BRINGING THE STATE (GOVERNMENT) BACK IN
Home Rule and the Politics of Secession in Los Angeles and New York City

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Theories of urban power have explored limitations on municipal governance by power elites, by global economic forces, and by economic competition. Less attention has been given to the impact of state government. This article explores the state role in recent secession conflicts in Los Angeles (San Fernando Valley) and New York City (Staten Island). Secession proponents expanded the scope of conflict to their state governments. Although both cities eventually survived secession battles, both were forced to accede to significant reforms. Though state interference with home rule is always a possibility because of the formidable role of the state in local government, it is not inevitable. The capacity of local political actors to form alliances at the state level and political incentives for state actors to get involved are crucial. Older debates about state limitations on urban home rule have much to offer in discussions of the twenty-first-century city.

Keywords: secession; home rule; state-local relationship; Los Angeles; New York City

Secession movements in Los Angeles and New York became the subject of both public and academic interest during the late 1990s. The widely publicized Los Angeles case was a treasure trove for academics, who linked the issue to long-standing debates over the proper size of cities (Rusk 1993; Tiebout 1956) and urban fragmentation (Weiher 1991; Purcell 1997, 2001; Hogen-Esch 2001, 2002; Boudreau and Keil 2001; Keil 2000). Although it

received less attention, the Staten Island case also offers important lessons for scholars. Briffault (1992) and Viteritti's (1995) studies of the borough's attempt to win municipal independence during the 1980s and the 1990s previewed many important theoretical and practical issues that would become relevant to the Los Angeles case.

Center-periphery tension has long been part of the discourse in Los Angeles politics. Secession movements emerged in the San Fernando Valley, in the 1920s, 1960s, 1970s, and again in the 1990s. Each time, movement leaders complained of inadequate services and representation in city government. In 1999, just as secession seemed to be gaining momentum, voters passed reforms that significantly decentralized the city's political structure. In 2002, the voters defeated a secession measure, halting the secession threat.[1]

Staten Island, the "forgotten borough" in New York City politics, also had a long history of secession sentiment, which accelerated in the 1990s. The borough took its case all the way to the state legislature following passage of two secession referenda by Island voters. Republican Governor George Pataki was ready to sign a secession bill before Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan) declared that secession could not go forward without a home rule message from the City of New York (Rooney, Hart, and Jaffe 1983). Silver's decision to prevent the bill from becoming law was eventually backed by the State Court of Appeals, although the state court did not base its decision on the merits of the city's home rule claims (Viteritti 1995). Mayors Rudolph Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg eventually moved to close the Island's controversial Fresh Kills landfill, helping to quell support for secession.

It is hard to imagine a greater threat to municipal sovereignty than the possibility of being broken apart. The forces that can compel such a change must be powerful indeed, and they must be able to overcome the fierce resistance of local governing regimes. The urban literature suggests that the driving forces behind secession would either emerge from "below," fought between competing growth coalitions, or from "above," a result of global economic forces.

While internal politics and international capital mobility are critical to the analysis, the missing link in the theoretical literature is the sometimes overlooked institutional importance of state governments in shaping political conflict in cities. That state government can potentially play a major role in local government is no surprise. But what circumstances activate state interference in local boundary disputes? How do local actors manage to pull state government into these battles? We find that the trajectory of urban secession conflicts in Los Angeles and New York was largely shaped by power strug-

gles taking place in state capitals between and among urban and state actors (McHenry 2001, 2002). A comparative case study of secession in these global cities provides evidence for the need to literally "bring the state (government) back in" as an important independent institutional actor in urban politics.

THE VIEW FROM "BELOW":
GROWTH MACHINE AND REGIME THEORIES

The urban growth thesis, developed during the 1970s and 1980s, argued that local ruling coalitions are properly conceived of as a "mosaic of competing land interests capable of strategic coalition and action" (Molotch 1976, 130; Logan and Molotch 1987; Gottdiener 1985). According to this perspective, alliances of government and business elites (growth machines) have a shared interest in maximizing a city's productive land use, often at the expense of the public good.

Building on early community power debates between Hunter (1953) and Dahl (1961), regime theory advanced our understanding of power dynamics in American cities. This perspective generally argues that cities are governed by "informal arrangements that surround and complement the formal workings of governmental authority" (Stone 1989, 3). Like elite theory, regime scholars argue that business interests are the dominant entity in these alliances. Much like pluralists, regime theorists acknowledge important limits on business influence resulting from the political mobilization of well-organized opposition.

Mollenkopf (1994) extended the analysis of urban power by his examination of "dominant urban political coalitions." Mollenkopf argued that these coalitions must be constructed around both public and private interests, but also with regard to popular constituencies. He called for a careful analysis of public sector interests (such as public employee unions) and how these forces affect the prospects for coalitions. Mollenkopf's theory broadened the study of urban power beyond the relationship between the political class and business interests. Like the other theories, however, it does not take into account the role of state government actors in local political coalitions.

Both growth machine and regime theories are useful in explaining the course of urban secession. As predicted, growth coalitions did develop to push for and against secession, most clearly in Los Angeles (Purcell 1997, 2001; Hogen-Esch 2001, 2004). But while regime and growth theories explain some elements of the ground-level power dynamics of secession, each

fails to account for how long-standing secession sentiment suddenly became a viable political challenge.

By themselves, local political factors and growth coalitions were unable to make those developments happen; outside forces had to have been at play. In their critique of growth machine power, Logan and Molotch (1987) do note that " . . . corporations that encounter difficulty at a local level . . . can use their influence with nonlocal jurisdictions to get their way" (p. 242). By and large, however, those writing in the growth and regime paradigms tend to focus on a city's internal politics, downplaying the influence of political and economic forces from above

THE VIEW FROM "ABOVE": GLOBALIZATION THEORIES

During the 1970s and 1980s, scholars challenged the view that the city is mostly self-contained as a political system. Peterson (1981) argued that due to capital mobility, cities are increasingly unable to pursue autonomous policies that might endanger a city's economic position. Peterson's approach highlighted the importance of external economic forces both in creating conditions for fragmentation as well as in limiting a city's ability to respond. In light of Peterson's capital mobility thesis, debate began to center around whether, and to what extent, local politics still matters (Logan and Swanstrom 1990).

In the 1990s, another literature was emerging to explain changes to urban areas wrought by global economic forces. Principally, Sassen (1991) argued that cities linked to transnational economies would experience heightened class polarization and spatial segmentation due to the increasing bifurcation of urban economies. According to Sassen, the simultaneous "downgrading of the manufacturing sector" (p. 9) alongside the explosion of high-tech and service sectors has created a "new industrial complex" (p. 334), characterized by severe class and ethnic segregation.

In her study of New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, Abu-Lughod (1999) accepted many of Sassen's core findings about the impact of global economic restructuring, in particular the increasing social inequality of urban economies. She warned, however, that "facile generalizations" (p. 417) about globalization mask important regional variations in the causes and consequences of globalization. Because global forces "operate always through local political structures and interact with inherited spatial forms" (p. 417), we should anticipate that meaningful regional differences would develop in the ways that global forces impact cities. Abu-Lughod offered no specific hypotheses

about the ways in which state or local political structures might shape the ways that cities respond to challenges posed by globalization.

Thus, in drawing our attention to the spatial impact of global economic restructuring, the global cities approach helps illuminate important external causes of urban fragmentation. Yet, there is little or no mention of the ways that cities can respond to the consequences of globalization. For Sassen in particular, while global cities now "function as command points in the organization of the world economy" (p. 338), they somehow have become delinked in this view from state and local actors.

Boudreau and Keil (2001) applied many of the insights of the global cities literature to their analysis of secession in Los Angeles. Exploring the seemingly contradictory notion of "fragmented consolidation," Boudreau and Keil argued: "The glue that keeps the region together in an era of globalized centrifugal forces is a complicated amalgam of centralized and concentrated globalized regional economies and decentralized and deconcentrated local identities" (p. 1710). In their view, secession movements emerge from both inward (the search for identity), as well as outward (repositioning the new city in the global economy) impulses. Keil (2001) portrayed the city's effort to halt secession through charter reform as an effort dominated by "global, imperialist, paternalistic, and centralist" (p. 33) downtown elites.

In our view, this account overstates the overtly global aspirations of both secessionists and antisecessionists in Los Angeles. While spatial changes during the 1980s were due in large part to economic restructuring, there is little or no evidence that secession was primarily a strategy to reposition the San Fernando Valley as a player in the global economy. Local economics played a role in the struggle, in debates about which sections of the city were receiving their fair share of city services (Purcell 2001). Given the region's history of secession dating back to the 1920s, the impulses underlying the movement are likely more "inward" than "outward" and more backward looking to a less "globalized" Los Angeles.

Moreover, charter reform in Los Angeles unfolded as a power struggle among labor unions, secessionists, the city council, and the mayor; downtown business elites played a role, but failed to dominate the debate. Downtown business leaders quixotically sought to stop the creation of neighborhood councils in favor of a plan to more than double the size of the city council. While the former proposal was by far the most popular element of charter reform, there was massive public opposition to a larger city council (Sonenshein 2004). One observer compared the business stance to British soldiers providing tempting targets in their bright red uniforms (Bickhart 1998).

THE VIEW FROM THE MIDDLE:
BRINGING THE STATE (GOVERNMENT) BACK IN

Long before debates over who governs the city, and more recent discussions of international capital and labor migration, an important tradition of urban scholarship focused on the relationship between cities and their state governments. This early literature reveals that the first, and perhaps most important, "city limits" placed upon cities were those originally set by state government.

Discussions of municipal sovereignty arose in the nineteenth century, following a period of relative autonomy for American cities. Prior to industrialization, issues of city-state sovereignty had been fairly well defined, as sparsely populated and geographically isolated cities and towns tackled issues of limited importance beyond municipal borders. But as industrialization advanced during the middle-to-late nineteenth century, cities confronted a host of new economic, social, and political problems to which they were ill-equipped to respond. The resulting governance crisis forced the first serious appraisal of the role of cities in the American federal system (Baker 1960). As state governments granted their cities powers of taxation to pay for new services such as infrastructure development, public safety, and education, state governments also sought to ensure legal authority and political dominance over increasingly influential cities.

With most state legislatures controlled by rural interests, the principle of Dillon's Rule—that cities are legally "creatures of the state"—was established, ensuring the dependent status of municipal corporations. State-level boards and commissions and other special legislation soon began to govern many aspects of urban life, frequently sanctioned by state courts as matters of "statewide concern" (Baker 1960; Clark 1984). In addition, the rising influence of urban political machines led to further state interference in municipal affairs, in alliance with reformers who sought to guarantee good government. For example, California voters passed a 1911 constitutional amendment that required all local elections to be nonpartisan.

By the early 1900s, however, advocates of greater municipal autonomy had mounted a counter offensive to redefine some areas of authority as "municipal affairs." In particular, municipalities won regulatory authority over land use and zoning following the 1926 United States Supreme Court decision *Euclid v. Ambler.* Overall, however, their efforts were only partially successful. For instance, although the practice of targeting special legislation at particular (usually large) cities was curtailed, state legislators responded by creating municipal classification systems that further exposed municipalities to state interference (Briffault 1992; Viteritti 1995; Baker 1960).

In the 1960s, municipal sovereignty again became the central concern in debates over the creation of metropolitan governments. When suburbanization resulted in the proliferation of local governments on the urban frontier, many planners and social scientists lamented the resulting duplication of government functions and social inequality created by permissive state incorporation statutes (Rusk 1993). In response, free-market-oriented scholars defended home rule and fragmented metropolises as the logical and efficient outcome of market forces (Tiebout 1956).

Briffault (1992) offers an historical overview of the many legal and theoretical issues surrounding the secession of Staten Island, including the legitimacy of secession and who has the right to decide the issue. Briffault also ties the issue to current debates over the proper size of municipal governments. Significantly, Briffault highlights the case of Staten Island as fundamentally a conflict between the principles of home rule and state authority. He concludes that secession is ultimately a matter of both state and local concern, and that the interests of both state and city, not just state, should be reflected in a state's legal procedures for detachment.

Viteritti's (1995) study of Staten Island secession questioned Briffault's analysis, particularly whether New York City had the right to veto secession by invoking the principle of home rule. Viteritti, who helped develop the draft charter for an independent Staten Island, argued that because state governments possess ultimate authority over municipal boundary change, state legislatures are the proper forum for deciding questions of local government secession. Viteritti argued: "Rather than provide the exceptional case that legitimizes the suspension of Dillon's Rule, secession is the fundamental issue of local governance which underscores Dillon's wisdom" (1995, 21).

McHenry's (2002) study of secession statutes in the 50 states finds that roughly two-thirds of states maintain legal statutes governing the process of secession. In most cases, a state-level commission is charged with deciding the fate of any secession attempt.[2] His study of the state role in urban secession finds that the "rules of the game" established at the state level are critical factors in deciding secession conflicts, although no specific hypotheses are presented. According to McHenry, "the nature of the political struggle has been prescribed by the state in a fashion that determined the process, but not the outcome" (McHenry 2001, 7).

Comparison of secession movements in Los Angeles and New York reveals a critical role played by state government actors. In both cases, supporters of secession expanded the scope of conflict to the state level, finding sympathetic audiences among state legislators and state commissions. We argue that secession conflicts in Los Angeles and New York were ultimately *politi-*
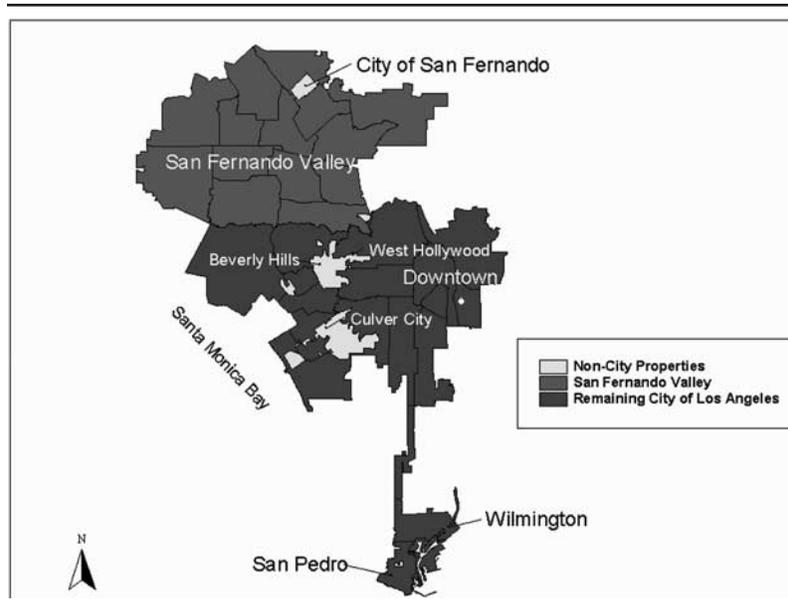
Figure 1: City of Los Angeles Boundaries, Including the San Fernando Valley, as well as Other Selected Communities

cal battles largely influenced by the willingness of state politicians to intervene in a local boundary dispute.

State constitutions and state laws allowed but did not require state intervention. Local secessionists successfully built political coalitions at the state level to marshal state power on their side. In the case of the San Fernando Valley, state government lowered the threshold for secession; in New York City, it passed enabling secession legislation. The remainder of this article explores in greater detail secession challenges in Los Angeles and New York City, emphasizing the critical role played by each state's government in structuring the path of each conflict.

SECESSION'S PATH IN THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

Talk of secession in the San Fernando Valley (hereafter, the Valley) in the 1990s was nothing new. Located northwest of downtown and separated from the rest of the city by the Santa Monica Mountains (see Figure 1), many Valley residents have talked about going it alone almost since the area's annexation in 1915. In the 1940s, Valley residents unhappy with what they per-

ceived to be an unresponsive city hall took steps to detach from the city. Each time, however, the tension was relieved either rhetorically or by appeasing Valley discontent with greater representation (Crouch and Dinerman 1963, 167).[3]

In the 1970s, a group of Valley business associations formed the Committee to Investigate an Independent Valley City/County (CIVICC). The group commissioned a study that claimed the Valley was paying far more in taxes than it received in services (Hogen-Esch 2001). In addition to tax and service complaints, when African-American liberal Tom Bradley won the 1973 mayoral election many Valley leaders thought that Bradley's victory, supported by a historic coalition of South Central's black community and the Westside's Jewish community (Sonenshein 1993), would mean that city hall would continue to ignore the Valley's concerns.

CIVICC nearly made detachment a reality after discovering a loophole in state law that might allow the tiny neighboring City of San Fernando to annex the Valley and then later allow it to secede. The deal fell apart when City of San Fernando leaders tried to retain certain sections of the Valley within their city's borders. Still, secession sentiment forced the City of Los Angeles to lobby at the state level for the Municipal Organization Act of 1977 that gave city councils around the state veto power over detachment proposals.[4] Marshaling the authority of state government on its behalf, the city gained a critical, albeit temporary, ally in protecting its territorial integrity. That both the city and state governments were securely in the hands of Democrats helped align the political interests of city and state. Such an alignment would not be in place in later years.

Secession's 1990s incarnation emerged following more than a decade of rapid demographic change (Purcell 1997). Largely White (75%) and single-family in 1980, as seen in Table 1, the Valley, like many quintessential American suburbs, had become transformed into a suburb with an increasingly urban feel (Teaford 1997; Fishman 1987; Davis 1990). Demographic change was particularly dramatic in such communities as Van Nuys, Panorama City, and North Hollywood, in the Valley's flatlands. Although more affluent communities of the South and West Valley also became somewhat more ethnically diverse and less single-family by 1990, they still remained predominantly White, single-family areas that were staunchly resistant to urbanization. It is the voter-rich South and West Valley where much of secession's support has come in recent years (Purcell 1997). Although the San Fernando Valley's 1.4 million residents account for 37% of the city's total population, because of high turnout rates, the Valley often accounts for more than 42% of the city electorate.

TABLE 1:   Population by Race/Ethnicity, San Fernando Valley,[a] 1990 and 2000

Race/Ethnicity	%1990 Population	%2000 Population
Whites	56	42
Blacks	4	4
Asians	8	12
Latinos	32	42
TOTAL	100	100

SOURCE: 1990 and 2000 Census.
a. Denotes only portions of the San Fernando Valley within the city limits of Los Angeles.

Despite widespread discontent with the pace of demographic and spatial change, the region's population growth had added significantly to the Valley's political muscle.[5] With the election of Republican Richard Riordan as mayor in 1993, Valley leaders hoped that the views of more conservative Valley voters would be reflected by dominant leadership at city hall in ways that they had not during the preceding 20 years under Mayor Tom Bradley. The Valley was clearly the emerging power center of Los Angeles politics, but its most active residents chafed under what they saw as continued restrictions placed on them by city hall. Frustrated expectations for Valley political power and continued demographic and spatial change greatly energized efforts at the state level to lower the bar for secession.

In 1996, longtime Sherman Oaks homeowner activist Richard Close, and Jeff Brain, a local real estate broker, formed the group Valley Voters Organized Toward Empowerment (Valley VOTE). The group soon enlisted the support of the Valley's most influential homeowner and business organizations to lobby at the state level to lower the bar for secession. In 1996, Valley Assemblywoman Paula Boland (R-Granada Hills), a veteran of the 1970s CIVICC effort and a Valley VOTE ally, authored state legislation that would have applied to only Los Angeles and allowed only Valley residents to vote on secession.[6] The bill was narrowly defeated in the State Assembly. In late 1997, and with Republican Governor Pete Wilson and an increasingly assertive Republican caucus vying for control of the legislature, two Valley Assemblymen Robert Hertzberg, (D-Van Nuys) and Tom McClintock (R-Granada Hills) introduced a compromise bill that Governor Wilson signed into law in 2000 as the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act.

The new law established a process that required the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), an obscure state agency responsible for overseeing proposed boundary changes, to assess the economic impact of secession.

If separation could be made "revenue neutral,"—meaning that neither area would be harmed fiscally—a measure would be placed on the ballot that would require a majority vote in the seceding area as well as in the existing city (including the seceding area). The Hertzberg-McClintock "dual majority" requirement represented something of a compromise between the earlier Valley-only vote pushed by Assemblywoman Boland, and the previous law that had given the City of Los Angeles unilateral veto power (McHenry 2002).

As long as Valley secession's advocates in Sacramento had been only Republicans, it would have been difficult to win legislation to ease the path of secession. The involvement of the influential Hertzberg, who became Speaker of the Assembly in 2000, provided legitimacy to the idea of lowering the state's threshold for secession. The political incentives for Hertzberg to assist the secessionists were complex. Hertzberg was a long-standing and enthusiastic supporter of governmental reform, especially in local government. Although Hertzberg eventually opposed secession in 2002, giving secessionists a shot at the ballot earned him substantial goodwill in the Valley.[7] With its strong and growing Democratic majority, Hertzberg (a member of the self-described "Mod Squad" of centrist legislators) would be able to tap the Valley as a base of support in future campaigns. Indeed, in 2005, Hertzberg parlayed Valley support into a strong mayoral campaign, narrowly falling short of making the two-person runoff election.[8]

In late 1998, as the political process was unfolding in Sacramento, Valley VOTE successfully gathered the requisite number of signatures to trigger a LAFCO Comprehensive Fiscal Analysis of secession. Under state law, the City of Los Angeles could appoint only one member to the nine-member LAFCO Board.[9] The remaining members of LAFCO's Board were almost all representatives of surrounding local governments. In numerous public meetings, it became clear that many LAFCO Board members were either indifferent to or openly hostile to the City of Los Angeles, the urban colossus in their midst. LAFCO's Executive Director, Larry Calemine, had been active in the CIVICC secession movement during the 1970s. One LAFCO representative compared the secessionists to the heroes of the Boston Tea Party. Eventually, LAFCO's studies found that a break-up could be "revenue neutral," and Measure F (for the San Fernando Valley) and Measure H (for Hollywood) were placed on the November 2002 election, setting the stage for a political battle in which the city's very survival was at stake.[10] Under the rules imposed by the new secession law, an election could lead to a breakup without majority support outside the Valley if Valley residents heavily outvoted the rest of the city.

The city's leadership dealt at first clumsily and later quite effectively with secession. Los Angeles leaders initially refused to cooperate with LAFCO, delaying giving information and alienating board members. But over time, the City found more effective methods of response. Two well-funded charter commissions, one appointed by the city council and one elected by the voters with the financial backing of Mayor Richard Riordan, were created to deal with the issues raised by secessionists.[11] Unlike the appointed commission, which required city council approval, state law enabled the elected commission to take its charter proposal straight to the ballot. Dueling commissions at first seemed to make reform unlikely. However, the two commissions eventually created a unified charter, which was passed by the voters in 1999. The new charter offered new participatory mechanisms such as neighborhood councils and area planning commissions, and city officials could now point to improved government responsiveness as a reason that secession was unnecessary (Sonenshein 2004).

Building on this argument, city leaders united to run a coordinated campaign against secession. Organized by Riordan's successor, Mayor James K. Hahn, the broad antisecession coalition included virtually every major politician, labor and downtown business leaders, and ethnic and nonprofit organizations (Hogen-Esch 2004). In contrast, secessionists were starved for support. By the time the campaign was over, the city leadership had so heightened the perception of risk that secession barely passed in the Valley itself.[12]

In the end, local political actors joined together to defeat a challenge that had been fostered by an alliance between local secessionists and state officials. But in the postsecession era, Valley residents won quite a bit. Conservative West Valley voters helped Hahn win the mayoralty in 2001, and in return Hahn supported their efforts to fight the expansion of Sunshine Canyon landfill. A 2002 redistricting of city council seats enhanced the Valley's place at the table by facilitating the addition of a new council district in the Valley. Moreover, the revised charter brought new forms of neighborhood participation and a decentralized planning process.

STATEN ISLAND'S PATH TOWARD SECESSION

Situated south and west of New York's other boroughs of Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, and connected above ground by only the Verazzano-Narrows Bridge, residents of Staten Island have long considered themselves a "forgotten" (Kurtz 1988) and "rebellious" (Bohanek, in Briffault 1992) borough (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The Five-borough City of New York

Like many Valley residents, Staten Islanders have long felt derided by the rest of New York City. As Robert Straniere commented during his campaign for Staten Island Borough President:

> You know, when you tell people you're from Staten Island, their reaction is usually a smile. You have that garbage dump, you have that quaint little ferry boat, it's the backdrop for the Godfather, or they could have filmed *The Sopranos* just as well on Staten Island as New Jersey, or *Working Girl*, kind of personifies working women on Staten Island (Kroessler 2001).

Valley Girl or Working Girl, the same feeling of stereotyping, lack of sophistication, and outsider status in a cosmopolitan region helped to forge separate Valley and Staten Island identities. Combined with each area's geographic isolation and perception of political exclusion, these factors helped drive the desire for municipal independence.

In 1898, residents of Richmond (later Staten Island) and other outlying independent jurisdictions of Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens were joined

with Manhattan to create North America's first megacity. Residents hoped that improved infrastructure would result in an economic windfall for the island. Richmond registered the highest voter support for the consolidation. The consolidation vote came in the face of the objections of the original New York City itself, as well as serious reservation on the part of representatives of the independent cities of Brooklyn and the Bronx (Briffault 1992, 778–79; Rooney, Hart, and Jaffe 1983, 5–6). In fact, the very consolidation of the City of New York, including the subsequent writing of its original city charter, was almost entirely orchestrated at the state level, and over the objections of every senator from New York and Brooklyn. New York State government has long been a powerful force in shaping the city's governing structure (Viteritti 1995).

After voting overwhelmingly to join the new city, and benefiting from initial investment to improve transportation links to the island borough, residents second-guessed their decision to join a larger New York when plans were announced to relocate garbage facilities to the Island in 1916, 1921, and 1938 (Briffault 1992). Initial efforts to secede from New York City erupted, only to be quelled when the city agreed to shelve the landfill proposals. However, to the outrage of local residents, the City of New York finally decided to open Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island in 1947. By the 1980s, Fresh Kills had become the largest landfill in the world. In the 1990s it was the last of the city's landfills continuing in operation. Until officials agreed to close the dump in 2001, the landfill served as the pre-eminent symbol of the Island's powerlessness and frustration with city government (State of New York . . . 1993, 5–6).

The second major catalytic event occurred in 1989, when the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Morris v. Board of Estimate* led to the abolition of the city's powerful Board of Estimate, which the Court said violated the "one person, one-vote" principle. Despite the borough's relatively small population, Staten Island had historically wielded authority equal to other boroughs on the Board of Estimate, a powerful force in the city's budget, contracts, and land-use politics.[13] Following a 1989 charter revision of the city's governing structure, Staten Island has since accounted for only 3 of 51 City Council seats (Neindorf 1993), resulting in a major dilution of the borough's political strength (Mauro 1989).

In 1989, Staten Island experienced a second blow to its political power when David Dinkins was elected mayor. The City's first African-American mayor, Dinkins built a coalition of minority voters and some liberal Whites to defeat the more conservative alliance that had supported Mayor Edward Koch's long mayoralty (Mollenkopf 1994). Staten Island voters had been a pillar of this conservative coalition. Thus, unlike the San Fernando Valley,

TABLE 2:   Staten Island Population by Race/Ethnicity, 1990 and 2000

Race/Ethnicity	%1990 Population	%2000 Population
Whites	80	71
Blacks	7	9
Asians	4	6
Latinos	8	12
TOTAL	100	100

SOURCE: 1990 and 2000 Census.

which was just gaining political power after years of perceived exclusion, Staten Island was suffering a sort of downward political mobility. If Valley secession was a revolution of rising expectations, Staten Island feared its declining political fortunes.

Immigration had also reshaped Staten Island during the 1990s, although less dramatically than the Valley. According to the U.S. Census (see Table 2), in 1990, 80% of the island's residents were White. By 2000, 71% of Staten Island residents were White. In contrast, the rest of the City of New York had become far more diverse during the 1980s and 1990s. For Staten Island, the secession movement was triggered in part by the prospect of losing political power to the city's increasingly diverse boroughs (Briffault 1992). Unlike the Valley, which could draw upon its sheer population to project political power, Staten Island's 1990 population of 379,000 accounted for only 5.5% of the city's total population.

The original 1983 United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit decision on the Board of Estimate had led Staten Island's most influential politician, Republican State Senator John J. Marchi, to the first serious consideration of secession. Following the court decision, Marchi's Senate Committee on Finance issued a 1983 report stating that if the decision to abolish the Board was eventually upheld, a secession process should immediately begin (Rooney, Hart, and Jaffe 1983).

Marchi's committee report noted that the key fiscal issues in any breakup were water and waste. Staten Island was totally dependent on New York City for its water, through a pipeline across the river. On the other hand, the city depended on Fresh Kills landfill, the last remaining open landfill in New York City, for much of its waste disposal. The resolution of these two issues would be critical to the future viability of an Island city. Marchi's 1983 report argued that state law allowed for a unilateral secession by Staten Island, and that there was no legal requirement for approval from the New York City Council, known as a "home rule message."

When the U.S. Supreme Court finally upheld *Morris v. Board of Estimate* in 1989, Marchi led a bipartisan coalition of state legislators to pass a bill paving the way for an Island referendum on secession. Surprising some observers, Democratic Governor Mario Cuomo signed the bill authorizing the secession vote. As with Valley Democrat Bob Hertzberg, Cuomo understood the importance of reaching moderate and conservative White voters, in this case Staten Island's Italian-American voters.

In the wake of local outrage following the Board of Estimate's abolition, and alienation from the new Dinkins administration, 83% of the island's residents voted to approve the 1990 referendum, leading to the creation of a state commission to study independence. During the legislative session, New York City fruitlessly complained about the state-directed process, arguing that an Island-only referendum violated the rights of city residents and unjustly overrode the city's home rule authority (Briffault 1992; State of New York . . . 1993).

In compliance with the referendum, Governor Cuomo appointed a 13-member State of New York Charter Commission to study the feasibility of cityhood for Staten Island. The Governor, the Speaker of the Assembly, and the President Pro Tem of the State Senate each chose an appointee. The Commission was stacked with Staten Island representatives and their appointees, many of them outspoken secession advocates. Marchi was named chairman (State of New York . . . 1993). Not surprisingly, the Charter Commission report, released in early 1993, found that the Island could sustain itself financially as an independent city. As with Los Angeles's role with LAFCO, New York City had virtually no voice whatever in the commission's study.

Still, the actual fiscal viability of Staten Island remained in question. A 1990 analysis commissioned by Marchi's Senate Finance Committee had found that without the revenue from the Fresh Kills landfill, a Staten Island city could not generate revenues equal to its projected expenditures (Senate Finance Committee 1990). The study's results suggested that Islanders might someday have to choose between getting rid of the landfill and having their own city.

With the City of New York unable to stop the steamroller of secession at the state level, it initially refused to cooperate with the Charter Commission's data gathering process. Over time, however, the city leadership decided to take a more cooperative role, and as in Los Angeles, eventually provided data on budget and services to various bodies undertaking studies of secession. In December 1991, Mayor Dinkins created a *Task Force on Staten Island Secession* to interface with the commission, but also to help shape the data on the impact of secession. The Task Force issued a report challenging the "rosy picture" being painted by secession advocates (Task Force on Staten Island

Secession 1993). As in Los Angeles, where secession opponents highlighted the potential negative impact on politically powerful municipal employees, Mayor Dinkins's report contended that city workers, many of whom lived in Staten Island, would be severely harmed by secession (Task Force on Staten Island Secession 1993).

Backed by a respected academic staff, the charter commission authored a new charter for a proposed City of Staten Island that, if approved by the state legislature, would become the state's second-largest city (Briffault 1992). The new charter called for a strong mayor-council system similar to that of New York City, and for protections for civil service workers. Dinkins's Task Force countered that these assurances were unrealistic, and that city workers living and/or working in Staten Island would be at very high risk of losing their benefits and even their employment.

Buoyed by the results of the commission report, secession supporters pushed another bill through the State Legislature that led to a second referendum on secession in November of 1993. Proposal 5 passed with 65% approval, apparently creating a city charter for the new City of Staten Island (State of New York . . . 1993, 7–9). The 1993 referendum also had another major political consequence; the turnout it generated on the Island may well have been the difference in Republican Rudolph Giuliani's extremely narrow victory over Dinkins (Mollenkopf 1994). With Giuliani in office, however, Islanders might be more inclined to turn from secession, and Giuliani's interests clearly required keeping them in the city.

As the secession process moved forward, the creation of a new city required enabling legislation by state lawmakers. The legislation soon passed the Republican-controlled State Senate 36–17 (Finnegan 1995, 4). The state was moving in a Republican direction, and Republican George Pataki had upset Cuomo for governor in 1994. However, State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, a Manhattan Democrat, blocked the secession effort by arguing that the state Constitution required a home rule message from New York City before the proposal to create a new city could proceed in the legislature (Campanile and Schneider 1996, A1). In January 1995 the State Court of Appeals—the state's highest court—ruled that it would not force the State Assembly to vote on secession over the objections of Speaker Silver, effectively ending the effort.

The result was a fairly close call for New York City, since newly elected Governor Pataki, a Republican, had indicated that he would sign the secession bill if it came to his desk. With the formal end of the secession movement, Mayor Giuliani saw an opportunity to solidify his political support in Staten Island, and soon announced plans to close Fresh Kills. By 1997, polls reported a significant decline in support for Island secession. In 2002,

Michael Bloomberg, Giuliani's Republican successor, kept Giuliani's promise to close the landfill. In the end, the 1990 Marchi Report that had suggested the incompatibility between Island independence and the closing of the landfill turned out to be prescient. If the Island would not get independence it would instead get rid of the landfill. Without seceding, Staten Island got largely what it wanted: no landfill and sympathetic mayors.

ASSESSING HOME RULE IN LOS ANGELES AND NEW YORK CITY

What does the experience of secession in Los Angeles and New York tell us about urban theory generally and local autonomy in particular? First, we find current theories either too local or too global in their orientation to explain the trajectory of secession in Los Angeles and New York. We argue that even in an age of globalization and the continuing importance of local political actors, an older paradigm emphasizing the role of state governments provides a critical theoretical lens in explaining political conflict in twenty-first-century urban America. And within that paradigm, the ability of local actors to expand the scope of conflict and form coalitions with state legislators reveals the tenuous nature of municipal sovereignty.

STATE GOVERNMENT: THE ORIGINAL "CITY LIMITS"

Traditional urban theory and insights from the global cities literature tell us much about the forces that constrain municipal autonomy. Even in tandem, however, they still paint an incomplete portrait of the path that secession and reform took in each city. In particular, both approaches ignore the critical role played by state government (McHenry 2002; Viteritti 1995; Briffault 1992).

In both Los Angeles and New York, politics at the state level served to constrain each city's response to secession. In each case, secessionists were able to "expand the scope of conflict" (Schattschneider 1975) by forming alliances with political leaders at the state level. Leapfrogging hostile political opposition within their own cities, secessionists generated state interventions that were neither inevitable nor procedurally required, but were rather the result of political coalition building. Building alliances across levels of government is a standard method of winning political battles that, if kept within the local arena, would lead to certain defeat.

With the help of an increasingly influential coterie of Valley state leaders, particularly Democrats, Los Angeles secessionists shaped both state law governing secession as well as the state commission charged with studying its fiscal viability and determining whether a measure would be placed before the electorate. The state-created commission known as LAFCO came to be dominated by representatives of county government and smaller surrounding cities.[14] And although Los Angeles was still an important player throughout the process, representatives of state government were no great friends to the city—and at times were hostile—during the secession struggle.

In New York City, state actors advanced Staten Island secession in two different ways. First, a state court's challenge to the Board of Estimate (ultimately validated by the U.S. Supreme Court and implemented by city charter reforms) became a clarion call for secessionists who rallied borough residents behind calls for self-determination. More significantly, prosecession forces in Staten Island forced the City of New York into a reactive, defensive mode as a charter commission dominated by secessionists made finding after finding that supported the political and economic viability of independence. As in Los Angeles, New York City was a virtual nonplayer in the creation and composition of state commissions that studied secession. Time and again the City of New York was on the outside looking in on negotiations taking place in Albany.

Why would state politicians seek to interfere in the seemingly internal politics in Los Angeles and New York? One possible answer has to do with the political power that suburbs like the San Fernando Valley and Staten Island each possess. During the 1990s and into the 2000s, the San Fernando Valley—and particularly the voter-rich West and South Valley—has exercised increasing influence in the city's mayoral elections. The Valley was the centerpiece of Republican Richard Riordan's 1993 and 1997 mayoral campaigns, as well as James Hahn's 2001 victory. When challenger Antonio Villaraigosa made inroads into Hahn's Valley base in 2005, his victory over the incumbent was assured. Key state legislators who had been influential in furthering the secession campaign in the state legislature, such as Valley Democrat and 2005 mayoral candidate Robert Hertzberg, could clearly see the emerging influence of the San Fernando Valley as a moderate Democratic stronghold.

Similarly, Staten Island became a pillar of Republican Rudolph Giuliani's two mayoral victories during the 1990s. Indeed, the Island's political strength had been underscored in 1993 when the secession referendum mobilized enough voters to ensure Giuliani's narrow victory over incumbent Mayor David Dinkins.

Combined with the aid of state political entrepreneurs who saw an opportunity to win over a powerful block of voters, secessionists also gained the support of a broad coalition of legislators from around both states. In both California and New York, legislators from other parts of the state viewed the power of each state's largest city with a certain amount of disdain (Hogen-Esch 2004).

COMPARING HOME RULE
IN LOS ANGELES AND NEW YORK

What does this comparative case study say about the extent of home rule in Los Angeles and New York? First, home rule may be more advanced in California than in New York State. There is a long history of New York State intervention into the city's governmental structure and affairs through state-mandated charter-reform commissions (Viteritti 1989; Briffault 1992). It may also be that Progressive Era institutions and traditions such as home rule are more ingrained in California. Without urban-party machines to both challenge state-governing coalitions and to offer cases of urban corruption to be resolved by state "good government" reformers, Los Angeles may have earned slightly greater structural autonomy from state interference.

But it is still a difference of degree, not of kind. In recent years, California cities have suffered profoundly from state intrusions in fiscal matters, as governors and state legislators increasingly balance the state budget on the backs of local governments.

Each city played to its own home rule strengths in dealing with the secession threat. In Los Angeles, political reform became the city's *solution* to the challenge of secession. Two charter commissions, made up largely of opponents of secession, crafted a new city charter that addressed some of the concerns of alienated residents by increasing citizen participation and improving service delivery. Unlike in New York, Los Angeles's scholarly and legal communities were largely united on the side of keeping the city together. Not only did this allow opponents of secession to assume the moral high ground—"the city is better united than divided" became a common rallying cry—but their participation deprived secessionists of intellectual resources and legitimacy to advance their cause. As Finegold (1995) found, when progressive alliances forge coalitions with "experts," their power is multiplied. In New York City, some key experts were with the secessionists; in Los Angeles, most were with the city.

New York City's leaders, however, could draw upon assets found in the arsenal of traditional cities and largely unavailable in Los Angeles. The power of a mayor to impose his or her will on events is much greater in parti-

san, strong-mayor New York City than in reformed Los Angeles. Aside from its dream of independence, the one thing most desired by Staten Islanders had been the closing of Fresh Kills landfill. In the face of the threat of secession, two consecutive Republican mayors, Rudolph Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg, employed their authority to respond directly to the public clamor. In two fell swoops, Giuliani suspended the operations of the landfill and then Bloomberg killed it for good. Doing so made independence seem less attractive.

No Los Angeles mayor could as easily, or directly, impose such a solution. Power is far more divided in Los Angeles's progressive reform government, and such a move would have involved complicated regional negotiations with a number of other jurisdictions, the powerful city council, and quite possibly a vote of the people. Los Angeles's political culture and institutions militate against the raw exercise of behind-the-scenes power. As a result, Los Angeles leaders had to operate indirectly and in the open through the arduous process of building consensus for reform in order to defeat secession.

Los Angeles leaders made up for their lack of formal political power and for the relative weakness of public attachment to government by their undeniable unity, even across lines of political competition and personal hostility. Riordan and Hahn, political and ideological competitors, joined forces to support the measure for a new charter and against secession, even allying with former police chief Bernard Parks, whom Hahn had recently fired in a contentious decision. Even state legislators who had facilitated secession, like Robert Hertzberg, joined the opposition.

Secession struggles are likely to recur, especially as new pressures emerge on municipal governments. While New York Mayor Dinkins's "gorgeous mosaic" and Los Angeles Mayor Bradley's multiracial coalition attempted to manage increased diversity during a period of accelerated integration into the global economy, many in the city's traditional suburban neighborhoods interpreted change as a threat to their lifestyle and values. That secession emerged in regions of each city that were the most suburban, most conservative, most White, and fastest growing seems to suggest that "small property" (Lo 1990) interests not tied to ruling growth coalitions are likely incubators of populist backlash.

E. E. Schattschneider (1975) argued that nothing is more important to the course of political struggle than the "scope of the conflict." He noted that no battle is simply between two contending players in one political place. Players who are outnumbered on one field of battle can improve their chances of political success by bringing powerful external players into the game. We find that the intergovernmental politics of secession in two global cities allowed secessionists, who were certainly overmatched locally, to marshal

external forces to significantly alter both the rules and the outcome of the game itself.

But state involvement in local boundary disputes is neither a foregone nor inevitable outcome. State involvement is made possible when opposing regimes vying for power are able to expand the scope of conflict by forging political coalitions with state actors, who for a variety of reasons choose to support them. Similarly, protecting home rule, whether in the area of finance, land use, or boundary disputes, is also a political process, both in state capitals as well as locally. While urban regimes may be able to outgun their opposition in the local arena, the power differential is considerably leveled when the playing field is in the state capital, particularly when coalition building occurs across municipal borders.

While neither city lost its secession battle, the cases of Los Angeles and New York show that conflicts over urban fragmentation neither end at the city limits, nor do they leapfrog over state boundaries into the global arena. Even in the age of the global city, Dillon's Rule still casts a large shadow over municipal self-determination.

NOTES

1. A measure to break away the community of Hollywood was also on the November 8, 2002 ballot, and also lost.

2. McHenry notes that only Maine explicitly uses the term *secession*. *Disincorporation*, *detachment*, *special reorganization*, and *deannexation* are among the many terms that various states use to describe the process of secession.

3. An example is Mayor Bowron's 1948 revival of the borough concept for Los Angeles, a plan never given serious consideration by city officials.

4. The law later became part of the Cortese-Knox Local Government Reorganization Act of 1985, which was again amended in 1997.

5. Following the 2000 redistricting the Valley now holds four seats entirely within the Valley as well as a fifth that spans the Santa Monica Mountains. Historically the Valley has complained that districts spanning the Valley and westside served the interests of westside communities.

6. The city of Los Angeles is often derided as a "thousand pound gorilla" by lawmakers in Sacramento.

7. After the secession election Hertzberg began touting a need for study of a borough system for Los Angeles.

8. Hertzberg made breaking up the gargantuan Los Angeles Unified School District the centerpiece of his campaign.

9. A typical LAFCO has five members: two county supervisors, two city council members, and a citizen member chosen by the four elected officials. Some LAFCOs, such as in Los Angeles, have a specially designed statutory membership. Its LAFCO is composed of nine members: two supervisors, two city representatives, a public member, a Los Angeles City representative, two special district members, and a public member from the San Fernando Valley (see Manatt 1996, 1–7).

10. As the Valley secession movement gained steam in the 1990s, several "sister" movements attempted to piggyback on the Valley's success. These included the communities of San Pedro-Wilmington and Hollywood. Although both of these communities also gathered sufficient signatures to trigger a LAFCO study, only Hollywood was deemed to have sufficient resources to sustain itself.

11. The creation of two commissions stemmed from political rivalry between the City Council and Mayor Riordan. Dissatisfied with the composition of the initial charter commission, which came to be known as the "appointed commission," Riordan used his personal fortune to bankroll a slate of candidates for an "elected commission." Riordan hoped the elected commission would be more open to strengthening the powers of what he considered the city's weak mayoralty (Sonenshein 2004).

12. Measure F passed with 51% in the Valley, but won only 33% citywide.

13. Although the city's Board of Estimate was created in 1901, it was not until 1958 that the presidents of all five boroughs were given equal power on the Board (see Briffault 1992).

14. The County of Los Angeles, which makes substantial money by contracting with cities for services under the Lakewood Plan, hoped to win the contract for police services in a new Valley city. Los Angeles undoubtedly was better off than New York, which witnessed a fiscal assessment being conducted by the very commission that would write a charter for the independent city.

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