

# Geography In The News™

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## MILLION-PLUS CITIES

In 1805, there was only one city in the world with one million people, in 1905 there were three, and by 2005, there are 281 million-plus cities. In just 200 years, the world's population has grown from being mostly rural to nearly half of the 6.5 billion people now living in urban areas.

According to *People & the Planet*, "That is a huge change. In 1950, only 29 percent of the world's population of 2.5 billion were urban dwellers. And 83 percent of the developing world's people were still living on the land. If the United Nations projections are to be believed, by 2025 over 60 percent of the world's 8.3 billion global citizens will be living in towns and cities."

Even with the best censuses, it is difficult to obtain a truly accurate account of cities' populations, particularly in developing countries. Often city limits do not correspond with peripheral growth, so that urban densities may extend far into the surrounding areas where few if any urban services are available.

As a consequence, the term *metropolitan area* is often used to encircle cities' total populations, regardless of political boundaries. Another term used nearly synonymously with a metropolitan area is *urban agglomeration*, used to delimit contiguous densely populated urban areas, not demarcated by administrative boundaries" (2005 *World Almanac*). Consequently, world city popu-

lation calculations may vary somewhat from source to source, depending on the delineation process.

In the early 1800s, London became the first million-plus city, reflecting the influence of the Industrial Revolution. London's booming economy drew immigrants to dismal tenements with streets and alleyways running with sewage.

By the early 1900s, Paris and New York had joined the million-plus club, as both became *primate cities* for their respective countries. Like London, a century earlier, both were hubs of economic activity, providing urban jobs for many immigrants unable or unwilling to farm for a living.

In the last half of the 1900s, urban growth exploded, with cities reaching the million-plus mark with greater and greater frequency. The geographic pattern of today's 281 million-plus cities is very interesting, with the preponderance occurring in the middle latitudes.

In 2000, there were 15 cities around the world with 10 million or more inhabitants within their metropolitan areas. Although there are variations in the numbers, Tokyo was the largest with 34 million, followed by Mexico

with over a million people in 2001 (*Census of India*). More than 73 million live in these cities, but amount to less than 7 percent of India's 1.1 billion people. The United States had 15 metropolitan areas with over 2 million people in 2000, many of them with hyphenated names because they crossed several political jurisdictions, such as Chicago-Gary-Kenosha, Miami-Fort Lauderdale or Minneapolis-St. Paul.

China has the largest number of million-plus cities at 34. Eleven of these cities have over 2 million residents and 23 have between 1 and 2 million. Shanghai is the largest city at 13 million, but that represents less than 1 percent of China's 1.3 billion people.

Throughout the world, cities are economic magnets for landless people. As the world's population increases, land available for rural farming actually decreases. For new generations of people seeking opportunities with little, if any investment, as compared to farming.

As new tenants flock to cities by the thousands, there is a likelihood of their shear numbers outstripping the urban infrastructures, particularly in developing countries. Water, food, transportation and medical services are four issues of major concern to mayors of large cities everywhere.

What will the future hold for the world's urban geographies?

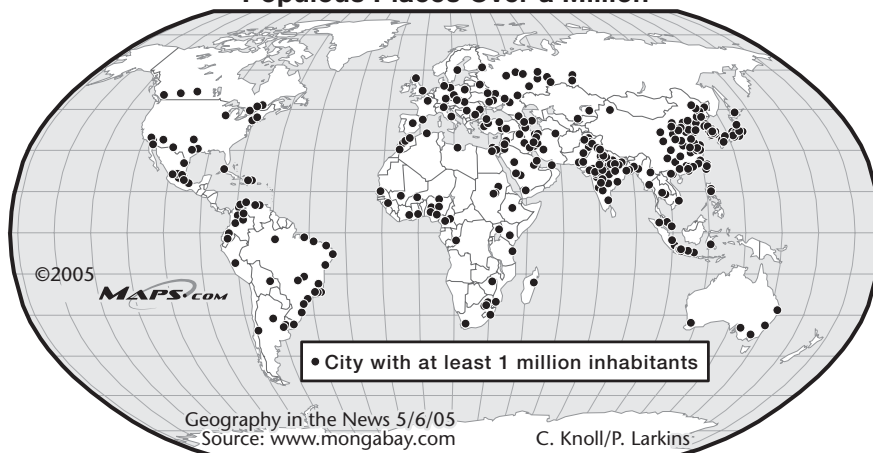
And that is Geography in the News. May

6, 2005. #779.

Sources: *People & the Planet*, "Greening the Cities," Vol. 5, No. 2, 1996; *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*, 2005, World Almanac Education Group, Inc.

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Populous Places Over a Million



City (18), New York City (18), Sao Paulo (17), Mumbai (Bombay) (16), Kolkata (Calcutta) (13), Shanghai (13), Buenos Aires (13), Delhi (12), Los Angeles (12), Osaka (11), Jakarta (11), Beijing (11), Rio de Janeiro (11), and Cairo (10) (2005 *World Almanac*). However, one U.N. count lists Lagos, Nigeria, with 14 million.

India had 27 metropolitan areas