Post-Suburbia
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Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

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Post-Suburbia: Government and Politics in the Edge Cities.

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Maintaining the Balance of Power

During the late 1950s and the 1960s the emerging balance between governmental fragmentation and central coordination faced a serious challenge. Academics, journalists, and reform-minded politicians viewed the multitude of suburban governments as a national disgrace threatening the quality of metropolitan life. They repeated the standard arguments about wastefulness, duplication of services, and inefficiency, but the apparent decline of the older central cities added a special urgency to their diatribes against suburban government. By the 1960s New York City, Detroit, and Saint Louis were aging badly, with blight spreading through their neighborhoods so rapidly that urban renewal agencies were falling further behind in the effort to bring new life to the city core. Moreover, television coverage of race riots and reports of rising crime rates reinforced the prevailing sense of urban debacle. Supposedly the government barriers between the central cities and suburbs were contributing to this decay and chaos, and only a united effort by all metropolitan residents, regardless of jurisdiction, could handle the emerging urban crisis.

Books, articles, and editorials thus called for governmental unification of metropolitan areas not only for the sake of efficient administration but more important, to save the endangered cities. Political scientists and reform pundits ridiculed the small-scale villages fostered by the traditional suburban ideal and called for a new inclusive metropolitan vision and a willingness among Nassau residents to admit that they in fact lived in the New York City metropolis and among Webster Groves homeowners to view themselves first and foremost as Saint Louisans. Even the federal government attempted to blackmail suburbanites into believing themselves responsible for the central city’s ills as well as for the problems of their own villages. Federal funding was to depend on metropolitan-wide cooperation and a renunciation of suburban parochialism. So-called experts, the media, and Washington, D. C. were sending the same message to the residents of Garden City, Southfield, Glen Ellyn, and Ladue. Eschew the delicate governmental balance that preserved the autonomy of the fragment and embrace metropolitanism.
By the close of the 1960s, however, the forces of metropolitan reform had failed. Attempts to strengthen the ties between Nassau and New York City, Oakland and Detroit, and Saint Louis County and Saint Louis city were to fail, as suburbanites successfully rejected the best advice of experts and bureaucrats and unequivocally made it clear that they were not residents of the central city and did not wish to be regarded as such. They fended off the forces of metropolitanism and in the process declared their independence anew. In the late 1960s the residents of the fringe counties thus retained their belief in small-scale, intimate government. Metropolitan-wide rule appeared more unrealistic in 1970 than in 1960 as suburbanites kept cooperation with the central city to a minimum.

While not surrendering to the forces of metropolitan unity, fringe dwellers were curbing their proclivity for governmental balkanization. During the 1960s, lawmakers successfully aborted the birth of additional units of government and fewer new municipalities appeared along the metropolitan rim than in earlier decades. Thus the tendency toward fragmentation was checked but at the same time metropolitan unity was thwarted. By the late 1960s, the middle way that was to characterize the emerging post-suburban metropolis was more evident than ever before. Long Islanders, inhabitants of Saint Louis County, and their counterparts in Orange County were devoted neither to infinite governmental splintering nor to metropolitan giantism. Rather, they continued to tend toward an intermediate position, which balanced the small-scale and intimate against the large-scale and coordinative.

Meanwhile, the life style and economic development of Suffolk, Nassau, Oakland, DuPage, Saint Louis, and Orange Counties were also increasingly balanced. These areas remained bastions of white-collar homeowners dedicated to green lawns, clear air, and good schools, but commercial growth continued to bolster the independent economic base of the counties. An increasing number of office buildings joined shopping malls and factories in fringe municipalities. The six counties were growing less suburban and more post-suburban and as they did so the arguments underlying the extreme options of fragmentation and metropolitanism seemed less convincing. The image of the country village where every voter knew the mayor and council members personally and volunteered to extinguish fires was increasingly incongruous in a suburbia of corporate headquarters and one-hundred-store malls. Despite many outlying residents clinging to the traditional suburban image, the six counties were no longer semirural refuges where village rule alone was sufficient. Yet at the same time they were no longer adjuncts of the central city and subordinate components of a single metropolis dependent for its economic vitality on the central-
city downtown. The counties were developing into something new, and neither village nor metropolitan-wide government totally suited them.

**EXECUTIVE CITIES**

"Mid-America's New Executive City"—by the late 1960s that was the new label applied to Saint Louis County's Clayton.¹ No longer just a community of fine homes and carefully manicured lawns, its flashy glass office towers, high-rise hotels, and lofty apartment buildings were symbols of the changing status of the once-traditional suburb. It was a full-fledged center of business, a community where business executives not only lived but also worked. Yet during the 1960s other executive cities were emerging along America's metropolitan fringe. In the 1950s factories and retailers had migrated to suburbia, but now office developers were doing likewise in increasing numbers. Corporate headquarters and slick office buildings were beginning to dot the suburban landscape, another sign of the growing obsolescence of the term *suburban*. The standard image of the split-level house, station wagon, and freckle-faced children survived, but it was an image increasingly out of line with what was happening along the urban rim.

Though office employment was growing in outlying areas throughout the nation, Clayton deserves credit as America's first full-fledged edge city. As early as 1952 the Brown Shoe Company moved its corporate headquarters to the Saint Louis County community, and in the course of the 1950s 2- and 3-story office blocks proliferated along Clayton's streets.² In 1958, however, city leaders ushered in a new era when they repealed a 5-story height limit and permitted the building of high-rise structures in the community's business district.³ During the early 1960s developers took advantage of the change, completing a 13-story office building in February 1962 and the 16-story Pierre Laclede Building a year later. The latter office tower proved so successful that a 23-story companion structure was erected in the late 1960s.⁴ High-rise apartment buildings added further vertical accents to the Clayton landscape, and in 1966 the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that the community's skyline "no longer blended into the county's amorphous urban sprawl, but now appeared more like a little Tulsa or perhaps an Omaha, than just another incorporated outskirt of St. Louis."⁵ A year later the chamber of commerce boosted that Clayton was "known for its high rise business district and high rise quality apartment buildings." But by 1968 the developers' dreams were soaring even higher, with one investor proposing an office center with one 30-story and two 20-story buildings.⁶
By the mid 1960s Clayton, in fact, had developed into a major office hub. A wide range of businesses filled its new towers and approximately one hundred of the nation's five hundred largest corporations had offices in the Saint Louis County community. At the beginning of 1966 Clayton could boast of fifty office buildings with a combined floor space of over two million square feet, equal to one-third of the total office space in downtown Saint Louis. Two years later a scholarly study of Clayton proclaimed it "a new metropolitan focus in the St. Louis area" and "an urban sub-capital" that supplemented the Saint Louis central business district.7

Yet high-rise office towers did not spell doom to high-priced residential neighborhoods. Clayton's city council was dedicated to preserving the elite residential reputation of the community and in the city's annual reports were repeated references to the "protection of residential areas" and "the containment of the Central Business District."8 As early as 1960 the city manager assured the local citizenry that commercial development had "not been at the sacrifice of [Clayton's] fine residential community character." Similarly, the city's proud mayor reported, "Farsighted and comprehensive planning has protected our fine residential areas while permitting desirable business development." The city council refused permits to construct a motion picture theater and to expand the local Ramada Inn when those projects were deemed to "adversely affect residential quality."9 As the mayor and city manager noted, the city's rulers were not about to trade the traditional advantages of the community for unrestrained commercial growth.

In fact, Clayton leaders sought and achieved both business and residential wealth. In its annual report for 1966, the city government proclaimed Clayton to be the "image of a balanced community," and four years later the report described the town as "a balanced community with excellent schools, fine homes, exceptional recreation and cultural facilities and a distinguished office and business center." Yet it was only balanced in terms of having the best of both commerce and residence. It certainly was not socially balanced. As the chamber of commerce boasted, it was truly an executive city, where executives worked and with neighborhoods where only executives could afford to live. According to the 1970 census, within Saint Louis County only the two census tracts in elite Ladue could claim a higher mean value of owner-occupied dwellings than could central Clayton. Moreover, the east and west ends of Clayton were also well above the county average in terms of wealth.10 Clayton was, then, a community composed primarily of the hub and outer ring of the traditional city. The intermediate concentric circles that included the lower- and middle-income neighborhoods were largely missing.
With its skewed social and economic profile, Clayton was the embodiment of the post-suburban dream. Having more than its fair share of mansions and high rises, it successfully captured the residential and commercial wealth of the metropolis. Post-suburban areas sought to combine the tax base of the central business district with the advantages of the traditional upper-middle-class suburb. As early as the 1960s Clayton had achieved that lucrative mix.

But Clayton was not the only community experiencing a rise in office construction and an influx of commercial wealth. The phenomenon was also evident on Long Island. Between 1959 and 1965 the number of office jobs in Nassau County rose 41 percent whereas manufacturing employment grew by less than 20 percent. Moreover, by the late 1960s planners were predicting that office employment would double in Nassau by the year 2000 whereas manufacturing jobs would increase only about 25 percent. Nassau was, then, attracting an increasing number of offices, and new low-rise office blocks were especially prevalent in the center of the county near the Roosevelt Field shopping mall.

In the mid 1960s, however, Long Islanders were dreaming of far grander developments. Mitchel Field, a former air base in the heart of Nassau County, was now available for development, and in 1965 C. McKim Norton, president of the Regional Planning Association, a private planning organization, suggested that the abandoned field and its environs become the site of a new "center for the suburbs." What he proposed was "a green Rockefeller Center suited to the suburbs," including shopping, offices, and cultural facilities, to serve as a focus for the sprawling, amorphous suburbia of Long Island. Recognizing that a post-suburban transformation was already underway, he told Long Island business leaders, "Even though we keep using the word 'suburbs,' they aren't suburbs anymore—they aren't 'sub' to any 'urb.' Suburbanites once depended on a central city for services which now must be supplied out among one-family houses." According to Norton, "the only way to get them [services] at top quality is in centers—not one-purpose shopping centers but new combined centers, uncrowded and green, suited to the new life that these new urban areas symbolize." The Regional Plan Association's report on the proposed Nassau Center expanded on Norton's vision of the future. "Nassau Center can be something new, combining the best of the urban and suburban world—if the right degree of concentration and greenness and the relation of each activity to the others are attained."12

Though Newsday reported that the proposal for a "downtown center" in Nassau County won the support . . . of the Long Island Association, a businessmen's group," the redevelopment of Mitchel Field proceeded slowly over
the succeeding years and never realized the dream of Norton or the Regional Plan Association. The proposal, however, was a classic post-suburban manifesto. It recognized that the suburbs were no longer truly suburban, but it also sought to create a future that balanced the traditional advantages of suburbia with the best of urban life. The proposal sought to replicate that great symbol of urban success, Rockefeller Center, but the Nassau version was to be a “green” Rockefeller Center, a center that did not pave over nature or crowd out sylvan beauty. The emerging post-suburban vision demanded “the right degree of concentration and greenness,” a perfect balance between the village and the city, between flora and concrete.

Meanwhile, a similar vision was emerging in Southfield, the pioneering post-suburban community of Oakland County. As early as 1955 the Bendix Corporation constructed its general offices and research center in Southfield, and Standard Oil and Reynolds Aluminum followed suit with low-rise regional offices later in the decade. Freeway construction in the 1960s hastened Southfield’s development with the city having the good fortune of being at the juncture of some of the metropolitan area’s leading highways. By 1964 Mayor James Clarkson was boasting of Southfield as “a Hub City with one of the largest expressway interchanges . . . , with 26 ways to go in the United States.”

With ample vacant land and optimum automobile access, Southfield became a favorite for developers of office buildings. In 1960 Eaton Yale and Towne transplanted its offices to the community, three years later the west tower of Northland Towers was completed adjacent to Northland Shopping Center, and an identical east tower was renting office space by 1966. Meanwhile, Federal Mogul had migrated to Southfield and was joined in the late 1960s by 3-M Investment Company, Merrill-Lynch-Pierce, and a high-rise building housing IBM's regional office. With its mother lode of taxable commercial structures, Eight-Mile Road was nicknamed the “Gold Coast.” Moreover, in the mid 1960s Mayor Clarkson predicted that “Northwestern Highway, already beautified by some of the foremost creative industries and office centers in the world, [would] be further silhouetted against the skyline by the erection of high-rise apartments; Northland Center and its Pointe [would] be fully developed and completed—making this a ‘Golden Triangle Center.’”

Office construction peaked in 1967 and 1968, with building permits for almost 1.3 million square feet of office space being issued during the latter year. The Detroit riot of 1967 accelerated the outward migration of business from the racially tense central city, and Southfield was the fortunate beneficiary. By 1971 Southfield was being called “Detroit’s new downtown,” with over 8.2 million gross square feet of existing office space or space under construction.
Though still dwarfed by the 22 million gross square feet of space in Detroit's central business district, Southfield's office inventory continued to grow, ensuring that city a place of significance in the emerging post-suburban world.

By 1970 Southfield was, then, no longer a bedroom suburb; instead it was a commercial hub providing jobs for people from throughout the metropolitan area. Whereas 26,518 gainfully employed persons resided in Southfield, 42,305 people worked there, including 11,352 commuters from Detroit. By comparison, only 8,262 Southfielders journeyed to a workplace in the central city.19

Yet in Southfield as in Clayton, residents were not willing to kowtow unthinkingly to the forces of economic growth. When in 1969 promoters of a new domed stadium for the Detroit Tigers and Lions sought a site in the booming community, local homeowners rose in rebellion. "Southfield stadium jeered by residents" read the headline in the Detroit News, and a spokesperson for the stadium promoters had to promise a gathering of concerned presidents of neighborhood associations, "We aren't going to shove this down your throats."20 The city of Detroit was vying desperately to become the site of the new major-league stadium. But Southfield residents feared the traffic and the resulting burden on local police and fire services. Unlike Detroit, Southfield was not willing to make major sacrifices in order to become a big-league city. Instead, it favored development only if that development was lucrative and did not detract from the advantages of suburban life.

Farther west, in DuPage County, the planned community of Oak Brook was winning recognition as yet another post-suburban pioneer. The father of Oak Brook was Paul Butler, heir to the Butler Paper Company fortune. A devotee of polo, Butler accumulated extensive land holdings in eastern DuPage County on which he raised his horses. In the 1950s, however, Butler's property became the site of one of the major interchanges in northeastern Illinois, the crossing of the East-West and Tri-State tollways. Recognizing that his land could support more than polo ponies, Butler embarked on the creation of a prestige development, including only the finest in residences, retailing, hotels, and offices. In 1964 he joined forces with Del Webb, an Arizona developer, and together they sought to fashion the ideal executive city.21

During the 1960s the rate of change was rapid. At the time of the community's incorporation in 1958, it had a little more than one hundred inhabitants; according to a long-time resident, it was known as "Horse Town" and "it was all prairies, groves, and polo fields."22 Ten years later the 154-acre office park laid out in 1960 was 60 percent developed and included twenty-three low-rise structures of one to three stories as well as five high-rise buildings of six to twelve stories.23 In 1958 American Can Company had been the first to estab-
lish offices in the community, but by the early 1970s Oak Brook could boast of the world headquarters of the McDonald's hamburger chain, the food research facilities of both Swift and Armour, and a long list of regional offices for Fortune 500 corporations. In 1974 it had 5 million square feet of office space and there were plans for the construction of 2.5 million more.\(^{24}\) With the opening of Oakbrook Center in 1962 it also became one of the shopping meccas of northeastern Illinois. Initially anchored by the Marshall Field and Sears department stores, the shopping mall later would attract such posh retailers as Neiman-Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, and I. Magnin.\(^{25}\) In the Chicagoland area, Oak Brook was to become synonymous with executive-class retailing.

But it was also to become an enclave of upper-crust residences. Carefully restricted subdivisions such as York Woods, Brook Forest, Steeplechase, and Ginger Creek became home to the most affluent DuPage Countians. Through restrictive covenants Paul Butler imposed architectural and aesthetic standards aimed at ensuring only the most tasteful and expensive development. Rumors circulated that Butler even controlled the type of draperies that hung in Oak Brook living rooms.\(^ {26}\) Once the neighborhoods were established, homeowner associations assumed responsibility for enforcing the restrictions that made Oak Brook an ideal residence for executives. By 1970 Oak Brook ranked first among DuPage County communities in median value of owner-occupied homes, its figure being more than double that of the county as a whole.\(^ {27}\)

With a 1970 population of 4,118 spread over approximately 5,000 acres, Oak Brook also retained an unusual amount of open space. At the heart of the community was the 550-acre International Sports Core, which offered residents an eighteen-hole golf course, three swimming pools, tennis courts, and extensive equestrian facilities, including seven polo fields.\(^ {28}\) In 1970 as in 1958 Oak Brook was a horse town, for Butler had achieved the remarkable feat of attracting corporate headquarters without sacrificing polo. By the early 1970s twenty thousand employees of the mall and offices crowded Oak Brook's major thoroughfares, but along these same roads were signs warning, "Yield to Equestrian."\(^ {29}\) This mix of the horse and the high rise, the semirural and the urban, was basic to Oak Brook and was evident in community institutions. Though its impressive tax base was able to support a first-class professional fire department, the Oak Brook Volunteer Firemen's Association survived to aid paid firefighters and to perpetuate the traditional village spirit of volunteerism so cherished by suburbanites.\(^ {30}\)

With office towers, Marshall Field's, exclusive residential subdivisions, and unparalleled leisure and recreation facilities, Oak Brook came as close to the post-suburban ideal as any community on earth. "To a remarkable degree,"
commented one observer in 1974, "Oak Brook has maintained its 'village' atmosphere while reaping the benefits of being a suburban 'downtown' for the region." In accord with the traditional suburban ideal, it was an exclusionary sylvan refuge, but it was a refuge both for big business and wealthy homeowners. This commentator correctly summed up the cardinal principle underlying the development of the community when he wrote, "Only two classes are welcome in Oak Brook—rich people and rich corporations." 31

In California's Orange County new post-suburban communities were also arising, but on a scale that dwarfed little Oak Brook. Development could proceed on a grand scale in Orange because the vast ranches in the southern part of the county had never been partitioned. Consequently, in the early 1960s huge tracts of land remained in the hands of a single owner or corporation, standing ready for the creation of expansive new communities. Most notable of the holdings was the Irvine Ranch, which sprawled across 130 square miles, encompassing approximately one-sixth of the county's area.

Before 1960 the Irvine Company had permitted the development of some relatively small tracts at the fringe of its holdings, but at the beginning of the decade its vast ranch remained largely intact, an undisturbed domain of orange groves, vegetable fields, and grazing cattle. Faced, however, with growing pressure to develop the land, in 1960 the company hired planner-architect William Pereira to lay out a ten-thousand-acre community around the proposed campus of the newly created University of California-Irvine, and four years later Pereira assisted in formulating a plan for the thirty-five thousand acres constituting the ranch's southern sector. Central and northern sector plans also followed as the company adopted a comprehensive blueprint for the development of its holdings.32

True to the emerging post-suburban model, the Irvine lands were to include tax-producing commerce as well as homes attractive to those seeking the suburban way of life. The company's leading office and retailing development of the 1960s was Newport Center, advertised as "a 622-acre complex of financial, business and medical office buildings, stores, restaurants and apartments in the epicenter of America's fastest growing area."33 At its core was Fashion Island, an upscale shopping mall, which promoters described as a "vast forum of tree-lined plazas and sculptured fountains intertwine[d] among four major department stores and more than 50 exquisite shops and restaurants."34 Nearby was the Financial Plaza of Newport Center, where two nine-story office buildings were completed in 1969. That same year ground was broken for the $10 million, sixteen-story Avco Financial Center, which would further enhance Newport Center's growing reputation as a post-suburban downtown for the south-
ern half of Orange County. Meanwhile, the Irvine Industrial Complex was attracting manufacturing and research facilities to the former ranch lands. By the close of the 1960s, 280 industrial companies had located in the 3,100-acre complex, providing jobs for more than 14,000 people.

Even though the Irvine Company was planning to create a full-scale city that eventually would include 430,000 residents, towering high rises, and giant factories, it did not wholly eschew the traditional suburban ideal of the small-scale and the intimate. Basic to the Irvine plan was the goal of creating a city composed of distinct residential villages that, according to one report, would "imbue the residential environment . . . with a sense of place and identity to which residents [could] relate on an intimate scale." The villages were to range in size from fewer than six hundred to more than two thousand acres and include schools and shopping facilities. Moreover, each was to have "a unique theme or focal point which differentiate[d] it from all other villages." This theme could be derived from a natural feature of the village, such as a canyon or bluff, or from its proximity to a golf course or water.

To further re-create the village atmosphere of the ideal traditional suburb, the company also organized homeowner associations charged with maintaining the neighborhood park and recreation facilities as well as enforcing architectural controls. Homeowners elected the association's governing board, which supposedly would speak for the neighborhood and enhance the sense of grass-roots rule. Thus the Irvine Company sought to fashion a city of villages with the intimacy of the small town and the participatory government of friends and neighbors so intrinsic to traditional suburban ideology.

Other large-scale developments in southern Orange County sought to achieve the same mix of community neighborliness and commerce. Laid out from 1965 on, Mission Viejo was an eleven-thousand-acre project with an expected ultimate population of ninety-five thousand middle- and upper-middle-class residents. Yet the developers of this giant real estate scheme emphasized instilling community identity in the new residents so that the project would not be just an anonymous collection of thousands of homes. To achieve this, the Mission Viejo Company built the community around an early California Spanish theme. All buildings conformed to the company's version of early California architecture and preferably had earth-colored stucco walls and tile roofs. Moreover, the community celebrated Cinco de Mayo, the Mexican national holiday, and when the development company asked residents for suggestions to rename the local newsletter, it reminded them, "Since Mission Viejo reflects the tradition of Early California and its Spanish heritage, a name indicative of this influence could be a strong contender." Yet the community also included a

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<th>County</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Population per Square Mile</th>
<th>Percentage of Employed Residents Working in County</th>
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three-hundred-acre industrial park, which attracted its first occupant in 1969, an engineering and manufacturing facility for electronic computers expected to employ more than fourteen hundred persons. According to the local newsletter, this high-tech facility was “to be built of adobe-style concrete block,” thereby conforming with the prevailing Spanish theme. Like other emerging post-suburban communities, Mission Viejo sought to attract commercial facilities and places of employment. But commerce was not to disrupt the suburban sense of community created through a unifying fantasy of romantic old California. In a community like Mission Viejo, the computers had to be manufactured in an adobe-like structure.

On Long Island, in Oakland, DuPage, and Saint Louis Counties, and in Southern California, the emerging post-suburban communities were, then, balancing the urban and the suburban. They were creating a world in which corporate headquarters adjoined polo fields and high-rise office towers arose within walking distance of elite residences. In this new world computer plants were to be sheathed in charming adobe and Rockefeller Centers were to be swathed in greenery. The best of the central city and the suburb were to be combined in an incongruous mix, a post-suburban compound that was becoming increasingly popular among developers and residents along the metropolitan fringe.

Moreover, a growing number of Americans were experiencing this transformation of metropolitan life. As seen in table 6, by 1970 Suffolk, Nassau, and Orange Counties each had more than one million residents while Oakland and Saint Louis Counties were not far from the million mark. Even diminutive DuPage County could boast of almost a half million inhabitants. Whereas the population of the nation as a whole rose 13 percent during the 1960s, the population of Orange County soared 102 percent, Suffolk’s count increased 69
percent, and the figures for DuPage, Saint Louis, and Oakland Counties rose 57 percent, 35 percent, and 32 percent respectively. Moreover, in each of the six counties population density exceeded one thousand people per square mile. With almost five thousand people per square mile, Nassau was filled to capacity, having virtually no additional undeveloped tracts. The bucolic open spaces that had lured early residents to the fringe areas were disappearing, and urbanization was proceeding without respite.

Indicative of the post-suburban trend was the growing percentage of people who both lived and worked along the metropolitan fringe. By 1970 in each of the six counties, at least 50 percent of employed county residents who reported their place of work were employed within their home counties (see table 6). And in every county but Suffolk this percentage had risen during the previous decade. Even in Suffolk, New York City was no longer the destination of the largest number of commuters; instead post-suburban Nassau had surpassed Gotham as a source of employment for Suffolk Countians. The white-collared, pinstriped commuter who boarded the train each day and migrated to an office in Manhattan or the Loop was not the predominant species in such areas as Nassau, Suffolk, or DuPage. This type was in the minority in the pioneering post-suburban counties.

The 1970 census data, however, only confirmed what was evident to anyone driving along the highways of Long Island, Southeastern Michigan, or Southern California. Those who were able to move along the traffic-clogged thoroughfares observed new office buildings arising at every interchange or major intersection. Shopping malls were growing larger, and manufacturing plants were releasing an increasing number of workers onto the highways at five o’clock each evening. With more greenery and parking, the relatively spacious layout of the post-suburban metropolis differed from that of the central city. But the office towers, department stores, and research laboratories announced to any observer that the executive-city model of Clayton and Oak Brook was definitely supplanting the prewar ideal of the suburban village.

**Checking Governmental Fragmentation**

Not only did the 1960s witness the emergence of executive cities that achieved a lucrative balance between commerce and residence. During these same years the local governmental structure also continued to adapt to the persistent need for balancing grass-roots village government and centralized, areawide administration. According to many political leaders and experts, in the past the governmental scales had tipped too far toward the side of the pint-sized village and
the fragmentation of suburbia. In the 1960s, however, the emerging post-suburban counties corrected this perceived imbalance and backed away from the rampant balkanization that had produced scores of municipalities in prewar Nassau County and postwar Saint Louis County. Though small-scale, intimate rule still appealed to many residents along the fringe, the splintering of the political scene into minuscule municipalities for every few hundred residents was no longer acceptable. To achieve the advantages of coordination and cooperation, lawmakers along the metropolitan rim were now prepared to halt the border wars and divisive incorporation battles that had characterized earlier decades. The mad rush to the courthouse to file annexation or incorporation petitions before one’s rival was a phenomenon disappearing from suburban practice.

The result was a drop in the rate of new incorporations. As seen in table 7, during the 1960s no new municipalities were created in Oakland County, the number of Long Island village governments rose only slightly, and in Orange County there were only three new incorporations. In Saint Louis County, the number of municipalities actually fell by three, owing to the consolidation of some existing units. (By comparison, during the 1950s fourteen new municipalities had appeared in Saint Louis County, thirteen in Oakland, and nine in Orange; see table 5, in chapter 3.) Though the number of municipalities that were fully or partially in DuPage County increased by eight, this figure is misleading. Actually only two new municipalities, Warrenville and Darien, were incorporated. Six municipalities, which were primarily in adjoining counties, annexed small tracts in DuPage, thus inflating the total number of municipal governments. In none of the counties was there an explosion of new governments of the type experienced in previous years.

In part, this change reflected the growing importance of subdivision associations as defenders of property values and regulators of suburban behavior. These homeowner associations increasingly offered the defenses desired by

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<td>Orange</td>
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suburbanites and reduced the necessity for incorporation. Miniature private
governments were thus filling the role previously played by public governments.
But the decline in the birthrate of municipalities also was a consequence of
changing legal procedures. In one state after another, lawmakers were fashion-
ing a legal environment more hostile to the proliferation of governmental units.

Nowhere was the change so dramatic as in Saint Louis County, that once-
prolific mother of municipalities. As early as 1951 the county council drafted a
policy to restrict further incorporations. The council specified that henceforth
incorporation petitions had to present detailed information about the proposed
municipality, including the projected first-year budget of the city or village, and
copies of the petition had to be transmitted to the county counselor, highway
ingineer, clerk, and planning commission for their perusal. These officials or
bodies were then to approve or disapprove the petition, and if any of them ex-
pressed disapproval, incorporation would require a positive vote by at least five
of the seven county council members. Yet under Missouri law the validity of
the council's efforts to curb the creation of new municipalities was doubtful.
That same year the county counselor told the county legislators, "The County
Court (or Council) is not authorized to deny incorporation to any area that rea-
sonably constitutes a city or town merely because it decides that no more mu-
nicipalities are advisable." Moreover, the counselor concluded that a negative
opinion by the planning commission, highway engineer, or other county officer
could not block an incorporation effort. "If the area is properly the subject of
incorporation," he contended, "the petition must be granted whether they [the
various county officers] approve or not."

Of greater significance in checking the rate of incorporation were major
changes in Missouri's annexation procedures. In Saint Louis County fear of an-
nexation had been a leading motive for incorporation. Under Missouri law, a
municipality could annex new territory unilaterally, without the approval of
the residents of the tract to be absorbed. One could block a proposed annexa-
tion only by submitting an incorporation petition for the disputed territory
prior to the filing of the annexation measure. Thus the permissive annexation
laws had spawned scores of new municipalities as residents seized upon incor-
poration as their best defense against absorption. By curbing the annexation
threat, Missouri would clearly slow the pace of new incorporations and limit
metropolitan fragmentation.

Recognizing this, in 1953 the Missouri legislature adopted the Sawyers Act,
which offered new protection for areas threatened with annexation. Under the
new law, cities could still annex without the approval of residents of the area to
be absorbed, but before proceeding with an annexation, municipalities had to
submit a petition to the county circuit court for a declaratory judgment authorizing the annexation. The petition had to demonstrate that the boundary change was "reasonable and necessary to the proper development of said city" and that the annexing city could "furnish normal municipal services of said city to said unincorporated area within a reasonable time after said annexation." Moreover, the burden of proof was on the annexing city. In other words, the Sawyers Act provided for judicial review of the reasonableness of an annexation proposal and forced the annexing city to prove that a boundary adjustment was necessary.

With the county council dedicated to resisting further incorporations and the Sawyers Act providing a judicial forum for determining the validity of boundary changes, the birthrate of new cities and villages dropped markedly after 1953. Only four additional municipalities were created between that date and 1960. But some irregular incorporations were still possible. For example, in 1959 developer Bill Bangert engineered the creation of the village of Champ as a means for developing an industrial park through the issuance of tax-exempt municipal revenue bonds. At the time Champ included only fifteen residents and Bangert was clearly exploiting the permissive incorporation laws for the purpose of personal profit. The \textit{St. Louis Post-Dispatch} labeled Champ "a promotion that grabbed one of the prime commercial locations in the then unincorporated area," and Missouri's attorney general challenged the validity of the incorporation, claiming that Champ was formed "for and exist[ed] for a private and not a public issue." Missouri's Supreme Court, however, upheld the incorporation, permitting the creation of yet another unit of government in Saint Louis County.

During the early 1960s, though, the Missouri Supreme Court generally offered little support for the forces of fragmentation and took action that markedly strengthened the foes of metropolitan divisiveness. The tribunal acted most notably in the case of the \textit{City of Olivette v. Graeler}. In 1957 the predominantly residential community of Olivette sought to annex 303 acres on its western boundary. Saint Louis County had zoned this acreage for industrial and commercial development, and Olivette's land grab was at least partially motivated by the municipality's desire to rezone the tract as residential and thus protect its western flank from the incursions of commerce. The land bordered on the existing Monsanto Company headquarters and laboratories in adjoining Creve Coeur, and county planners claimed it was ideally suited for industrial plants, which would enhance the county's tax base and employment opportunities. The case thus represented a classic conflict between county planners concerned about the broader welfare of the area and parochial mu-
nicipal leaders dedicated to exclusionary zoning, no matter the consequences to the county as a whole.

In the county circuit court, Judge Noah Weinstein ruled against Olivette, arguing that the county charter of 1950 had, in effect, incorporated the county and thus precluded municipalities from annexing any further county territory.49 On appeal in September 1960, the state supreme court rejected Weinstein's contention that the entire county was incorporated and ruled that annexation of county territory was possible. But the court asserted, "The interest of the county as a community must be weighed against the claims of the city." In ruling on the annexation of sections of the county, "attention should be given to the needs of the area for municipal services, whether they are adequately cared for [by the county] and whether they should be supplanted by those of the city."50 The supreme court then returned the annexation proposal to the circuit court for further consideration. According to the high tribunal, the county charter did not automatically preclude annexation, but the circuit court had to weigh the county's interests against those of the municipality and determine if landowners in the disputed tract had anything to gain in terms of services from annexation to Olivette.

In 1961 the county circuit court reheard the dispute and issued a decree authorizing the boundary change.51 Again the decision was appealed to the state supreme court, and in 1963 that tribunal thwarted Olivette's plans for annexation. In a ruling that reflected the growing opposition to metropolitan fragmentation, the court observed, "This race for annexations has become somewhat unseemly." It claimed that the county was "able to furnish all normal municipal services" to the area that Olivette sought to annex and thus annexation offered nothing to the property owners of the tract. Moreover, "in this instance, the interests of the 'county as a community' outweigh[ed] the claims of Olivette."52 In other words, the county would suffer from the annexation and its land-use plans would be threatened. Olivette could present no compelling interest that would outweigh this loss; consequently, Olivette had to yield. The court also recognized that Saint Louis County was not a typical Missouri county but had to be considered as a special case. It did provide municipal services and was not "an interim device, intended merely to operate during a transition period and until the areas had developed so as to be susceptible of municipal government." Defending the county against the forays of parochial municipalities, the court concluded, "So long as the County has an effective county organization, it should not be whittled away to a mere shell by annexations which have as their prime purpose the acquisition of more city taxes."53

Together the two Graeler decisions of 1960 and 1963 greatly enhanced the
opportunity for county coordination of boundaries and limited the likelihood of further fragmentation. If the county could prove that its interests outweighed those of the annexing municipality, then the county could stymie the annexation scheme. Moreover, in the Graeler rulings and later decisions as well, the Missouri Supreme Court showed little sympathy for selfish municipal land grabs. For the next two decades the courts vetoed annexation proposals aimed primarily at enhancing the tax revenues of municipalities. Such boundary changes were deemed unreasonable and unnecessary and thus invalid. Given the Graeler rulings, Saint Louis County now enjoyed the upper hand in boundary adjustment disputes. County opposition to an annexation proposal generally doomed that proposal to defeat. In 1963 an expert on the municipal law of Missouri concluded, "Although it is doubtful that the second Graeler decision will entirely inhibit future annexations by St. Louis County municipalities, it is nonetheless clear that for all practical purposes such municipalities now have a very heavy burden to meet in establishing not merely that the particular annexation is reasonable and necessary with respect to the municipality and the area to be annexed, but also that it is consonant with the interests of St. Louis County as a whole."54 Henceforth, in boundary disputes the interests of the whole would prevail over the interests of the fragment.

Meanwhile, in 1963 the Missouri legislature amended the Sawyers Act to require approval of the voters in the area to be annexed prior to annexation. Eschewing unilateral boundary adjustments, Missouri’s lawmakers now mandated concurrent majorities in both the annexing city and the tract to be absorbed. Thus the legislature and the supreme court together eliminated the threat of annexation that had earlier balkanized local government in Saint Louis County. During the 1960s municipalities seeking boundary changes suffered repeated defeats, both at the polls and in the courts. The county’s most populous municipality, Florissant, lost a number of battles in the courts, and audacious little Champ could no longer pursue its selfish plans unobstructed.55 When the virtually uninhabited village attempted to annex two tracts totaling one thousand acres for further industrial development schemes, the Missouri Supreme Court proved an insuperable obstacle. “On the whole record, . . . both annexations are unreasonable,” the court held in 1969. “The village of Champ is not bursting at the seams. It is not growing into either area. . . . It has no present facilities or demonstrated future abilities for providing any sort of municipal services to the areas sought to be annexed.”56

While the supreme court was blasting the ambitions of Champ, some within the state legislature were attempting not only to slow the rate of new incorporations but to consolidate existing governmental units. Repeatedly during the
1960s, legislators submitted bills that would require consolidation or disincorporation of all county municipalities having a population under two thousand. The legislature never adopted the measures, but these bills aroused consternation since they threatened the existence of about half the villages in Saint Louis County. Missouri lawmakers did, however, reduce the barriers to municipal consolidation. Until 1961 state law required that mergers win the approval of two-thirds of those casting ballots in each of the merging municipalities. That year the requisite margin of approval was reduced to a simple majority.

Meanwhile, within Saint Louis County some were also urging a reduction in the number of municipalities. In 1967 County Supervisor Lawrence Roos added his voice to the chorus decrying fragmentation and called for the compulsory consolidation of the thirty county municipalities having fewer than one thousand inhabitants. If compulsory mergers proved impossible, Roos urged that at least the county council and county planning commission should assume the initiative in proposing, studying, and submitting schemes for consolidation. Some, however, were not willing to wait for county action. In 1967/68 a group called the Citizens Advisory Council for Consolidation and an University of Missouri study proposed the merger of the municipalities of Manchester, Winchester, Ellisville, and Ballwin. Repeating the arguments that foes of fragmentation had been presenting for decades, the university report claimed, “The consolidation . . . offers the best practical approach for citizens to take planned action to see that their governments are modernized to provide maximum services.” Moreover, proposals for the consolidation of Ferguson and Berkeley and Ferguson and Bridgeton stirred some interest in the northern half of the county.

Though the forces of consolidation were taking the offensive, the defenders of localism proved formidable foes. Speaking for the suburban cities and villages, the St. Louis County Municipal League opposed the bills to establish minimum population limits, claiming that ability to provide municipal services rather than number of inhabitants should be the standard used to determine whether a municipality should survive. Vincent A. Bayer, mayor of Greendale (population 1,100) and chair of the league’s merger committee, observed: “My study of cities in the county has led me to believe that it is true that many do not provide adequate services. But some smaller ones do a good job and some larger ones do not.” The league’s president seconded this position, claiming, “It is not necessarily bad to be small any more than it is necessarily good to be big.” Even the St. Louis Post-Dispatch expressed opposition to the idea of forced consolidation or disincorporation, arguing that there was “no need to eliminate any municipality that [met] its obligations to the county as a com-
munity.” If the city or village adequately provided basic services, “why condemn it to extinction?”

Plans for the merger of Manchester, Winchester, Ballwin, and Ellisville aroused similar criticisms. “In the smaller community people know their elected officials better and participate more closely in city government,” argued the mayor of Manchester. Expressing a view often repeated along the metropolitan fringe, his honor told reporters, “If they [suburbanites] liked the cold impersonal attitude of big city government they would have moved to or stayed in St. Louis.”

Faced with such opposition, the merger movement made little headway. Manchester, Winchester, Ballwin, and Ellisville remained separate municipalities as did Ferguson, Berkeley, and Bridgeton. In 1962 little Meadowbrook Downs consolidated with Overland, and two years later Marvin Terrace merged with Saint John as did Elmdale in 1965. Thus the number of municipalities declined but the great majority of governmental units survived. A continuing devotion to grass-roots rule was sufficient to stymie wholesale mergers. Fragmentation abated in the 1960s but consolidation advanced only slightly.

Though suburban Californians were not as prolific producers of municipalities as their Saint Louis counterparts, they too were attempting to curb the forces of fragmentation during the 1960s. Whereas the judiciary played a major role in the changes occurring in Missouri, in California the state legislature was to assume the lead in transforming the incorporation and annexation process. In Orange County and in the Saint Louis area, however, the arguments for change were similar. Government splintering had to be checked and some order imposed on the boundary adjustment process.

In 1960 the California legislature conducted a series of hearings to investigate the balkanization of suburbia and to consider how it could be halted. Meanwhile, the Governor’s Commission on Metropolitan Problems was studying the same question. At a final hearing of the legislature’s Interim Committee on Municipal and County Government, this commission, the League of California Cities, and the County Supervisors Association of California each presented its proposals for dealing with the seeming governmental chaos along the metropolitan fringe.

The three groups differed markedly on the issue of centralization versus local authority. Urging central control of incorporation and annexation, the governor’s commission suggested the creation of “a State Board to review local boundary changes.” This state board would “consider all proposals for annexation and incorporation, as well as for the consolidation and the formation of special districts” and would “be given power to approve or disapprove the pro-
posals brought before it."66 In other words, state officials in Sacramento would have the power to determine whether a community could become a municipality and whether territory could be added to a city. Understandably, this proposition did not please municipal or county officials. The County Supervisors Association strongly asserted that "the California tradition of local home rule and self-determination as applied to county government . . . be continued and strengthened" and contended that any state boundary commission should have only "advisory" powers.67 The localities should retain the final decision-making authority. The League of California Cities was less definite in its proposals, but its associate counsel reminded the legislators that "the idea of a State agency having any degree of control over local boundary changes [was] abhorrent to those in local government." Moreover, he indicated that a "large number of city officials . . . recommended a county agency as the proper agency for decision-making in connection with annexations."68

Ultimately, the legislature opted for such a county agency. In a compromise bill enacted in 1963, California's lawmakers mandated the creation of a Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) in each of the state's counties. These commissions had the power "to review and approve or disapprove with or without amendment, wholly, partially, or conditionally, proposals for the incorporation of cities, creation of special districts and the annexation of territory to cities or special districts."69 If the commission disapproved of a boundary change, that would end the incorporation or annexation procedure, though petitioners could resubmit proposals after a year's interval. The commission was to be composed of two county officers, two representatives of the cities within the county, and a fifth member chosen by the other four.70 Specifically, in Orange County the board of supervisors chose the county representatives and the Orange County League of Cities named the two members who spoke for the municipalities. Thus the commission supposedly balanced county and municipal interests, and its composition was intended to ensure that neither the supervisors nor the mayors would be able to dominate the annexation or incorporation process.

Through the creation of LAFCOs the California legislature clearly intended to achieve greater countywide coordination of annexation and incorporation initiatives. Rather than allow the helter-skelter carving up of the county into myriad municipalities, the state's lawmakers sought to impose a guiding hand on the boundary adjustment process. In Orange and other California counties, coordination would purportedly replace selfish fragmentation, and defensive dairy farmers would no longer be able to create protected municipal enclaves such as Dairyland and Cypress. With LAFCO monitoring local government or-
ganization in Orange County, rationality would supposedly supplant the unseemly race to the courthouse as the norm.

But reality differed somewhat from the reform ideal. In Orange County and elsewhere the creation of LAFCOs did not eliminate all border wars or result in a coordinated scheme of government organization. During the first decade of its existence, Orange County's LAFCO reviewed petitions for incorporation or annexation, but it did not create any plans for future government development. It responded rather than guided. It acted as a quasi-judicial body, hearing petitions and deciding on specific cases presented. Orange County's commission did not regard itself as a regulatory body charged with formulating guidelines and policies for prospective boundary adjustments. Moreover, the Orange County body as well as other LAFCOs were generally permissive rather than restrictive. Referring to petitions for incorporation and annexation, one account from 1970 noted that the LAFCOs "ordinarily ha[d] a poor record of resisting such requests."71

The shortcomings of the Orange County LAFCO were evident in the struggle over the incorporation of Irvine at the beginning of the 1970s. Like so many previous incorporation fights, the Irvine struggle was an old-fashioned battle to defend valuable turf from land-hungry municipal neighbors. Moreover, despite urgings to assume command of the situation, the Orange County LAFCO played a relatively passive role in the conflict, providing little guidance or direction.

By 1970 approximately seventy-six hundred persons already lived in the Irvine subdivisions and the Irvine Industrial Complex was attracting an increasing number of industrial taxpayers. Concerned about the future governmental status of the fast-growing area, in June 1970 about thirty community associations united to form the Council of the Communities of Irvine (CCI). These community associations enjoyed the backing of the powerful Irvine Company, which shared their concern about predatory municipalities eager to gobble up the ranch lands. John Burton, chair of the CCI, expressed the fears he shared with others when he told the Irvine World News, "Newport Beach has its eye on the Irvine Industrial Complex, Costa Mesa wants some of the County Airport area, Santa Ana can grow only one way—east into Irvine, and Tustin wants the Lighter Than Air station site. . . . We can consider studying incorporation now or we can do nothing at all, or we can incorporate later whatever is left to incorporate," Burton explained, "and if we try to do it later, we'll run the increased risk of our borders being annexed." Closing on an ominous note, he predicted, "We'll be forced to fight border wars."72

His worst fears were soon realized, for the city of Newport Beach applied to
LAFCO for the annexation of the 177-acre site of the Collins Radio plant in the Irvine Industrial Complex and that commission was to approve the boundary adjustment. Burton said he was "shocked at the imprudent action" of Newport Beach, calling it "unjust, unfair, selfish, and short-sighted." Moreover, the Newport Beach city council proposed a "summit conference" with the cities of Santa Ana, Costa Mesa, and Tustin, to consider boundary changes and the future status of Irvine, an action viewed with suspicion by Irvine leaders fearful of further land grabs. To thwart such raids by aggressive neighbors, in September 1970 the CCI petitioned LAFCO for incorporation of the city of Irvine.

Earlier that year the Irvine Company had submitted a large-scale plan for the development of the central section of the ranch, and that together with the incorporation petition aroused consternation through much of the county. Many observers believed that the Irvine Company was pushing incorporation so that it would no longer be subject to the interference of the county planning department or the veto power of the board of supervisors but would be able to do whatever it liked, operating through a rubber-stamp city planning agency. One planning firm summed up the prevailing fears of surrounding communities when it observed: "Action on this [incorporation] request will determine whether future planning and development activities of the Irvine Company will be subject to approval by representatives of the 1.4 million residents of Orange County or by representatives of the 7,000 residents of Irvine." The adjoining city of Santa Ana was especially fearful of the consequences of the incorporation scheme and hired a Chicago consulting firm to recommend a proper course of action. Included in the planning consultants' report was an appeal to LAFCO to take charge and deal forcefully with the problem. The report noted that LAFCO would play "the key role in the incorporation of the Irvine property and in the future governmental organization of the entire county" and urged the commission to deny the petition and undertake "a positive program . . . to recommend a system of government, including boundaries for the Irvine property." According to the consultants, "the commission must act as an initiator of policy rather than in response to implicit policies resulting from petitions such as the Irvine petition."

A county planning department staff report likewise urged LAFCO to stand up to the Irvine Company and lead rather than follow. It recommended that the commission reject incorporation and annexation applications relating to the Irvine Ranch property until the community was more fully developed. Moreover, LAFCO's own executive director, Richard Turner, recommended that the commission deny the incorporation bid until it determined the ultimate boundaries of the cities adjacent to Irvine. Like other planners, Turner urged
Maintaining the Balance of Power

LAFCO to guide governmental development rather than defer passively to the petitions for self-determination submitted by Irvine residents.77

Those residents, however, were to triumph, for in February 1971 Orange County's LAFCO rejected the advice of its executive director and endorsed the petitioners' request for incorporation. Two of the five LAFCO members opposed the incorporation petition, but even they were motivated more by political opposition to the Irvine Company than by concern for long-range governmental planning.78 LAFCO's chair expressed the prevailing sentiment when he said, "I believe it should be up to the people of the area if they want to assume the problems and responsibilities of establishing a city of their own."79 In a clash between county oversight and local self-determination, the latter still prevailed. Despite the creation of LAFCO, many Orange County leaders felt local residents should continue to have control over the carving up of the county.

In the Irvine incorporation battle, the Orange County LAFCO fell short of the dreams of those favoring central coordination of local government organization. Yet in 1971 California's legislature forced LAFCOs throughout the state to play a more dynamic role in charting the future course of government. The state lawmakers directed each LAFCO to formulate a plan for the prospective development of local governments and to specify the spheres of influence of cities and special districts to ensure a more orderly and predictable pattern of annexation. The LAFCO would determine what unincorporated territory lay within the sphere of influence of each county municipality, thus defining the zone appropriate for annexation to each city.80 Henceforth, Tustin was not to annex land within the Irvine sphere of influence and Irvine similarly was not to invade Tustin's growing space.

In the future, then, Orange's LAFCO would be required to draft a countywide plan for governmental development, but during the first decade of its existence it did not revolutionize local government organization in the county. It did not assume dictatorial sway or overturn traditional suburban practice. In California as in Missouri, lawmakers curbed the tendency toward fragmentation without substituting heavy-handed central control. County and municipal officials convinced California's legislature to reject proposals for a state agency to determine boundary questions. Boundary adjustment would remain a local issue. Moreover, the Orange County LAFCO did not allow county planners to draw the boundaries of municipalities. The initiative remained with the municipalities and community residents. They petitioned for incorporation or annexation, and LAFCO responded to their petitions rather than issue dictates about future boundary changes or incorporation schemes. California lawmakers provided for review of grass-roots proposals; they did not stamp out such initiatives.
Elsewhere, as well, legislators were concerned about imposing order on the process of boundary adjustment. For example, in 1968 the Michigan legislature authorized creation of the State Boundary Commission to review proposals for incorporation and consolidation, and two years later the state's solons extended the commission's authority to annexation petitions as well. This commission included three gubernatorial appointees and two members chosen by the presiding probate judge of the county in which the petitions under consideration arose.81 Thus Michigan, unlike California, opted for a measure of statewide control, but still retained a local voice in the deciding of boundary questions. Moreover, if the boundary commission approved the petitions, then the annexation or incorporation requests would be submitted to local voters, who would ultimately determine boundary adjustments.

During the 1960s Michigan, California, and Missouri were, then, retreating from the chaotic first-come, first-serve pattern of boundary change and incorporation that had prevailed during the decade and a half following World War II. Fragmentation was a dirty word and coordination and cooperation were the emerging fashion. Even in states where there was no dramatic change in the boundary adjustment process, many public officials were lambasting suburbia's legacy of divisiveness. For example, on Long Island Suffolk County executive H. Lee Dennison was expressing an opinion heard in an increasing number of state capitals and county courthouses. "Unquestionably, better public service could be provided at less cost by fewer agencies," he wrote in 1962, and throughout the decade he continued to decry "an inherited tradition of isolated, self-sufficient, independence, nurtured over the years for local political advantage under a slogan of local home rule."82

Yet devotion to this slogan remained strong, and a Suffolk County newspaper columnist responded to Dennison's cries for centralization by attacking "the starry-eyed county executive" who sought "to eliminate the safeguards of grass-roots town government."83 Given such attitudes, in neither Suffolk nor any of the other emerging post-suburban counties was consolidation proceeding at a rapid rate. Fragmentation was being kept in check, but that did not mean that post-suburban areas were opting for the opposite extreme of centralization. Saint Louis County remained divided and Orange County's LAFCO refused to devise an authoritative plan for future incorporations and annexations. As they fashioned a government structure suitable for a world partially suburban and partially urban, post-suburban residents were eschewing the worst of the suburban past without abandoning the perceived advantages of small-scale government.
DISCARDING THE METROPOLITAN VISION

Accompanying the assault on fragmentation was a push toward metropoli-

tanism. In the minds of many urban planners, business leaders, and academics

of the 1960s, the solution to metropolitan ills was increased ties between the

suburbs and the central city so that they could together tackle the problems

plaguing urban areas. Proponents of metropolitan unity repeatedly claimed

that the city and the suburbs were part of one social and economic whole and

only artificial political boundaries separated them. What was needed was a new

metropolitan vision to overcome barriers inherited from the past. For many re-

form-minded citizens a curb on fragmentation was not sufficient. What was

needed was to reunite the city of Saint Louis and Saint Louis County, to

strengthen ties between Oakland County and Detroit, and to establish an au-

thority to coordinate government on Long Island and in New York City. Rather

than think of themselves as suburbanites, residents of the fringe areas had to

conceive of themselves as citizens of a single metropolis of interrelated govern-

mental units.

A smattering of victories buoyed the hopes of metropolitan reformers.

Nashville combined with surrounding Davidson County, and Jacksonville like-

wise absorbed the previously unincorporated areas of Duval County. But per-

haps the most notable example of metropolitan consolidation was the union of

Indianapolis and Marion County. In 1969 Indianapolis Republican leaders

fashioned a scheme known as Unigov that extended the city’s jurisdiction to

virtually the entire county, boosting the city’s population by 60 percent and

adding thousands of suburban Republicans to the Indianapolis electorate,

thereby ensuring the perpetuation of GOP rule. A cooperative Republican state

legislature authorized this reform without referring it to the local voters. By

avoiding a popular referendum, sponsors of Unigov were able to impose their

scheme on a skeptical citizenry.

Elsewhere, however, metropolitan reformers were less successful in bypass-

ing the popular will, and their campaigns for metropolitan unity faltered when

confronted with the realities of the emerging post-suburban world. Despite re-

peated efforts to weave links between city and suburb, at the close of the 1960s

Oakland, Nassau, and Saint Louis Counties were socially and economically

more self-sufficient than they had ever been and as dedicated as ever to their

governmental independence from the central city. Metropolitanism was not to

triumph in the post-suburban world. Basic to that world was the desire to pre-

serve the best of suburbia while accepting necessary compromises in the face

of growing urbanization. Balance was essential. Metropolitanism, however, re-
quired acceptance of the notion that the post-suburban counties were, in fact, part of a big city and responsible for dealing with its problems. This vision was unacceptable, for it tipped the scales too far toward the side of centralization and threatened the traditional suburban ideal.

Nowhere did the battle over metropolitanism rage so loudly or long as in Saint Louis County. Since the early twentieth century the division between the city of Saint Louis and the county had been the subject of heated debate. Business leaders in the city had long argued that the city-county split slowed economic growth in Saint Louis, causing the city to fall behind its urban rivals throughout the nation. As early as 1926 a proposal to consolidate city and county under one city government was decisively rejected by county voters, and four years later the county's electorate also defeated a plan for a federative metropolis combining city and county under a single supergovernment but allowing existing municipalities to maintain control over certain local functions.84

Following World War II the all-too-evident decay of the central city stirred renewed demands for metropolitan reform. The city of Saint Louis was losing population and blight was seriously eroding property values in the urban core. Concerned leaders identified various causes for this decline, one being the governmental fragmentation of the metropolitan area. Surrounded by hostile suburbs and unable to extend its boundaries, Saint Louis could not embrace the new taxable wealth of the metropolitan fringe. Instead, its tax base shrank as money moved to the suburbs. Not only did governmental fragmentation sap the strength of the central city, it also supposedly slowed growth in the seemingly vital county. According to some business leaders, the ninety-eight municipalities in the county were unable to work together to promote economic development but instead competed for tax dollars to the detriment of the area's business growth. Saint Louis was on the skids and metropolitan reform seemed to be one means for turning the city around.

In 1954 voters in the city and county had approved the creation of the Metropolitan Saint Louis Sewer District to assume responsibility for constructing, maintaining, and operating sewer facilities for both the city and county.85 But by the close of the 1950s advocates of metropolitan reform wanted a more far-reaching change in the governmental structure. Consequently, they proposed the creation of the multipurpose Greater Saint Louis City-County District with areawide responsibility for seven functions: formulation of a comprehensive master plan; traffic control on major thoroughfares; regulation of mass transit; promotion of the local economy; supervision of police training and communications; civil defense; and sewerage.86 Existing municipalities would survive and continue to regulate local streets and provide such services as police and
fire protection and garbage collection. The multipurpose district was intended to act as a metropolitan government, drawing the city and county together in an experiment in areawide rule.

Before the district plan could go into effect, it had to win the approval of a majority of the voters in the county as well as a majority of the city's electorate. To garner these concurrent majorities, supporters of the plan organized a vigorous referendum campaign. Supporting the reform proposal was an elite corps of business and civic leaders. The campaign committee included the president of the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, the presidents of both the city and county chambers of commerce, and a past president of the League of Women Voters, an organization that consistently rallied behind reform crusades in the Saint Louis area. Moreover, Civic Progress, Incorporated, a group of downtown big-business moguls dedicated to urban revitalization, also backed the plan as did both the metropolitan daily newspapers. Many of the most powerful people in the Saint Louis area thus sided with the metropolitan cause.

Yet prior to the November 1959 referendum on the plan, hostile county residents launched a counterattack. The district plan smacked too much of big government and offended the village ideal of traditional suburbia. Moreover, the proposed strengthening of ties with the city of Saint Louis stirred fears that the suburban municipalities were about to be sacrificed on the altar of downtown interests. The whole scheme smelled of the big city, and that was an odor that thousands of county residents could not tolerate. The Citizens Committee for Self-Government, led by Brentwood mayor A. Ray Parker, responded by urging "leaders of all of the County's 98 communities . . . to set up their own town meeting . . . so that everyone [would] have the opportunity to gather and express their disapproval of the proposal in the old-fashioned town meeting manner." Each town meeting would also appoint block workers to be known as town criers. "The town criers will move up and down their respective blocks ringing a bell, which we will furnish, to alert the people against the evils of the District Plan," Parker explained. Like their colonial ancestors, Saint Louis Countians were, then, to take to the streets and warn of the forces of tyranny threatening their communities. According to Mayor Parker, warnings were necessary, for the district plan would result in "exorbitant taxation, duplication of services, and concentration of power in big government." He and his colleagues were prepared to fight against these evils and to ensure "popular and democratic self-government in St. Louis County."

Within the individual cities and villages, opposition groups also developed to battle those who seemingly threatened suburban autonomy. For example, the president of the Webster Groves Task Force for Self-Government reminded
voters: "Our local government is tailored to fit the needs of the citizens in our own locality and we believe has been doing quite an efficient job." Moreover, he urged Webster Groves residents to "read the fine print in the District Plan," which purportedly gave "extraordinary power to another group of politicians far removed from local communities." Similarly, the Gravois Township Republican Men's Organization warned: "We do not want to lose sight of the very great advantage we county residents have in the services of our local citizens in governing our own communities. We also have the right to speak out, be heard and be governed by our own neighbors who are well acquainted with our problems. This participation and citizen action is discouraged by . . . the present District Plan." 

County newspapers joined in the assault on metropolitanism, printing one editorial after another exhorting voters to repel the big-city forces of amalgamation. The Brentwood Scope accused proponents of the district plan of attempting "to destroy the system of American democracy and local self-government . . . in the County . . . They want us to give up our right to govern ourselves[,] to place the County in the hands of the St. Louis political machine." The Claytonian-University City Tribune warned: "When a super governmental structure is established it will be only a decade until a monster may be created." Meanwhile, the Webster Groves News-Times labeled the plan a "sugar-coated merger." "A vote for the District Plan on November 3 will be a little like taking castor oil from a honey jar: By the time you find out what's really there, it's too late," argued the Webster Groves editor. "And," he warned his readers, "the Metro medicine is forever." Likewise, the Watchman-Advocate of Clayton claimed that the metropolitan district was not "just another layer of government" but "a complete superstructure." It predicted that voters would reject the proposal, leaving "professional do-gooders" to lick "their wounds, while feasting on crow and at the same time casting their eyes about for another cause to espouse." It was clear by election day that the weekly newspapers of the Saint Louis area had, in the words of one reporter, "formed a Rock of Gibraltar against the Metropolitan District Plan." 

Joining in the denunciations were the county's most important governmental groups and figures. The Saint Louis County League of Municipalities, representing sixty-seven government units in the county, voted without dissent to "condemn" the district plan, adopting a resolution that warned of the "endless confusion between the various governmental agencies" that would result from implementation of the reform scheme. County supervisor James McNary added his voice to those of the nay-sayers, claiming that the plan was "a mere foothold to establish the means of effecting eventual all-out city-county merger! . . . Vote
No—to protect your county's progress from strangulation by this costly added layer of government which is an all-powerful, potential octopus," the county chieftain told his constituents.94 A few county leaders did support the plan. The mayor of University City was a backer of the district scheme, though his municipality officially sided with the opposition.95 Three members of the Clayton Board of Aldermen also endorsed the reform, noting that it had been recommended "by unbiased experts in the fields of government and economics."

"We must stop looking at local problems with a magnifying glass and survey the area as a whole," argued one of the Clayton officials.96

These metro-minded Claytonians, however, were in the minority, and on election day the scheme suffered defeat in the county by a three-to-one margin. Only 39 of the county's 353 precincts backed the plan, and it carried none of the county's 16 townships. Brentwood's Mayor Parker claimed that the election returns "pointedly reflect[ed] an inherent dislike by [the] American voter of large, centralized government," and his judgment seemed to correctly sum up the feelings of county residents.97 Throughout the referendum campaign, county leaders had appealed to the suburban devotion to grass-roots rule by friends and neighbors. They had dredged up all the standard arguments that had appealed to suburbanites for decades, and the election returns demonstrated that those arguments were as attractive to the electorate in 1959 as in 1929. By the beginning of the 1960s Saint Louis Countians were willing to compromise the suburban ideal to allow some degree of county coordination and to permit the creation of a single-purpose metropolitan sewer district. But more radical experiments in government centralization were taboo.

In the early 1960s county voters were to make this clear once again when metropolitan reformers presented yet another scheme for governmental reorganization. Immediately following the defeat of the district plan, proponents of an alternative blueprint for the consolidation of the city and county launched their campaign for change. Labeled the "borough plan," this scheme would place the city and county under a single unit of government known as the Municipal County of Saint Louis. This municipal county was to be divided into twenty-two boroughs, each with a borough council exercising very limited powers. These councils would be able to advise the central government about local questions, submit bills to the central legislative council, and wield a veto power over some zoning changes.98 Beyond that, power was vested in the mayor and legislative council of the municipal county. The borough proposal thus provided for a much more centralized structure of rule than the defeated district plan. This new scheme would destroy all existing municipalities and substitute one consolidated government ruling over both city and county.
Advocates of the scheme organized the Committee for the Borough Plan to Reunite Saint Louis and sought to achieve their goal through an amendment to Missouri’s state constitution. Such an amendment, however, required the approval of Missouri voters, and prior to the 1962 referendum on the issue, both friends and foes of the plan engaged in a heated campaign that repeated much of the rhetoric of the 1959 struggle. Backers of the reform plan faced an uphill fight, for this scheme enjoyed less support from the civic and economic elite than did the district proposal. The St. Louis Globe-Democrat gave the borough plan token endorsement but the Post-Dispatch denounced the scheme, claiming it was “not at all necessary to abolish all the governments in city and county—the good and the strong along with the weak and the ineffective—in order to create a device for handling metropolitan problems.”99 Likewise, the League of Women Voters did not rally behind the plan nor did the city chamber of commerce nor any powerful business or political leaders.100

In contrast, the opposition was loud and vigorous. Led by a group known as Citizens for Home Rule and Opposed to the Borough Plan, foes of the scheme blitzed the county with dire warnings. Mayor F. William Human of Clayton headed this citizens group and it had the strong backing of the county chamber of commerce. Human argued that the plan “would completely erase forever many communities such as Clayton, Webster Groves, Kirkwood, and University City” and in their stead would create “an impersonal unwieldy governmental setup that would be far removed from the wishes and feelings of [the county’s] citizens.” Many criticized the attempt to foist this plan on the people of the city and county through a constitutional amendment. By doing so, the backers of the scheme were allowing voters throughout Missouri to determine the governmental fate of metropolitan Saint Louis rather than reserving that prerogative to the city and county electorate. “I do not believe any proposal has ever been placed before the people of this state more objectionable than this one,” cried the president of the county chamber of commerce, who further denounced the plan’s “flagrant disregard for the rights of more than 1,500,000 citizens and taxpayers who reside in the City and County.” Similarly, a past president of the Missouri League of Municipalities denounced the proposal as “contrary to the principles of local self-government, self-determination and Home Rule.”101

County municipalities and periodicals also lambasted the supposedly tyrannical scheme. The city of Shrewsbury’s board of aldermen denounced the plan and urged local citizens “to protect the principles of home rule and self-government.”102 By the end of October 1962, just a week before the referendum, the governing bodies of more than sixty Saint Louis County municipalities had adopted similar resolutions.103 The Saint Louis County Observer, published in
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Maplewood, concurred with the plan's foes, referring to the proposed municipal county as "a governmental monstrosity." Repeating a cliche of traditional suburban ideology, the Observer editorialized, "The people in St. Louis County approved incorporation of present municipal governments because . . . they wanted to keep close watch on the kind of administrative functioning they expected and for that matter, they were promised." The borough plan would violate this article of suburban faith and create a government absolutely contradictory to suburban beliefs. Meanwhile, the Watchman-Advocate of Clayton rejected the notion that city and county residents should "abrogate their right of self-determination or that they should embrace the first and worst thing that [came] along simply for the sake of doing something." The St. Louis County Medical Society Bulletin added its influence to the attack on the metro monster when it diagnosed the borough plan as infected with "the chronic and acute illness of bigness." "We have always held that governmental units can be so big that they easily become unwieldy, expensive, inefficient, slow and ineffective," announced the bulletin.

With such angry denunciations of the scheme appearing in editorial columns and city council minutes, it was not surprising that on November 6, 1962, the borough plan went down to devastating defeat. County voters opposed it by a four-to-one margin, and statewide, the vote was three to one against the plan. Again as in 1959, metropolitan reform failed to win a majority in any of the county's townships. "We feel the vote demonstrates once again the feeling of our citizens that they believe in free choice of government through the free expression of the citizens to be governed," observed the triumphant Mayor Human. And in its postmortem, the St. Louis County Observer concluded: "It is our conviction that people in the County . . . want to retain the identities of the communities in which they live [and] want to retain close contacts with their respective governmental officials."

Following the borough plan's defeat, county leaders did not, however, embrace a policy of total isolation. Instead, they indicated their desire to cooperate with the city of Saint Louis and with one another without opting for the extreme of consolidation or merger. Mayor Human explained that he did not "intend to take this victory as a mandate for the status quo" but pledged "to support those proposals which offer[ed] a realistic, acceptable answer to metropolitan needs." John Dowling, the chair of the county council, likewise proposed cooperation among the county government, the city of Saint Louis, and the county's municipalities to solve joint problems. In a letter to Normandy mayor Walter Lundholm, president of the St. Louis County Municipal League, Dowling urged the county and municipal league to "collaborate with officials..."
of the City of St. Louis on all matters . . . of metropolitan-wide importance.” Mayor Lundholm responded by assuring Dowling of the league’s willingness to cooperate “in any program designed to provide the people of [the] metropolitan area with better areawide services.” Similarly, the newly elected county supervisor Lawrence Roos promised “to work out with Mayor Tucker (of St. Louis) and officials of municipalities of the County a program of coordination and cooperation in connection with certain area-wide functions in which all of the local governments [had] a common interest.”

By the close of 1962, then, cooperation, not consolidation, was the watchword. In both the 1959 and 1962 contests, foes of reform had spouted the standard suburban ideological slogans of home rule, small-scale government, and administration by friends and neighbors, and the election returns had proved that this rhetoric still swayed voters. Despite mounting criticisms of fragmentation and a gradual increase in county authority, the suburban faith remained strong, and adherents to that faith would not tolerate the heresy of metropolitanism. In fact, talk of metropolitan government in the Saint Louis area waned after 1962. Never again would anyone be foolish enough to seriously propose the consolidation of the city and county under a single government. The county and its municipalities had reaffirmed once and for all their independence. They were willing to cooperate if it would result in some demonstrable improvement in services, but they would cooperate as equals, not as subordinate offspring. The county supervisor, president of the County League of Municipalities, and mayor of Saint Louis were seeking links with one another, but none was willing to defer to the superior position of the others.

Elsewhere friends of metropolitan reform were placing their hopes on councils of governments. The typical council of government included representatives of counties and municipalities from throughout the metropolitan area and was dedicated to a cooperative and consolidated attack on metropolitan problems. It was a voluntary association with only advisory powers, a United Nations of local units of government. Yet devotees of the metropolitan vision believed that such councils might lay the foundation for more thoroughgoing metropolitan reforms of the type proposed in the Saint Louis area. They might be the first step in a process of metropolitan reorganization. In 1968 the federal government bolstered these emerging councils of governments by giving them authority to review all federal grant proposals submitted by local governments within the metropolitan area. Known as A-95 reviews, this procedure made the councils clearinghouses for federal funding and was intended to encourage metropolitan-wide planning.

Yet councils of governments faced often insuperable opposition from foes of
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metropolitanism. In emerging post-suburban areas, local officials viewed them with suspicion and were willing to back them only if the councils could produce concrete benefits. If metropolitan cooperation paid off in better services, it was an acceptable compromise of traditional suburban ideology. Unity for the sake of unity, however, was unappealing to most mayors and county officials. In the end, the rocky career of most councils of governments only proved that suburban devotion to small-scale, intimate rule remained much more powerful than belief in regional government or metropolitan union.

This was evident in the conflict over the Metropolitan Regional Council. Created in 1956 at the behest of New York City’s mayor Robert Wagner, the council attempted to build bridges between public officials in the New York metropolitan area to enable them to work together to tackle problems affecting them all. As Mayor Wagner told the assembled representatives of local governments at the initial meeting, “We can identify and define more clearly the nature of our mutual problems[,] and] if we should seek the assistance of the Federal government in certain cases, the combined action of all our communities will give us a power that no one of us could wield individually.”

This group, however, was not to be a unit of government with any coercive powers. The council’s original steering committee specified, “The organization is voluntary in character, both in composition and in binding policy determination.” Moreover, it was to respect “the principle of home rule and the integrity of the communities in the region.” It offered, then, government leaders from throughout the metropolitan region an opportunity to talk together about problems and use their combined clout to wrench money from Washington. But its members discussed rather than dictated, and throughout its history, the council was primarily dedicated to researching metropolitan problems, disseminating information to metropolitan counties and municipalities, and establishing contact among the region’s public officials.

In 1958, however, Mayor Wagner initiated an effort to achieve legal status for the Metropolitan Regional Council. He and like-minded leaders wanted the New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut legislatures to formally recognize the council as a federation of county and municipal governments with authority to engage in research and foster cooperation among the governments of the metropolitan area. Moreover, the council would have a full-time staff and be authorized to levy a tax on each member government proportionate to the population of that governmental unit.

Though it provided for a seemingly modest change in the status of the council, the proposal aroused a furor among Long Island leaders who felt it was the first step by a predatory New York City to swallow them alive. Nassau County
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executive A. Holly Patterson refused to support the move, and in 1959 he told other metropolitan leaders that his county would never participate in a council that enjoyed such legal status. He stated point blank that Nassau would never join "any junior United Nations or super-duper government." "Nassau County will cooperate with one and all but will surrender its autonomy to no one," Patterson announced. Moreover, he declared his opposition to "putting another overcoat of government on an already smothering taxpayer . . . [which might lead to] an obliteration of county boundaries." Nassau County continued to participate in the council, but it also persisted in opposing any legal status for the body.

The debate over legal status for the Metropolitan Regional Council continued through the early 1960s. Long Island leaders believed that New York City was seeking to create a regional planning body that would gradually acquire authority to override the decisions of local planning agencies. Mayor Wagner, the council's chief sponsor, fueled these fears when in 1962 he wrote in the New York Times Magazine of the New York of the future as a "super-city," requiring a "supergovernment to which all local government in the area—along with the three state governments of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut—will have to yield some of their present authority." Moreover, false reports and exaggerated rumors reinforced the mounting opposition among Long Islanders. In October 1960 the Long Island Press incorrectly claimed that if the council were granted legal status, then membership by Nassau, Suffolk, and other area counties would be "compulsory" and that New York City would "hold the balance of power in the Council." The threat of a metro monster seemed to be looming large, and a fervent band of Long Island citizens was ready to rally to the defense of local autonomy.

The fight over the Metropolitan Regional Council reached its climax in Suffolk County in May 1962. County Executive H. Lee Dennison, a Democrat in a predominantly Republican county, had asked the Republican-controlled board of supervisors to endorse an agreement among the metropolitan-area counties and municipalities calling for legal status for the Metropolitan Regional Council. At the board meeting to consider the endorsement, Dennison faced a barrage of protest. The Committee to Protect Suffolk County from Metropolitan Regional Government was perhaps the most vehement in its denunciations, but its arguments were supported by the Citizens Planning Council of Huntington, the Long Island Federation of Women's Clubs, and the right-wing Young Americans for Freedom. Foes of the metropolitan body also read a letter from Robert Moses, chair of the Long Island State Park Commission, which denounced the creation of "any more super agencies." In a telegram to
the board, State senator Elisha Barrett urged Suffolk to “avoid any entangling alliances with [the county’s] all but bankrupt city neighbor” but to opt instead for “cooperation without affiliation.” At the hearing Arthur Cromarty, chair of both the board of supervisors and the county Republican party, recited the suburban credo, asserting his belief in “home rule and in grass-roots government.” Moreover, he linked Dennison with his fellow Democrat Mayor Wagner in a plot to foist metropolitan rule on Suffolk Countians. Cromarty charged that the metropolitan council was “the first step toward total centralization of all government under a huge bureaucracy directed by political appointees” and argued that New York City wanted “to take over control of Suffolk County . . . and make the Eastern seaboard one unit of government with appointed bosses responsible to no one.”

The county planning director, a former president of the Suffolk County League of Women Voters, and Bernard Hillenbrand, executive director of the National Association of County Officials, spoke on behalf of the metropolitan council, but their arguments were pallid compared to the fervent warnings of the council’s foes. Hillenbrand later recalled, “I never had witnessed such wild, irrational, yet apparently well planned outbursts.”

At the close of the hearing, the board of supervisors voted unanimously to sever ties with the council, claiming that “the best interests of the County [would] be served and promoted by not participating.” Following the defeat in Suffolk, the executive secretary of the Metropolitan Regional Council lamented that the council’s opponents were “dealing with something out of Fairyland, not reality.” But Cromarty and his allies remained firm in their beliefs, fantasy or not. When testifying before Congress in 1963, Cromarty repeated his charges against the council, attacking New York City politicians who sought to “annex . . . Suffolk and saddle [it] . . . with the city’s vice, corruption and welfare problems.” The Suffolk County leader told the members of Congress, “Only the local official can accurately gauge the importance of a project and only a watchful eye can ferret out waste and corruption.”

Though Long Island’s most widely read newspaper, Newsday, dismissed the nay-saying Suffolk County supervisors as “rural reactionaries,” other local newspapers supported Cromarty’s stance. “Perhaps it is stuff and nonsense to believe that the regional council envisions setting itself up as a super-government,” the Port Jefferson Times editorialized, “but the straws in the wind indicate that the city constantly wishes to exercise greater influence on its neighbors.” Moreover, it claimed the “sprawling regional council . . . would have New York City dominating the entire area to the benefit of New York City.” Likewise, the Smithtown Messenger suggested that legal status for the regional
council “would be a step in the direction of setting up a super-government. . . . It would be only the opening wedge in ultimately making our county an appendage to New York City and all that metropolitan control involves.”

After the 1962 debacle, the Metropolitan Regional Council remained in existence but acted only as a relatively weak clearinghouse for the exchange of information among regional public officials. No supercity or supergovernment was to assume control of the New York City area and threaten the authority of Nassau or Suffolk. The boundary between the city and Nassau remained unbreachable, and the two Long Island counties were not to become subordinate units in a grand metropolitan scheme. Instead, on Long Island as in Saint Louis County, leaders of the emerging post-suburban domain were jealously defending their prerogatives and repelling the central city’s overtures for closer links. The rhetoric of grass-roots rule survived in Suffolk and Nassau as well as Saint Louis County, and what some deemed a fairyland ideology of autonomy thwarted the metropolitan vision of Mayor Wagner and his ilk.

During the late 1960s a similar clash between local officials and supporters of a metropolitan council of governments occurred in Oakland County. As early as 1954 supervisors from the various counties of southeastern Michigan had met to discuss the water supply problems that plagued the area. Recognizing the need for a permanent forum for the exchange of information and opinions, they formed the Supervisors Inter-County Committee (SICC), which was granted legal status by the state legislature in 1957. The committee consisted of forty-two representatives, seven from each of the region’s six counties, who met once a month. The group lobbied for the passage of state legislation favorable to the region and sponsored research studies on sewerage and water supply in southeastern Michigan. It was, then, a voluntary association of officials dedicated to furthering the common goals of the six area counties without infringing on the powers of those counties.

By the mid 1960s, however, some metropolitan leaders believed a new umbrella agency for the region was needed. Municipalities, including the city of Detroit, had no direct representation on the SICC and that body had no authority to coordinate the efforts of special-purpose districts. Moreover, many Detroit-area leaders complained that the SICC and the separate Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Commission needed to combine their efforts to avoid wasteful duplication. A joint initiative by the two regional groups seemed more sensible than each pursuing a parallel, or possibly overlapping, course of action.

Consequently, in 1965 a Committee of One Hundred, consisting of public officials from throughout the region, suggested the creation of “a voluntary association of local governments” to supplant the SICC and “assume the func-
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ations and projects of the existing Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission." In its report on the proposed association, the Committee of One Hundred observed "that the more than four hundred local governments, ... in Southeast Michigan form[ed] one regional community" with a citizenry "bound together physically, economically, and socially." But given the existence of "many separate, yet interrelated, local governments," the committee faced the dilemma of how "to retain local home rule while combining [the area's] total resources for regional challenges. ... We believe that the expansion of effective voluntary cooperation among our local governments is the best solution for dealing with this dilemma," concluded the Committee of One Hundred.124

By 1967 a number of the region's governments had agreed to membership in the new association, and on January 1, 1968, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) was formally established, superseding the SICC. At the same time, the Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission became SEMCOG's planning division. Each governmental unit, no matter its population, sent one voting representative to SEMCOG's general assembly, with the exception of the city of Detroit and Oakland and Macomb Counties, which had two votes each, and Wayne County, the most populous unit, which had four votes.125 Like the SICC, SEMCOG was intended to serve as a lobbying and research group that could further the mutual goals of the region's many governments. Moreover, it conducted the A-95 reviews of federal grant proposals submitted by area governments. It did not, however, have any authority to dictate policy.

Despite its limited powers, SEMCOG aroused the same fears that metropolitan proposals had stirred on Long Island and in Saint Louis County. Some Oakland Countians viewed it as the first step in a metro takeover of local government and were not reluctant to express their misgivings. In the Royal Oak municipal election of November 1967, membership in SEMCOG, according to a local newspaper, "produced, by far, the widest split among the 15 contesting for city commission seats and the mayor post." Some candidates favored the regional group, others opposed it, and a few expressed mixed feelings, but virtually all made it clear that they did not want to proceed too far down the path of metropolitanism. "I think getting into the council of governments set up ... is the worst thing Royal Oak ever did," announced one mayoral candidate. With a typically suburban aversion for large-scale government, he explained, "You don't need a great big agency." A commission candidate likewise observed, "[SEM]COG's so big it looks like a scary monster. It looks like 'big brother' to me." In things like [SEM]COG you're bypassing local autonomy," warned a winning contestant for a commission seat, and a fellow victor ex-
pressed mixed feelings when he noted, “On a voluntary basis, it’s great. But we have to be awful careful of it growing, without realizing it.”

Royal Oak’s mayor L. Curtis Potter took a favorable stance on SEMCOG, attacking the “isolationism” of the association’s opponents. But even he placated his constituents by assuring them that SEMCOG would “only be a coordinating agency, not a controlling one. . . . Control will be in the general assembly where every unit will have a vote,” Potter explained. “This will defend against a big city ruling the roost.”

In part, the antagonism to SEMCOG arose from fears that it might encourage social programs fostering the migration of low-income Detroit blacks to the suburbs. The Detroit riot of 1967 heightened the already tense race relations in southeastern Michigan, leaving white suburbanites suspicious and fearful of any additional links with the seemingly threatening big city. A Royal Oak mayoral candidate warned that SEMCOG could “be used as a big club to beat local cities into submission,” and as evidence he cited a recent threat from Detroit’s mayor that if the suburbs did not provide more low-cost housing, Detroit might cut off Oakland’s water supply and sewage treatment services. Moreover, in 1967 the Detroit News noted that foes of SEMCOG had equated the regional association “with a vast conspiracy to eliminate local government, to racially integrate every hamlet and to stifle individual freedom.” The News assured its readers that those who claimed that SEMCOG was “a tool to force integration, higher taxes and school district changes” were “either totally misinformed or deliberately dishonest.”

During the following few years, however, criticisms of SEMCOG mounted, with some attacking the agency as a malevolent centralizer and others contending it nurtured a do-nothing bureaucracy. In fact, a number of Oakland communities rejected affiliation with the organization. Pontiac, the county seat and largest city, never joined SEMCOG and booming Southfield likewise did not opt to participate. In 1969 Southfield’s mayor Norman Feder said he favored joining but suspected the city council opposed membership. “Frankly our council hasn’t talked about it for nearly three years,” admitted Mayor Feder. Other Oakland cities talked a great deal about the metropolitan association. In 1969 Troy angrily withdrew from SEMCOG, indicting it as a “monolithic extra layer of government seeking to usurp the powers of local governments.” Troy mayor Jules R. Famularo claimed, “SEMCOG usurps home rule powers.” But he also expressed an increasingly familiar complaint about the seeming inactivity of the organization, when he concluded, “All they do is piddle around.” By 1970 Hazel Park and Clawson had withdrawn as well. Hazel
Park’s mayor explained his city’s departure, noting, “There was the general feeling we just weren’t getting that much out of it, that it’s too big and too diversified.” A Hazel Park city council member complained, “Our dues go toward paying figureheads who do nothing.” But he also raised the standard complaint that SEMCOG was “a stepping-stone to supergovernment.” And in 1970 Clawson’s chief executive explained his city’s withdrawal: “We had hoped for a solution to our refuse disposal problems with SEMCOG’s help. It never came. We couldn’t give a reasonable explanation to our taxpayers for staying in.”

That same year Royal Oak also abandoned the metropolitan association. One member of the city commission labeled SEMCOG “a dynasty of empire builders” and said he voted in favor of withdrawing from the organization “because of my lasting distrust of bureaucracy.” He further contended that the people in charge of SEMCOG were “extremely liberal in social orientation.” “I just don’t believe in a lot of vast social programs where everything is run by a director,” he confessed. Royal Oak’s mayor attacked SEMCOG as “another layer of government which perform[ed] lengthy studies costing millions of dollars.” Like their colleagues in Hazel Park, Clawson, and Troy, Royal Oak’s leaders could find nothing good to say about the regional association. In their minds it threatened autonomy, spent money, and did nothing constructive for Oakland County’s communities. In any case, by the beginning of the 1970s few Oakland County municipal officials had been converted to the ranks of metropolitan reform. In 1970 the Detroit Free Press observed, “Royal Oak’s imminent departure virtually wipes out Oakland County participation in SEMCOG.”

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s supporters of SEMCOG were on the defensive. The organization’s director, E. Robert Turner, repeatedly denied that he and his staff were “metropolitanists” and claimed that if SEMCOG failed, the federal government might well impose regional government on the Detroit area. According to Turner, “SEMCOG, rather than being the first step toward metro or ‘super’ government, may actually be the last chance for preventing it.” “Our major role is the maintenance of strong, local government,” Turner insisted, and this could best be achieved through regional cooperation that ensured optimum services in each of the area municipalities. Yet Turner’s protestations won relatively few converts to the SEMCOG camp, and by August 1971 the number of members in the council of governments had dropped to 91, down from a high of 114 members in 1969. Oakland County’s government continued to participate, and William Richards, the chair of the Oakland County Board of Supervisors, was a supporter who believed in the necessity “for all communities to work together to benefit everyone.” But in 1971
even he lamented, "What kind of a lobby can you have with only 25 percent of the possible membership belonging. With only 91 of 346 government units represented, SEMCOG loses its credibility."134

Both Richards and Turner were being made aware of the persistent strength of the traditional suburban ideal of small-scale government. Repeating rhetoric heard for decades along the metropolitan fringe, Oakland municipal officials complained of the bigness and bureaucracy of the metropolitan association. Moreover, they feared the big-city influence of Detroit over SEMCOG. Though the metropolitan vision may have prevailed in academic and planning circles, it made little headway in the city halls of Troy or Royal Oak. True to the emerging post-suburban compromise, municipal officials would accept regional cooperation if it paid off in more efficient or effective services. Yet when SEMCOG did not deliver benefits as quickly as desired, municipal leaders balked. Clawson would deviate from suburban isolationism for the sake of improved refuse disposal, but if metropolitan coordination did not solve the garbage problem, it would withdraw. In post-suburban Oakland as on Long Island and in Saint Louis County, village rule remained the ideal; regional cooperation was an acceptable compromise of the ideal if it produced the desired results.

Given this attitude among municipal officials, SEMCOG had little chance to fulfill the vision of its supporters. It survived, in part because of the federal government's policy favoring regional agencies. But it was not a major force in the government of southeastern Michigan during the late 1960s or 1970s.

Underlying its weakness was the fallacious assumption of its founders. Despite the beliefs of the Committee of One Hundred, southeastern Michigan was not one community bound by common social and economic ties. Post-suburban Oakland County was increasingly removed from the central city of Detroit. As the municipal officials of Troy, Royal Oak, Clawson, and Southfield made clear, the dominant ideal of small-scale government in Oakland deviated markedly from the model of centralized administration that prevailed in the big city. Not only did views on government differ, so did social and economic interests. Southfield was not a bedroom community dependent on Detroit; it was a competitor of downtown Detroit. Race riots in the heart of the Motor City were a boon to commercial developers in Southfield as tenants of downtown offices fled the violence and bad reputation of the central city. Detroit's loss was Southfield's gain. Moreover, the increasingly black city of Detroit was socially alien to the predominantly white cities of Oakland. In the minds of many Oakland Countians, Detroit meant low-cost public housing, declining property values, and an abysmal school system, everything that was anathema to the residents of Oakland.
SEMCOG was, then, attempting to impose cooperation among government units that had diminishing grounds for cooperation. The communities of the six-county region shared water supply and sewerage problems, and Oakland Countians were willing to cooperate in the provision of such services. But beyond sharing the same watershed, Oakland municipalities had relatively little in common with the central city. Increasingly, Oakland and Detroit were socially, economically, and governmentally incompatible.

DuPage and Orange Counties found metropolitan ties equally uncomfortable. Orange County joined the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) but was cool toward the Los Angeles-based group, suspecting that it served the interests of Los Angeles first and those of Orange second. During the 1970s twelve Orange cities dropped out of SCAG. Some rejoined, but by the late 1980s twelve of the county’s twenty-eight cities remained outside of the association. Likewise, DuPage Countians maintained an arm’s length relationship with metropolitan agencies in northeastern Illinois. An Orange County supervisor summed up a truth applicable to post-suburban areas throughout the country: “Let’s face it. Local governments in Orange County have voted with their feet. They’ve walked away from SCAG.” In Illinois and California as in Missouri, New York, and Michigan, the metropolitan vision did not conform to the emerging post-suburban vision and municipalities did not hesitate to opt out of metropolitan schemes.

This post-suburban vision glorified traditional suburban values while appreciating the practical benefits of commercial development and governmental cooperation. The metropolitan vision, however, regarded suburbia as an intrinsic, involved part of the big city and its problems, not as a haven where one could enjoy the good life. Supporters of metropolitanism believed regional cooperation was a natural outgrowth of the common bonds that linked the entire metropolitan area. Yet among leaders of the emerging post-suburban areas, intergovernmental cooperation was unnatural, an artificial creation that could prove useful but could also threaten the small-scale community governments they valued. By 1970 this post-suburban vision had proven to be a powerful molder of future government. In Suffolk, Nassau, Oakland, DuPage, Saint Louis, and Orange Counties it had eclipsed its metropolitan rival.