

## **CITIES & URBAN LAND USE**

Sarah Witham Bednarz  
Department of Geography  
Texas A&M University  
College Station, Texas 77843-3147  
[s-bednarz@tamu.edu](mailto:s-bednarz@tamu.edu)

### **Activity: What is a Boomburb?**

#### **Overview**

A boomburb is a new urban phenomena that has emerged in the last 20 years along with the growth of the Sunbelt and its suburban-dominated forms of urbanization. Boomburbs are rapidly growing suburban cities and represent a new metropolitan form; even as boomburbs grow, they remain essentially suburban in character. Nearly 9 million Americans live in boomburbs.

This activity engages students in identifying boomburbs, their location, characteristics, unique urban morphology, and causes for existence. Boomburbs are contrasted with other urbanized areas.

#### **Advanced Placement Human Geography**

VII Cities and Urban Land Use: Impacts of suburbanization and edge cities

#### **Time Required**

Two class periods

#### **Materials**

- Handout 1: Data Set 1, one per student or group of students
- Characteristics of a Boomburb, overhead transparency
- PowerPoint 1 and projection display mechanism (or print copies of images, one per student or group of students)
- Handout 2: Data Set 2, one per student or group of students
- Handout 3: Data Analysis Worksheet, one per student or group of students
- Map of the United States, one per student or group of students
- Populations of Non-Boomburb Cities, overhead transparency

#### **Classroom Procedures**

##### *Beginning the Activity*

1. To begin, students will answer the question, “What is a boomburb?” Present students with Handout 1: Data Set 1. It identifies 10 boomburbs from around the country, the larger metropolitan area each is near, its population in 1950 (or the first census year in which it appeared as a separate entity), its population in 2000, and the percent growth in recent decades. Give students five minutes, working in small groups, to try to analyze the data to define “boomburb.” What characteristics do all these cities share in common?

2. Display “Characteristics of a Boomburb.” Give students time to evaluate its “factors” and revise their definition of a boomburb. These factors are:

- What is the threshold population of each city in year 2000? That is, each city has a

population larger than \_\_\_\_\_. (ANS: 100,000)

- What is the relationship between boomburbs and other cities in this metropolitan area. Are these the largest city in their metropolitan area? (ANS: They are NOT the largest city in their metropolitan area)
- What is the rate of population growth in recent decades? (ANS: Each city has maintained double digit growth in recent decades).

3. Use PowerPoint 1 to show the location of each boomburb in relation to the largest city in each metropolitan area. What is the relative location in each case? (ANS: They are all located in suburban, peripheral locations.) What is the primary means of transportation to and from the boomburb? (ANS: interstate highway).

4. Conclude by asking students to write the definition of a boomburb in their own words. Characteristics of boomburbs include:

- population greater than 100,000
- not the largest city in their metropolitan area
- having double digit growth for several decades
- in suburbs or periphery of the largest metropolitan entity
- often developing along interstate beltways that ring large US cities.

#### *Developing the Activity*

5. Distribute Handout 2: Data Set 2 and Handout 3: Data Analysis Worksheet. Students will use the data from Handout 2 to complete the Data Analysis Worksheet following these instructions:

- a) Count the number of boomburbs in each metropolitan area and enter the number in Column A "Number of Boomburbs."
- b) Total the population in boomburbs for each metropolitan area and enter the number in Column B "Boomburb Population."
- c) Calculate the percent of each metropolitan area's population living in a boomburb by dividing the boomburb population by the total metropolitan population and entering it in Column D "Percent of Population Living in Boomburbs."

The completed worksheet should contain these answers:

	A	B	C	D
Metropolitan Region	No. of Boomburbs	Boomburb Population	Metro Population	Percent of Population Living in Boomburbs
Phoenix	7	1,371,159	3,251,876	42.2
Los Angeles	18	2,963,724	16,373,645	18.1
San Diego	3	468,144	2,813,833	16.6
San Francisco	4	586,389	7,039,362	8.3
Denver	3	521,459	2,582,506	20.2
Miami	3	481,395	3,876,380	12.4
Tampa	1	108,787	2,395,977	4.5
Chicago	1	128,358	9,157,540	1.4
Las Vegas	2	290,869	1,563,282	18.6
Dallas	7	1,323,908	5,221,801	25.4

Salt Lake City	1	108,896	1,333,914	8.2
Norfolk	1	199,184	1,569,541	12.7
Seattle	1	109,569	3,554,760	3.1
TOTAL	53	8,798,765	62,999,640	14.0

You may wish to assign this to students for homework so they can use calculators and/or a spreadsheet like Excel. You may also ask students to map this data, for example, using proportional symbols to represent the number of boomburbs in each location.

### *Concluding the Activity*

6. Debrief the data analysis by exploring the spatial distribution of boomburbs. Ask students questions like:

- Where are most of the boomburbs located? (ANS: In the South and West of the US)
- What is the exception to this generalization? (ANS: Naperville, in the Chicago metropolitan area.)
- How many boomburbs are NOT in the Southwestern part of the US, defined as the region from Texas west to California? (ANS: 9, or 17 percent.)
- How many boomburbs with a population greater than 200,000 are east of the Mississippi? (ANS: only 1, Hialeah, FL).
- Which metro area has the highest percent of its population living in boomburbs? (ANS: Phoenix, 42.4 percent).

The goal is for students to understand that boomburbs are mostly a western, Sunbelt phenomena. It is important to understand about boomburbs because over half of the growth in the last decade in cities between 100,000 and 400,000 was in boomburbs.

7. Display “Populations of Non-Boomburb Cities.” This presents students with another opportunity to understand how important boomburbs have become by comparing their populations with those of other, “traditional” cities.

Ask:

- Which boomburb is bigger than Miami, Minneapolis, and St. Louis?
- Where does Arlington, TX stand compared to Pittsburgh and Cincinnati?
- What boomburbs are roughly the same size as older mid-sized cities like Knoxville, TN, Providence, RI, and Worcester, MA?

Boomburbs are larger in population than many other urban areas but often do not have the feel, density, or scale of traditional cities or offer the same range of services.

8. Brainstorm with students the elements found in most cities, for example, housing, retailing, entertainment, and offices. Point out that boomburbs possess these elements but not in traditional urban form. Boomburbs do not typically have a dense business core or “downtown.” Boomburbs have office parks, big-box retail, and strip development; housing is most often in subdivisions primarily with large-lot, single family homes.

9. Conclude by asking students to speculate about some of the problems boomburbs face because of their exceptionally rapid growth rates and urban form. Students should consider problems related to traffic congestion, strained public services, including providing the number of schools needed, water shortages, and sprawl.

## **Content Background**

A boomburb is a new urban phenomena that has emerged in the last 20 years along with the growth of the Sunbelt and its suburban-dominated forms of urbanization. Boomburbs are rapidly growing (double digit rates of population growth) suburban cities with a population greater than 100,000 that are not the largest city in their metropolitan area. Between 2000 and 2003, the five fastest growing cities with population over 100,000 in the US were all boomburbs (Gilbert, AZ; North Las Vegas, NV; Henderson, NV; Chandler, AZ; and Irvine, CA).

Boomburbs have developed along interstate beltways around large US metropolitan areas, particularly in the Southwestern US from Texas to California. Nearly 9 million Americans live in boomburbs. They may represent a new metropolitan form; even as boomburbs grow, they remain essentially suburban in character. Boomburbs are larger in population than many other urban areas but often do not have the feel, density, or scale of traditional cities or offer the same range of services. Boomburbs possess most of the elements found in cities, such as housing, retailing, entertainment, and offices, but not in traditional urban form. Boomburbs do not typically have a dense business core or “downtown.” Boomburbs are characterized by low-density office parks, big-box retail, and strip development; housing is most often in subdivisions primarily with large-lot, single family homes.

It is predicted that boomburbs will continue to grow although analysis of data from 2000 to 2003 indicates that a few have been developed about as far as they can (e.g. Tempe, AZ), some mature boomburbs with high minority populations are slowing in growth (e.g. Hialeah, FL and Anaheim, CA), and two Bay area boomburbs, Sunnyvale and Daly City, have become “bustburbs” due to economic challenges in the high tech industry.

## **References**

Lang, R. E., and P.A. Simmons. 2001. Boomburbs: The Emergence of Large, Fast Growing Suburban Cities in the United States. *Fannie Mae Foundation Census Note 06*. Accessed December 16, 2005 at [http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/programs/census\\_notes\\_6.shtml](http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/programs/census_notes_6.shtml).

Lang, R.E. 2004. Are the Boomburbs still Booming? *Fannie Mae Foundation Census Note 15*. Accessed December 16, 2005 at [http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/programs/census\\_notes\\_15.shtml](http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/programs/census_notes_15.shtml).

## Handout I

Data Set I: What is a Boomburb?

<b>Boomburb</b>	<b>Metro Area</b>	<b>Population 1950</b>	<b>Population 2000</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
Tempe, AZ	Phoenix	7,684	158,625	1,964
Anaheim, CA	Los Angeles	14,556	328,014	2153
Escondido, CA	San Diego	6,544	133,559	1,941
Sunnyvale, CA	San Francisco	9,829	131,760	1,241
Aurora, CO	Denver	11,421	276,393	2320
Coral Springs, FL	Miami	--(1980: 37,349)	117,549	215
Naperville, IL	Chicago	7,013	128,358	1,730
Henderson, NV	Las Vegas	3,643	175,381	4,714
Arlington, TX	Dallas	7,692	332,989	4,229
Bellevue, WA	Seattle	--(1960: 12,809)	109,569	755

1. What characteristics do all these places share in common?

2. What is a boomburb?

## **Characteristics of a Boomburb**

**Here are some factors to consider as you define a boomburb...**

**A. What is the threshold population of each city in 2000? That is, each city has a population larger than\_\_\_\_\_.**

**B. What is the relationship between boomburbs and other cities in the metropolitan area. Are these the largest city in their metro area?**

**C. What is the rate of population growth in recent decades?**

Table 1

## The Boomburbs

Boomburb	State	Metro Area	Year Started	Starting Population	2000 Population	% Change
Chandler	AZ	Phoenix	1950	3,799	176,581	4,548
Gilbert	AZ	Phoenix	1980	5,717	109,697	1,819
Glendale	AZ	Phoenix	1950	8,179	218,812	2,575
Mesa	AZ	Phoenix	1950	16,790	396,375	2,261
Peoria	AZ	Phoenix	1960	2,593	108,364	4,079
Scottsdale	AZ	Phoenix	1960	10,026	202,705	1,922
Tempe	AZ	Phoenix	1950	7,684	158,625	1,964
Anaheim	CA	Los Angeles	1950	14,556	328,014	2,153
Corona city	CA	Los Angeles	1950	10,223	124,966	1,122
Costa Mesa	CA	Los Angeles	1960	37,550	108,724	190
Fontana	CA	Los Angeles	1960	14,659	128,929	780
Fullerton city	CA	Los Angeles	1950	13,958	126,003	803
Irvine	CA	Los Angeles	1980	62,134	143,072	130
Lancaster	CA	Los Angeles	1950	3,594	118,718	3,203
Moreno Valley	CA	Los Angeles	1990	118,779	142,381	20
Ontario	CA	Los Angeles	1950	22,872	158,007	591
Orange	CA	Los Angeles	1950	10,027	128,821	1,185
Oxnard	CA	Los Angeles	1950	21,567	170,358	690
Rancho Cucamonga	CA	Los Angeles	1980	55,250	127,743	131
Riverside	CA	Los Angeles	1950	46,764	255,166	446
San Bernardino	CA	Los Angeles	1950	63,058	185,401	194
Santa Ana	CA	Los Angeles	1950	45,533	337,977	642
Santa Clarita	CA	Los Angeles	1990	110,642	151,088	37
Simi Valley	CA	Los Angeles	1970	56,676	111,351	96
Thousand Oaks	CA	Los Angeles	1960	2,934	117,005	3,888
Chula Vista	CA	San Diego	1950	15,927	173,556	990
Escondido	CA	San Diego	1950	6,544	133,559	1,941
Oceanside	CA	San Diego	1950	12,881	161,029	1,150
Daly City	CA	San Francisc	1950	15,191	103,621	582
Fremont	CA	San Francisc	1960	43,790	203,413	365
Santa Rosa	CA	San Francisc	1950	17,902	147,595	724
Sunnyvale	CA	San Francisc	1950	9,829	131,760	1,241
Aurora	CO	Denver	1950	11,421	276,393	2,320
Lakewood	CO	Denver	1960	19,338	144,126	645
Westminster	CO	Denver	1960	13,850	100,940	629
Coral Springs	FL	Miami	1980	37,349	117,549	215
Hialeah	FL	Miami	1950	19,676	226,419	1,051
Pembroke Pines	FL	Miami	1970	15,589	137,427	782
Clearwater	FL	Tampa	1950	15,581	108,787	598
Naperville	IL	Chicago	1950	7,013	128,358	1,730
Henderson	NV	Las Vegas	1950	3,643	175,381	4,714
North Las Vegas	NV	Las Vegas	1950	3,875	115,488	2,880
Salem	OR	Portland	1950	43,140	136,924	217
Arlington	TX	Dallas	1950	7,692	332,969	4,229
Carrollton	TX	Dallas	1960	4,242	109,576	2,483
Garland	TX	Dallas	1950	10,571	215,768	1,941
Grand Prairie	TX	Dallas	1950	14,594	127,427	773
Irving	TX	Dallas	1950	2,621	191,615	7,211
Mesquite	TX	Dallas	1960	27,526	124,523	352
Plano	TX	Dallas	1960	3,695	222,030	5,909
West Valley City	UT	Salt Lake City	1980	72,378	108,896	50
Chesapeake	VA	Norfolk	1970	89,580	199,184	122
Bellevue	WA	Seattle	1960	12,809	109,569	755

## Handout 2: Data Set 2

Source: Fannie Mae Foundation Census Note 06.  
[http://www.fanniemae.foundation.org/programs/census\\_notes\\_6.shtml](http://www.fanniemae.foundation.org/programs/census_notes_6.shtml)

### Handout 3

#### Data Analysis Worksheet

#### Boomburb Metro Summary

	A	B	C	D
	No. of Boomburbs	Boomburb Population	Metro Population	Percent Pop. Living in Boomburbs (Boomburb Pop./Metro Pop.)
Phoenix			3,251,876	
Los Angeles			16,373,645	
San Diego			2,813,833	
San Francisco			7,039,362	
Denver			2,582,506	
Miami			3,876,380	
Tampa			2,395,977	
Chicago			9,157,540	
Las Vegas			1,563,282	
Portland			2,265,223	
Dallas			5,221,801	
Salt Lake City			1,333,914	
Norfolk			1,569,541	
Seattle			3,554,760	
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>62,999,640</b>	

## **Populations of Non-Boomburb Cities**

Minneapolis, MN	382,618
Miami, FL	362,470
St. Louis, MO	348,189
Pittsburgh, PA	334,536
Cincinnati, OH	331,285
Knoxville, TN	173,890
Providence, RI	173,681
Worcester, MA	172,648