Chapter Fourteen: Population and Urbanization

Learning Objectives

- Distinguish between the theories of population put forward by the Malthusians, New Malthusians, and the Anti-Malthusians.
- Differentiate between the symbolic interactionist and conflict theorists’ perspectives on the factors behind population growth.
- Summarize the role of population pyramids in understanding population growth. Identify the three demographic variables used to project the future of populations.
- Understand the meaning of zero population growth and why it is difficult to forecast population growth accurately.
- Understand the process of urbanization and distinguish between a metropolis, a megalopolis, and a megacity.
- Explore the different U.S. urban patterns of migration.
- Discuss the concept of rural rebound and the “pushes” and “pulls” behind it.
- Compare the different models of urban growth.
- Explore the different elements of city life and the norm of noninvolvement and diffusion of responsibility.
- Understand the primary reasons why U.S. cities have declined and how they can be revitalized.

Chapter Summary

More than 200 years ago, Thomas Malthus observed that populations grow geometrically, while food supplies increase arithmetically. In his classic book, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), Malthus warned that at the current rate of growth (based on statistics available in the eighteenth century) the population of the world would outstrip its food supply. Referred to as the “Malthus theorem,” demographers continue to debate the accuracy of Malthus’ original prediction. The “New Malthusians” agree with Malthus’ original grim calculations. Another group, the “Anti-Malthusians,” contends that world population growth is slowing and the problem in the future will be too few babies being born, not too many. It is too early to tell who is right, the New Malthusians or Anti-Malthusians.

The New Malthusians point out that millions of people are starving worldwide, which supports their argument. Even though some parts of the world are decimated by famines, the amount of food currently produced worldwide is higher than ever. These famines are primarily caused by drought, inefficient farming, and wars that disrupt harvests and food distributions, not by overpopulation.

The population of the Least Industrialized Nations is growing about much faster than that of the Most Industrialized Nations. Without immigration, it would take several hundred years for the average Most Industrialized Nation to double in population, but only 40 years for the average Least Industrialized Nation to do so. People in the Least Industrialized Nations continue to have
large families because parenthood elevates their status and large numbers of children are economic assets. The implication of these different growth rates can be illustrated using population pyramids—graphic representations of a population divided into age and sex.

To project population trends, demographers use three demographic variables: fertility, mortality, and migration. Fertility refers to the number of children the average woman bears, while mortality is measured by the crude death rate: the annual number of deaths per 1,000. Known as the basic demographic equation, the growth rate equals births minus deaths, plus net migration. The growth rate is affected by anticipated variables, such as the percentage of women who are in their childbearing years, and unanticipated variables like wars, famines, and changing economic and political conditions.

Industrialization is the primary factor that influences a country’s growth rate. In every country that industrializes, the growth rate declines and the standard of living improves, including life expectancy. The invention of the plow, which predates the Industrial Revolution, led to the development of cities. For most of human history, cities were small. After the Industrial Revolution, the number and size of cities in the world grew rapidly. As cities grew, so did their influence. Urbanization is so extensive today that many cities have become metropolises, and some metropolises have expanded into megalopolises.

Of special interest to sociologists is how people adapt to their environment. Known as human ecology or urban ecology, there are four major models of urban growth. These include the concentric zone model, the sector model, the multiple-nuclei model, and the peripheral model. Another important aspect of urban sociology includes an analysis of who lives in cities and why. Herbert Gans identified five types of urban dwellers: cosmopolites, singles, ethnic villagers, the deprived, and the trapped.

Some people find a sense of community in cities; others find alienation. A common characteristic of city dwellers is that they follow a norm of noninvolvement. This norm, in turn, contributes to a diffusion of responsibility that can be dysfunctional in emergency situations.

The primary problems of urban life today are poverty, decay, and a general decline of quality of life exacerbated by suburbanization, disinvestment, and deindustrialization. Reversing past trends, large numbers of Americans are now moving from cities and suburbs to rural areas. The potential for urban revitalization is based on several factors. A combination of urban renewal and the development of enterprise zones have traditionally been used in an effort to improve cities. Although successful to some degree, each of these is accompanied by other problems they create, such as the displacement of people who once lived in the areas of the city targeted for improvement. Replacing old buildings with new ones is not necessarily the answer. To be truly successful, efforts to improve cities and city life need to follow three guiding principles. These include scale (regional and national planning), livability (appeal to human need), and social justice (how it affects people).
Chapter Outline

I. A Planet with No Space for Enjoying Life?
   A. Thomas Malthus wrote *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) stating the Malthus theorem: population grows geometrically while food supply increases only arithmetically; thus if births go unchecked, population will outstrip food supplies.
   B. New Malthusians believe Malthus was correct. The world population is following an exponential growth curve (where numbers increase in extraordinary proportions): 1800, one billion; 1930, two billion; 1960, three billion; 1975, four billion; 1987, five billion, 1999, six billion; and in 2011, seven billion.
   C. Anti-Malthusians believe that the three-stage process of population growth, known as the demographic transition, provides a model for the future.
      1. They cite the historical experiences of European countries over the last two centuries as an example.
      2. Stage 1 is characterized by a fairly stable population (high birth rates offset by high death rates); stage 2, by a “population explosion” (high birth rates and low death rates); and stage 3, by population stability (low birth rates and low death rates).
      3. Some Anti-Malthusians have suggested a 4th stage: a shrinking population characterized by high death rates and low birth rates.
      4. They assert this transition will happen in the Least Industrialized Nations, which currently are in the second stage.
   D. Who is correct? Only the future will prove the accuracy of either the projections of the New Malthusians or the Anti-Malthusians.
      1. The Least Industrialized Nations are currently in stage 2 of the demographic transition—their birth rates remain high while the death rates have dropped.
      2. There are signs that birth rates in the Least Industrialized Nations are dropping, but the two sides greet this news differently. The New Malthusians say that the populations in the Least Industrialized Nations will continue to climb, only at a slower rate, while the Anti-Malthusians say that the slow rate is a sign that these nations are beginning to move into stage 3.
      3. Population shrinkage (a country’s population is smaller because birth rate and immigration cannot replace those who die and emigrate) is now occurring in 77 nations, suggesting a fourth stage to the demographic transition.
      4. Some Anti-Malthusians predict a “demographic free fall.” Eventually, the world’s population will peak at 8 or 9 billion then begin to grow smaller.
   E. Why are people starving?
      1. Anti-Malthusians note that the amount of food produced for each person in the world has increased: famines are not the result of too little food production, but result from maldistribution of existing food.
      2. The New Malthusians counter that the world’s population continues to grow and the earth may not be able to continue to produce sufficient food.
      3. Recently, famines have been concentrated in Africa. However, these famines are not due to too many people living on too little land. Rather, these famines are due
to drought, outmoded farming techniques and ongoing political instability that disrupt harvests and food distribution.

4. Starvation in Africa is a result of the maldistribution of food rather than overpopulation.

II. Population Growth

A. Three reasons poor nations have so many children are (1) the status that parenthood provides; (2) the community supports the “parenthood status” view; and (3) children are considered to be economic assets (the parents rely on the children to take care of them in their old age).

1. The symbolic interactionist perspective stresses that we need to understand these patterns within the framework of the culture and society in which the behavior occurs.

2. The conflict perspective stresses that in the Least Industrialized Nations, men dominate women in all spheres of life, including that of reproduction. There is an emphasis on male virility and dominance, including the fathering of many children, as a means of achieving status in the community.

B. The consequences of a rapid population growth are enormous.

1. The continued desire of parents in the Least Industrialized Nations to have many children, would mean that the population in the average Least Industrialized Nation will double in forty years.

2. The result of that population growth is that, to stay even, within forty years a country would have to double the number of available jobs and housing facilities, its food production, infrastructure, schools, hospitals, etc.

3. Conflict theorists point out that a declining standard of living poses the threat of political instability resulting in protests, riots, even revolution, to which the government will respond by repressing its people.

4. The fear of this instability has led the leaders of the Most Industrialized Nations and the United Nations to direct a campaign of worldwide birth control.

C. Demographers use population pyramids (graphic representations of a population, divided into age and sex) to illustrate a country’s population dynamics.

1. Different population growth rates have different implications. Countries with rapid growth rates have to cope with increased numbers of people among whom to share resources; this can result in a declining standard of living.

2. A declining standard of living may result in political instability followed by severe repression by the government.

D. Estimated population growth is based on three demographic variables:

1. Fertility, measured by the fertility rate (number of children an average woman bears), is sometimes confused with fecundity (number of children a woman theoretically can bear). To compute a country’s fertility rate, demographers use crude birth rate (annual number of births per 1,000 people).

2. The countries with the highest fertility rate are found in Africa, with Niger being the highest. Macao and Hong Kong have the lowest fertility rates.

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3. Mortality is measured by the crude death rate (number of deaths per 1,000 people). The highest death rates occur in Afghanistan in Asia and the lowest, in Qatar, another Asian country.

4. Migration is measured by the net migration rate (difference between the number of immigrants moving in and emigrants moving out per 1,000). There are two types: movement between regions within a country and movement between countries. “Push” factors make people want to leave where they are living (e.g., persecution, lack of economic opportunity); “pull” factors attract people (e.g., opportunities for education, better jobs).

5. Around the world, the flow of migration is from the Least Industrialized Nations to the Industrialized Nations. The U.S. admits more immigrants each year than all the other nations of the world combined.

6. There is a debate as to whether immigrants are a net contributor or a drain on our economy.

E. The growth rate equals births minus deaths plus net migration.

1. Economic changes, wars, famines, and plagues all make it difficult to forecast population growth. The primary unknown factor that influences a country’s growth rate is its rate of industrialization—in every country that industrializes, the growth rate declines. Industrialization creates new opportunities for work, but it also makes it more expensive to have children.

2. Some countries are concerned about underpopulation. Other countries, like China, are concerned about overpopulation and instituted policies to limit childbearing.

III. Urbanization

An introduction to what was once a garbage dump, now the district of El Tiro in Medellin, Colombia, provides a context for understanding urban life.

IV. The Development of Cities

A. A city is a place in which a large number of people are permanently based and do not produce their own food. Small cities with massive defensive walls existed as far back as 7,000 years ago; cities on a larger scale originated about 3500 B.C. as a result of the development of more efficient agriculture and a food surplus. The key to the origin of cities is the development of more efficient agriculture.

B. The Industrial Revolution drew people to cities to work. Today, urbanization not only means that more people live in cities, but also that today’s cities are larger; today well over 500 of the world’s cities contain at least 1 million people.

C. Urbanization is the process by which an increasing proportion of a population lives in cities. There are specific characteristics of cities, such as size and anonymity that give them their unique urban flavor.

1. Metropolis refers to cities that grow so large that they exert influence over a region; the central city and surrounding smaller cities and suburbs are connected economically, politically, and socially.

2. Megalopolis refers to an overlapping area consisting of at least two metropolises and their many suburbs.
3. A megacity is a city of 10 million or more residents. Today there are 22 megacities and most are located in the Least Industrialized Nations. Megacities are growing so fast that by the year 2025 there are expected to be 29.

D. In 1790, only about 5 percent of Americans lived in cities; by 1920, 50 percent of the U.S. population lived in cities; today, 80 percent of Americans live in cities.

1. The U.S. Census Bureau divided the country into 274 metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), which consist of a central city of at least 50,000 people and the urbanized areas that are linked to it. About 60 percent of the entire U.S. population lives in just fifty or so MSAs.

2. As Americans migrate in search of work and better lifestyles, a two-way pattern of migration between regions appears. Today, five of the ten fastest-growing U.S. cities are in the West; the five are in the South. Of the ten shrinking cities, most are in the Northeast.

3. As Americans migrate and businesses move to serve them, edge cities have developed (a clustering of service facilities and residential areas near highway intersections).

4. Gentrification, the movement of middle-class people into rundown areas of a city, is another major U.S. urban pattern. As a consequence of gentrification, the poor are often displaced from their neighborhoods. A common pattern is for the gentrifiers to be white and the displaced to be minorities.

5. Suburbanization is the movement from the city to the suburbs. After racial integration occurred, many whites fled the cities. In 1920, only about 15 percent of Americans lived in the suburbs; today over half of all Americans live in the suburbs.

6. The most recent trend is the development of micropolitan areas. A micropolis is a city of 10,000 to 50,000 residents that is not a suburb.

E. Some Americans are retreating to rural areas. Fears of urban crime and violence are “push” factors. The “pull” factors to these rural areas are safety, lower cost of living, and more living space.

V. Models of Urban Growth

A. Robert Park coined the term human ecology to describe how people adapt to their environment (known as “urban ecology”); human ecologists have constructed four models that attempt to explain urban growth patterns.

B. Ernest W. Burgess proposed the concentric zone model.

1. The city consists of a series of zones emanating from its center, each characterized by a different group of people and activity: zone 1 is the central business district; zone 2 is in transition, with deteriorating housing and rooming houses; zone 3 is an area to which thrifty workers have moved to escape the zone in transition while maintaining access to work; zone 4 is more expensive apartments, single-family dwellings, and exclusive areas where the wealthy live; and zone 5 is a commuter zone consisting of suburban areas or satellite cities that have developed around rapid transit routes.

2. Burgess intended this model to represent the tendency for towns and cities to expand outward from the central business district.
C. Homer Hoyt proposed the sector model, which sees urban zones as wedge-shaped sectors radiating out from the center.
   1. A zone might contain a sector of working-class housing, another sector of expensive housing, a third of businesses, and so on, all competing with one another for the same land.
   2. In an invasion-succession cycle, poor immigrants move into a city, settling in the lowest-rent area available to them; as their numbers grow, they begin to encroach upon adjacent areas. As the poor move closer to the middle class, the middle class leave, expanding the sector of lower-cost housing.

D. The multiple-nuclei model, developed by Chauncey Harris and Edward Ullman, views the city as comprised of multiple centers or nuclei, each of which focuses on a specialized activity (e.g., retail districts, automobile dealers, and others).

E. Chauncey Harris later developed the peripheral model of urban development to account for more recent changes in the use of urban space. In this model, people and services move away from the central city into the periphery; highways radiating out from the center encourage this development along the edges of metropolitan areas.

F. These models tell only a partial story of how cities are constructed. They reflect both the time frame and geographical region of the cities that were studied. They cannot explain medieval cities or cities in other Most Industrialized or Least Industrialized Nations.

VI. City Life
A. Cities provide opportunities but also create problems.
   1. Humans have a need for community, which some people have a hard time finding in cities and experience alienation.
   2. Urban dwellers live in anonymity; their lives marked by segmented and superficial encounters that make them grow aloof from one another and indifferent to other people’s problems.
   3. “Road rage” is a form of alienation.

B. The city can also be viewed as containing a series of smaller worlds, within which people find a sense of community or belonging.

C. Herbert Gans identified five types of people who live in the city.
   1. Cosmopolites—intellectuals and professionals; artists and entertainers who live in the inner city to be near its conveniences and cultural benefits.
   2. Singles—young, unmarried people (usually in their early 20s to early 30s) who come seeking jobs and entertainment.
   3. Ethnic villagers—live in tightly knit neighborhoods that resemble villages and small towns, who are united by ethnicity and social class.
   4. The deprived—the very poor or emotionally disturbed individuals who live in neighborhoods more like urban jungles than urban villages.
   5. The trapped—(1) those who could not afford to move when their neighborhood was invaded by another ethnic group, (2) downwardly mobile persons who have fallen from a higher social class, (3) elderly people who have drifted into the slums because they are not wanted elsewhere and are powerless to prevent their downward slide, and (4) alcoholics and drug addicts.
D. Urban dwellers are careful to protect themselves from the unwanted intrusions of strangers.
   1. They follow a norm of noninvolvement, such as using a newspaper or an iPod to indicate inaccessibility for interaction, to avoid encounters with people they do not know.
   2. The more bystanders there are to an incident, the less likely people are to help because people’s sense of responsibility becomes diffused.
   3. The norm of noninvolvement and the diffusion of responsibility may help urban dwellers get through everyday city life, but they are dysfunctional because people do not provide assistance to others.

VII. Urban Problems and Social Policy
A. U.S. cities have declined due to suburbanization and disinvestment and deindustrialization.
   1. As people have moved out of the city, so have the businesses and jobs.
   2. This shift has left people behind who had no choice but to live in the city. William Wilson notes that this transformed the inner city into a ghetto. Those left behind were trapped by poverty, unemployment, welfare dependency.
   3. Suburbanites, preferring that the city keep its problems to itself, fight movements to share suburbia’s revenues with the city. However, the time may come when suburbanites may have to pay for their attitudes toward the city.
   4. As suburbs age, they are becoming mirror images of the city, leading to a spiraling sense of insecurity, more middle-class flight, and a further reduction of property values.

B. As the cities’ tax base shrunk and services declined, neighborhoods deteriorated and banks began redlining. That is, they drew a line on a map around problem areas and refused to make loans for housing and businesses located in these areas. This disinvestment pushed these areas into further decline.
   1. The development of a global market has led to deindustrialization. Manufacturing firms have relocated from the inner city to areas where production costs are lower. As millions of urban manufacturing jobs were eliminated, inner-city economies were unable to provide alternative employment for poor residents, thereby locking them out of the economy.

C. Social policy usually takes one of two forms.
   1. Urban renewal involves tearing down and rebuilding the buildings in an area. As a result of urban renewal, residents can no longer afford to live in the area and are displaced to adjacent areas.
   2. Enterprise zones are economic incentives to encourage businesses to move into the area. Most businesses, however, refuse to move into high-crime areas.
   3. If U.S. cities are to change, they must become top-agenda items of the U.S. government, with adequate resources in terms of money and human talents focused on overcoming urban woes.
   4. William Flanagan suggests three guiding principles for working out specific solutions to urban problems: (1) regional and national planning is necessary; (2) growth needs to be channeled in such a way that makes city living attractive; and
(3) social policy must be evaluated in terms of its effects on people. Finally, unless the root causes of urban problems, such as poverty, poor schools, and lack of jobs, are addressed, solutions will only serve as Band-Aids that cover the real problems.

**KEY TERMS**

*After studying the chapter, review the definition for each of the following terms.*

- **alienation**: Urban dwellers whose lives are marked by segmented and superficial encounters that leads to them feeling aloof and indifferent to other people’s problems; the price of personal freedom that the city offers (p. 440)

- **basic demographic equation**: the growth rate equals births minus deaths plus net migration (p. 427)

- **city**: a place in which a large number of people are permanently based and do not produce their own food (p. 431)

- **crude birth rate**: the annual number of live births per 1,000 population (p. 425)

- **crude death rate**: the annual number of deaths per 1,000 population (p. 425)

- **deindustrialization**: The process of industries moving out of a country or region (p. 445)

- **demographic transition**: a three-stage historical process of population growth; first, high birth rates and high death rates; second, high birth rates and low death rates; and third, low birth rates and low death rates (p. 418)

- **demographic variables**: the three factors that influence population growth: fertility, mortality, and migration (p. 425)

- **disinvestment**: the withdrawal of investments by financial institutions, which seals the fate of an urban area (p. 445)

- **enterprise zone**: the use of economic incentives (reduced taxes) in a designated area to encourage investment (p. 445)

- **edge city**: a large clustering of service facilities and residential areas near highway intersections that provides a sense of place to people who live, shop, and work there (p. 436)

- **exponential growth curve**: a pattern of growth in which numbers double during approximately equal intervals, showing a steep acceleration in the later stages (p. 416)

- **fecundity**: the number of children that women are capable of bearing (p. 425)

- **fertility rate**: the number of children that the average woman bears (p. 425)

- **gentrification**: middle-class people moving into a rundown area of a city, displacing the poor as they buy and restore homes (p. 436)

- **growth rate**: the net change after people have been added to and subtracted from a population (p. 427)
human ecology: Robert Park’s term to describe how people adapt to their environments; also known as urban ecology (p. 438)

invasion-succession cycle: the process of one group of people displacing a group whose racial-ethnic or social class characteristics differ from their own (p. 439)

Malthus theorem: an observation by Thomas Malthus that although the population grows geometrically (from 2 to 4 to 8 to 16 and so forth), the food supply increases only arithmetically (from 1 to 2 to 3 to 4 and so on) (p. 416)

megacity: a city of 10 million or more residents (p. 434)

megalopolis: an urban area consisting of at least two metropolises and their many suburbs (p. 434)

metropolis: a central city surrounded by smaller cities and their suburbs (p. 434)

metropolitan statistical area (MSA): a central city of at least 50,000 people and the urbanized areas linked to it (p. 434)

net migration rate: the difference between the number of immigrants and emigrants per 1,000 people (p. 425)

population pyramid: a graph that represents the age and sex of a population (p. 424)

population shrinkage: the process by which a country’s population becomes smaller because its birth rate and immigration are too low to replace those who die and emigrate (p. 419)

redlining: a decision by the officers of a financial institution not to make loans in a particular area (p. 445)

suburb: a community located just outside a city (p. 436)

suburbanization: the migration of people from the city to the suburbs (p. 436)

urban renewal: the rehabilitation of a rundown area, which usually results in the displacement of the poor who are living in that area (p. 445)

urbanization: the process by which an increasing proportion of a population lives in cities and has a growing influence on the culture (p. 431)

zero population growth: women bearing only enough children to reproduce the population (p. 428)

KEY PEOPLE
State the major theoretical contributions or findings of these people.

Ernest Burgess: Burgess developed the concentric zone model of urban development. (pp. 438-439)

John Darley and Bibb Latané: These social psychologists found that people tend to remain uninvolved when they perceive there are others around who might become involved; they referred to this as the diffusion of responsibility. (pp. 443-444)
William Faunce: Writing about the far-reaching implications of exponential growth, this sociologist’s views are consistent with the New Malthusians. (pp. 416-417)

William Flanagan: Flanagan has suggested three guiding principles for finding solutions to pressing urban problems: (1) use of regional and national planning, (2) awareness that cities must be appealing and meet human needs, and (3) equalizing the benefits between social classes as well as the impact of urban change. (p. 446)

Herbert Gans: Gans studied urban neighborhoods, with the result that he documented the existence of community within cities and identified the several different types of urban dwellers that live there. (p. 442)

Chauncy Harris and Edward Ullman: These two geographers developed the multiple-nuclei model of urban growth. Harris later introduced the peripheral model of urban growth to account for more recent developments. (p. 440)

Homer Hoyt: Hoyt modified Burgess’ model of urban growth with the development of the sector model. (pp. 439-440)

Thomas Malthus: Malthus was an economist who made dire predictions about the future of population growth. (p. 416)

Steven Mosher: This anthropologist did field work in China and wrote about the ruthlessness with which the “one couple, one child” policy is enforced. (p. 427)

Robert Park: Park coined the term “human ecology” to describe how people adapt to their environment. (p. 438)

William Julius Wilson: Wilson observed that the net result of shifting population and resources from central cities to suburbs was the transformation of the cities into ghettos. (p. 444)

Discussion Topics to Encourage Student Participation

- Ask students who grew up in the city to critique the material in the text that describes city life and comment on its accuracy. Each student should identify the part of the city in which he or she grew up and be sure to comment on the accuracy of Henslin’s description of the norm of non-involvement, the sense of alienation they may have felt, and how they personalized their activities. They should also include an observation of the types of people who live in the city according to the typology presented by Herbert Gans.

- Ask your students to discuss the Malthus theorem while choosing sides between the New Malthusians and the Anti-Malthusians. In choosing between the two groups, have your students defend their positions, as well as speculate on how their own lives would be affected if the opposing side ultimately turns out to be right.

- After students have read How Tsunamis Can Help Us to Understand Population Growth, have student discuss whether they think that this is a good example of the “unprecedented population growth that is taking place in the Least Industrialized Nations.” Is that what
students got out of the tsunami story? Or was it that nature can act however and whenever it
wants? Second, have them discuss whether it makes sense to rebuild cities that experience
these natural events after such devastation, continuing to overpopulate dangerous areas. Keep
in mind that, since similar devastation was present, we are talking about New Orleans as
much as we are the Least Industrialized Nations.

- Because industrialized societies with free-market economies and educated populations
  significantly reduce starvation and poverty, what could be done indigenously and
  internationally to help alleviate the problem of starvation and poverty in these nations?
  Finally, since many people in the U.S. are against involvement in the affairs of other nations
  (e.g., Iraq), what responsibilities does the United States have, if any, to intervene in these
countries’ indigenous problems while, externally, providing financial aid and/or massive
shipments of food to these countries? In short, what should the United States be doing to help
reduce the problems of the world?

- Ask your students whether they plan on living in a city after they graduate. For those who
  prefer to live in a city, ask, “What most appeals to you about city life?” For those who choose
  not to live in a city, ask “What least appeals to you about city life?” Generally, students can
discuss, “What is your favorite city in the United States, and why? If you had to pick a single
city anywhere in the United States or the world to serve as a role model for all cities to aspire
to, which city would you pick and why?”

Classroom Activities and Student Projects

- Break your students into small groups and have them design, from scratch, their ideal city. In
doing so, tell them to address the following variables: its size, people, economy, businesses,
politics, services, systems of social control, tax base, transportation system, education system,
housing, culture, and types of entertainment.

- Give your students the following assignment to complete either individually or in small
groups: First, determine the metropolitan statistical area in which your college is located.
Second, obtain or draw a map of your MSA and identify on the map the central city, edge
cities, and suburbs. Third, note any areas on the map that are undergoing gentrification while
marking with arrows any movements of people within the MSA as a result of the invasion-
succession cycle. Fourth, identify which model of urban growth the MSA most exemplifies,
and draw that model on your map. And fifth, as best you can, place the different types of
urban dwellers in the MSA within the different zones or sectors of the urban growth model
that you drew on your map.

- Ask your students whether they think that people’s fears about city life are rational or
irrational. How dangerous are cities? How might variables of race, social class, and/or gender
affect how dangerous cities really are?
Service Learning Projects and Field Trips

- Take your class on a field trip to the nearest large city. If your college is located in a large city, spend an afternoon with your students out and about in the city. Walk everywhere and, using the sociological perspective, have your students look for and record the following: 1) gender, social class, race, and ethnicity patterns in the different neighborhoods; 2) areas of gentrification; 3) different models of urban growth; 4) different types of urban dwellers; 5) signs of community and alienation; 6) signs of the norm of noninvolvement and the diffusion of responsibility; 7) evidence of disinvestment and deindustrialization; and 8) evidence of urban revitalization.

- As a term project, have your students borrow a video camera (if they don’t have one) and produce a thirty-minute video comparing and contrasting life in the suburbs with that in the city. Encourage them to be creative while filming the people, sights, and sounds of suburban life and city life through a “sociological lens” that captures the “best” and “worst” of both worlds. At the end of the semester, have your students present their videos to the class.

- Discuss with the class ways in which students can make a contribution to reducing the hunger experienced by children living in the inner city. Appoint a committee of volunteers to design a project in which the students can make a contribution to this effort. One suggestion would be to have each student, on a voluntary basis, skip a specific meal and donate the amount of that meal to the class project. As a symbol of their sacrifice, a student may elect to donate the equivalent of some other commodity taken for granted such as the price of admission to the theater, a case of their favorite beverage, or some other expense that is often taken for granted. The committee coordinating this effort may wish to publicize the project in the school newspaper and design a manner in which other students may participate. At the conclusion of the project, make a cash donation to the agency chosen by the class. Compile a set of statistics as to what that donation represents.

Suggested Films

*Demography.* Films for the Humanities and Sciences. 1993 Listings, 23 min. (DVD).

This film explains the science of demography.

*Journey to Planet Earth: The Urban Explosion.* PBS. 2009, 57 min. (DVD).

Investigates four mega-cities (Mexico City, Istanbul, Shanghai, and New York City) and if urban populations can be maintained without destroying the environment.


The lives of several displaced families are presented.