

New books authored or co-authored by two well-known journalists provide sharply contrasting visions of our urban future. One holds out hope for restoring and reshaping central cities. The other sees a future in which urban villages grow and the city core continues to decline and decay. The review examines these views and discusses their over-generalizations.

Divergent Views of the Metropolis

Joel Garreau. *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*. (New York, Doubleday, 1991) 171 pp.

Neal R. Peirce with Curtis W. Johnson and John Stuart Hall. *Citistates: How Urban America Can Prosper in a Competitive World*. (Washington, Seven Lock Press, 1993) 325 pp.

Neal R. Peirce and Robert Guskind. *Breakthroughs: Recreating the American City*. (New Brunswick, Center for Urban Policy Research Press, Rutgers, 1993) 185 pp.

An invitation every academic welcomes is the rare opportunity to review a book by a nationally known journalist who purports to write with special authority in the academic's very own special field. When the invitation includes a review of *three* books by *two well known journalists* the academic not only welcomes the review, but relishes it. Such is the case as I undertake to evaluate, with a firm grip on objectivity, two recent books by Neal R. Peirce and associates, *Citistates* and *Breakthroughs*, and *Edgecity* by Joel Garreau.

Historically, of course, academics and media people have a very hard time getting on. Countervailing egos are at work. The academic marvels at the ability of the columnist to turn out daily five hundred or more words in usually literate prose while the professor stares glumly at a blank sheet of paper or an empty computer screen. He or she takes comfort in the belief that the reason the media person is so agile is that the theoretical underpinnings of his work rest on the class notes which survive from his undergraduate education. So, of course, they are simplistic and out of date. So far as the media commentator is concerned, when the academic's work finally appears, it seems choked with incomprehensible jargon which, when finally deciphered, proclaims the obvious. Thus the tension is continuing. The academic has credentials that the journalist cannot muster but lacks the visibility that the op-ed page provides, if only for a fleeting moment.

This obligation to review these three books, however, by two very able and respected writers breaks the mold

of old clichés. Garreau and Peirce have undertaken far more than cut-and-paste commentary on metropolitan life in present-day America. They have worked seriously to portray two quite different directions which our urban regions might take to guide the policy debates for the current generation. What is intriguing is not so much their variance with "acceptable" research scholarship as their sharply divergent visions about what the American metropolis can and should look like. Peirce and his associates hold out hope for restoring and reshaping central cities of almost all sizes (one cannot use the term 'renewal' any more) if the right coalition of elites, buttressed by a committed and discerning citizenry, join together with a "doable" strategy of public-private partnership. Garreau sees a different urban future -- one in which the urban villages, first detected in the early eighties, grow larger and larger, anchored by exciting commercial malls and campus-like new high-tech production facilities at the fringes of our metropolitan areas. Meanwhile, central cities continue to decline and decay, becoming little more than holding cages for the poor, the minorities, and the unprepared immigrants drawn increasingly from third-world countries.

What is puzzling about these sharply contrasting visions of our urban future by able and seasoned reporters -- at least initially -- is the similarity of their research methods. Both are experts in carrying out case studies, investigatory reporter style. After initial "overview" chapters where Peirce posits "the new citistate age" brought about by "breakthroughs: recreating the American city," and Garreau heralds "life on the new frontier," they undertake to document their forecasts by a place-by-place examination of urban development particulars. As each picks a locale (nine for Garreau, six for Peirce in *Citistate*, augmented in *Breakthroughs* by six project cases) they proceed by a number of interviews and locally available documents to make their respective cases for city restoration or abandonment.

Peirce proceeds via a team approach with Curtis Johnson, John Hall, and Robert Guskind as able colleagues. Garreau goes it alone. But their respective techniques are much the same, and they follow in a tradition established by the American Institute of Architecture about a generation ago. Its leadership, feeling an obligation to address the urban turmoil and riots of the sixties, sent regional/urban design teams, operating *pro-bono*, to urban communities large and small across the nation, to provide instant analysis and instant solutions to whatever problems were at hand. Originally scheduled for San Francisco, I did my duty in Anderson, Indiana.

The format was well structured. Typically, a multi-disciplinary team of architects, planners, historians and assorted social scientists arrived on a Thursday night for a long weekend of exploration. Early the next morning, the team helicoptered over the area and then split up in the afternoon and throughout the next day to interview previously designated representatives of the rich, poor, community and civic activists, local media, and religious and cultural leaders. Late Saturday evening, the team did an "architecture school all-nighter," writing respective sections of the report. Sunday morning, the sections were assembled and the report was printed. Sunday afternoon or evening, the team reported orally to a large assembly of committed but unsuspecting citizens. There followed a party hosted by the team's sponsors. Prudently -- and very early Monday morning -- team members flew back to their separate homes.

Peirce and Garreau are more serious and responsible in their inquiries. Although they keep the helicopter rides (an excellent initial orientation to catch a spatial and topological sense of place), they probe more deeply into the economic, so-

cial, and political life of their locales.

Peirce and his colleagues focus essentially on the pluralism of life in major and not-so-major urban centers including, somewhat curiously, Owensboro, Kentucky, population 53,549. They commend a coming together of neighborhoods, an acceptance of multi-cultural futures, a recognition of the indispensable local links with their metropolitan regions, and a reinvigoration of government and strong citizen organizations with faith in the public sector. After Peirce's team arrives at its conclusions, the findings are initially published in the local newspaper which sponsored the visit, and are then updated in the book. They consist principally of relatively unstructured interviews and the review of local documents reminiscent of the work of sociologist Floyd Hunter and political scientist Robert Dahl thirty or more years ago.

Garreau's focus is on the entrepreneur, the mover and shaker who packages major edge city development, and also on sample upwardly mobile families in residence who have benefited by the developer's initiative, know-how, and risk-taking. His operative assumption is that the marketplace is truly the most efficient and equitable allocator of scarce resources, including land, and his developers appear for the most part as folk-heroes. They confront and overcome the very urban actors on whom Peirce relies to build the new "citistate": local officialdom, planner, bureaucrats, architects. Yet the research techniques of both principal authors -- substantial time on location, professionally crafted interviews, supporting local documents, and sprightly if impressionistic exposition -- are much the same.

Then how to account for the contradictory, almost diametrically opposite, conclusions on America's urban future? One clue is found in the manner in which the authors treated the only city they examined in common: Phoenix. Garreau titled his chapter on that city "Shadow Government," noting that public government had fallen into scandal and disgrace, and thus was augmented or justifiably displaced by essentially private institutions such as Sun City, the Salt River Project, and Downtown Management Partnership. All these enterprises possess the capacity to tax, regulate, and exercise police power or the equivalent. The 183-member-strong, Sun City Posse is offered as a particularly attractive example. These shadow governments moved into "a vacuum" according to Garreau, although he is sensitive to the charge they might represent "plutocracy, not democracy" and that the "isolated and helpless" seem not to be protected. Nonetheless, there is managerial efficiency and effectiveness in the way the Leisure World and the Salt River Project are run. Harking back to colonial days, when property rights prevailed over individual rights, Garreau tosses the dice as to whether above-ground government is to be preferred to shadow government. Maybe, he concludes, "old New Deal era reliance on big government is being replaced by new informal pragmatic idealism."

Peirce's study of Phoenix has the same point of departure: a recognition that its residents have a long-standing preference for "minimalist government" and an acknowledgment that developers wield "inordinate power" within a business elite which is more plant manager in its leadership potential than corporate CEO. "Getting its act together" on such issues as public education and public land development, such as the Rio Salado proposal, has proved difficult for the private sector to do. No effective countervailing force, public or private, appears to exist to discipline the drive for new urban villages on the sprawling fringe or to offer effective regional alternatives to the shadow governments.

Where Peirce differs from Garreau is in his explicit assertion that above-board governments can emerge to counteract the greed of unrestrained private devel-

opment, and his conviction that they should be put in place. Peirce and his colleagues would sidestep the issue of a formal metropolitan government, at least in Phoenix where it has been a political hot button since the 1950s, and strengthen Maricopa county government instead. They would push for a comprehensive regional authority to carry out the Rio Salado Master Plan. They would shame a tight-fisted provincial business community, and strive to awaken a sense of civic culture and "tap the potential of neighborhoods and people." In short, the Peirce solution lies primarily in the public and not-for-profit sectors -- comprehensive planning, stronger government, and regional public authorities.

When one runs down the two comparative lists of observations and prescriptions about Phoenix, the powerful force of *a priori* assumptions of the authors is startling. Garreau's commitment to the market place borders on the ideological. This may be why his introductory chapter is a brief twelve pages, reasonably precise in defining the characteristics of edge cities, but generalized and normative in sug-

gesting that America now searches for a new Eden, neither city or suburb. Although his value preferences are scattered throughout his separate city chapters, by sheer repetition his frontier heroes emerge as the developers of the eighties working in the largely unfettered Reagan era. From New

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Jersey to San Francisco to Dallas and on to Washington, the developers outwitted small town officials, regional planners, and national and state bureaucrats alike to build their malls and New Age factories and labs. They picked their locations just off federally-financed interstate highways, and shifted most of their infrastructure costs to state and local governments. What they did was good and Garreau's "Tomorrow Land" enshrines the market as the best of all possible urban decision-making processes, indifferent to the qualifications applied to land economics from Ricardo to Henry George.

Peirce's philosophical bent is more subtle and substantive. His overview chapter of 37 pages reflects a historically sophisticated world view which emphasizes the "rise of the citistate and the eclipse of the nation-state," brought about by the communication revolution, the emergence of the multinational private corporation, the crumbling of trade barriers, and the acceleration of immigration. He buttresses the contemporary picture with a short but essentially accurate account of the history of the city state from antiquity to the present, and identifies human resources as the critical factor of production today. Political leadership which can bring central city, suburb, and edge city together and bind them to common development strategies is the second element necessary for a successful new "citistate." Although edge cities are acknowledged, for Peirce, the central city remains the heart of the new urban region.

When it comes to options and strategies then, not surprisingly, Peirce breaks decisively with Garreau. Instead of accepting cities as the outputs of inexorable, impersonal market forces, augmented by the occasional shrewd intervention of a wily developer, he insists that "free will lives" and that citistate leaders are "able to shape fundamentally what their destiny will be."

In exploring his six cities, Peirce argues for the restoration of *public* capabilities, effective responsible government, and a resurgent civic culture. His guideposts stipulate regionalism, education, research and development, the restoration of the center city and its neighborhoods, attention to social deprivation and the natural

environment, urban fiscal reform, and improved government performance from “the bottom up.” A heavy-lifting agenda, to be sure, but well presented and in sharp contrast to Garreau’s *caveat emptor* prescription oblivious to the external dis-economies of the savings and loan scandals, the excessive overbuilding in city and suburb alike, the astronomical profits, and the ravaged land that edge cities have produced.

Still, Peirce’s agenda has a boy-scout-oath, it’s-a-wonderful-life, Our-Town quality about it. Since he has shown himself to be a pluralist, he is perforce committed to bridge-building across an increasingly diverse and often disparate “community”: public and private sectors, neighborhoods, civic activists. Indeed one can treat his *Breakthroughs* reportings of the winners of the Bruner Foundation awards as an extension of the importance of the growing roles of citizen participation and human empowerment in these high quality and intriguing project case studies. This is quite a challenge to lay on a cynical, dispirited public today, after a full generation of political and intellectual disparagement of the potential and promise of public action. Today, if Garreau’s base is chiefly economics and Peirce’s mostly political science, who can doubt the ultimate policy winner?

Still, a judgment must be struck on grounds of both feasibility and desirability about which road urban America should follow. It will be no surprise to those familiar with this reviewer’s track record in print and practice to learn his preference for Peirce’s optimistic and upbeat prognosis for center cities, and his disinclination to applaud Garreau’s new frontier. But preferences are no substitutes for predictions. Here perhaps the most useful commentary is to identify a common conceptual fallacy to which most journalist-commentators are prone, and to focus on what these books left out -- three critical omissions.

The fallacy is the media sin of over-generalization. There are no gradations in the models eloquently prescribed -- either Peirce’s or Garreau’s -- no corrections for size, economic base, demography, political cohesion, or lack thereof. There is black and white but little recognition of gray as reality. More precisely, no one loses -- there are only winners -- restored central cities, booming edge cities. Phoenix will triumph whichever way it goes. Owensboro will rise again, up by its bootstraps, if only it will believe. So the fallacy of generalized prediction attaches to both principal authors.

As for omissions, one is the role of the national government. Admittedly, it has been almost absent since 1976 and the onslaught of fiscal deficits. The Reagan years savaged HUD, and the Bush years did little better. The response to the Los Angeles riots in 1992 compared to those made after Newark and Detroit in 1968 is a scandal for the timidity, indifference, and cynicism displayed. But over time, one simply cannot believe that the federal presence will fade away. The national interest in homebuilding and more belatedly in the homeless, in infrastructure and social equity may be weak now given the growth in the sizes of the suburban and edge city constituencies. Still, if Peirce is only partly on target in his sketch of the new international economic role of central cities, city political clout will rise again. Further to the national role is the national responsibility for immigration policy and for national education standards. If we are to compete post-GATT, these obligations simply cannot be ignored.

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A second omission -- although Peirce touches on it -- is the emerging and crucial role of the states. Growth management is now a cutting edge of state policy from Maine to Florida and west to Washington. If effectively pursued, growth man-

agement policy can slow the spread of edge cities and accelerate central city revival. Neither author treats these options seriously.

Finally, neither dwells much upon the critical need to restore in our common civil culture the dimension of simple tolerance. The waves of migrants authorized in the 1980s, somewhat curiously by a national conservative-liberal alliance, now break upon us. The domestic challenge of civil rights becomes more complex shifting from political to economic concern for equity by gender as well as by race and ethnicity. Accordingly, more than ever before, the call for the spirit of tolerance and compassion becomes a compelling requirement in our national life. Both urban journalists and urban scholars have been delinquent in facing this issue in the 1990s, and in failing to reframe the response that seemed so simple in the 1960s. How well we truly bring urban constituencies and communities together on this issue in the next decade may well determine whether Garreau, Peirce, or neither was correct. The most pressing urban issue may well be how to transform violent confrontation, individual or group, into constructive encounter. A strategy for that issue has yet to be fashioned.