

**THE URBAN COMMUNITY:
SELECTED PAPERS FROM THE
PROCEEDINGS OF THE
AMERICAN
SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY, 1925**

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The urban community: selected papers from the Proceedings of the American sociological society, 1925 by Ernest W. Burgess

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ERNEST W. BURGESS

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THE URBAN COMMUNITY

*Selected Papers from
The Proceedings of the American
Sociological Society
1925*

EDITED BY ERNEST W. BURGESS
Secretary of the American Sociological Society



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PREFACE

Nine years ago the central topic at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Society was "Rural Sociology." So great was the demand for the volume, especially for use in classes in universities and colleges, that a second edition was necessary. This year when the papers read at the main sessions of the Society were organized around the subject "The City" the Executive Committee, in anticipation of a like interest, authorized the publication of a special edition, to which it has seemed best to give the title *The Urban Community*.

It is probably not merely a historical accident that the systematic study of rural life has preceded by more than a decade the sociological study of the city. Indeed, the center of gravity of the country-life movement had been from the start not in the solution of the economic problems of the farmer, nor even in social reform in the narrower sense of that term, but in the cultural life of the rural community and its development in response to the changing economic and social situation. The work of Butterfield, Galpin, and Gillette, to mention only three pioneer rural sociologists, has been more concerned with the analysis and the description of the economic, social, and cultural organization of the rural community than with the more technical matters of scientific agriculture, of the administration of co-operative enterprises, or of rural health and social work.

The absence of a corresponding urban-life movement may be attributed to several causes. The very size and complexity of the city; the unforeseen and seemingly unpredictable changes which accompany rapid growth; the mobility and diversity of its population, have made it difficult, almost impossible, to conceive of the city as

anything more than a geographical or administrative unit. At the same time the very urgency of the many social problems, accentuated if not caused by urban growth, has given rise not to *one*, but to many and diverse movements.

As a matter of fact, the city has been the "happy hunting ground" of movements: the better-government movement, the social-work movement, the public-health movement, the playground movement, the social-center movement, the settlement movement, the Americanization movement. All these movements, lacking a basic understanding or conception of the city, have relied upon administrative devices, for the most part, to correct the evils of city life. Even the community organization movement, theoretically grounded upon a conception of the city as a unit, had the misfortune to stake its program upon an assumption of the supreme value of the revival of the neighborhood in the city instead of upon a pragmatic, experimental program guided by studies of actual conditions and trends in urban life.

The tendency at present is to think of the city as living, growing; as an organism, in short. This notion of the city in terms of growth and behavior gives the character of order and unity to the many concrete phenomena of the city which otherwise, no matter how interesting, seemed but meaningless flotsam and jetsam in the drift of urban life. With the dawning perception of the breakdown of our traditional institutions of social control, and of the failure of the many promising makeshifts for them, a disposition is emerging to base fundamental changes in these institutions upon a more fundamental understanding of the city as a product of the interplay of economic and cultural forces.

This volume may be taken, perhaps, as a prospectus of the present state and promise of sociological research in this field. The introductory paper by President Robert E. Park indicates the range of the materials for research represented in the papers which follow. At the same time, it seeks to chart and analyze the significance of

the interrelationships of the different techniques of research, ecological, cultural, and statistical, which have been and are being applied to the study of the city. The main divisions of this volume mark off certain of these fields even more sharply: human nature and the city; the social biology of city life; statistics of the city; the ecology of the city.

The individual papers no doubt have a value independent of their place in this volume. But it is believed that their value is increased by indicating their position and significance with reference to a general topic. In this sense, the volume is something more than an exhibit of research in progress; it is an introduction to an urban sociology.

From the beginning the papers read at meetings of the Society, as in this volume, have been, so far as possible, organized about some single topic. But with the growth of technical interests in a growing number of diverse fields, this aim is rendered the more difficult. Yet this is just the course of development by which sociology is being transformed from a social philosophy into a science of society. At the same time, so far as different points of view and methods of study can be focused upon a single subject, the results, while varied, are more fruitful. In this volume, the attempt is made to present not only from a fundamental point of view, but also from different angles, the present findings of research on the city. In this way, too, perhaps as well as in any other way, are exhibited whatever practical bearings theoretical studies have upon the practical problems of city life. The reader will also understand the reason for the necessary lack of rigid co-ordination of the papers and the absence of an all-round treatment of the different aspects of city life.

ERNEST W. BURGESS

July 7, 1926

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