

## Introduction

In 1972, Democratic candidate George McGovern captured only Massachusetts in the presidential election. This crushing defeat cemented the reputation of the state as the unrivaled bastion of American liberalism. The outbreak of the infamous busing crisis just a few years later, however, gave the state's capital, Boston, the dubious and contradictory status as the "Little Rock of the North" and "most racist city in America."<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts earned national notoriety once again in 1988 with the resounding defeat of Democratic presidential candidate and Bay State governor Michael Dukakis, which seemed to confirm the view that "Massachusetts liberals" were out of touch with the rest of the country. The 1972 electoral map, violence of the Boston busing crisis, and the Dukakis presidential bid have become signposts of the exceptionalism of Massachusetts, failure of New Deal/Great Society liberalism, and decline of the Democratic Party.

This book counters those conventional narratives of exceptionalism and decline by examining the liberal residents who lived and worked along the high-tech corridor of the Route 128 highway outside Boston. Dispelling the widely held view that the rise of the New Right and the Reagan revolution led to the demise of liberalism, *Don't Blame Us* demonstrates the reorientation of modern liberalism and the Democratic Party away from their roots in the labor union halls of northern cities, and toward white-collar suburbanites in the postindustrial metropolitan periphery. The individualist, meritocratic, suburban-centered priorities of liberal, knowledge-oriented professionals embody the rise of postwar metropolitan growth, inequality, and economic restructuring, and contributed directly to the transformation of liberalism itself. The stories of the political activism by residents in the Route 128 area link these larger processes to local politics, reinforcing the key role of the suburbs in shaping party politics, public policy, and structural and racial inequality. The grassroots mobilization for the liberal causes of civil rights, environmentalism, peace, and feminism simultaneously challenges the scholarly assessments that have focused primarily on the reactionary, republican, and Sunbelt-centered dimensions of suburban politics. Connecting political culture and activism in the Boston suburbs to larger national political developments, *Don't Blame Us* shows that liberals did not prioritize "posteconomic issues" such as race, gender, foreign policy, and environmentalism, and become less responsive to the economy and workers in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Rather, in supporting these issues, liberalism and the national Democratic Party increasingly came to reflect the materialist concerns of suburban knowledge workers rather than autoworkers.

## 2 Introduction

The growth of liberal politics and support for the Democratic Party in postindustrial, high-tech enclaves across the country proves that Massachusetts holds an influential, but not exceptional, position in national politics. Engineers, tech executives, scientists, lawyers, and academics in the suburbs of New York, Philadelphia, northern Virginia, Atlanta, Chicago, Seattle, and Los Angeles, the college towns of Ann Arbor, Madison, Austin, and Boulder, and regions like the Research Triangle and Silicon Valley shared similar political priorities. This agenda combined economic and cultural issues, including a commitment to equality through support of affirmative action, pro-choice policies, concern about the environment and urban sprawl, and promotion of high-tech industry.

These priorities contributed to the increased support of knowledge workers in high-tech suburbs for the Democratic Party in national elections. Marking a trend that began with McGovern's candidacy, in 1988 a majority of professionals supported Dukakis in the presidential election. This pattern steadily grew over the next twenty years, and by 2012, Barack Obama earned the support of an overwhelming number of knowledge workers, particularly those with a postcollege education. Suburban knowledge workers tended to be less party loyal at the state level, which illustrates the complexity of both electoral patterns and the definition of liberal politics. In Massachusetts and other heavily suburbanized states, such as Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and California, white-collar professionals consistently elected governors who promoted a blend of government reform, lower taxes, and socially liberal policies from both parties, helping to perpetuate a strand of moderate republicanism. Liberals in the Route 128 corridor, therefore, are equally important to understanding national political realignment and postwar suburban politics as New Right strongholds in the South and West.<sup>3</sup> Although a small portion of the electorate and an even smaller percentage of the national population, this group of people has come to hold a tremendous amount of political power at the national, state, and local levels.<sup>4</sup>

The suburban liberals along Route 128 also symbolize the larger economic and occupational reorganization of the nation after World War II that Daniel Bell famously deemed the "coming of the post-industrial society."<sup>5</sup> As soon as Bell coined the term, a reporter contended, "Probably no institution can claim to satisfy Bell's definition more completely than M.I.T."<sup>6</sup> The Cold War and other postwar imperatives led the federal government to significantly increase its funding of scientific-based research projects at universities. Boston and especially the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) benefited from an enormous windfall of defense dollars. The money spawned new innovation and led to an explosion of technology and electronics companies in office parks and labs along the ring of the Route 128 highway.<sup>7</sup> The rise of the high-tech industry propelled the



Figure 1.1 Members of the technology industry unveiling the new sign heralding Route 128 as “America’s Technology Highway” in 1982. These signs appeared on the side of the roadway to signal and promote Route 128’s long-standing position at the forefront of the Information Age. Courtesy of the *Boston Globe* and United Press International.

migration of engineers, scientists, academics, and other knowledge professionals to move to the affluent suburbs clustered along Route 128.

In the early 1960s, real estate executive Daniel Wheeler offered a reporter a driving tour of the office parks spread along Route 128 that his company Cabot, Cabot & Forbes (CCF) had been instrumental in developing. Speeding by the exits to the suburbs of Lexington, Concord, and Lincoln, Wheeler declared, “Scientists and engineers are the main thing here.” He described the towns as “quiet leafy places with good public schools, and scientists with young children like to live in them. They favor them because of their history—Paul Revere and so on.”<sup>8</sup> Wheeler’s depiction encapsulated the distinct set of polarities of history and modernity, tradition and progress,

#### 4 Introduction

typicality and distinctiveness that animated the political culture of the Route 128 communities and the sensibility of the people who moved and lived there. Wheeler's comments also capture the meritocratic commitment to education, a desire for high quality of life and superior municipal services that defined most residents' priorities. The desire to live in proximity to the commuter roadway in a community with good schools and other amenities was not the exclusive domain of self-described liberals. Conservative, moderate, and apolitical people also sought out these areas, which created key tensions over local and national issues.

The communities of Lexington, Concord, Lincoln, Newton, and Brookline were by no means the only liberal suburban places in the Boston area or the country. Yet in this particular set of suburbs, the convergence of postwar demographic patterns with their specific histories and identities as spaces of tolerance, beauty, and open-mindedness created an especially fertile context for the emergence of liberal politics. As affluent families with ties to universities and Route 128 companies sought out communities that had certain cultural, social, and political markers of open-mindedness and a commitment to education, it further emboldened the distinctive reputation of this group of suburbs and made them ever more attractive to a particular type of liberal homebuyer. Attorney Julian Soshnick, for instance, explained that he settled in Lexington because he believed the "wall-to-wall Ph.D's, and the doctors and the lawyers" made it "a very nice, sensitive, caring community." Fellow Lexington resident and grassroots activist Bonnie Jones similarly observed that "like-minded folks tend to move into the same communities."<sup>9</sup>

The clustering of "like-minded people" in Lexington and other Route 128 suburbs catalyzed grassroots political activity for a range of liberal causes. Residents like Soshnick and Jones got involved in the fair housing movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These efforts led to the formation of the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) in 1966, a voluntary one-way integration program that transported African American students from Boston into the predominantly white suburban school systems. Suburban activists along Route 128 organized local open space and environmental movements, participated in peace and antiwar movements in the 1960s (formulating the idea for the Vietnam Moratorium in 1969), feminist and reproductive rights campaigns in the early 1970s, and mobilized for liberal politicians such as Eugene McCarthy and Father Robert Drinan. These activists displayed a consistent ability to work effectively within the formal channels of the political system, especially at the state level. The federal government and national organizations embraced many of the laws, policies, and initiatives first launched by grassroots suburban activists in Massachusetts, including fair housing, school integration, inclusionary zoning, open space and growth controls laws, the Vietnam Moratorium, and single-issue advocacy for abortion rights.

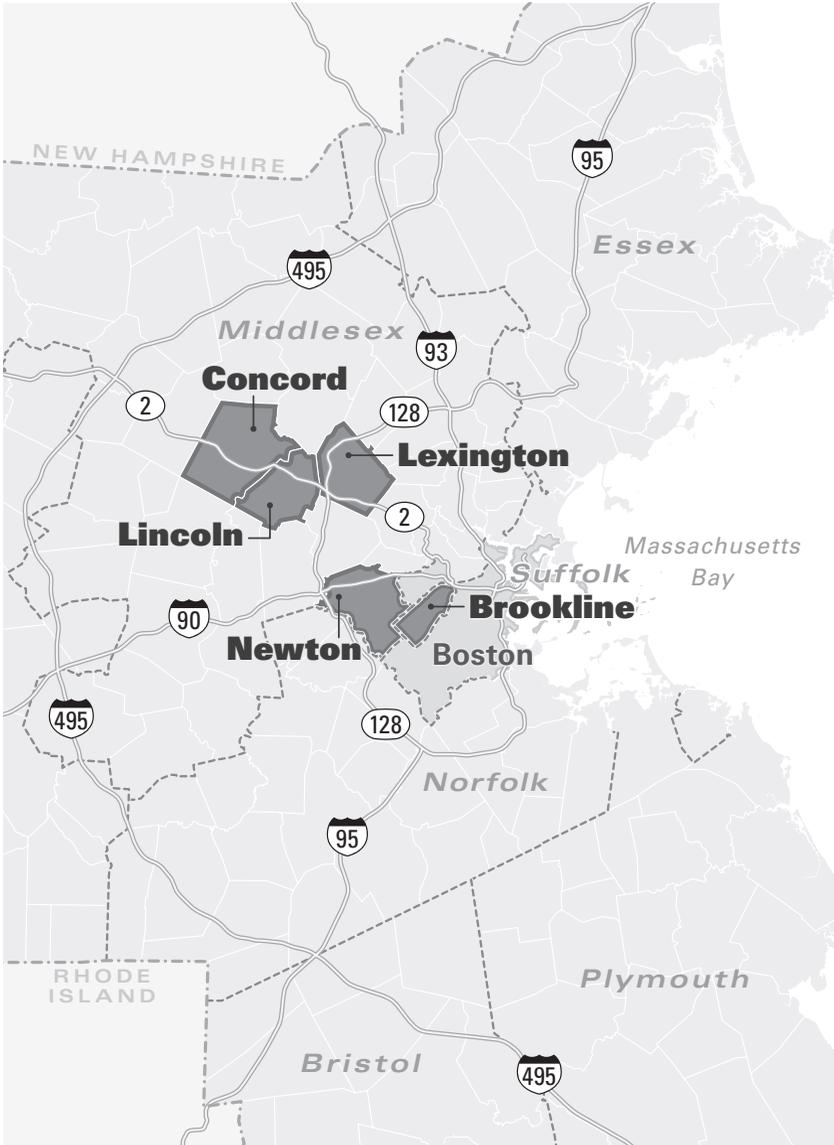


Figure 1.2 Metropolitan Boston and the Route 128 area. The five suburbs that comprise the basis of this study are shaded, and the map also highlights the major commuter highways of Route 128 and Route 2.

This set of causes reflected the class identity and consumer-based, meritocratic priorities of the affluent suburbanites who spearheaded and championed them. Each element of suburban liberals' lives—from their homes in affluent suburbs like Lexington or Concord, jobs at research and development (R & D) labs along Route 128, and the roadway itself, to the educational opportunities for their children and the open spaces they enjoyed—emerged from the extensive array of federal policies produced by the pro-growth agenda of New Deal liberalism and the Cold War military-industrial complex. In turn, many suburban liberals sought to use their identities, privileges, expertise, and social networks to shape policy through politics and legislation. Looking at how and why suburban liberals had success with some campaigns more than others underlines the broader structural and political forces that gave rise to yet also constrained their philosophy and actions.

Suburban liberals achieved the greatest victories in campaigns that proposed individualist solutions to rights-related issues, required limited financial sacrifice, and offered tangible quality-of-life benefits. These campaigns included fair housing, voluntary integration, environmentalism, peace politics, and feminism. Issues that challenged structural inequalities and threatened residents' property values and the entitlements of homeownership met greater resistance and far less success in the Route 128 suburbs. The limitations of this suburban liberal vision predicated on individualist solutions and middle-class privilege became most pronounced when the nation's economic climate shifted following the 1973 recession. The large cutbacks in defense spending hit the Route 128 area particularly hard, and fears about job security and a sharp rise in local property taxes buoyed by inflation brought many of the limits and challenges of suburban liberalism into sharp focus. Fierce battles emerged over the construction of small affordable housing developments, expansion of involvement in the METCO program, and a statewide cap on local property taxes in the same suburbs that had been most vocal in their support of fair housing and environmentalism, and had turned out in large numbers for McGovern and against the Vietnam War. These fights revealed the internal and external limits and constraints of suburban liberalism.

## Suburban Liberalism

Despite their important role in national politics and the economy, commentators and scholars have long struggled to find a term that accurately portrays the political consciousness of these highly educated professionals who supported a liberal agenda, and figure out where they fit into traditional class, political, and geographic schema.<sup>10</sup> In the 1970s, the broad term “New Class” emerged, and since then critics and defenders have formulated a series of variations on that label, ranging from “professional-

managerial class,” “professional middle class,” “knowledge class,” “educated class,” “knowledge worker,” and “creative class,” to “liberal elite,” “latte liberal,” “bobo,” “neoliberal,” and “Atari Democrats.”<sup>11</sup> Each phrase captures a certain aspect of the professional identity, class standing, and political outlook of this constituency. Yet most of the white-collar professionals living in high-tech suburbs like the Route 128 area rarely used the words in this lexicon to self-identify. Instead, these residents often adopted the label “suburban liberal,” which combined their explicit geographic, ideological, and political sensibilities and implicit racial and class identities.

The terms “suburban” and “liberal” have each been difficult to define satisfactorily. Scholars have long debated the proper mechanisms of how to determine what makes a space or person suburban, using a series of overlapping and competing measures, such as geography, the built environment, density, transportation networks, racial and economic characteristics, familial arrangements, cultural sensibility, ideology, and politics.<sup>12</sup> Liberal has proven an even more elusive term, whose meaning has shifted across the twentieth century depending on the context, scale, and especially who is invoking it. Liberal has described growth and regulation, free markets and economic justice, racial equality and racial privilege, and hawkish foreign policy and pacifism.<sup>13</sup> Critics and defenders often invoke the word liberal less to connote a unified set of values but as a term of opposition to mean “not radical,” and especially “not conservative.”<sup>14</sup>

Putting suburban and liberal together does not resolve many of these problems of capacious and contradictory terminology. Suburban liberal suggests a particular geographic location and political sensibility, but the term is neither spatially fixed nor static. Homeowners in the college towns of Cambridge, Boulder, Austin, and Palo Alto and the gentrified enclaves of Brooklyn, Chicago, and Seattle shared many of the same class and political priorities and politics, but did not deem their communities or themselves “suburban.” The term suburban liberal is therefore as useful for the categories that it does not explicitly signal as those that it does. The label intimates but does not identify a partisan affiliation with the Democratic Party. Moreover, suburban liberal suggests a white middle-class identity, but neither word on its own is an explicit marker of race or class.<sup>15</sup> Suburban liberal thereby naturalizes the forms of systemic inequality and privilege embedded in both the meaning and the class and racial status of the people who embody the label. The terms suburban and liberal also each represent the ideals and values of individualism, yet suburban liberal itself is a category of shared identity. Thus, suburban liberalism reflects an ideology and politics of individualism that obscures the structures and forms of privileges and entitlements that link the people who ascribe to it together.

Less than a completely stable and consistent identity or ideology, it is more useful to consider suburban liberals and suburban liberalism the

product of a set of interrelated historical processes. These processes and the relationship between them have their roots in the early twentieth century and the rise of urbanization, corporate capitalism, and progressive reform and flourished during the New Deal. Changes in the economy and the explosive growth of US cities led to the expansion of corporate institutions, and gave rise to both modern professions such as medicine, law, and engineering and a new emphasis on expertise and technocratic skill. The progressive movement's visions of government reform, which advocated for qualified elites to solve the problems of unregulated capitalism and social disorder, made technocratic expertise, science, and rationality a fundamental part of twentieth-century liberalism.<sup>16</sup> The New Deal further elevated this managerial ideology and the importance of using scientific expertise to solve the problems of social, economic, and racial inequality. In doing so, the New Deal agenda placed technocratic ideas and people at the heart of the mechanisms of government and ideals of liberalism.<sup>17</sup>

The Cold War not only vastly expanded the scope of the federal government but also fueled the rise of professional sectors, particularly in the sciences, and contributed to making “knowledge workers” the fastest-growing occupational sector in the decades after World War II.<sup>18</sup> The commitment of such knowledge-oriented fields to the ideals of hard work, intelligence, and skill elevated meritocratic individualism and accomplishment as ever more core values of twentieth-century liberalism. In the early 1970s, Daniel Bell observed that the “professional,” who provided “not raw muscle power or energy, but information,” had become the central figure in the postindustrial economic and social order, and predicted that “eventually the entire complex of prestige and status will be rooted in the intellectual and scientific communities.”<sup>19</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich similarly contended that for the new postindustrial professional class, education and knowledge had supplanted property and capital as the primary markers of identity and social status.<sup>20</sup>

This conceptualization of the significance of education, nevertheless, elided the importance of suburbanization as another key development to emerge from the New Deal, which played an equally critical role in shaping the nation, economy, and political outlook and identity of the new professional class. As part of its effort to create economic security and opportunity and stabilize market forces, New Deal and postwar bureaucrats developed a vast range of public policies—from mortgage initiatives, tax incentives, consumer credit, and subsidies for home building, to road construction, and urban disinvestment—to encourage single-family homeownership for whites outside central cities.<sup>21</sup> The same forces and policies of postwar suburbanization also produced systemic residential segregation by race and class that largely prevented minorities from gaining the privileges of homeownership.<sup>22</sup> Yet as several scholars have powerfully proven, the state-mediated real estate market fortified by the ideals of postwar liberalism and popular cul-

ture popularized a “free market” discourse that encouraged white suburbanites to understand their decisions about where to live as individual choices and rights, and not see how such actions perpetuated forms of racial and economic privilege and inequality.<sup>23</sup> The directives and incentives of state-sponsored suburbanization simultaneously prompted homeowners to adopt a more market or consumer-minded attitude toward government services—from federal tax policy to local public schools—that further fostered an individualist outlook.<sup>24</sup> The set of policies that took shape at all levels of government magnified the privileging of individual self-interest over collective obligation in postwar liberal ideology and institutions.<sup>25</sup>

The increasing popularity of psychology in the 1940s and 1950s accentuated this focus on individualism, injecting a new emphasis and vocabulary of the self and therapeutic ethos into the politics of postwar liberalism.<sup>26</sup> Psychoanalytic theories became especially important to liberal ideas about race and racism during the postwar period, and reinforced the idea that racism was the product of personal prejudice and moral deficiencies, rather than public policy or the directives of the market. Thus, postwar liberals demonstrated a renewed commitment to working within the political system to solve the problems of racial inequality, but tended to advocate for civil rights policies that created “equal opportunity” and “individual rights,” rather than those that focused on eradicating the structural underpinnings of racial segregation and economic inequity.<sup>27</sup> Thomas Sugrue has powerfully shown how the quests of African Americans to fulfill their right to housing and jobs came into direct conflict with the expectation of white homeowners that the state would protect the privileges of property ownership, and revealed the fissures structured into the New Deal coalition.<sup>28</sup> Suburban liberals came to embody and extend both aspects of this dual definition of rights consciousness. As their attitudes toward fair housing, school integration, and affirmative action demonstrate, this duality structured their political priorities before and after the so-called crisis of liberalism in the late 1960s.

This set of historical developments—from the rise of expertise and meritocracy, to homeownership, the focus on the self, and the popularity of racial liberalism—converged to intensify the commitment to individualism within liberalism as well as define the key parts of the worldview, political affiliations, and voting patterns of suburban liberals. The Democratic Party never experienced a “golden age” of unity and equality, and was always rife with forms of exclusion. Yet the increased emphasis on individualism after World War II did mark a deviation from the forms of collective politics—particularly unionization—that defined the party’s agenda for much of its history.<sup>29</sup> The dedication to ideals of individual meritocracy rooted in knowledge work and suburban residency did more than prevent the forging of coalitions across racial, economic, and spatial lines, or even the development of class consciousness

among white suburban professionals.<sup>30</sup> These individualist values submerged the ways in which many of the policies that suburban liberals benefited from fortified structures of economic and racial inequality. This multifaceted form of “class-blindness” had a profound impact on public policy, party politics, and the metropolitan landscape, and contributed to the continuation of, changes in, and constraints on liberalism since the end of World War II.

## The “Problem” of Liberalism

Suburban liberals in the Route 128 area have stood at the intersection of the political, economic, and spatial reorganizations that occurred in the United States since 1945, but they have been largely left out of the traditional frameworks of twentieth-century political and urban history. Scholars have revitalized the field of political history by applying the ideas from urban studies to central questions about electoral realignment and the persistence of racial segregation.<sup>31</sup> Yet many of these works have rested on a geographically overdetermined narrative exaggerating the importance of the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, and a binary relationship between the decline of the New Deal coalition in the industrial centers of the Rust Belt North and Midwest, on the one hand, and the conservative ascendance in the suburbs of the Sunbelt South and West, on the other.

In his seminal 1994 essay “The Problem of American Conservatism,” Alan Brinkley accused historians of a political prejudice by overlooking conservatives.<sup>32</sup> Efforts to correct this prejudice led to a generation worth of scholarship reinforcing a story of inexorable liberal decline. Yet even before Brinkley’s essay appeared, a declension narrative posed a “problem” for the study of twentieth-century liberalism. The earliest accounts of postwar politics argued that the “excesses” of 1960s’ liberalism led to the “unraveling” of the New Deal coalition. The development of the “rise and fall of the New Deal Order” argument complicated that narrative and offered key insights into changes in the political economy fostered by New Deal policy. But the “rise and fall” framework focused primarily on the experiences of white male union members in the blue-collar neighborhoods of the Rust Belt, thereby wedding the travails of liberalism to the “Reagan Democrats.”<sup>33</sup>

A counternarrative of postwar politics has examined the mobilization of the New Right in places like Orange County, California.<sup>34</sup> Lisa McGirr’s *Suburban Warriors* and other works also demonstrate the importance of using grassroots methodology to address national political developments, and helped move conservatism from the “orphan in historical scholarship” to its increasingly favored child.<sup>35</sup> Many of these works, however, have treated the growth of the New Right and suburbanization as interchangeable processes, taking elements of suburban development and culture more broadly—such

as the rise of the military-industrial complex, massive migration, federally subsidized entitlements, exclusionary zoning, and racial homogeneity—and attribute them solely to Sunbelt conservatism. In doing so, this analysis has obfuscated not only the alternative political constituencies that exist in suburban settings but also the ways in which a similar set of factors created the context for liberal activism and voting patterns.

There are undoubtedly differences between many of the suburbs in the “red” strongholds like Cobb County outside Atlanta, Hamilton County outside Cincinnati, Phoenix, Colorado Springs, and parts of Southern California versus the “blue” Northeast and Pacific Northwest. These differences derive from their respective histories, migration patterns, religious cultures, and particular forms of corporate and military investment. Yet concentrating only on these regionally based reputations and differences has obscured the fact that there are liberal and conservative suburban professionals everywhere. Many engineers in Orange County campaigned with the same fervor for McGovern that their colleagues had for Barry Goldwater a decade earlier. Housewives outside Miami fought as hard for gay rights as Anita Bryant and her supporters stood against it, and scores of suburbanites in Atlanta and Houston remained committed to school integration. At the same time, there were many conservatives in bastions of liberalism like the suburbs along Route 128. Robert Welch, founder of the John Birch Society, lived in the Boston suburb of Belmont. And as this study documents, there were many homeowners in Newton who held strong against affordable housing and busing, committed tax revolters in Concord, and opponents to the legalization of abortion in Lexington.<sup>36</sup>

More important, looking solely at these regional distinctions has prevented scholars from recognizing the factors that transcend both regional and partisan divisions and that are symptomatic of a larger suburban political ethos predicated on low taxes, high property values, quality education, and the security and safety of children. This set of priorities influenced conservatism *and* liberalism as well as their relationship to one another.<sup>37</sup> Expanding the definition of and issues that fall under the rubric of suburban politics to include causes and concerns like environmentalism, peace, and feminism not only reinforces how national issues contributed to the development of grassroots activism and political identity formation in the suburbs. It also shows how the quests to preserve open space, oppose the Vietnam War, and advance abortion rights collided and interacted with the bread-and-butter suburban priorities of homeownership, taxes, and education, and heightened the forms of inequality embedded within both the metropolitan landscape and campaigns for progressive causes. Looking at how this set of issues are inextricably intertwined at the grassroots level does not just expand understandings of modern liberalism and suburban politics but also widens the analytic boundaries of both political and urban history.

Political and urban historians have often drawn too rigid a binary between cultural and economic issues, which has obscured the ways in which average suburban residents fused their material and cultural priorities. The new literature on evangelical Christians, especially those residing in the suburbs, has illustrated convincingly the processes through which faith and free market principles became fundamentally intertwined in the worldview of evangelicals at the individual level and the platform of policies of the Republican Party at the national level.<sup>38</sup> This connecting of cultural and economic priorities was not exclusive to evangelical conservatives or the Republican Party. Affluent suburbanites in the Route 128 area gained specific material benefits and rights from the adoption of policies related to racial diversity, environmentalism, reproductive freedom, and national security. Likewise, liberal political ideals often dictated pocketbook decisions such as in which community to purchase a home and where to send a child to school.

The campaigns that liberals spearheaded and supported underscore that the politics of family was by no means the sole domain of social conservatives of the religious Right. Liberal residents in the Route 128 area forged alternative definitions of family values that relied on a language of defending and protecting their children. But these concerns manifested less in standing against abortion, gay rights, and sex education, and more in advocating for fair housing, voluntary integration, peace, and environmentalism in order to protect their families from the dangers of nuclear war, pollution, and sprawl and to prepare their children for the demands of a diverse and competitive global society. Individualist and rights-based programs like METCO that advocated for one-way busing and did not threaten property values or inconvenience white children, therefore, were not posteconomic or postmaterialist but directly complemented the material priorities of suburban liberals as well as their forms of political activism.

## Political Activism and Party Politics in Massachusetts

Liberal activism in the Route 128 area illuminates several key factors about the nature of suburban politics and the relationship between national developments and the particularities of political patterns in Massachusetts. Suburban liberals in Boston were extremely effective at grassroots mobilization to secure the passage of landmark legislation in a variety of arenas, especially at the state level. This success derived in part from the fact that many of the campaign leaders used their professional and class status, expertise, and personal ties to build support at the grassroots level and pressure politicians and policymakers, which was particularly important in Massachusetts with its small size and the heavy concentration of its population

around Boston. These campaigns underscore that on the left, right, or in the center, a small group of well-organized affluent suburbanites can have a tremendous amount of impact on local, state, and national politics and policy.<sup>39</sup> The record of legislative victories is equally notable since committed liberal activists in the Route 128 area were always the minority in their towns. Many of the most dedicated activists, like Bonnie Jones of Lexington, Newton's Jerome Grossman, Anita Greenbaum, and Rhona Shoul, and Concord's Paul Counihan were involved in and moved between campaigns around several different issues. These connections helped to tie the tactics and issues closer together.

Suburban activists along Route 128 proved equally effective at navigating the political culture of their own communities, adopting a strategy that couched issues to align with and complement the privileges and priorities of suburban residency. Such strategies enabled activists to earn support for potentially controversial issues such as voluntary integration or opposition to the Vietnam War among more moderate neighbors, and channel that support through the political process. This pragmatic approach, however, often foreclosed the possibility of subsequent reform and restricted the possibility of more comprehensive change.<sup>40</sup> These tactics also made it difficult for suburban liberals to create coalitions across racial, economic, and spatial lines.

The limited ability of suburban liberals in the Boston area to forge alliances with other traditionally Democratic constituencies like union members, African Americans, and urban ethnic party regulars underscores the relationship between metropolitan fragmentation and the splintering of the New Deal coalition in the postwar era, especially as it coincided with the historical patterns of Massachusetts politics. The vast majority of suburban professionals worked in settings such as research labs, universities, and corporate law firms, which were nonunionized, and lived in communities with negligible rates of union membership. Issues related to organized labor rarely penetrated the daily concerns or lives of even those residents who might have had an abstract commitment to union causes. Similar spatial structures imposed barriers on suburban liberal alliances with minority activists. White suburban liberals worked with African American organizations to address specific issues such as fair housing legislation, the formation of the METCO program, and the campaign to stop the construction of the Inner Belt highway, but certain ideological and practical considerations made such coalitions difficult to maintain permanently. The persistence of racial segregation in white-collar occupations and suburban neighborhoods meant that the majority of white Route 128 residents had rare sustained contact with African Americans and did not confront the realities of systemic racial inequality in their daily lives. Many suburbanites had never traveled into the low-income and predominantly minority parts of Boston like Roxbury, and some rarely went into the city at all. These forms of limited contact contributed to the

direction and agenda of suburban liberal activism. Thus, suburban liberals might have voted in similar ways as labor and minority groups in national elections, and worked with civil rights organizations or unions to support a particular candidate or cause, but it did not mean that these types of collaboration led to sustained and meaningful coalitions.

The particularities of Massachusetts politics further shaped liberal coalitions, strategies, and voting patterns in the Boston suburbs. Dating back to the nineteenth century, the tension between the Boston Brahmin elite and working-class white ethnic groups, especially the Irish, structured the political culture of Massachusetts.<sup>41</sup> By the early twentieth century, partisan loyalties had divided neatly along ethnic, class, and spatial lines. Upper- and middle-class “Yankees” in the suburbs and rural parts of the state aligned with the Republican Party, and working-class ethnic groups in Boston and the state’s other industrial areas joined the Democratic Party, which was led by colorful and corrupt figures such as John “Honey Fitz” Fitzgerald and James Michael Curley.<sup>42</sup> From the 1930s through the postwar era, many parts of Boston remained some of the most consistently Democratic wards in the nation, with Republicans regularly losing by margins of five to one.<sup>43</sup> More than identifying with the values of Franklin Delano Roosevelt or the New Deal, most urban, Catholic, blue-collar voters followed the model of the archetypal “Al Smith Democrats.”<sup>44</sup> The rise of suburbanization and growing power of postindustrial professionals upset the balance of these long-entrenched voting patterns, and led to growing gains for the Democratic Party in the suburbs of Boston in national elections.<sup>45</sup> After 1960, Democratic candidates consistently won the presidential contests in Massachusetts, but it did not indicate an across-the-board realignment of Massachusetts or the disappearance of the Republican Party in state politics.<sup>46</sup>

These patterns demonstrate many of the problems of using the red state/blue state framework to understand national political polarization or suburban politics, especially when interpreting historical events.<sup>47</sup> Throughout the decades after World War II, the state Democratic Party continued to boast a long rap sheet of patronage, bribery, and other illegal activities, which alienated and angered a large contingent of suburban professionals, and inspired them to adhere to a split-ticket voting pattern.<sup>48</sup> “I am not entirely sure whether I am a Republican or Democrat,” Henry B. Cabot, a resident of suburban Dover and member of one of the state’s most prominent families, explained in a letter to a friend in the mid-1950s. “I am a Republican in Massachusetts state politics, but I usually vote Democratic in national elections.”<sup>49</sup> Affluent suburban professionals like Cabot helped keep alive the state’s tradition of liberal Republicanism, and led the state to elect a series of governors from Christian Herter and John Volpe to Francis Sargent, and later William Weld and Mitt Romney.<sup>50</sup> The traditional factions in

the state Democratic Party remained strong as well, which meant that suburban liberal activists often worked outside the formal mechanisms of the parties, and mobilized around particular issues and candidates instead. The assumption of Massachusetts' bluest of the blue identity, derived from its returns in recent presidential elections, has produced a distorted view of the state's liberal distinctiveness both in the present and past, concealing a more complex history and reality.

## Don't Blame Me, I'm From Massachusetts

The popularity of the blue state identity represents the most updated version of long mythology of Massachusetts exceptionalism. Dating back to the Puritans' christening of Boston as "the city on a hill" and claims that the city was the "birthplace of liberty" during the American Revolution and extending to the recent invocations of the "Massachusetts liberal" label, residents have frequently adopted various elements of the state's history and even appropriated criticism as a means to distinguish themselves from the rest of the nation. By reducing the state's politics to the 1972 election, and emphasizing the ways that Massachusetts stood outside and above the rest of the nation, this discourse also makes exceptional the persistence of racial segregation in metropolitan Boston, the state's role in the tax revolt, its strong tradition of moderate Republican politicians, and deep and long-standing ties to the military-industrial complex. Understanding what issues and events this discourse has magnified and what it has concealed as it coincided with structural forces, grassroots activism, and electoral politics constitutes one of the main objectives of this study.<sup>51</sup>

*Don't Blame Us* consists of a community study focused on the five Route 128 suburbs of Brookline, Concord, Lexington, Lincoln, and Newton. The argument is organized around ten chronologically thematic chapters arranged in two parts. Part I begins by exploring in more detail the structural and culture forces that produced both the political culture of the Route 128 suburbs and the suburban liberal worldview of many residents. Chapter 1 also shows how these developments established the foundations for a variety of forms of grassroots liberal activism, which the rest of part I examines. With chapters devoted to fair housing, voluntary integration, open space and environmental politics, and peace and antiwar activism, it looks at how these movements fortified Massachusetts' reputation as a "bastion of liberalism" and certain forms of exclusivity and inequality.

Part II investigates the continuities and changes in suburban liberal politics as residents in the Route 128 area confronted and adapted to new economic and political realities, including the scaling back of defense spending, the recession and rise of inflation, changing family structures, busing

crisis, the rise of the pro-family movement, and the Reagan revolution in the 1970s and 1980s. It returns to many of the issues, spaces, and figures discussed in part I. Following an examination of the McGovern campaign in 1972, the subsequent chapter concentrates on a series of conflicts over affordable housing that took shape during the late 1960s and early 1970s that pitted traditionally liberal causes like civil rights and environmentalism against each other. Chapter 8 places the debates over voluntary integration within the context of Boston busing crisis and the national recession. Chapter 9 looks at the growth of suburban feminism as a means to consider the persistence of certain elements of suburban liberal activism and ideology in this changed political and economic climate.

The final chapter explores both Dukakis's career from the early 1970s to his presidential bid and the state's economic turnaround, dubbed the "Massachusetts Miracle," which made the high-tech industry and skilled professionals ever more central to the state's economy and politics, and the Democratic Party. Despite Dukakis's loss, his platform of abortion rights, affirmative action, the environment, and other quality-of-life concerns coupled with an emphasis on using market incentives to stimulate high-tech growth had a deep impact. Dukakis's platform influenced the set of policies and approach adopted by the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) and its leader, Bill Clinton, in their efforts to appeal to suburban voters and move the party closer toward the center. This agenda continued to disproportionately benefit postindustrial professionals, while also perpetuating forms of racial and economic inequality within metropolitan Boston and in the Democratic Party's priorities.

In the aftermath of the 1972 election, a bumper sticker began appearing on cars along Route 128 declaring "Don't Blame Me, I'm From Massachusetts." While the slogan, from which this book draws its title, clearly referenced the state's sole support of McGovern, its underlying meaning is equally important to understanding the larger dynamics of Massachusetts, suburban, and liberal politics. The individualist, exceptionalist, and progressive meanings embedded in that seemingly unapologetic statement illustrate both the possibilities and limits of suburban liberalism. Rather than celebrating or blaming suburban liberals, it is more important to understand the broader structural and political forces that both gave rise to and constrained their particular form of politics and worldview. Suburban liberals and Massachusetts both need to be understood less for the reasons that they proudly stood against the national tide, and more for what they represent about American politics and society over the last fifty years.