal projects, with another 51 on the drawing board (Parsons 1963, p. 207). Reflecting the regional patterns of “urban crisis,” Section 112 projects clustered disproportionately in the East and Midwest.

Campus expansion turned from an economic drag into a huge economic boon to cities, becoming a way to execute very large urban renewal projects for very little money. In city after city, university campuses became critical sites for urban renewal projects that spilled

Footnote 4 continued

traffic and pollution. The “technoburbs” (Fishman 1987) that sprouted with university campuses as their anchors fundamentally changed the character of what had been rural or largely residential areas and hastened the exodus of white-collar employment to the suburbs by the end of the twentieth century.

out into neighboring areas and profoundly changing their form, function, and demographics. In the cities of the Rustbelt, Section 112-sponsored renewal projects targeted neighborhoods that had become destinations for Southern African American migrants, restricted by *de jure* and *de facto* segregation to older and crowded central city neighborhoods. The contrast between these poorer and blacker neighborhoods and the large elite institutions next to them was stark.

During the heyday of urban renewal, from 1949 to roughly 1965, universities and their allies in local government generally approached neighborhood decline as a matter of aesthetics rather than a reflection of deeply rooted economic inequities and systemic racism. In doing so, the university-driven redevelopment efforts of the 1950s and 1960s were a reflection of their times. This emphasis on eradication of “blight” and the replacement of old infrastructure with new was a hallmark of the urban renewal program and of city and regional planning generally. The lack of planners’ consideration of the human dimensions of cities prompted fierce and eloquent critiques by the beginning of the 1960s (e.g., Jacobs 1961).

The university-city alliances reflected the politics of the age, and it later became apparent that this contributed to the problems. Leadership of both university and city was largely white, male, and middle-class. The cronyism of machine politics had been replaced by the 1950s by a new kind of old-boy network, one that had great faith in expertise and pride in its incorruptibility. In cities from Atlanta to Pittsburgh to Seattle to San Francisco, urban governments formed close alliances with downtown business leaders to create urban regimes focused on the preservation of land values and the retention of jobs and retail activity (Stone 1989; Teaford 1990; Isenberg 2005). The land development programs they produced were in keeping with postwar liberalism’s understanding of the problem of concentrated poverty and the top-down, grand-scale strategies they employed to help poor people and communities of color. Although priding themselves on their racial liberalism—true racial integration was an objective of many of these projects—university administrators and their allies in government envisioned these renewed communities as spaces as highly educated and as middle-class as the campuses themselves. In a pre-Civil Rights Act era when the most urban minorities were working class or poor, racial integration was impossible without class integration.

When the architects of Section 112-funded renewal projects shifted their attention from aesthetics to social infrastructure, they expressed concern and sympathy for the poor and minority residents of university neighborhoods but gave little heed to neighborhood complaints and concerns. This disregard stemmed partially from the newness of demographic change; many of the African American residents of large northern cities had lived there less than a decade, drawn by war work to the metropolis and crowded into central-city neighborhoods by racially discriminatory housing practices. Unlike whites, African Americans could not move to the suburbs as the cities started deteriorating around them; they had to build community in place (Sugrue 2008). Not recognizing the integrity of these communities, universities paid little attention to the fates of those who had moved into these areas of “blight.” Instead, universities and their allies in local government viewed already populated poor and minority neighborhoods as seemingly empty spaces on which to build anew (Perry 2005).

3.3 Social amelioration

By the middle of the 1960s, it was clear that the top-down, aesthetically-focused approach of renewal was not working. Business-minded urban governments and universities may

have overcome their mutual disdain and joined together in land development initiatives, but now both found themselves the targets of fierce opposition. The consensus liberalism practiced by the expert-elite postwar power structure crumbled in face of a “thunder on the left” (Barzun 1968) that emanated both inside the campus community and from its neighborhoods outside, and that reflected the broader national political changes of the post-civil rights era. Operating in tandem with on-campus protests that vigorously questioned the teaching and research activities of Cold War universities (and sometimes involving the same student leaders), community activism strongly critiqued university-driven renewal projects that had displaced neighborhood populations, uprooted social institutions, and exhibited little sensitivity to the needs of poor and minority citizens. Instead of stabilizing neighborhoods, citizens argued, federally-financed campus expansion had deepened the divide between town and gown and exhibited thinly veiled racism (Nash 1973; Chisholm 1971). Boston College, Temple University, Tufts University, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Pittsburgh all had to scale back campus expansion plans in the face of this sustained opposition (Berube 1978).

If the urban deterioration of the 1940s and 1950s had left elite universities concerned about their future viability, the violent protests of the 1960s increased this worry tenfold. Universities dropped controversial research programs or spun them off into independent research institutes. They added Black Studies programs and injected other minority and non-Western perspectives into the curriculum. And while campus expansion efforts continued apace, universities softened their hard edges with new social outreach programs. The definition of university-driven urban economic development was no longer concentrated on aesthetics and infrastructure, but it took on a much more explicitly ameliorative mission.

Applied research and service learning have long histories in American universities, dating from Progressive-Era reform movements whose leaders moved fluidly in and out of university settings. This occurred most notably at the University of Chicago, whose first president, William Rainey Harper, celebrated the public service mission of higher education, particularly in urban setting; he noted that “urban universities are in the truest sense national universities [because] the great cities represent the national life in its fullness and its variety” (1905, p. 159). In Chicago, settlement-house reformers became university professors and vice versa, and where explicitly socially ameliorative approaches shaped the sources and methodologies of a new subfield of urban sociology (Diner 1980). As Progressive Era reform movements gave way to New Deal government expansion, the cohort of university-based experts began to migrate to federal agencies, setting in place a pattern of movement between academe and federal service that continued into the Cold War period (Rogers 1998; O'Connor 2002).

The growth in urban research had paralleled that of university land development programs, and it had been fueled by the same funding. Title IV of the 1949 Housing Act established an ambitious housing research program that operated with few limitations until 1952, when pressure from the homebuilding industry narrowed its focus; the program continued, however, into the 1960s (Johnson 1949; Murphy 1975, p. 16). Staff of the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA), the predecessor to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, engaged university-based researchers in technical assessments of housing, zoning, and related urban infrastructure projects. Coupled with new attention to housing and urban issues paid by national philanthropies, university-based urban research and teaching thrived during the 1950s and helped create a local market for consultancies to local governments by university faculty.

The Ford Foundation played a significant role in generating enthusiasm and action around university-based urban research programs. In a 1958 speech, Foundation official Paul Ylviskaver suggested that the Morrill Act of 1862, which had established the land-grant university system, be reworked to meet the needs of an urban era. “Urbanites,” he argued, “no less than their rural predecessors, need help with family budgets, nutrition, maintenance, land use, housing, vocational guidance, credit, and conservation.” Universities, with their abundant resources and urban locations, were the institutions best-equipped to do it (quoted in Klotsche 1966, p. 51; also see Ylvisaker 1957). The Foundation followed on this declaration with establishment of grants to universities for the purpose of establishing urban research centers. In their focus on assessing, categorizing, and ameliorating social problems, these initiatives were little different from the Progressive-Era approaches. If anything, they were even further removed from the communities they studied, ensconced in large university bureaucracies and enmeshed in disciplinary conventions and grant reporting requirements.

Ylviskaver’s urban-grant idea soon attracted the attention of national policymakers. In a January 1965 message on education to Congress, President Lyndon B. Johnson spoke of the great potential he saw in universities for the solution to society’s most pressing problems:

The role of the university must extend far beyond the ordinary extension type of operation. Its research findings and talents must be made available to the community. Faculty must be called upon for consulting activities. Pilot projects, seminars, conferences, TV programs, and task forces drawing on many departments of the university—all should be brought into play (Johnson 1965).

An urban-grant approach became even more relevant as violence and protest engulfed university campuses in the late 1960s. Clark Kerr, the great proponent of the engaged and economically potent “multiversity,” was unseated from his job as University of California Chancellor because of student unrest. Shortly thereafter, he took up the urban-grant idea in a speech in New York, arguing for “a type of university which would have an aggressive approach to the problems of the city, where the city itself and its problems would become the animating focus, as agriculture once was and to some extent still is of the land-grant university” (Kerr 1968, p. 6).

By this time, the federal government’s support of urban research had evolved into an “urban observatory” program established during the early months of the Johnson Administration’s War on Poverty. Created at the suggestion of the National League of Cities and some of its member mayors, this HUD-financed program established ten research centers whose mission was to build “bridges over which the research and training resources of universities might find their way into the problem-solving processes of City Halls” (Barnes 1974, p. 47).⁵ Rather than being called to solve particular local problems, the observatories were conceived as places that would identify broader urban trends and identify widely applicable best practices. Yet coordination was hard to muster. Within a few years, each urban observatory had evolved into locally and organizationally distinct entities with few common research emphases across sites (Williams 1972). In the age of Nixon’s New Federalism, when the centralized programs of the Great Society began to devolve and shrink, the urban observatory idea lost momentum and support. It was terminated in 1974, after less than ten years of existence.

⁵ The cities participating in the program were: Albuquerque, Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Cleveland, Denver, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Nashville, and San Diego.

As the social tumult of the 1960s and 1970s died down, and as cities re-emerged as desirable middle-class destinations in the 1990s and beyond, the amelioration of urban social and economic ills became a less explicit focus and goal of many research universities and their local partners. Attention instead has shifted to regional economic development, and discourses around these kinds of university-metropolitan partnerships often present increased socioeconomic equity as a spillover effect of a robust, knowledge-driven metropolitan economy.⁶ However, the legacy of the 1950s and 1960s endures. The typical urban university performs multiple economic and social outreach functions, from extension programs to service-learning initiatives, technical assistance programs, and development of community infrastructure.

Some of the urban universities who were most involved in urban renewal—and politically burned by the reaction against it—have become national leaders in university-community partnerships. At the University of Pennsylvania, a former student protestor (turned faculty member) founded a university-community partnership program that has engaged hundreds of students in service-learning activities and poured resources and energy into supporting neighborhood organizations and public schools (Harkavy and Puckett 1994; Rodin 2007). Similar programs have thrived at formerly embattled private campuses like Chicago, Columbia, and Yale as well as urban public universities like the University of Washington and the University of California, Los Angeles. While service-learning has proliferated, however, there is variation in the degree of institutionalization of this approach (Bingle and Hatcher 2000). There are also many places where citizens continue to feel that universities have failed to meet their promises to poor and disenfranchised populations (Perry 2005).

4 Conclusions

In becoming partners in urban renewal, universities often found themselves in a localized and historically particular kind of triple helix, one in which industry, government, and university allied in a pro-growth coalition focused on shoring up the fortunes of large institutions and try to revive the white and middle-class character of urban neighborhoods. The tumult of the 1960s—both the systemic collapse of communities beyond the campus and the student protests inside of it—forced universities to consider the social implications of urban change. In applying their research expertise to urban problems, universities tried to mitigate the political damage done by renewal programs and become a more engaged and empathetic “good neighbor.” Yet this engagement tended to remain a one-way street, in which scholars used local populations as sources of data rather than partners in its analysis and application.

The use of the university as a vehicle for social action has proven to be a difficult task for a highly decentralized type of institution whose professional reward systems prioritize basic research and traditional pedagogy over applied research, public engagement, and social outreach. As a 1982 report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development put it: “communities have problems, universities have departments” (Centre

⁶ A case in point is the recent trend of urban universities’ commissioning “economic impact statements” that seek to outline the total monetary impact of teaching, research, and employment activities. See for example, Economics Research Associates, “Economic Impact Analysis of the University of Southern California Annual Operations” (September 2006), and University of Kentucky, “Top 20 Business Plan” (December 2005).

for Educational Research and Innovation 1982). In the age of urban crisis, economic development and neighborhood social outreach became closely intertwined, involving many of the same administrators and faculty. In the early twenty-first-century university, these two functions usually operate in completely different silos. Community service and service-learning programs involve undergraduate students in large numbers and are often led by faculty in the social sciences as well as schools of public affairs, social work, and urban planning. Economic development efforts—chiefly oriented around the commercialization of research—involve central administrators and faculty in the hard sciences and engineering, including schools of law, medicine, and business. Undergraduate student involvement is minimal, although graduate students and postdoctoral researchers may be involved. This separation can obscure the wider impact of these initiatives on perceptions of the university, on relations with governments and nonprofit entities, and on regional economic development.

University-driven economic development efforts are products of their times, operate upon multiple dimensions, and are reflective of the broader social and political debates and biases of a given era. The way that universities and their advocates have talked about economic development has not always corresponded with the actions they have taken, partly because of circumstance and partly because of organizational capacity. They have reflected less a broader philosophy of public service and more the universities' political and fiscal circumstances at that historical moment. As a consequence, discussions of university public service have often revolved around the degree to which universities' receipt of federal and state appropriations obligate it to respond to social problems, and actions around economic development have depended on what kinds of public funds were available to tackle a given economic or social problem.

Employing the university's resources for specific economic and social ends has not always worked as policymakers presumed it would. The land-grant colleges of the nineteenth century did not bring stability to agrarian regional economies and create "a relatively classless society" (Kerr 1968, p. 47) as was intended. Instead, they did a spectacular job of making the children of farmers into members of the new white-collar service professions that would eventually displace both agriculture and manufacturing in driving the American economy.

Similarly, the research universities of the late twentieth century did not halt urban decline and suburban expansion, nor were they able to have much influence on continuing social inequities and racial disparities. But the legacy of urban renewal has had some positive effects. Universities' pursuant emphasis on more open admissions and adoption of affirmative action policies gave many children from working-class, urban, and minority families entry into the white-collar, middle-class, and largely suburbanized world of postindustrial America. The education of students, rather than community service programs or economic spillovers, has been the university activity with perhaps the biggest "public service" impact by far.

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