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Megalopolis

The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States

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PART FOUR

NEIGHBORS IN MEGALOPOLIS

The preceding parts of this book have studied the dynamism of a prosperous society living in relatively crowded conditions on a small but most important parcel of American land. We have studied this land, the uses made of it, and the activities of its people in the past and in the present. We have seen the whole region become urbanized in one way or another, although much of its landscape does not look the way we have been used to seeing cities look. We have found the region of Megalopolis closely integrated as one system, but this system remains quite different from what a city was or is. It is not in any way isolated from the outside by a wall, a stockade, or any significant administrative boundary; it consists rather of a chain of crossroads, all intimately connected with other areas or cities outside the region we have defined. Still, Megalopolis stands out as a well

differentiated and integrated system, which has a "personality" in itself, a set of characteristics not repeated outside it.

The degree of integration of the region has perhaps been best demonstrated on flow maps: actual daily flow of telephone calls (Figs. 177 to 186, pp. 583-593); of highway traffic (Fig. 203, p. 645); of airline passenger traffic (Fig. 204, p. 646); and the longer range, endless flow of population change (Fig. 9, p. 41, and Fig. 73, p. 248). This emphasis on *flow*, especially of people, demonstrates graphically the vast web of variegated and often abstract relationships that unite the different cities and counties of Megalopolis in one regional system. Beyond the limits we have outlined for this region the intensity of all these flows slackens, the density of interconnections weakens.

It is certainly too early to speak at this time of a "Megalopolitan community," and such a thing may never come to be. One can observe within Megalopolis far more competition, rivalry, and diversity than common loyalty or recognition of common interests. In fact, almost every component of Megalopolis is closely linked to and associated with groups, institutions, and interests rooted in other regions of America or even abroad. This may even seem required by the region's historical role as an economic hinge; by its special activities; by the complex maze of contracts, means of transportation, and communication facilities necessary to supply it and to keep its business operating; and last but not least, by the Megalopolitan endeavor to assume leadership in many fields. But even though we do not feel justified in considering this region as one community, much less, of course, as one city, we have found enough integration in the whole and enough interplay between its various parts to indicate strongly that all those thirty-seven million inhabitants counted in Megalopolis by the 1960 Census are close neighbors.

This immense neighborhood is evidenced partly by all the flows within the region, all its tidal currents, and partly by the density of the population, the crowding. The residents of Megalopolis are all neighbors because they have so many problems in common, and most of these problems stem from the crowding due to population density or from the congestion due to the intensity of the various flows. Congestion and crowding have been recorded mainly in the axial belt of Megalopolis, that central ribbon of land that especially deserves the label of the "Main Street of the nation." But the axial belt has been steadily widening, and progress in this sense has been particularly clear between 1950 and 1960 (see Figs. 1 and 9, pp. 6, 41). Even those parts of Megalopolis where the density of population remains thin, or may even be declining, are increasingly used as immedi-

ate adjuncts of the more urbanized districts, be it as farmland, parks, hunting grounds, or otherwise.

We have had many opportunities to ascertain how interdependent are the various economic and social facts and trends analyzed earlier in this book. Whether they are conscious of it or not, the people and the institutions in Megalopolis are related one to another by links of neighborhood, both geographically and functionally. They live and work together in a region in which they share many things, both material and immaterial, and the former are very abundant owing to the labor and resourcefulness of its people for three centuries. However, all this sharing must go on in an environment carefully partitioned administratively, politically, emotionally, and in many other ways. The very diversity of Megalopolis, which in some respects makes its strength and wealth, also causes many difficulties and discomforts and calls for constant adjustment and change.