

Imagining the City:
Urban Politics and Imagined Communities

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Human beings are social animals; except for the occasional religiously fanatical hermit, most individuals enjoy the company of others. It is this desire for community, along with more material needs, that leads to us defining ourselves as members of religions, social organizations, and other aggregations of people. Many of these groupings to which we pledge our allegiance involve face-to-face interaction; we see and know our fellow Elk members or Episcopalians on a regular basis. However, some of our memberships are less tangible; these memberships, such as the nation to which we belong, better categorized as being imaginary. Benedict Anderson associated the notion of the imagined community with the collectivity known as the nation. According to Anderson, the nation is an imagined political community because while members of the nation feel a unique sense of kinship with one another, “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them.”¹

Yet, the nation is not the only imagined community to which we belong. Pursuing this line of thought, I intend to expand the use of the idea of imagined community from the nation to the urban community. Anderson himself suggests the imagined community of the nation is not a singularity. Anderson argues that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even those) are imagined.”² Hence, the application of the notion of the imagined community to the urban community is valid. Through this analysis, I intend to display that the urban community is an imagined community, with a structure that parallels the nation. In order to accomplish this task, I will first outline the basic form of the imagined community,

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2003), 6.

² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

utilizing Anderson's analysis of the nation as my model. Building from this analysis, I will provide the form of the urban imagined community, suggesting both the apparatuses utilized to structure the urban imagined community in addition to the positive role that it serves in urban life. Finally, I will consider the tension that arises between local democratic government and the urban imagined community.

Imagining the Nation

The first phase of this analysis is examining the basic template of the nation, in order to identify the structure of the imagined community. By considering the primary components that comprise the imagined community that is the nation, it will be possible to articulate how the urban environment contains corresponding elements. While the urban imagined community does not perfectly replicate the form of its national counterpart, both contain analogous essentials that legitimize the utilization of the concept of "imagined community" when discussing urban politics. To begin, Anderson argues the nation is composed of four facets: it is imagined, it is a community, it is limited in size, and it is a sovereign construct.³ The imagined component of the nation was established above: the connections established by membership in the nation are not actual relationships based on interpersonal interactions, but rather develop among individuals due to inclusion in the same nation. This construct will be taken as a given; my focus will be on the latter three factors. To delve further into the urban environment as an imagined community, Anderson's definitions of the remainder of these terms, as well as the methods by which these constructs are realized in practice, must be elaborated.

Community

The first function of the imagined community is to build a sense of connection and shared fate among disparate individuals. Nations serve to build a "deep, horizontal comradeship"

³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

among their members, despite any actual inequalities or other social differences that might exist.⁴ This sense of community establishes social cohesion within a nation. Nations are large bodies of people, potentially incorporating a range of economic classes, political ideologies, religious affiliations, or other varying demographic characters. National imagined communities seek to mitigate these social tensions, easing the operation of society by building a sense of kinship among its members.

This horizontal kinship among members of a nation can be cultivated through a number of mechanisms. For instance, Anderson highlights the newspaper as a useful tool for integrating members into a community. According to Anderson, the newspaper becomes a ritual. Each morning or evening, when an individual reads the paper, she can be certain that other members of her nation are doing the same thing. Furthermore, by reading the same paper or reading that paper in the same language, a shared consciousness is developed.⁵ Anderson also suggests that institutional experiences, particularly in the educational system, are important in building community ties. Anderson relates how educational systems, imposed by colonial rulers, in Indonesia and Southeast Asia built a common set of experiences and a shared knowledge base that united otherwise tenuously connected individuals.⁶ The first function of an imagined community, therefore, is to produce bonds between members of that community through the utilization of shared experiences, such as the written word or institutional normalization.

Limited

The second central aspect of the nation, as outlined by Anderson, is that they are limited entities. The imagined nation may conceive of itself as enormous, incorporating thousands or even millions of individuals. However, there is always an end to the nation; there is an

⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35, 44-45.

⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 121-140.

understanding that not everyone is a member of the nation and that other nations exist. Without these boundaries, the national imagined community would provide little meaning. If an imagined community was inclusive of all members of a society, any corresponding sense of identity or connection to similar individuals would be in danger of being washed away.⁷ While exclusion and the potential for violence are a risk, a salient characteristic of the national imagined community remains its bound nature.

The limited nature of nations is maintained through a number of methods. Language is a mechanism that is often used to define who does and does not belong in a nation. Much as speaking a language marks one as a member of a nation, an inability to speak that language is a useful heuristic to label someone as outside the community.⁸ Borders are another useful mechanism to limit the size of the nation. Borders are of course arbitrary, and not all members of a nation live within the same nation-state. However, imagined or not, members of a nation often point to a “homeland,” or site of origin. Requiring individuals to trace their ancestry back to this potentially mythical site is another mechanism to limit the size of the nation.⁹ While nations are large aggregates, socially constructed through myth, they limit their size through such mechanisms as language and geographic borders in order to maintain their own coherence.

Sovereign

The final quality of the imagined community, as described by Anderson, is its sovereign character. According to Anderson, nations believe that based on their status as unique communities, they should be free from the control of outside forces. Hence, each nation believes it should have the power to determine its own destiny. The result is that each nation harbors a faith in its own efficacy; each nation believes it has not only the capability, but more

⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 145.

⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 164-178.

fundamentally the right, to self-rule. This desire for sovereignty translates into nations pressing for their own state apparatus, in order to remove themselves from the domination of others. Associating the national imagined community with sovereignty provides a legitimate mechanism around which to structure political life, following the decline of other forms of social organization, such religion and familial political dynasties.¹⁰ This sense of sovereignty, the final aspect of the nation, provides a common purpose behind which members of a community can rally.

These three concepts of community, limited size, and sovereignty are the core upon which the imagined community of the nation rests. These concepts provide a coherent sense of identity and purpose to members of an imagined community. With a basic understanding of what the imagined community is and how it develops through an analysis of the prototypical imagined community of the nation, it is now possible to turn to urban communities, and consider how the model of the imagined community fits onto urban life.

Urban Communities as Imagined Communities

Urban environments, while lacking the scale of the nation, can nonetheless be large, sprawling places. Not surprisingly, in most cases, individuals living in a city do not personally know the vast majority of citizens with whom they share their zip code. Despite this apparent disconnect, individuals certainly feel a connection to their fellow urban dwellers. The elation we feel when we encounter someone from our hometown while traveling provides, somewhat anecdotally, evidence of the unique bond that we share with members of our own urban community. Urban communities, much like nations, *are* imagined communities.

In order to clarify how urban communities are imagined communities, I will identify the three core tenets of the urban imagined community, the role that each tenet serves in the function

¹⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7, 12-22.

of the urban environment, and the method through which such ideas are constructed. Not surprisingly, the core tenets of the urban imagined community reflect many of the same features as the nation; the urban imagined community, however, does possess its own unique twists that require elaboration. First, the urban imagined community is also a community, fostering a sense of similarity and bonding between citizens. Second, an urban imagined community is still limited, but with its own criteria for membership. Finally, while not sovereign, an urban imagined community is oriented towards boosterism and its own development. Thus, urban imagined communities mirror the basic form of their grander brethren the nation.

Before engaging the actual subject of the urban imagined community, however, a brief word must be said about the urban environments utilized to develop the concept of the urban imagined community. My theorizing primarily builds from accounts of life in two cities. First, I selected the Disney-sponsored town of Celebration, Florida. The second city I utilized to inform my work was Las Vegas, Nevada. Certainly, neither town is representative of urban life as a whole. Celebration, caught somewhere between a theme park and Mayberry, is a literally new town, emerging from the swamps of Florida in the mid-1990s as a means for Disney to generate revenue from land that otherwise would have gone to waste. Las Vegas is of course Sin City, a rather strange amalgam of tourism, natural beauty, retirement communities, people looking to start over, and long-time residents. Despite their colorful nature, both sites prove informative for providing insight into urban imagined community. First, both Celebration and Las Vegas are towns that have experienced tremendous growth in recent years. Thus, both are cities still in their growing states and seeking to define themselves; this nascent quality makes them ideal to study the establishment of the urban imagined community. Further, while certainly not the standard urban environment, both Las Vegas and Celebration are true urban communities,

meaning they are still legitimate sites to investigate how urban imagined communities develop. With that said, my attention will now turn to describe the basic functions and origins of the three concepts that compose the urban imagined community.

Community

Much like the nation, the urban imagined community attempts to create a sense of community, or horizontal kinship, among its members. This sense of community can provide a number of social goods. It can prompt cooperation and generate concern for other members of the community. The results can lead to impromptu social safety nets, where citizens care for one another in times of need due to their membership in the same urban imagined community.¹¹ Furthermore, building a sense of community among urban residents builds a sense of connections that can alleviate social tension. The urban environment, similar to the nation, is a diverse place. Urban residents hail from any number of different ethnicities, social classes, religious affiliations, sexualities, and so on. For example, the largest urban centers contain sizable immigrant populations.¹² It should come as no surprise, then, that conflict is not uncommon to urban settings. Persistent tensions between African Americans and Cubans in Miami are merely one instance of different social groups engaging in conflict.¹³ Building a sense of community generates greater social cohesion, mitigating some of this conflict.

In fact, when an urban environment lacks a strong sense of community minor disagreements can quickly escalate out of control. For example, not long after the Celebration-chronicling journalists Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins relocated to Celebration, they

¹¹ Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney's Brave New Town* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 174-175.

¹² John Mollenkopf, David Olson, and Timothy Ross, "Immigrant Political Participation in New York and Los Angeles," in *Governing American Cities: Interethnic Coalitions, Competition, and Conflict*, ed. Michael Jones-Correa (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), 17-70.

¹³ Patrick D. Joyce, "Protest or Violence: Political Process and Patterns of Black-Korean Conflict," in *Governing American Cities: Inter-Ethnic Coalitions, Competition, and Conflict*, ed. Michael Correa-Jones (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), 158-79.

experienced a disagreement with neighbors that ballooned out of proportion due, in part, to the fact that no sense of community had yet emerged in the nascent town. The argument began as a spat between children, which carried over to the parents. The rift that developed between the parents was so significant, that they were never able to reconcile. Musing on the incident, Frantz and Collins suggest the entire episode might have occurred differently even just a few months later, after a sense of community had developed in Celebration.¹⁴ Certainly, reducing conflict between neighbors over the argument of children is not the most significant event in an urban setting. However, while small in scale, this event exhibits the importance of community by providing an example of how conflict can unnecessarily be aggravated by a lack of community.

In order to reap these benefits of community, however, the imagined urban community must first establish those ties. Urban imagined communities utilize a number of mechanisms, many of them similar to the methods of nations, to establish these community linkages. Urban communities employ newspapers and educational institutions, much like nations, along with physical space, in order to establish a sense of community among members of an imagined urban community. First, local publications, such as newspapers, provide a common base of information and a shared experience that establish this imagined (but useful) sense of community among urban residents. In Celebration, this function was provided by the local newsletter, which was written by Disney employee, town manager, and Celebration resident Brent Herrington. It was through Herrington's newsletter, for example, that residents were reassured that the removal of the Disney logo from the town's simulated water tower did not mean the company was pulling out of the town. Additionally, Herrington's newsletter offered tips on keeping up appearances, such as "do and don't" lists for porch decorations. Herrington also used his newsletter to discourage residents from referring to the newest developments in Celebration by separate

¹⁴ Frantz and Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney's Brave New Town*, 122-123.

monikers, such as “North Village,” because he feared such language would divide the town. Herrington’s newsletter was delivered to every home in Celebration; everyone read the newsletter and it prompted numerous conversations among residents.¹⁵ The urban newspaper provides a ritualistic experience and a shared well of information for the urban imagined community, much as it does for the nation, building a similar sense of linked fate and horizontal kinship.

Much like the newspaper, urban communities resemble nations through their reliance on educational institutions for building a sense of community. Similar to nations, members of an urban community participate in the same school system, gain allegiance to neighborhood teams, and learn the rivalries between local teams. Educational systems at the urban level promote bonding not only among students, but among parents as well. Celebration parents coalesced due to their local school, particularly over fears regarding their brand new school. More than just a new building and the latest computers, the school was also based on the most recent and innovative educational techniques. The school was broken up not into individual grades, but rather learning groups comprised of a range of age groups. Further, traditional grades were not assigned and no textbooks were used. Students were rarely given assignments; instead, they were encouraged to develop their own study programs. Many parents and students found the system chaotic, and serious concerns were raised over the quality of education at the school. In response, parents joined the Parent Teacher Student Associations in droves.¹⁶ While a somewhat extreme example, the incident in Celebration exhibits how schools operate as the center of a community, producing a sense of kinship and bonding among citizens. Education, which

¹⁵ Frantz and Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney's Brave New Town*, 118, 178-181.

¹⁶ Frantz and Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney's Brave New Town*, 135-136.

provides a shared experience and a common policy concern among many residents, serves an important role in developing a sense of community among urbanites.

However, not all of the mechanisms of developing the community aspect of an urban imagined community resemble national mechanism of establishing community. A notable area of difference between nations and urban imagined communities is the role of physical space in urban imagined communities. Las Vegas, for example, is a rapidly expanding community. Neighborhood residents experienced a sense of distance from their local community and the city at large. Part of developing the status of the city, and promoting a sense of community among residents, was the development of a series of libraries. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Las Vegas built a number of libraries, designed by internationally renowned architects. These libraries serve as an important anchor for communities, providing a space for cultural events and meetings that had not previously existed.¹⁷ Hence, Las Vegas utilized the presence and space of these libraries to build a sense of connection among otherwise alienated residents.

Celebration is a superb example of an attempt to manipulate physical space in order to promote community bonding. In Celebration, lot sizes are purposefully small and houses are placed very near to one another. All of the houses have front porches; homes are located near the front of each lot, in order to encourage interaction among neighbors. The town is designed with extensive sidewalks so that all parts of it are easily accessible by foot. Important buildings, such as the controversial school, are placed in the center of town to encourage citizen involvement.¹⁸ Hence, a sense of community bonding at the urban level can be generated through numerous means, including architecture, institutions, and newspapers. However, this sense of connection that urban residents share among themselves remains imagined, since all

¹⁷ M. Gottdiener, Nancy C. Collins, and David R. Dickens, *Las Vegas: The Social Production of an All-American City* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 165, 270.

¹⁸ Frantz and Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney's Brave New Town*, 43-46, 57-58, 182-184, 247, 330.

residents obviously do not know one another. This connection serves an important function at the urban level, promoting social cohesion and cooperation.

Limited

The second feature of the urban imagined community is that it is a limited body, much like the nation. By referring to the urban imagined community as limited, I am referring to the fact that no city extends its limits indefinitely. In order to be a member of an urban imagined community, an individual must reside within the limits of that city. However, in comparison to the nation, this is the only real restriction on the urban imagined community in its most ideal form. Hence, anyone who lives within the city limits is a member of that imagined community; additional restrictions such as language or point of origin matter considerably less. Naturally, the border erected around a city is incredibly permeable. However, there are borders; cities exist as separate entities from one another. Thus, the urban imagined community's finite nature is not necessarily realized in a more lenient or restrictive manner than the nation's; rather, it is merely formulated in a different mode.

Erecting a border around a city, similar to differentiating among nations, is a logical step in building an imagined community. First, it provides separation between different cities, allowing each city to develop its own unique sense of self. Without such borders, cities would lose their unique character, undermining attempts to build community among residents. More practically, borders around cities are an important mechanism for managing resources. Cities do not have unlimited resources; erecting borders defines not only those persons and businesses for whom a city is responsible, but also those that the city can tax in order to raise funds.¹⁹ Hence, cities erect borders, much like nations, in order to better define their unique characters, as well as the individuals to which they own responsibility and can utilize for resources.

¹⁹ Paul E. Peterson, *City Limits* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

Establishing borders around cities, however, is considerably different from the nation's approach at defining its limits. As mentioned above, nations utilize language and ancestral heritage as their barriers against other nations. Urban imagined communities can no longer erect walls to control the flow of people across their borders, but they are not without means to limit their community. Urban imagined communities take advantage of incorporation and zoning laws as mechanisms of limitation. The first method urban imagined communities utilize to limit themselves is relatively straightforward: urban imagined communities establish borders. As mentioned above, these borders serve to clearly define where one municipality and another begins. To defend these borders, urban imagined communities incorporate their cities as a means of preventing annexation by other municipalities. Through such motions, cities can maintain their own identity.²⁰ For instance, North Las Vegas, the home of the infamous Vegas Strip, is a separate city from Las Vegas. North Las Vegas resisted incorporation into Las Vegas proper, as part of a strategy of maintaining its lower taxes and municipal costs.²¹ Effectively, cities exercise legal borders between municipalities in order to differentiate one community from another.

However, urban imagined communities enact more than lines on the map in order to limit their community; zoning laws are the other significant device urban imagined communities invoke to limit their size. Zoning laws move beyond merely distinguishing one community from another; zoning laws can serve as an active attempt to control the flow of residents into a city. Zoning laws allows cities to control the categories of housing (limiting apartments and low-income housing), the size of lots, and the types of businesses that are allowed within the city.²²

²⁰ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

²¹ Gottdiener, Collins, and Dickens, *Las Vegas: The Social Production of an All-American City*, 26-29.

²² Peterson, *City Limits*.

Celebration takes advantage of zoning laws in order to maintain its fanciful character. Disney actually pays a fee to Orange County to subsidize low income housing in other parts of the county to avoid the requirement of building affordable housing in Celebration.²³ Thus, while city lines keep cities separate, zoning laws serve as more active barriers to maintain a certain integrity of a community, generally based on income. The effect is to limit the urban community. Through both of these mechanisms, urban imagined communities effectively establish the size of the community and exert some control over who can relocate within the city. Corresponding to the limited nature of nations, urban imagined communities are also not inclusive of all individuals. Cities are bordered and therefore limited, demanding residency in the city in order to become a member of the imagined community. In order to erect these strict but relatively porous borders, urban imagined communities utilize strategies of incorporation, zoning, and taxation in order to exert some control over who can join the urban imagined community.

Boosterism

The final aspect of the urban imagined community is the emphasis that is placed on boosterism. Urban imagined communities are continually trying to improve the quality of life (or at the very least the *image* of the quality of life) in their cities. Cities, unlike nations, cannot realistically demand sovereignty; cities are members of and dependent on greater political bodies, especially states and more generally the national government. Urban imagined communities may not be able to achieve absolute control over their own political destiny, but they can make their city more prosperous and attractive by attracting businesses, tourists, as well as new residents. This focus on developing the city is boosterism; enhancing the value of land

²³ Frantz and Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney's Brave New Town*, 76, 222, 309-310.

and improving the lives of residents. Both concepts stress the desire for the imagined community to achieve; the difference is one of scale.

Boosterism is certainly a valuable ideal for a city to cultivate. Creating a sense of boosterism among residents brings citizens together, uniting them behind achieving a common good for the polity. Further, by supporting improvements in their city and working to achieve those enhancements, urban imagined communities improve the daily lives of their membership. An urban imagined community operating under the rubric of boosterism is one that is fighting to attract new businesses to provide jobs and taxes, working to beautify the city, as well as trying to cajole sports franchises and cultural events to relocate there. The goal, through museums, sports franchises, shopping, natural scenery, advertising campaigns, and historical districts is to establish the city as a great place to be.²⁴ Since cities lack much of a capacity to acquire resources on their own, boosterism is a vital aspect of maintaining the health of the city.²⁵

Examples of cities embracing boosterism abound, generally occurring in one of two ways. First, boosterism can focus on actual improvements to the city and its policies in order to attract residents and capital. In Celebration, the development of the town focused on building an attractive downtown area, filled with a range of businesses for tourists and locals. Efforts to increase the attractiveness of the community also included the construction of an extensive fitness center.²⁶ Urban imagined communities may also develop parks, good schools, or beneficial tax codes in order to attract businesses and desirable middle class residents, who bring skills to attract more businesses as well as tax dollars for the city coffers.²⁷ Hence, the first

²⁴ Dennis R. Judd, "Promoting Tourism in US Cities," in *Readings in Urban Theory*, ed. Susan S. Fainstein and Campbell Scott (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 278-99.

²⁵ Peterson, *City Limits*.

²⁶ Frantz and Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney's Brave New Town*, 61, 114-115.

²⁷ Peterson, *City Limits*.

strategy of boosterism that an urban imagined community can employ is actually changing the physical features or the policies of their city.

However, the urban imagined community can also achieve boosterism through more ideological means. Essentially, urban imagined communities can try to use advertising to improve their image and “sell” the city to tourists, residents, and businesses. The aim of this approach is to attract new residents to the city, whose presence will in turn improve the city in some manner. Las Vegas may very well be the most booster oriented city in the country, if not the world. Las Vegas of course promotes its casinos, as well as the natural beauty of its deserts and the nearby Hoover Dam. In addition to these obvious attractions, Las Vegas has throughout its illustrious history promoted the sex, atomic blasts, gangsters, and easy weddings that are all also apart of its particular mystique.²⁸ Early suburbs also relied on this type of technique, touting their country lifestyle as good for the family and individual spirit.²⁹ Celebration promoted its connection to Disney, as well as evoking images of mythical suburban life, in order to attract residents.³⁰ These strategies of boosterism are not exclusive; most urban imagined communities apply a combination of both in order to develop their city. In place of sovereignty, urban imagined communities focus on boosterism. Urban imagined communities are centered on trying to continually improve themselves. Since absolute control is out of their reach, urban imagined communities seek to enhance their status and the quality of life of residents.

Concluding Remarks

The urban imagined community, similar to the nation, is comprised of three facets. The urban imagined community is a bonded community that is limited in size and emphasizes growth. The urban imagined community serves an important, positive role in most cities. A

²⁸ Gottdiener, Collins, and Dickens, *Las Vegas: The Social Production of an All-American City*, 68-93.

²⁹ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*.

³⁰ Frantz and Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney's Brave New Town*, 23, 28, 104, 117, 218, 225.

strong urban community can ease tensions among groups sharing the same geographic space, limit the cityscape to a manageable size, and assist the city in growing into a larger, more attractive city. While the definitive categories of the urban imagined community still require more development, the basic framework suggested above is consistent with urban political life. In fact, the urban imagined community serves as a useful model to explain a good deal of the political activity that occurs in a city, such as attempts to promoting city development or fostering peaceful co-existence among inhabitants.

However, despite these benefits, the impact of the urban imagined community is not always positive. Each of the core tenets of the urban imagined community has a darker flipside. Ideas of community, for example, serve to not only define who is inside but also who stands *outside* of the community. This capacity to define who is a member of the community is a tremendous power, and can be used to silence groups deemed undesirable.³¹ This dark side of community is exemplified by the attempts of coal companies to prevent miners from unionizing in Appalachia. The company labeled outsiders who arrived to assist the miners in formed a union as rabble-rousers and communists seeking to destroy the community.³² Adherence to “community” can lead to choices that violate self-interest and actually lead to harm.

The other aspects of the urban imagined community can be just as problematic as attempts to define community. Too strong of an insistence of borders can lead to an excessively homogenous city, as witnessed by critiques that Celebration lacked in any real racial diversity.³³ Additionally, rigid municipal boundaries can result in neighboring cities needlessly duplicating resources instead of pooling their effort. This problem plagues the Las Vegas metro area, as Las

³¹ Sharon Zukin, "Whose Culture? Whose City?" in *Readings in Urban Theory*, ed. Susan S. Fainstein and Scott Campbell (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 325-34.

³² John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 109-116.

³³ Frantz and Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney's Brave New Town*, 217-225.

Vegas, North Las Vegas, and Boulder City continue to experience difficulties in coordinating their provision of government services. The result, essentially, is waste of precious resources, which could be used to better serve the urban community.³⁴ Boosterism has its own set of problems. In particular, an emphasis on boosterism and growth can lead to citizens placing all of their trust in urban economic elites and landowners, allowing elites and not the polity as a whole to make decisions. The result is that city governments become focused on developing the image of the city and promoting it as a grand place; meanwhile, more serious urban problems, such as crime and poverty, are brushed under the rug. This is particularly problematic since many attempts at boosterism, such as professional sports teams, actually create more costs than revenues.³⁵

While valuable, the trio of ideals that are incorporated into the urban imagined community can also operate in a much more inimical fashion. The danger stems from spending too many resources defending the virtual imagined community, and ignoring the actual problems of residents living in the real city.³⁶ In essence, too much of an emphasis on the urban imagined community can lead the depletion of local democracy. The task is to understand the urban imagined community and how it operates, in order to ensure that its focus is on promoting community and shared goals, instead of alienating citizens from their local government.

³⁴ Gottdiener, Collins, and Dickens, *Las Vegas: The Social Production of an All-American City*, 149; see also Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom, *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the Twenty-First Century* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001).

³⁵ John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine," in *Readings in Urban Theory*, ed. Susan S. Fainstein and Scott Campbell (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 199-238; John Rennie Short, "Urban Imagineers: Boosterism and the Representation of Cities," ed. Andrew E.G. Jonas and David Wilson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 37-54.

³⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1981, translated by Sheila Fraser Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

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