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HOW SOCIAL SCIENTISTS, PLANNERS, AND REFORMERS FIGURE OUT WHAT'S GOING ON AND WHAT NEEDS FIXING

This book is filled with references to research and theories about the development of cities, suburbs, and towns and how people in these places live. We described our preferred way to look at all that information and make sense of it (i.e., our so-called “cultural perspective”). Mindful that writers representing other schools of thought can look at the same evidence and come up with a much different take on what’s going on, however, we also reviewed their approaches to studying urban phenomena. Fair as we tried to be, of course, there’s a good chance that people who don’t share our point of view will say we didn’t offer a treatment of their ideas that was as thorough and balanced as it should have been. In effect, we stacked the deck to favor the approach we like and downplayed the value of their perspective.

Disagreements of this sort arise all the time among the practitioners of academic disciplines. Our research is reviewed by knowledgeable persons before it’s published and frequently provokes spirited debate among specialists on the

subject being studied. Sometimes the argument is over the data that were analyzed or the kinds of statistical manipulation to which they were subjected. On other occasions, the argument may be about how our findings were interpreted and the appropriateness of one theory over another in helping us make sense of those findings. It is how we test the limits of what we know and refine the questions we ask.

Apart from standing toe-to-toe and screaming at each other, which sometimes happens at conferences and on the pages of the journals where our work is published, there’s really only one good way to determine whose approach actually works better. Put them to some kind of empirical test. Make them compete in much the way athletic teams do on the field. Look at a body of evidence and see which approach does a better job at explaining how urban places develop and people behave.

Such testing is an important part of what researchers do. It’s also a distinguishing feature of any discipline that wants to pose as a science.

For these reasons alone, we need to consider how researchers go about the business of studying urban places and people.

Here we will introduce some of the more important protocols researchers use to collect, examine, and talk about the information they gather. Social scientists would call this a “methods chapter.” But it’s more accurate to say that it’s a chapter on the “sociology of knowledge” pertaining to urban places and people. *We’re not just interested in how researchers study urban phenomena but in how their methods affect the way they imagine and talk about these places and people.*

The questions researchers ask and answer are connected to the kinds of evidence available to them and how they’ve been trained to analyze data. All the information at their disposal and the insights gleaned from it are used by more than scholars and students, however. They also are used by people who want to fix what they think isn’t working well in these places and change the way people live and work there. Policy makers and reformers can have strong opinions on these matters, and their opinions also shape the questions researchers ask and the answers we come up with.

By now you should have a pretty good feel for the kinds of problems that scientists, planners, and reformers worry about and study. Clearly, there are lots of gaps in what we know. Good research will fill some of these holes and help us determine which ones we should go after next. Even after we’ve given it our best shot, however, the chances are small that any one perspective will provide all the answers to how people build and live in something as big as a city or metropolitan area.

Research is also expensive to do and time consuming. Not many countries have the resources and trained personnel to conduct research much less the means to put it to good use. Even when we have the money and personnel to conduct research, however, the fact is that sometimes we know what we’re looking for and sometimes we don’t. On those occasions when we have hypotheses or good hunches about what’s going on, the data we acquire can help us figure out which of those

hunches is more plausible and which ones we can probably set aside. There are many occasions, though, when our research is a bit more speculative. It looks more like we’re poking around in the dark for anything that will help us describe and understand a little better what we knew very little about before. We call this work “exploratory” in the hope that no one will notice how much we didn’t know about the question or problem that drove us to get the information we pulled together and analyzed.

As with many human endeavors, it’s not the questions we ask that get us into trouble but the ones we *don’t* ask. One of the strengths of exploratory research is that it helps us come up with new and better questions to ask. Unfortunately, this kind of research may not be picked up by scientists who test hypotheses or may not be easily translated into testable propositions. Then there’s this: *even when we think we’ve come up with a pretty clear picture about what’s going on there’s no guarantee that our hard work will be put to good use.* Reformers and policy makers may push ahead with changes based on their own explanations about what’s happening and bothering them. Or they may not use the information that scientists pull together in order to determine whether any of the solutions they’ve been trying out actually make much difference.

There’s more than intellectual modesty at work in this admission. Policy makers, agency officials, professional reformers, and part-time activists all have an interest in using research, if only to make the point that they were right all along and anyone who disagrees with them completely missed the boat. They are advocates, not dispassionate observers. They don’t have the luxury or inclination to wait for researchers to get all the information that might be desirable to have or think is needed in order to address a problem that should have been taken care of yesterday. And a lot of the time, as we just acknowledged, researchers can’t really say what’s going on with a great deal of certainty, or that what is going on in one setting will apply equally in other places.

Those of us who fancy ourselves scientists also may have a preference for one of the policy positions being argued over and tip our analysis or choose our words in a way that favors the side we favor. Our error may be inadvertent. But sometimes it isn't. For evidence of both, one need look no further than some of our most ardent arguments over race and ethnic relations in this country. Steven Jay Gould's (1981) reanalysis of IQ research tests showed how the data used in many studies had been manipulated and fudged in order to show that some people—immigrants, Blacks, and women—had lower IQs than White males. More recently, scholars who were invested in the idea that racial segregation was persisting ignored signs that Blacks, especially middle-class Blacks, and Whites were finding more racially mixed (often suburban) settings in which to live (Massey & Denton, 1993; Dawkins 2005; Glaeser & Vigdor 2012).

The lesson to be taken from this is clear enough. You have to be a careful and smart consumer of the research that social scientists produce and planners and policy makers use. We don't always play fair or fight nice. So, the only way you're going to know what information you can trust is to have some understanding of what it is we actually do. By the time you finish this chapter, you might not find our research any more convincing than you did at the outset. But you will have concluded one thing about our work that may surprise you. Research isn't for sissies.

NUMBERS, PICTURES, AND WORDS

Research on urban settlements and people is based on artifacts, pictures, words, and numbers. Obviously, there is less information available the further back in time one looks. Archaeologists literally piece together a picture of early settlements and the people who occupied them from the bones, shards of pottery, pieces of rock and metal, wall paintings, and the remnants of building sites they uncover. The pictures and pieces of their lives that people leave behind become more

numerous, detailed, and available for study when one focuses on more recent settlements. More importantly, people also put down more about themselves in words. Early on they might have left diaries, letters, and stories. Later they would add whole books, newspapers and magazines, and many formal accounts of their business dealings and government records. Today, you can include all the materials stored on the Internet, too. All these sources can be mined for evidence of how urban settlements and people operate.

Key to any scientific endeavor is the systematic collection of information. You can't say much if you only have a little information, aren't sure about where it came from or how it was collected, and, importantly, don't have a clue about how to organize or think about the evidence in front of you. More detailed and accurate information allows us to make increasingly finer and more precise comparisons of urban settlements and the kinds of people who occupied these places. Ultimately, it also allows us to make better sense of how they lived.

Most people equate science with rigorous research that is based on numbers, the more the better. Whether one is dealing with more information from a small number of sites and people or less information taken from a great many settlements and people, numbers are the gold standard by which most research is judged. They allow one to subject comparisons to statistical manipulation and determine with some precision just how much alike or different these settlements and people are from each other. If similar reports were available in the past, you also can begin to put together a picture of how these places and people changed over time.

Equally rigorous but less easily generalized to other settlements, people, and times are studies based on information drawn from as few as one settlement and the records people left or the ones we collected by observing them or talking to them. The information may be detailed, but there simply isn't enough of it to count. These case studies can offer tantalizing hints about how settlements were put together and people lived but not enough information to reach anything

like a definitive conclusion about what goes on in other places. However, as examples of exploratory research, case studies can suggest new questions that should be asked as new cases are studied and added to the ever-growing body of research.

Both kinds of studies—the more *quantitative* type where there are lots of numbers from one or more sites and the more *qualitative* pieces usually featured in case studies—are used in research on how urban settlements develop as well as on how urban dwellers live. Archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians study contemporary settlements and people, but their work is the only work we have on places and people from earlier times and hard-to-reach places.¹ Social scientists—sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, and economists—do most of their work on more modern settlements and people. That's largely because their disciplines didn't emerge as respectable pursuits until the middle and late-19th century when people were desperate to make better sense of industrial-era cities and the people who were flocking to them. It also has something to do with the kinds of information they like to collect—numbers—and the way they like their research to be taken—as scientific.

Numbers produced by government agencies are commonly used in studies of *urbanization*. Governments track everything from the number and kinds of people who occupy a given municipality and records of industrial output and jobs to public accountings of public expenditures and taxes. Census data, for instance, are often used to tell the story of how settlements in the United States have grown for all or part of the time since we began collecting that kind of information nationally in 1790. They also can tell us something about the kinds of people that lived and worked there (and by implication which ones didn't), how well or poorly they were faring, and whether they'd done better or less well in the past. Data on public expenditures and taxes help show us what mattered to governments, the problems they faced, and how their priorities changed over time. Information from government records in more recent times is sometimes supplemented

with numbers collected by business organizations, foundations, and nonprofit institutions that were made available to the public at some point.

Researchers who write about the history of different kinds of settlements in the United States before 1790 have to rely on other kinds of documentary evidence. There are maps, drawings, paintings, and, later in the 19th century, photographs. There also were people around who wrote and kept records about how their settlement was doing. Assuming there were persons like them in different settlements and they kept similar records, then historians and social scientists can begin to piece together a more complete picture of how settlements were doing at that time. Newspapers, magazines, and records collected by businesses and organizations such as churches also provide valuable information when they are published or can be retrieved. Much of this written material, however, is better used or used more often in the study of *urbanism* or how people actually lived in particular places and times.

David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot (1990), for example, used documentary evidence going back several hundred years to trace the evolution of our larger public debates over coeducation in American schools. They consulted school records and changes in curricular offerings for boys and girls, histories written about individual schools, arguments over the up and down sides of coeducation that were published in formal reports and the popular press, pictures of children in different school settings, among many other pieces of documentary evidence to make their case. Beyond the fresh perspective brought to our conversation about the place of girls in schools, this work contributed to an even bigger discussion about the ways in which women's civic roles had changed in American cities. We were able to see how much larger their civic engagement was, how much earlier it started than we might have known, and the historical origins of agitation on behalf of women's rights that took place in the 1970s and 1980s.

Historical and archaeological evidence even older than this was drawn on in the first three

chapters of the book where we learned about the origins of city life and the development of cities in different parts of the world, including the United States. You can go back and better assess now how much we were able to glean about the development of cities and suburbs from this kind of material. You'll be reminded that the view of older urban settlements revealed through these records is from something like 30,000 feet and centuries ago rather than the last couple of years and on the ground where individual persons actually lived.

Research with numbers also is found in studies on *urbanism*. Social surveys and polling data are particularly helpful in this regard. They provide us with a snapshot of what persons were thinking and doing in one place or from different settlements just as census research can. The real strength of this research is that social surveyors get a lot more information from the people who are interviewed than census takers do. They acquire a broad but superficial picture of people's lives, what they believed, their attitudes, their affiliations with others, membership in different organizations, and anything you can imagine a researcher might want to know about them. If the sample of interview subjects is large and varied, then what these people said is taken to indicate what their neighbors were probably thinking and doing at the time. Apart from the fact that social surveys can only skim the surface of peoples' thoughts and deeds, nobody was doing large-scale social surveys much before the mid-20th century. The insights afforded by survey research, therefore, go back only a generation or two.

This is where historians can be helpful again. The written materials and pictures that people from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries left behind about American towns and cities provide us with a great deal of information. The problem is that the picture of everyday life that one often gets from historians comes from people who weren't average, run-of-the-mill men and women. They were more likely able to read and write and from someplace higher on their community's social and economic ladder than most of the persons they wrote about. Less well-to-do

persons sometimes left clues to how they lived, mostly from artifacts found in the ground beneath where they lived or worked. But most of what was written about their daily lives comes from people who were decidedly better off than they were. There's much more material being provided directly by less well-to-do people today. But all manner of historians and social scientists have been chronicling how these people lived since the mid-19th century.

Among the earliest and most detailed social surveys conducted *before* the advent of the computer and rigorous sampling procedures was carried out by Henry Mayhew (1861/1968) and his associates in mid-19th century London. The richly-detailed sketches of the city's working poor and "street people" captured their everyday lives and struggles, the kinds of jobs they held, where they hung out and slept at night. There were beggars and prostitutes among the people whose stories were told to be sure. But there were many more people who struggled in sweatshops and whatever "casual" employment and part-time work they could find. Mayhew accumulated their stories and summarized them in several volumes that showed how precarious an existence these people led and how very little money they earned for all the work they did. Mayhew's research and writing painted an unromantic picture of life in the most prominent and richest city of his time and helped to lay the groundwork for modern welfare and work relief programs. It also helped to validate some of the studies that were beginning to be produced at the tail end of the 19th century by the early demographers and epidemiologists of their day.

Apart from studies based on things like census data and in more contemporary types of social surveys, most research into urban settlements and people comes out as case studies. Case studies have been a staple in sociology, political science, anthropology, and history since their inception. Often equated with "community" studies in sociology and political science, the unit of analysis or subject is usually neighborhood-sized when the researcher is attempting to study and describe the way of life or culture of the

people occupying a specific place. Such a study also might be used to describe the “culture” of an organization or institution, but most of the work focused on the way people lived.

Little or no attention may be paid in case studies to how what’s learned about a particular community can be applied to the city as a whole or how the community might have changed over time. That connection is left for the reader to make. The study is generalized only to other “communities” like it, such as an ethnic enclave or village, and only for the period in which the study was carried out. It might focus on a particular element of life in that community, as would be the case in a study focusing on how social class or gender relations play out there. In this case, the author may suggest how class, gender, or ethnic relations in that place or among those people may be connected to class, gender, or ethnic relations in society as a whole.

Entire cities can be the subject of case studies by social scientists, too, but rarely are (Monti 2013). The focus of these works typically is on the way the city’s economy, population, and/or political system is organized or has changed over time. Historians and anthropologists are much more likely to describe the culture of a place or people as a whole, reasoning that the events and ideas they see practiced or in play tell us something about the way people generally thought and acted in that era. They also may seize on a particular element of life or event as revealing some underlying truth about the way of life practiced by people in a particular community or society (Boorstin 1974; Fischer 1989).

Historians Susan Davis (1986) and Mary Ryan (1997) showed just how turbulent 19th-century American cities were through their studies of rowdy street celebrations and popular uprisings, parades, and demonstrations. But they also used their careful description of “public life” back then to make a point about contemporary Americans’ civic habits. Both scholars effectively acknowledged that contemporary life isn’t nearly as rowdy as it used to be. Davis talked about the growth of malls and the erosion of “public spaces” available to people with something on their mind to say.

Ryan (1997, p. 312) used her analysis to raise questions about whether “the pragmatics of making public policy through civil war” may have reached “a point of diminishing returns.”

Needless to say, authors working in different disciplines borrow each other’s ideas and use complementary approaches to conduct their studies. There is more than a little overlap in their respective approaches and some of their theoretical ideas. Still, historians are far more likely to use their case studies to make a more expansive statement about the times in which the people they study lived.²

Social scientists don’t look at the world the same way most historians do. You can see just how differently by picking up a couple of social science and history journals and reading some of the articles published in them. Naturally, it would be helpful if the subject matter deals with urban settlements, metropolitan areas, or people who live in these kinds of places. But it need not. In the case of the social science articles, don’t worry if you can’t follow all the sophisticated statistical analyses that the author presents. Just look at the way the argument is set up and delivered. Do the same for the history articles.

You probably won’t have to read more than three or four before a pattern begins to emerge. You’ll find that much social science research is built around or delivered through numbers. It also talks about social phenomena using words like “independent” and “dependent variables.” Independent variables are presumed to “cause” or are used to account for differences in dependent variables. The size of a city’s population or the kinds of people that live there, for instance, might be used to account for how many of the residents commit crimes, how long they are likely to stay in school, or how much money they make. For instance, we might hypothesize that more crime is committed per capita in bigger cities than smaller ones or that bigger cities have more wealthy and poor people but comparatively fewer middle-class people than smaller places have.

Independent variables often deal with big things like the size of a city or something relatively permanent about a person like his color and

gender, something that's out of the person's control to change. Independent variables also can include something that people might change about themselves like how many years they go to school, their marriage status, or job. More often than not, however, what people do or say is treated as a dependent variable. Researchers are hoping to determine why so many persons do this and not that, say one thing and not another, and hold views different from the ones that people in other parts of town or other communities hold.

What much social science research about cities and other sorts of communities has in common is the tendency to focus on conditions or behaviors that researchers view as problematic. Bigger places or places with more minority residents, for instance, might be looked at to see if they have more divorced people, delinquency, drug use, people who are poor, belong to fewer clubs, and so forth. Rarely, if ever, would we look to see how many books city dwellers read, how many little old ladies they help across the street, or how often local businesses do things that help their customers but reduce the profit they make. The focus on social problems is in large measure a function of researchers' perceived need to collect information that we think will help understand and ultimately solve those pressing problems. However, the assumption implicit in much social research on cities is that people in bigger and more crowded places or places that have more different kinds of people living there have more problems and more people exhibiting problematic behavior.³

Even when it turns out that people in urban settlements are no more likely than village dwellers to have problems we're still left with the impression that the best that big-city people can do is react to changes or adjust to conditions over which they have little control (Fischer 1976). Sociological research sometimes seems to suggest that individual people in cities don't make things happen. Things happen to people, and their response to the conditions they face is often problematic. In other words, it can sometimes emphasize "social conditions" and "structures" at the expense of individual agency.

Research in history journals doesn't always present people as winning or being nice to each other, but they're rarely portrayed as ineffectual. History writers are much more likely to show human beings acting on the world rather than always reacting or being victimized by it. Men and women may not make big things happen. They may even fail. But historical research typically depicts even people who lose as having put up a fight. On the other hand, historians sometimes downplay the way that larger systemic forces influence the range of actions available to those individuals.

To argue that there's something suspect about a discipline whose practitioners have a particular way of looking at the world misses the point. Researchers are trained inside what some people like to refer to as academic "silos." There's a sociological silo and way of looking at the world, just as there is a psychological silo or an economic silo and way of making sense of the world. To make matters even more confusing, there are researchers in each of these "silos" who have different takes on what the people in their own silo should be looking at and how to make sense of the information they tend to collect. It can all be very confusing at times, even to the people inside the silo. But all professionals have a particular way of looking at the world. It's how they bring some order to all the information they collect. Indeed, if they didn't already have these silos, they would have had to invent them just to give their research and writing some organization and direction.

Their differences notwithstanding, there are similar or common themes that cut across the work done by the people in these different silos. None of us can avoid the social and political context in which we conduct our research and write, for instance. Intellectual tastes and prejudices change, though often slower than we'd like. The organizations that underwrite our work have certain priorities and questions they want addressed. It's not a big leap to conclude that they probably have answers they'd be happier to receive and others they'd rather not. Under these circumstances one would be surprised if

researchers produced results that were way out of line with what their peers and audience expected. That's why all the different professionals who looked at urban settlements and people in the 19th century came up with remarkably similar pictures of how troubled these places and people were (Lees, 1985). It's also why some kinds of people were thought to be inherently less capable than others and why Black and White people were shown to still be living separately when there were already many signs that this barrier was beginning to break down.

For instance, public and private leaders in the late 19th and early 20th centuries who were trying to understand urban problems were desperate to figure out how different kinds of people were going to fit into cities that were growing very quickly and in ways no one had seen before. *They worked exceedingly hard to find new ideas and ways for all the residents of big cities to come together or act in concert, new ways that would transform a seemingly chaotic mass of strangers into something approximating a self-conscious "people" and effective "community."* Such leaders tended to come from cities' White, native-born elite and were predisposed to believe in their own positive qualities.

It certainly wasn't a coincidence, then, that 19th and 20th century researchers consistently found that White people had higher IQ scores than Black people, men had higher scores than women, and long-time Americans had better scores than immigrants. Research of the sort that showed certain kinds of people being better qualified to fit in had predictable and important consequences for everyday life in American cities and for national policies. Women and Black people were denied access to schooling altogether or were educated less well and not as long as White males were. They also could be directed to fill jobs—in the home and outside the home—befitting their “innate” abilities and temperament. Restrictions on immigration were justified in part because research showed what so many “native” Americans already took for granted: Foreign people would be hard to fit in and were only good for some kinds of neighborhoods and jobs.

Reanalyzing the IQ data that 19th and early 20th century researchers had worked with, Stephen Jay Gould (1996) and his assistants discovered that earlier scientists had tweaked their samples and analyses in such a way so as to make drawing patently racist and sexist conclusions all but inevitable. When previously omitted data were included, Gould found a great deal more overlap than gap in the IQ scores of these persons. He argued that the original researchers had looked at their evidence through White male American lenses. They'd conducted their work at a time when people assumed that White people, men, and American-born persons were inherently smarter and better than Black people, women, and foreigners. No one, least of all the scientists, was surprised when the data came out the way they did.

Gould also found much-publicized contemporary research on the alleged gap between IQ and other test scores for these populations that was every bit as biased as the earlier work he'd studied. It would seem that bad scientific habits are as difficult to break as some bad personal habits are. One of the important lessons coming out of his research, however, was that science also could correct what early scientists had got wrong. The biggest mistake that earlier researchers made had come well before information they collected was analyzed. It was logical or ideological in nature rather than numerical.

Many researchers today, including the authors of this book, would like to think they have some built-in immunity to the bias bug. We don't believe, for instance, that White males are inherently smarter or better than Black persons, women, and immigrants. Nor are we likely to support policies and programs that would restrict anyone's opportunities on the basis of color and gender or keep foreigners from coming into the country and treat them badly once they arrived simply because they were, well, *foreign*. We all want to think that our progressive-minded colleagues can be counted on to treat people fairly, no matter what they look like or where they come from.

The world is more complex than we think. We are as likely to bring our “progressive” bias into

the science we preach as reactionary professionals were to bring racism and sexism into the science they practiced. Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has argued, for instance, that left-wing scholars constitute a “tribal-moral community” just like the one reactionary scholars once had (Tierney, 2011). The roots of this “community” are to be found in the “fight for civil rights and against racism” in the 1960s and 1970s. It “became the sacred cause unifying the left within the academy” and has stayed that way for nearly five decades at this point.

One result is that an overwhelming number of today’s university faculty hold very progressive or socially liberal views. Their “sacred values” blind them to the hostile intellectual climate they’ve created and held over the heads of conservative thinkers since the 1960s. The left-leaning social science tribe has also become self-perpetuating. People who supported those values were drawn to the social sciences. People who held different values chose different careers.

It’s not hard to find evidence that the kinds of questions and answers left-leaning people come up with are every bit as biased as the ones conservatives prefer. Sociologist Scott Cummings (2011) recently assembled census data outlining homeownership rates by race for 1990 and 2000. Predictably, Whites had the highest ownership rates at just over 68%. Blacks and Hispanics, at 43% and 42% respectively, had much lower rates of ownership. American Indians and persons of Asian descent, at 54% and 52%, fell somewhere in between. Except for the American Indian data, perhaps, no one would be surprised by these findings or by the conclusion that as of 2000 it looked like Black and Hispanic people still were being discouraged from purchasing a house.

When Cummings broke down these rates according to the nationality (or tribal ancestry) of Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans something interesting happened. Not all White persons were equally likely to own a house. Persons of Slovenian descent had the highest rates (i.e., around 85%). Whites of Salvadoran descent had relatively low rates of home ownership (i.e., 23%). The

same proved true for different kinds of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American people. Blacks who traced their ancestry to South America had ownership rates at about 53%, but only about 14.5% of Black people of Dominican descent owned homes. Among Hispanics almost 48% of West Indians owned their own houses, while only about 14.5% of Panamanian Hispanics did. Nearly 77% of Asian people of Taiwanese descent owned a house, but only a bit more than 12% of Hmong did. Finally, and perhaps most surprisingly, ownership rates among Native Americans went from about 77% for Lumbee Indians to 38% for persons of Cheyenne descent.

People of different races have different rates of homeownership. No card-carrying social scientist would be surprised by that. Nor would they think that on the basis of such evidence government programs to help people from “races” that have been discriminated against in the past should be ended.

It’s not clear what they would say about Cummings’s other major finding. That’s because we’ve been trained to expect White people to be better treated or do better than minority people and that something needs to be done to undo the effects of *racial* discrimination. It doesn’t even enter our mind to worry about *ethnic* discrimination, and there are no laws singling out individuals from different ethnic groups for privileged treatment like there are for people of a particular “race” or gender. Yet the fact is that there are greater differences in rates of homeownership among ethnic people of the same race than there are between persons of different races. Persons who claim to be politically liberal may have some difficulty reconciling their values with these facts.

Based on these data, for instance, it would be pretty hard to argue that “Blacks” or “Hispanics” as such are being discriminated against today. Are there still gaps between Whites and non-Whites? Yes, there are. At the same time, some Black people have rates of homeownership greater than those of some White people. The gap is either closing or was never as great as

we made it out to be. As it happens, rates of homeownership for Black people come closest to matching those of Whites whose ancestors are from Central and South America. This means, of course, that White people from Central and South America have the lowest rates of homeownership among Whites. We'll come back to this point momentarily.

The picture of homeownership afforded by these data certainly doesn't tell us everything we'd want to know about whether and how we should amend public policies intended to increase home ownership among minority persons. It does suggest, however, that we need to revisit them and think a lot harder about who really needs help and who doesn't.

One could argue, for instance, that rates of Black homeownership will eventually rise to levels achieved by some White groups as more recent Black immigrants from Central and South America gain a stronger foothold in the economy. That would be a good thing, no doubt about it, if only because we wouldn't need to offer public subsidies to "Black people" much longer. This assumes, however, that recent Black immigrants should be included in our policy calculations when they haven't experienced the history of discrimination that Black Americans have. Ignoring that problem for the time being, a better and fairer measure of how much Black people are still being discriminated against today would come from comparing rates of homeownership for Black people from Central and South America to those of White people from Central and South America. Of course, it might take a decade or two before changes that large showed up in census data.

In the meantime, many persons, especially those who think of themselves as being socially progressive and politically liberal, still believe that "Blacks" are victimized by widespread and systematic discrimination. They probably would take strong exception to any effort to diminish the help Black people get to buy a house, no matter how long they've lived in this country. To sustain that argument, however, one would have to show that ethnic differences among persons of

the same race don't matter when it's patently obvious they do. One also would have to argue that no White person deserves special consideration and assistance even though some could clearly use it and their ancestors have lived here for generations. Given the results of Cummings's analysis, it's actually far more likely that self-respecting liberals would argue that these Whites also should receive assistance to buy a house.

If nothing else, this evidence suggests that our national discussion about race and homeownership policies can't be boiled down to an easy black and white answer. On the other hand, maybe it can. The most provocative aspect of these findings is that they mirror what Gould found when he took a harder and more complete look at the IQ scores of different kinds of persons. Namely, there were greater differences among Whites and among Blacks than there were *between* Whites and Blacks, greater differences among men and among women than there were *between* men and women, and greater differences among native-born persons and among immigrants than there were *between* native-born persons and immigrants.

That evidence pointed to a reduction in the gap between better treated or better liked categories of persons and those less well thought of and treated in the United States. Or it might have been taken to mean that there had never been a sizable gap, much less one that was genetically rooted, in the scores of Whites and Blacks, men and women, or native-born and immigrant Americans. Whatever the source of the overlap in their IQ scores, differential treatment on the basis of one's color, gender, and nativity was not justified. There was no good moral basis, much less a biologically based justification, for treating men better than women, Whites better than Blacks, and native-born Americans better than immigrants.

The important policy issue raised by Cummings's research is that differential treatment *favoring* Black people or Hispanic people on the basis of their color might not be justified in the area of homeownership. Even if we were able to come to some agreement on this very

sensitive point, it is unlikely that there would be much push to dismantle all the programs set up to encourage homeownership by minority people or that such pushing would succeed. To the extent that is so, we would be acting on a bias no less real and indefensible than the one once used and still used sometimes today to discriminate against American citizens who are Black and Hispanic.

Researchers might help shed light on how big a problem Black and Hispanic Americans still have. Since academic researchers apparently are disposed toward favoring policies that expand the number of claimants for assistance, however, any evidence they bring to bear on this question is likely to be discounted or at least looked at skeptically. As Gould's research shows us, facts don't speak for themselves. They are framed in a way and nudged into saying what people want them to say, maybe especially when sensitive or contentious matters are being discussed.

What often happens in public policy disputes where there are strong differences of opinion like the one involving minority homeownership is that we effectively elect to have it both ways. We might formally accept responsibility for causing harm to a particular class of persons. But it's more likely that we'll simply acknowledge that harm has been done. Our struggle then is to find a way to undo the damage or at least soften its effects on the aggrieved class. The problem, as we've seen in the case of race and homeownership, is that not all members of an aggrieved class (i.e., Blacks and Hispanics) may actually have a grievance and the persons who get assistance may not be the ones who need it most (Monti, 1997). This may be one of the reasons why policy-related research so often shows that reforms make some difference in people's lives but not as big a difference as its proponents had hoped for or its detractors feared. A good example of this phenomenon is apparent in the modest-to-disappointing results exhibited by minority people who participated in the "movement to opportunity" relocation experiment tried out on public housing tenants in Chicago and several other cities in the 1990s. A review of the impact that moving had on tenants showed that the

dramatic improvements hoped for either didn't happen or were a lot more limited than the backers of the experiment had predicted. Part of the reason why the relocated people didn't do better than expected was that they either didn't move far from their old neighborhood or moved into an area very much like the one they'd just left. The ones who did better moved out of Chicago or to a different country (Sampson 2012; Sharkey 2013). Another obvious answer to what happened (or didn't happen), these authors think, is this. The effects of poverty may be a lot harder and take a lot longer to undo than researchers have the time to study or reformers have the luxury and patience of waiting for.

The effect of reforms, one that is unexpectedly captured by researchers, is that we crawl toward changes we aren't as thrilled about—or dead set against making—as we made ourselves out to be. The biggest contribution of research to this policy-making ritual may be that it familiarizes us with persons and places we know precious little about but who have become impossible to ignore. We inform and educate our fellow citizens a little more and a little better about these people and places. Our work is usually better at laying out how big a problem there is than at showing how to solve it or why our reforms aren't working as we'd expected. But that doesn't diminish the broader cultural service rendered by all the studying and writing that researchers do. Indeed, as the history of moral reform crusades in this country demonstrates, our best work chronicles the conditions of peoples' lives, how they deal with the situations they face, and how all their deal making and accommodating plays out over time (Boyer, 1978). It doesn't settle arguments about what should or shouldn't be done. It sets the table we sit around and argue over better.

The fight Gould picked with contemporary researchers who still insist there's a genetic basis for differences in "intelligence" or educational accomplishment, for instance, didn't change how we fund education or treat minority children. What our scholarly intramural spat did accomplish in this instance may have been even more

important in the long run. It altered the shape and affected the content of our current disputes over race by reminding us how much louder, strident, meaner, and absurd our table-clearing our arguments used to be. It held the mirror of our own history in front of our faces where we couldn't ignore it. Good research won't necessarily make us smarter or keep us from making mistakes. What good research does best sometimes is keep the light focused on stupid so we can push it off the table or put it under a napkin and get down to talking about what's really bothering us and what we can do about it.

HOW WE CAME TO STUDY WHAT WE STUDY

When it comes to arguments over what kind of research is better or needed more to help us get to that point, some of us favor the fragmented, partial but otherwise rich views of life in urban settlements that are found in case studies. Others favor the broader, more representative, but not especially deep view of life and conditions revealed in surveys and census data. The truth is there's actually more than enough space on the table for both kinds of research. As with anything else people consume, however, we have definite preferences for the kind of research we like to set out and think everyone else should take first and eat most.

Antecedents to the quantitative and qualitative research done today were fashioned in mid-19th century Europe. Henry Mayhew's thumbnail sketches of laborers and poor people in East London may have been prompted by fear of the "dangerous classes," but the evidence he assembled made it difficult to paint these people as the cause of their own misery. The cumulative effect of the stories he and his assistants gathered was to show that illness, old age, death, and accidents—notably, conditions over which the poor had little control—made it all but impossible for people to lead a healthy life. The kinds of jobs these people had once filled were gone. Men and women had been compelled to find more casual and

temporary sources of employment wherever they could. Displaced artisans had become day laborers, and day laborers became part of a chronically underemployed and frequently unemployed mass of displaced workers crammed together in the slums of London.

John Snow's less dramatic but equally compelling interviews of London's Soho residents in 1854 allowed him to pinpoint which public pump was fouled and thus the source of the cholera epidemic that had broken out that year. Snow's map showed a pattern in the outbreak that had eluded officials. He also was able to track the contaminated water back to the waterworks companies that had been drawing drinking water from parts of the Thames River polluted by raw sewage. His use of maps and statistics presaged the development of public health and epidemiology as research-driven enterprises. The work such people did in tracking and analyzing the spread of contagious diseases and the prevalence of health conditions in certain populations established these types of social research as legitimate scientific endeavors.

American researchers would soon use the same techniques to describe and understand conditions in their own cities. Widespread concern about immigrants, for example, prompted a dramatic expansion in the number and variety of question posed by interviewers for the 1920 census. You might recall that 1920 was the year in which the U.S. population was officially declared to be "urban." In any case, items like the number of rooms each household had and the availability of toilets were introduced so as to provide officials with an overview of immigrants' living conditions.

Analyses based on census data complemented more detailed descriptions of everyday life in American cities. These were stories of the sort Henry Mayhew might have collected or been composed by Dickens (Woods, 1898/1970; Sinclair, 1905/1960; Steffens, 1904/1969; Woods & Kennedy, 1914/1962). The research was often undertaken by settlement house workers and volunteers working on behalf of organizations that were trying to help the poor and immigrants by

studying where and how they lived. Their findings were compiled into reports that went to a variety of public and private leaders who needed to know what was going on in certain parts of the city before initiating campaigns to clean them up and save the local residents from themselves (Boyer, 1978; Du Bois, 1899/1996; Lees, 1985).

There's still a strong reformist edge or point to a great deal of social science research dealing with urban places and people. Much of the research done in urban areas or that focused on urban residents in the post-World War II era, for instance, had the twin goals of diagnosing and understanding urban ills and fixing urban places and people. Among the more important topics dealt with have been the redevelopment of older central cities, the consequences of suburbanization and urban sprawl, the rise of newer metropolitan areas in so-called "Sunbelt" states, and the impact these changes had on poor and minority people with few good job prospects who were left behind in rundown inner-city areas.

No small part of this research, much of it *quantitative* and based on census data or social surveys, explored the extent to which minorities, especially Blacks, had access to the same kinds of jobs, housing, and educational opportunities as White people did. Concern about the conditions faced by minorities in general was replaced by a growing chorus of researchers who chronicled the conditions under which persistently poor people live. This was especially apparent in studies of the poorest Black Americans, inner-city residents whose situation was so desperate that it was hard to imagine how it could ever change (Sampson 2012; Sharkey, 2013).

Many *qualitative* pieces of research followed the pattern of case studies conducted by University of Chicago faculty in the early 20th century. This was especially true of work that chronicled the lives of various "denizens" of the inner city or suburbs including gays, street people, the homeless (e.g., Liebow, 1967; Humphreys, 1975; Baumgartner, 1988; Anderson, 1999; Duneier, 1999), and gang members (e.g., Moore, 1978; Padilla, 1992; Monti, 1994; Miller, 2001). A second stream of case studies focused on community

change and the redevelopment of inner-city neighborhoods (e.g., Suttles, 1968; Kornblum, 1974; Susser, 1982; Anderson, 1990; Monti, 1990; Cummings, 1998; Small, 2004).

The specific issues raised in each of these books may have been different. Unlike the work undertaken in quantitative studies, social scientists who write case studies and specialize in qualitative pieces of research like to explore new questions. They're not inclined to revisit other scientists' research sites in order to check out the finer points of their analysis. The authors' assessments of what was going on in their respective research venues, therefore, don't necessarily coincide. Nevertheless, their work reached back to important ideas that researchers from the University of Chicago had brought out in their pioneering work earlier in the 20th century. They were likely to make a connection, for instance, between the physical state of the locale they were studying (e.g., rundown and fragmented versus cleaned up and put together well) and the social and moral worlds of the people who live and work there (e.g., socially disorganized and tough to manage versus orderly and congenial). Gangs were more likely to take root and be nastier in rougher parts of a city or suburban municipalities, for example. On the other hand, neighborhood change and redevelopment would produce better looking and more socially congenial results in areas where institutional and corporate landholders and community people were seen having a bigger stake in the outcome.

The familiarity of the researcher with his community or subjects is a crucial feature in all these studies. Firsthand observations and revealing interviews provide an intimate picture of life in the communities where the research was undertaken. At the same time, they give critics many chances to read their own values into the stories the researcher has chosen to tell about the people and places he studied. Critics have ample opportunity to pick apart the researcher's methods and conclusions and not infrequently impugn his motives in ways that researchers working with lots of numbers usually manage to avoid.

Laud Humphrey's (1975) book detailing the lives of men who had homosexual relations in public restrooms touched a number of these raw nerve ends. It was provocative for both its subject matter and the methods he used to get personal information about the men he observed. The finding that these men were living otherwise conventional, even conservative, lives was overwhelmed by concern over, among other things, the way Humphrey tracked these men to their homes by taking down their license plate numbers and getting their addresses from driving registration records. His subsequent interviews with them at their homes under the guise of an unrelated and notably federally funded survey raised additional concerns. On top of that, the fact that a number of his subjects were employees of a hospital affiliated with his university didn't make senior officials of his university happy. Indeed, the intramural fight inside his university became a much-publicized dispute in the academy generally and was instrumental in the effort to compel researchers to take their human subjects' rights seriously. It also contributed to the eventual closing of the sociology department at his university. Students still read his work, if only to learn how *not* to do fieldwork and research in which the observer also becomes a participant in the site or group he's studying.

Mitch Duneier's (1999) work on sidewalk vendors provided a detailed picture of how these men made a living, the moral and legal lines they crossed, and where they fit into the larger economy. Elijah Anderson (1999) chronicled relations between "street people" and more conventional families in a Philadelphia ghetto. And Katherine Newman (1999) described how the "working poor" of Harlem embraced standards of personal morality usually subscribed to more secure and well-off middle-class persons. Applauded by many reviewers, these works provoked a feverish backlash against both the works *and* the authors for the sanitized and even romantic way in which they had allegedly presented their subjects. Criticized, too, was the way they'd supposedly downplayed or ignored the

woeful political and class conditions that laid at the root of all the problems the authors either danced around or inadvertently embraced by their renderings of contemporary race relations (Wacquant, 2002).

As is the custom in such debates, the original authors were given an opportunity to respond. But the effect of a public and professional spanking of the sort experienced by these authors for messages they never penned or intended to be pulled from between the lines of the stories they related undoubtedly left a bitter aftertaste. It's impossible to know whether other researchers took the cue and didn't pursue the lines of inquiry laid down by these researchers. However, the kind of intellectual reining back into the leftist fold intended by such an attack wasn't missed by anyone.

One of the authors of this book had his own public brush with infamy as a result of his study of school desegregation in the St. Louis area (Monti, 1985). Heralded one day in a lead editorial in *The New York Times* soon after it was published, the work and its author were excoriated on the pages of the same newspaper a few days later by the NAACP's chief counsel who came as close to calling the author a racist as one can without actually using the word. The author's sin was real enough in the eyes of some people who were staunch advocates of the reform and enmeshed in the industry that had sprung up around school desegregation research and programs. He was the first researcher to point out that both the defenders and critics of desegregation were engaged in a loud but well-choreographed dance that created only the appearance of change in the lives of the children the reform was supposed to help. The ritualistically prescribed crises and reforms he described may be vital to the maintenance of the culture and help people adjust to changes in smaller digestible pieces. However, the idea that desegregation enabled school officials to run their districts in much the same way they always had didn't go over well with civil rights advocates who were implicated as "enablers" if not collaborators in this process.

The moral to be taken from these brief stories is that *researchers who delve into sensitive topics are likely to provoke both interest and outrage from people with a stake in the outcome of how these issues play out in the public arena.* This is particularly true of research on topics that agitate policy makers and challenge important institutional caretakers like police departments and public school systems. Much as we might wish it otherwise, researchers aren't in control of the message people take from their work and the political ends it is used to serve. The fact that these books had received awards or some measure of public recognition didn't stop them from being lambasted. Indeed, it probably increased the scrutiny to which they were subjected. The effect of the lessons each of these authors learned, as we noted earlier, was that researchers need to have thick skin when delivering unwelcomed and unexpected news.

In addition to the reformist tradition built into much of our work, there's a second and equally strong tradition among urban researchers to describe and measure everything about their subjects better than we measured it in the past. This more "scientific" part of what researchers do is supposed to help them come up with findings that can be generalized to more settings or groups of people. It is most often captured in arguments over the way we "measure" things by people whose stock-in-trade is presented in the language of statistics. However, it's driven by the same impulse to discover orderly principles in the apparent chaos of city life that pushes reformers to do the work they do.

The primary objective of number-crunching urban researchers, of course, is to come up with principles that describe how these places and people are set up and operate. If someone can figure out how to put all their science to good use, that's even better. But the scientist's interest in patterns doesn't necessarily translate into policies and programs intended to make the urban world prettier or nicer. It's enough for the scientist to have figured out the big picture.

The biggest-picture scientists in urban research are the human ecologists. The information they

collect and analyze allows them to describe how towns in Western societies grew into cities and how cities became part of much larger metropolitan areas surrounded by many smaller places. It also enables them to explain why cities in many non-Western societies *didn't* grow that way. Given the right data, more mathematically inclined scientists would generate diagrams and equations that captured how these patterns unfold. The diagram and equation for one city or urban region would be compared with diagrams and numbers from other cities and regions until we have a pretty clear idea of what the overall picture of urban development looks like.

As it happens, two physicists, Geoffrey West and Luis Bettencourt, announced in 2010 that they'd produced just these kinds of equations and done the equivalent of cracking the city's underlying DNA code or structure (Lehrer, 2010). They reportedly did it by scouring "libraries and government Web sites for relevant statistics . . . downloaded huge files from the Census Bureau, learned about the intricacies of German infrastructure and . . . looked at a dizzying array of variables, from the total amount of electrical wire in Frankfurt to the number of college graduates in Boise. They amassed stats on gas stations and personal income, flu outbreaks and homicides, coffee shops and the walking speed of pedestrians."

After two years of analysis, they discovered that "all of these urban variables could be described by a few exquisitely simple equations." According to the researchers, what was represented in these equations were "laws that automatically emerge" whenever people live in cities. For instance, the scientists concluded that cities rather than small towns are "the real centers of sustainability." Their statistics showed that cities are more efficient than smaller places, and not by just a little. "People who live in densely populated places require less heat in the winter and need fewer miles of asphalt per capita."

The physicists also found that cities "facilitate human interactions." Urban dwellers exchange more ideas and collaborate more than people in

other kinds of settlements do. Their creativity spawns further inventions and efficiencies that enable people there to live better than they would elsewhere. Mind you, West and Bettencourt don't claim that everyone in cities is well-off and happy about their situation. It's just that the urban population as a whole is better off for having lived in a city than someplace that isn't a city.

As interesting as it must have been to see huge datasets reduced to a few equations, the insights the physicists drew from all their number crunching are anything but new. Economists, historians, the aforementioned human ecologists, and even the spare urban planner or two have used almost identical words to describe the "economies of scale" or efficiencies that cities create. They also have long commented on the inventions city dwellers come up with that enable so many people to be crammed into the same small space without life in the city coming to a screeching halt.

West and Bettencourt may have been too enamored with their numbers and equations, but they did provide a measure of substantiation for ideas about city life that have been around for a long time. This was not a small accomplishment. You'll recall that we noted earlier in this chapter that there are many statements scholars make about urban places and people that are based on good research but not enough data for them to say anything definitive. Their ideas aren't easily translated into testable propositions. West and Bettencourt took the time and had the resources to look at data that effectively put these ideas to a more rigorous statistical test, even if they didn't realize it at the time. They reaffirmed that cities work relatively well and, indeed, a great deal better than their critics have long argued.

As one might expect, there are researchers who have challenged West and Bettencourt's findings and conclusions. Their analysis, one critic observed, did not take into consideration changes that haven't yet made it into data sets of the sort the physicists used. For instance, the suburban "Boomburbs" and edge cities we talked about in the second chapter have been producing many more jobs than central cities in the last

decade or so. The physicists' findings apparently don't reflect that fact. In rebuttal, West and Bettencourt shrug their shoulders and note that scientists still don't have all the bugs worked out in their equations about how planets move. The smaller details of how cities work will be worked out later. Those of us watching these arguments unfold from the sidelines can only nod our heads in agreement with both sides. This is the way we do science.

The other numbers frequently used in urban research come from social surveys. Researchers interview persons and ask them questions about what they do or think about a range of topics. The sample of people being interviewed has to be big enough and representative of the kinds of people the researcher was looking to interview (e.g., elderly people, teenagers, middle-class divorcées) before the findings are taken seriously. If the sample and questions were well designed, then whatever these people say probably applies to all persons who are like them but weren't interviewed. If the samples and questions weren't well designed, then the research can't be taken seriously.

The amount of published research based on social surveys is substantial and covers a large array of questions. What people are asked depends on what researchers think is important and what the people looking to use what researchers find want to learn. Among the first topics urban researchers put through this kind of empirical testing were ideas suggested by sociologist Louis Wirth. His classic essay "Urbanism as a Way of Life" (discussed in Chapter 5) laid out a series of hypotheses about how the size, density, and heterogeneity of big-city populations affected the way people thought and acted. Wirth and most writers of his era expected that people wouldn't react well to living in such populous and compact places surrounded by lots of different kinds of people.

The research inspired by his paper in the decades following its publication showed quite the opposite (Fischer, 1976). Urban dwellers ultimately were not shown to be particularly "alienated" or as prone to acting poorly as traditional

theories about modern urban society would have us believe. They certainly have their issues and problems, but perhaps no more so than men and women living in much smaller, spread-out places or people who had the presumed advantage of living alongside others who were a lot like them.

This was a good example of how careful research based on social surveys could contradict what had passed as conventional wisdom for a long time. Wirth's essay is no less revered today as a classic piece of social science writing on the city than when it was first published in 1938. In fact, ideas laid out in it still find their way into our public deliberations about cities and the way people allegedly live in them. The difference today is that there's a lot of research to counter the impression that cities are places where people with problems are likely to congregate and/or otherwise sober and sane people become intemperate and wacky simply because they live there.

Another interesting feature of Wirth's essay is that it built on work he had done on behalf of the National Resources Committee on Urbanism in 1937, the first presidential commission looking into the conditions of American cities. Wirth was its chief researcher and the primary author of the report. Completed during the height of the Great Depression, the report laid out the condition of U.S. cities and the problems they faced. Wirth's essay the following year in the *American Journal of Sociology* summarized what observers had long thought about the impact that cities had on their residents and the poor way people reacted to city life. It certainly wasn't the first time that researchers and writers had expressed their concerns about city life. It was notable, however, for its systematic treatment of that subject and for being published at a time when so many people were out of work and national leaders were worried about the possibility of mass uprisings and political agitation inside cities.

Concern about cities and the ability of people to lead productive and civilized lives there didn't end with the Great Depression. In some ways, it actually grew in the post-World War II era with the onset of mass suburbanization, the loss of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in cities, and the

increasing presence of minority persons—mostly Black, relatively recently arrived, and not yet well integrated into regular economic and social routines—in many American cities. As we noted earlier, a whole generation of academic researchers responded to these issues with an unprecedented outpouring of books and scholarly journal articles on one or another troubling urban problem or problematic urban population.

Another wave of research on the state of America's urban areas and the integration of people into ongoing community routines came in the 1990s. This period was marked by cities completing a marked transition away from manufacturing to professional and technical industries. There also was a dramatic increase in immigration from parts of the world that hadn't sent many immigrants to the United States before and the movement of Black and other minorities into the suburbs. The response by American researchers to all these changes had the same hand-wringing sense of urgency that research during the civil rights era and Great Depression had exhibited.

We'll focus on two different but complementary research debates that arose during this period, both of which built on concerns that Louis Wirth and generations of observers have expressed about urban places and people. The first debate was over the idea that the persons who find their way to urban areas are somehow different from people who don't end up in cities. The second debate revolved around the question of how well people respond to the pressure of living in an urban world today. Both discussions, at their foundation, have an even longer pedigree in the social sciences, one that reaches back to the work of Ferdinand Tönnies (as you will recall from Chapter 4) who distinguished urban societies (i.e., so-called *Gesellschaften* societies) from pre-urban societies (i.e., characterized as *Gemeinschaften* societies).

It should be noted that by the end of the 20th century, researchers were working under the assumption that the better part of the United States was effectively "urban" in character. Every region of the country was heavily urbanized by

then. City people and big-city ways were now part of the “metropolitan” landscape, so much so that many suburbanites could no longer escape the everyday realities and problems familiar to people who lived in big cities. More important for our discussion, the ways that researchers once talked and theorized about cities and worried about the people who lived and worked there were now being appropriated to describe American society as a whole and Americans generally.

With regard to the kinds of persons who reside in urban areas, Richard Florida (2002, 2005) has asserted that places with high concentrations of artistic people, immigrants, and gays do better economically than places with fewer of these persons. Modern urban societies (i.e., the *Gesellschaften* societies) thrive when they have more members of this “creative class” because the culture of these places is open to new ideas and people. Now, you’ll recall that’s what physicists West and Bettencourt concluded and many other scholars have been saying for a long time about what makes urban societies different. But Florida was celebrated as a kind of latter-day prophet and got a lot of credit for opening peoples’ eyes to the advantages of attracting a more diverse and creative workforce to urban areas. His pitch was that if you acquired more people like this, your moribund economy would undoubtedly rebound. Cities all over the country bent over backward trying to portray themselves as somehow being more creative than their neighbors. Their clamoring was expensive, but it helped elevate Florida to the status of a noted public intellectual.

The problem with Florida’s argument, apart from the fact that scholars had been saying the same thing for a long time, was that the evidence he adduced to support it actually showed how unfounded his conclusions were. He converted his counts and percentages of “creative people” into a simple ranking system and reported those figures. This let him say that one place had more or less creativity going for it because it had more or fewer gays, artistic types, and immigrants.

Florida didn’t specify (for good reasons it turns out) “how much” better or what might “count” as

a big or little difference in the “creativity” of the local population. If we assume that having more of these persons actually matters, when you looked at the actual percentages of these persons in all the urban areas Florida studied, three things are immediately apparent. First, all urban areas had a lot of people who would have qualified for membership in Florida’s “creative class.” Any statistical comparison of these figures would have shown the differences among urban areas to be trivial. Second, some places such as Dayton, Ohio, which has seen little in the way of growth, have higher percentages of creative people than a city such as Tucson, Arizona, which has been growing dramatically in the last couple of decades. Third, other factors such as public expenditures on education or military installations might have been more strongly correlated to an area’s economic development. In short, Florida had a lot of numbers but his findings just didn’t add up.

A second area of research and debate revolves around the strength and quality of the social ties Americans share with each other. Like the research and writing that prompted Florida to look at the data he assembled, this area of research stretches back to the classical social theorists’ concerns about how people in cities would get along. This debate about the quality of Americans’ relationships with one another was reignited by Robert Putnam’s 2000 book *Bowling Alone*. Putnam’s analysis of surveys showing changes in Americans’ organizational memberships and civic habits over the course of several decades revealed that people weren’t joining face-to-face organizations as much and weren’t as communally engaged as they’d been in the past. Traditional patterns of engagement and social ties like those that were supposed to be common in *Gemeinschaften* societies have fallen off or into disfavor as we moved into a more *Gesellschaften* kind of urban society. He argued that this apparent erosion in peoples’ sociability and civic mindedness was pervasive and serious. Putnam attributes it to changing economic conditions (e.g., more of us are working longer hours) and social habits (e.g., more of us are engaged in more solitary pursuits like watching television).

His argument is consistent with the idea that modern society has wiped out or seriously diminished many of the better parts of life that people knew in earlier times when we weren't as rushed or self-absorbed.

There were problems with Putnam's analysis that other researchers pointed out almost immediately. Basically, there was a great deal of information already in the public domain that contradicted his assessment that people had greatly diminished levels of "civic capital" and "social capital." He didn't take into consideration evidence that didn't fit the view of the world he was offering his readers. A reanalysis of some of the data he worked with indicated that the changes he described weren't as big as he made them sound when he wrote about them.

On at least one occasion he even left out information from a table that would have confounded his analysis. His book shows that people who went to church a great deal donated blood more often. A fuller examination of the data would have shown that people who didn't go to church at all also donated blood often. The omission of non-churchgoers from the published data allowed the author's view of how Americans were changing their commitments and sensibilities to stand (Monti, Butler, Curley, Tilney, & Weiner, 2003; Monti, 2007). In short, the numbers came out the way he wanted them to come out. Evidence that would have contradicted his point of view was not reported. It's very much like the situation Gould found when he revisited some of the research done on IQ test scores. The lesson bears repeating. Researchers can be so committed to a point of view that they skew their analysis and come up with results showing what they expected or wanted to find.

We said earlier in the chapter that research isn't carried out in a social or political vacuum. Putnam's and Florida's respective research are no different. The process and procedures of science are supposed to insulate our work from these polluting influences but can't, certainly not entirely and sometimes not at all. Can we learn anything about our cities or how to make them better? We can certainly learn something about

the culture and policy environment in which we ask and answer social questions. The questions we ask or are commissioned to ask are usually framed around what people are worried about today. The way we answer those questions is influenced, sometimes subtly and sometimes not, by what people are expecting to hear and in words familiar to them or likely to make more sense to them.

The political or intellectual bubble social scientists work in has been characterized as "liberal" or "left of center" for a while now. To be sure, there are lots of people inside that bubble who have trained newcomers in ways that reinforced a more liberal or leftist view of the world. Some of the people outside that bubble supported that approach. Other people who don't share that point of view try to push the bubble so that it will go in a different direction. Much as we might like thinking that we work in a bubble that fits our liberal sensitivities and we resist conservative values we don't share, this view ignores just how conservative some of our social scientific sensibilities really are.

The work of Florida and Putnam clearly fell into line with liberal sensibilities in one sense. They were both trying to understand how all the different kinds of people in this country could be made comfortable and more effective. After all, if America is to be an inclusive country, then room has to be made for these different people and they have to figure out how to get along with each other. Liberals like that kind of talk.

In another sense, however, the research these particular men did took us back to a time when public and private leaders worried about keeping all the new people in line and how that might be accomplished. Recall the earlier discussion about civic leaders and reformers at the beginning of the 20th century and their concerns about whether rapidly growing cities could function, given their large numbers of new residents that included both migrants from within the United States and large numbers of immigrants from other countries. We hear echoes of these debates in Florida and Putnam. How accountable all Americans were to each other

and how closely they followed the rules and precedents laid down by people who were here first were questions a lot more conservative in their origins than contemporary social scientists recognize or like to talk about today. And there's little doubt that both Florida and Putnam were worried about how closely different kinds of people would follow old rules or make up their own rules and how they'd manage to work together in the meantime.

We'll see in the next chapter how reformers, planners, and policy makers use the science at their disposal to repair urban places and people. In the process, we'll also learn how they try to blend the forward-looking and backward-looking ideas talked about by researchers into a workable program of action. The inescapable conclusion of our review will be that their programs and policies are very much works in progress. This isn't a bad conclusion. It only suggests that the problems people are dealing with are every bit as complex and nuanced as the ideas are for how we can leave urban places and people better than the way we found them.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What questions are more likely to be addressed using quantitative data? Which ones are more likely addressed using qualitative data?
2. What kinds of answers would qualify as "liberal" and "conservative" in urban research?
3. Consider any urban problem and outline the evidence it would take for you to be convinced that it had been "fixed" and that we could comfortably move on to address other problems.
4. What are the political and scientific advantages of not being able to say that we had solved a particular urban problem?

NOTES

1. Good examples of archaeological and historical studies of ancient cities would include the following:

Max Weber, *The City* (The Free Press, 1958); Gideon Sjoberg, *The Preindustrial City* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1960); Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961); Spiro Kostof, *The City Assembled: The Elements of Urban Form Through History* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1992); Sir Peter Hall, *Cities in Civilization* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1998).

2. Listed below are books that deal exclusively with cities, suburbs, and towns in the United States. We've taken the rather unorthodox step of listing some of the case studies we know best, if only to drive home the point that this kind of research has provided scholars with a partial and fragmented but at the same time an especially rich look into community life in the United States. A good sample of books authored by social scientists working in this tradition might include the following: Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1962); Gerald Suttles, *The Social Order of the Slum: Ethnicity and Territory in the Inner City* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968); William Kornblum, *Blue Collar Community* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981); John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); M. P. Baumgartner, *The Moral Order of a Suburb* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988); Elijah Anderson, *StreetWise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Daniel Monti, *The American City* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999); Mario Luis Small, *Villa Victoria: The Transformation of Social Capital in a Boston Barrio* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Michael Ian Borer, *Faithful to Fenway: Believing in Boston, Baseball, and America's Most Beloved Ballpark* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); and Lyn Macgregor, *Habits of the Heartland: Small-Town Life in Modern America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010). Here are several case studies by anthropologists that are worth reading: Sally Engle Merry, *Urban Danger: Life in a Neighborhood of Strangers* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1981); Ida Susser, *Norman Street: Poverty and Politics in an Urban Neighborhood* (New York, NY: Oxford

University Press, 1982); James Acheson, *The Lobster Gangs of Maine* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1988); and Max Kirsch, *In the Wake of the Giant: Multinational Restructuring and Uneven Development in a New England Community* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). Some of the best work done by urban historians was published for Oxford University Press in the 1960s and 1970s in a series edited by one of the leading historians of the late 20th century, Richard Wade. Among these works are the following: Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820–1860* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1964); Kenneth Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915–1930* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1967); Zane Miller, *Boss Cox's Cincinnati: Urban Politics in the Progressive Era* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1968); Melvin Holli, *Reform in Detroit* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1969); Humbert Nelli, *The Italians in Chicago, 1880–1930* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1970); Roger Lotchin, *San Francisco: From Hamlet to City, 1846–1856* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); and Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Neighborhood Deterioration and Middle-Class*

Reform, Chicago, 1880–1930 (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1978). Also see Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870–1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1973); John Schneider, *Detroit and the Problem of Order, 1830–1880* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980); Richard Lingeman, *Small Town America: A Narrative History, 1620–the Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980); Roger Lane, *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860–1890* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Mary Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City During the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Bear in mind that this is just a sample of the books dealing with American towns and cities. Academic writing on these subjects can be found in a number of history and social science journals as well.

3. This hypothesis, long considered a classic among urban researchers, was first advanced by Louis Wirth in his famous essay entitled “Urbanism as a Way of Life.” It was first published in 1938 in the *American Journal of Sociology*, 44, 1–24.