



The Voluntary City: Choice, Community, and Civil Society (Economics, Cognition, and Society)

David T. Beito, Peter Gordon, Alexander Tabarrok

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The rise and decline of American civic life has provoked wide-ranging responses from all quarters of society. Unfortunately, many proposals for improving our communities rely on renewed governmental efforts without a similar recognition that the inflexibility and poor accountability of governments have often worsened society's ills. *The Voluntary City* investigates the history of large-scale, private provision of social services, the for-profit provision of urban infrastructure and community governance, and the growing privatization of residential life in the United States to argue that most decentralized, competitive markets can contribute greatly to community renewal.

Among the fascinating topics covered are: how mutual-aid societies in America, Great Britain, and Australia provided their members with medical care, unemployment insurance, sickness insurance, and other social services before the welfare state; how private law, known historically as the law merchant, is returning in the form of arbitration; and why the rise of neighborhood associations represents the most comprehensive privatization occurring in the United States today.

The volume concludes with an epilogue that places the discoveries of *The Voluntary City* within the theory of market and government failure and discusses the implications of these discoveries for theories about the private provision of public goods. A refreshing challenge to the position that insists government alone can improve community life, *The Voluntary City* will be of special interest to students of history, law, urban life, economics, and government.

David T. Beito is Associate Professor of History, University of Alabama. Peter Gordon is Professor in the School of Policy, Planning, and Development and Department of Economics, University of Southern California. Alexander Tabarrok is Vice President and Research Director, the Independent Institute.

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