Places in Need:
The Changing Geography of Poverty and the American Safety Net
(forthcoming at Russell Sage Foundation Press)

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Conventional Spatial Discourse

Urban = poor  Suburban = opportunity

Informs scholarship
Guides media
Shapes philanthropy
Targets policy tools
Large gaps in public awareness persist

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Rising Poverty in Suburbs (and Cities)

Number of Poor Persons (1000s)

Source: 1990, 2000 Census; American Community Survey, 2006-10

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Poverty is a Metropolitan Problem: Urban and Suburban
Metro Safety Nets Slow to Respond

- Private giving = flat
- Policy predicated on urban poverty
  - Funding often has zero-sum quality
- Perception gap and limited political will
- Fragmentation and multiplicity of actors
- Competition and NIMBYism
- Anti-immigrant sentiment
- Regional solutions require new institutions and processes
Can Metropolitan Safety Nets Adapt?

- Expansive array of public assistance programs
- Reallocating $ from cities to suburbs ≠ solution
- Lag effect for nonprofit capacity and local will
- Potential suburban advantages
  - Substantial philanthropic potential in suburbs
  - Resource commitment to education system
  - Strong religious congregations and communities
    *Many suburbs lack these advantages
- Can we build capacity without regional leadership?
- Can a sense of shared fate prevail?
Thank You