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Q&A on *Divided They Fall: Hardship in America's Cities and Suburbs*

(Note to editors/reporters: Comments below may be attributed to David J. Wright or Lisa Montiel)

- **What does this report say about my city and metro area?**

There are a lot of numbers here. They tell three major stories about the nation's urban conditions. The *first* is how concentrated poverty is in each city. The *second* looks at how metropolitan regions compare. The *third* is more complicated; we look at cities and compare them to the suburbs because this relationship (which we refer to as the urban/suburban "disparities" relationship) is so critical to cities' well-being. The Table of Contents provides key findings and a list of measures for individual cities and metropolitan regions. You can also see how conditions in given cities and metro areas have changed over time; the report presents in-depth decennial data for 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000.

- **Education levels are one of the factors in the hardship index. Are educational levels in these cities generally improving, or declining?**

Education levels in our study cities are generally improving at both the central city and the metropolitan area levels. Central cities whose education levels improved the most from 1990-2000 are Cleveland, St. Louis, Louisville, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Newark. Metropolitan areas that improved the most are Knoxville, Birmingham, Charlotte, Louisville, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati. Urban areas with the most improvement in the difference in education levels between their central city and their suburbs are Washington DC, San Antonio, and San Francisco.

- **What role does immigration play here? Is there anything we can say in general about those urban areas that have higher rates of immigration than others?**

Generally, urban areas that fared well in our hardship study had higher rates of immigration over the 1990s. Conversely, urban areas that did poorly on our hardship measures had lower rates of immigration. In addition, metro areas that fared well on our hardship measures tend to be metro areas that gained more population through immigration than the population that it lost, while metro areas that did poorly on hardship measures were those that lost more population than was recuperated in immigration.

- **Why do you think Southern and Western cities are starting to experience the hardship conditions more familiar to Northern and Midwestern cities?**

The cities in the North and Midwest regions are older industrial cities that have been dealing with socioeconomic hardship conditions for decades. Some cities in the South and West have only begun to have problems in the last few decades related to population pressure resulting from movement of people and jobs into their cities. These cities now have to deal with issues such as crowded housing, high housing costs, influx of immigrants, and transportation and infrastructure concerns that the older industrial cities have already had to face.

- **Did any cities actually expand their borders during the period studied, and if so did that appear to have any influence on conditions in those cities or their metro regions?**

Most cities expanded their borders from 1970 to 2000. Over one-third of our study cities increased their land area by over 50 percent. Cities such as Oklahoma City, New Orleans (before the hurricane), and San Jose had significant expansion and improvements in their intercity hardship scores, declining poverty impactation rates, and improvements in their urban-suburban disparity. Clearly, the ability to expand their borders has a positive impact on city residents.

- **Among the cities whose fortunes improved during the period, what do we know about factors that may have helped?**

Factors associated with improvements in the socioeconomic conditions of urban area residents are the ability of a city to change its physical/political boundaries, have a high proportion of the metropolitan area's population living within the central city, a low degree of African American with White residential segregation, a low share of older housing, and a large decline in violent crime rates.

- **What do we know from other research about how cities have been doing since 2000?**

The American Community Survey, which will replace the long-form of the Decennial Census, is just beginning to provide housing and population data on major metro areas. While data are still not

available to calculate concentrated poverty measures, the ACS data do indicate that poverty rates for metro areas have increased since 2000, so the trend we found for strongly increasing poverty impact from 1970-2000 may be continuing. Five cities that we found to have overall the best performances on our hardship measures — Columbus, Denver, San Francisco, San Jose, and Seattle — still seem to be performing well according to the most recent ACS data release in the areas of dependency, education, income, poverty, and unemployment. Conversely, the cities in our study that consistently performed poorly — Cleveland, Detroit, Miami, Milwaukee, Newark, and Rochester — are still challenged on these same indicators.