

THE SUBURBAN ERA

The country life is to be preferred, for there we see the works of God, but in the cities little else but the works of men.

—WILLIAM PENN, *Reflections and Maxims*

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INTRODUCTION

North America is a suburban continent. For more than forty years America has had more suburbanites than city dwellers. In numbers this translates to 40 million more people living in the suburbs in 2010 than in 1990. Moreover, since 1997 an absolute majority of the population has lived in suburbs, and today 55 percent of the population is suburban. In the fifty-one metro areas of 1 million or more some 70 percent of the residents are suburban. Suburbs have changed from being fringe locations from which commuters go to the city to being the modal areas where people work, live, shop, and recreate. Indeed, a role reversal has occurred between cities and suburbs—young singles, widows, and other non-family households now outnumber married-with-children homes in the suburbs.

Also, while cities overall still have higher rates of poverty, the number of suburban poor as of 2011 exceeded

the city poor by 3 million. Between 2000 and 2011 the number of suburban poor increased 64 percent, compared to 29 percent in the cities.¹ Suburbs of the one hundred largest metropolitan areas are now the home of the largest and fastest-growing poor population in America. Policies that were created to help those in urban low-income communities no longer fit the new suburban geography of poverty. While suburbs continue to dramatically change, both for good and bad, many of our images of suburbia remain set in the myths of the past. The suburban revolution has changed suburbs from being residential places on the periphery to being the residential, economic, and commercial centers of a new metropolitan form.

SUBURBAN DOMINANCE

Economically, the suburbs now rule. We shop at some 50,000 suburban malls. Downtown department stores, by contrast, remain open in only a handful of cities. Suburbs also are where most of us work. Two-thirds of metropolitan office space and two-thirds of the nation's manufacturing jobs are in the suburbs. National Association of Realtors and other surveys indicate that roughly 80 percent of Americans prefer a single-family house of the type found in suburbs.²

Politically, suburban voters are in the majority, and their interests now set national and state agendas. Big-city bosses like Mayor Richard J. Daley of Chicago once played a major role in choosing and electing presidents such as John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. Today presidential candidates primarily address themselves to the interests and concerns of suburbanites. President Barack Obama tailored his 2012 election campaign to the needs and interests of white middle-class suburbanites.

That the suburban shopping mall has replaced downtown as a shopping site is commonly recognized. What is less known is that factory employment now also has a suburban zip code—twice as many manufacturing jobs are located in suburbs as in the central city. The city factory has been supplanted by the suburban industrial park. Most white-collar office jobs have also suburbanized. Outer Dallas has three times the office space of the central business district. Downtown Atlanta has a skyline of new office buildings, but

suburban Atlanta has twice the office space. Even in the New York metropolitan area, northern New Jersey has more office space than does Manhattan.

Out-movement of offices, manufacturing, and shopping has turned Burgess's zonal hypothesis inside out and created a multinucleated pattern of outer suburban centers or edge cities. Suburbs have been transformed from being primarily outlying residential areas to being the nation's new economic and commercial cores. The suburbs are no longer "sub." While it twists the language, suburbs in many respects are now the nation's demographic and economic centers.

EMERGENCE OF SUBURBS

How did this major change occur? Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Adna Weber concluded that the most hopeful sign in American urbanization was the "tendency . . . toward the development of suburban towns," for "such a new distribution of population combines at once the open air and spaciousness of the country with the sanitary improvements, comforts, and associated life of the city."³ This image of the suburb as a green or pleasant oasis with its single-family homes, neighbors, children, dogs, and bikes—all within commuting range of the city—is one that still has force. Suburbs have been called "bourgeois utopias."⁴ Intellectual critics may scorn such a suburban vision, but scorned or not suburbs have transformed the landscape demographically, organizationally, and in lifestyle.

Up until 2010 suburbs had been growing faster than central cities for nine decades. (Remember, though, that *suburban* as defined by the Census Bureau simply means territory inside the metropolitan area that lies outside the central city. Some of the more outlying areas might not ordinarily be considered suburban.) Officially the U.S. became a nation of suburbanites in 1970 when the census showed that for the first time suburban areas of metro areas exceeded central cities in population size and growth rate. Virtually the entire metropolitan area increase since that time has occurred in suburbs. In 1920 only 15 percent of all Americans were suburbanites, and the percentage was only 20 percent by 1940. It increased to 24 percent in 1950, and then shot up to 33 percent in 1960, 40 percent in 1980, 52 percent in 2000, and 55 percent today.

The following sections first discuss the emergence of suburbs, then their organizational and demographic aspects, then the question of suburbia as a way of life, and, finally, the increasing role of minorities in suburbs.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

As noted in Chapter 3: The Rise of Urban America, the American city of the nineteenth century was compact, had high density, and could be walked rather quickly. Major suburbanization was not possible prior to the transportation advances of the nineteenth century that permitted population dispersal. The first to move out were the wealthy, who built "suburban" communities out along the railroad lines radiating from the city.⁵ Initially, some of the homes were summer villas, but it was not long before families remained year-round and businessmen were commuting daily by train.⁶ These expensive railroad commuter suburbs were to provide an idealized rural refuge from the clamor of the city.⁷ As advertised by a promotional piece of over a century ago:

The controversy which is sometimes brought, as to which offers the greater advantage, the country or the city, finds a happy answer in the suburban idea which says, both—the combination of the two—the city brought to the country. The city has its advantages and conveniences, the country has its charm and health; the union of the two (a modern result of the railway), gives to man all he could ask in this respect. The great cities that are building now, all have their suburban windows at which nature may be seen in her main expressions—and these spots attract to them cultured people, with their elaborate and costly adornments.⁸

As this quotation suggests, the first American suburbs were generally upper-class villages of substantial country homes. The quotation also notes the importance of the railroad. In the absence of a reliable transportation technology, one could venture no farther from the railway station than one could conveniently walk, or be driven by carriage. Suburbs thus were strung out along the rail lines like beads on a string. Chestnut Hill on Philadelphia's Main Line was an early example of this pattern. Chicago's North Shore was another. Only those who could afford both the

time and money to commute could combine an urban occupation with a rural residence. This began social class polarization between city and suburb.

ELECTRIC STREETCAR ERA: 1890-1920

The rapid adoption of the electric streetcar around the close of the nineteenth century allowed the middle class to move out to the new suburban developments springing up along the streetcar corridors. Boston, for example, as of 1850 was a walking city extending at most 2.5 miles from city hall. The coming of the electric streetcar in 1888 changed the spatial configuration of Boston and other American urban areas from that of a compact city to that of a star-shaped urban area.

By 1900 the streetcar meant one could live as far as twelve miles from the central business district. Moreover, one could ride the entire line for a five-cent fare. Using the streetcars, the middle-class population could separate where they worked from where they lived, just like the wealthy had been able to do earlier by using the railroads. Development, both residential and commercial, occurred along the fingers of the electric streetcar tracks, while the interstices remained empty and undeveloped.⁹ The electric streetcar, not the automobile, first made middle-class suburbanization possible.

ANNEXATION

Annexation was the major means of adding to the city during the last part of the nineteenth century. New suburban housing areas on the edges of the cities, such as Hyde Park on Chicago's south side (President Obama's neighborhood) were commonly annexed to the central city once they were built up. In 1889 Chicago annexed a massive area of 133 square miles on its south side. Such annexations were usually sought by suburban residents. Before the twentieth century, suburbs sought to be annexed by the city in order to benefit from its superior fire protection, schools, and roads; to gain access to city water supplies (both for drinking and fires); and to use city sewer systems.

However, by the early twentieth century, the pattern had generally reversed: suburbs increasingly actively sought "home rule" and opposed annexation. In many cases, the desire for suburban autonomy was directly linked to suburbanites' desires to remain free of the

graft, corruption, political bosses, and the ethnic political influence of the central city. Keeping control over land use and taxes was also very important, as was maintaining influence over the local schools. Home rule meant that WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) suburbanites could exclude from their suburban schools the immigrant Irish, Italian, Polish, and Jewish children found in the central cities. While the city was ethnically and religiously diverse, suburbs could remain Anglo-Saxon Protestant havens.

The fragmentation of governmental units within the metropolitan area thus became part of the American system. The twenty-five metropolitan districts defined by the census of 1910 showed the new future pattern. A full quarter of the metropolitan population already lived outside the core city. By the time of World War I the pattern was one of ethnic working-class populations residing in the central city, while more affluent white-collar workers commuted. To move out was to move up.

The division between city and suburbs is a legal distinction that over time has become a sociological division. While local municipal boundaries are significant in many ways—including financing, taxing, and schools—other social, organizational, ecological, and demographic criteria can be used to distinguish different regions within the metropolitan area. Some of these criteria are population density, the proportion of single-family dwellings, and distance from the center of the city. However, none of these alternative schemes has gained anywhere near the acceptance of the traditional city-suburb division. Today the city line is commonly viewed as a social and economic boundary as much as a legal boundary.

AUTOMOBILE SUBURBS: 1920-1950

Widespread adoption of the automobile greatly accelerated suburbanization. Car registrations, which had been 2.5 million in 1915, jumped to 9 million in 1920 and then skyrocketed to 26.5 million in 1930. (Today there are 255 million cars and two-thirds of families have two or more autos). Henry Ford changed the car from a plaything of the rich to an everyday means of transportation. Ford's assembly lines did more than produce cars; they brought a revolution that changed the face of the nation. Ford had produced 16 million

Model T autos by the time production switched to the Model A in 1927. At that time one of every two vehicles on the road was a Ford Model T.

Automobile usage meant that previously inaccessible land was open for suburban development. No longer was it necessary to be located along a railroad or streetcar line; commuters willing to pay the costs in money and time could drive their own cars to work and live where they pleased. The result was a middle-class suburban housing boom.

Ironically, the automobile was initially praised as solving the serious pollution problem caused by horses. Each horse produced 15 to 26 pounds of manure and several gallons of urine a day. In New York at the beginning of the twentieth century, this meant 2.5 million pounds of horse manure and 60,000 gallons of urine each day. Manure littered the streets and provided a breeding ground for disease-carrying flies. Some forty-one horses a day also died in the street. Thus, the automobile was viewed as a far less polluting form of transportation.

Popular upper-middle-class and affluent auto suburbs of this era—the Grosse Pointes, Shaker Heights, and Winnetkas—established an image of suburbs as places of substantial single-family houses surrounded by lawns free of crabgrass, and inhabited by white Anglo-Saxon Protestants of upper-middle-class income and educational levels. Voting Republican was frequently included in this image. These affluent suburbs established an image of suburbia as being "the good life," an image that developers still use to sell even the most humble suburban houses.

Suburbs built before World War II were sharply distinguished according to income, occupation, religion, and ethnicity. Developing suburbs often used zoning laws, which had come to be widely adopted following the pioneering New York City Zoning Resolution of 1916, to prevent the building of inexpensive homes on small lots. Restrictive racial, religious, and ethnic covenants included in deeds were also widely used to exclude "undesirable" groups such as blacks, Asians, Jews, and, occasionally, Catholics.

Pre-World War II suburbs had the advantage of appealing to the long-standing anti-urbanism of Americans—suburbs were supposedly closer to nature and thus better places to live, while at the same time



Robert Rehm and his family living in the suburb of Levittown, NY, in 1950 was described by the Census Bureau as the "average American." "He is a semi-skilled worker; has a wife and two children; has an average income of around \$3,000; owns a refrigerator, radio, and telephone; and is paying on his home." Bettmann/Corbis

close enough to the city to have all the advantages of the urban life that the suburbanite didn't really want to abandon. Suburban houses built during this period reflect the romanticism of their owners. Styles were widely eclectic; houses half-timbered in the grand English Tudor style were built next to pillared Georgian colonial houses and Spanish-Moorish villas. To their owners, these homes were far more than mere housing; they represented the romantic idealization of an earlier non-urban era. "A man's home was his castle,"

where he could live, if not as a lord, at least as a latter-day country gentleman—and all without being isolated from the advantages of modern city life such as electricity and connection to city water, sewer, phone, and gas lines. Newer suburban homes had access to city services such as electricity and gas well before older, poor inner-city neighborhoods.

Actually, most of the suburban homes built during the 1920s were not grand estates but rather more utilitarian and moderately priced bungalows. Such one- or

two-story homes were small, but efficiently laid out, and could be managed without servants. Bungalow homes suggested not wealth but solid middle-class comfort. To real estate developers, the adoption of automobiles was a boon, for it meant that open land lying between the rail and streetcar axes was now available for residential development. The ideal was that every family (or at least every middle-class family) should have a single-family home (and mortgage).

The middle-class and upper-middle-class character of this development meant that American cities were assuming a spatial configuration in which movement out was increasingly being associated with movement up. By the 1920s the social distinction between cities and suburbs was set.

MASS SUBURBANIZATION: 1950-1990

The pent-up housing demand that had been frustrated first by the Depression of the 1930s, and then by World War II, burst in a suburban flow by 1950—a momentum that has carried to the present day. Following the war the exodus of whites from the city included not only the rich and well-to-do but also large numbers of middle-class families and even working-class families.

Across the country once-largely-rural areas such as Los Angeles County saw massive conversion of rural tracts and orchards to suburban subdivisions. New families flowed to the suburbs seeking detached single-family houses in homogeneous look-alike residential areas. This movement was made possible by liberalized lending policies of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the new Veterans Administration (VA) loans. Often no down payment was required for purchasing a new home in a suburban subdivision. The consequence, as discussed later in this chapter, was a *de facto* national housing policy of government-subsidized movement to suburbia. (Canada has no similar national mortgage subsidy plan, nor does Canada allow a tax deduction for mortgage interest.)

As noted in Chapter 5: Metro and Edge City Growth, postwar suburbanizing families were rapidly followed by retailers who discovered that retail shopping malls were far more lucrative than their older stores in the declining central business districts. Business and industry similarly leapfrogged to the suburbs

in order to benefit from newer plants, increased space, lower taxes, and access to the new freeways.

The rapidity with which farmers' fields were converted to single-family housing developments is well known. Builders of tract developments transformed huge areas of rural land into instant suburbia. Homes in Levittown, the prototypical postwar development, built 30 miles east of New York City on 4,000 acres of potato fields on Long Island, cost \$6,900 in 1948, which even then was a real bargain. For this amount you purchased a 720-square-foot home having a 12-by-16-foot living room, a kitchen, two bedrooms, a bath, and a stairway leading to an unfinished attic that could be finished. Interiors of all homes in Levittown were exactly alike, and there were four facades with different colors for external variety. To the ex-GIs and their wives, often living doubled-up with parents in a city apartment, such homes were a dream come true. The Levitt brothers revolutionized home-building, being the first to use a version of assembly-line techniques to mass produce some 17,500 houses for 80,000 people. On the West Coast, Lakewood Village, south of Los Angeles, was even larger, housing more than 100,000 persons in 16 square miles. Most suburban developments were, of course, far smaller.

The aesthetically vapid nature of many of these tracts of "little boxes" has been justly condemned. On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that the city neighborhoods from which many middle-class and lower-middle-class people migrated were far from being architectural gems. Look-alike uniformity was not a suburban invention. Most city streets have similar-type housing. For most families, a move to a suburban subdivision meant a move to a better house.

The titles of many suburban sub-developments built after World War II—Rolling Meadows, Apple Orchard Valley, Oak Forest Estates—are really epitaphs for what was destroyed by the housing developments. I lived for two years in a suburban Washington, DC, apartment complex of several hundred units named Seven Oaks Farm. The farm had been plowed under by the housing project, and there were only three oaks—mere saplings hardly three feet tall. Country names are used to suggest an openness and rural nature—a nature that vanishes as soon as the subdivision is built. But, of course, suburban developments named



The Rancher in Levittown

\$59 A MONTH

No Down Payment for Veterans!

► The famous Rancher of Levittown is now being built in two more sections of Levittown. When these are sold there will be no more Ranchers; we haven't any more room for them.

► It's a beauty of a house that's priced unbelievably low at \$8990. Carrying charges are only \$59 monthly, and veterans need absolutely no down payment. Non-veterans need only a total of \$450 down. Can you think of anything much easier than that?

► The house at \$8990 comes with two bedrooms, but you can have a third bedroom for only \$250 more. If you're a veteran you still don't need any money down, and a non-veteran needs only \$100 more. We think that's a bargain, don't you?

► Of course, you're not buying just a house. You own the ground—60 x 100—beautifully landscaped. You have ac-

cess to the community-owned swimming pools, recreational areas, etc.

► Your house itself is charming, cheerful, and convenient. Such things as a four-foot medicine chest completely mirrored, picture windows from floor to ceiling, an outside garden storage room, a Bendix washer, an oil-fired radiant heating system, complete rock-wool insulation—all add to your comfort and enjoyment.

► Get your application in as soon as possible. Occupancy may be any time from January thru May. You pick the month. You'll need a good-faith deposit of \$100, but you'll get it back at settlement if you're a veteran; credited against your down payment if you're a non-veteran.

► O, yes, we almost forgot! Total settlement charges are just \$10! See you soon, folks!

Furnished Exhibit Homes open every day until 9 P. M.

TO LEVITTOWN

By car from Philadelphia—Drive out Rittenhouse Boulevard (passing on Route 1 for about 3 miles). Turn right on Levittown exp. to Route 11. Turn left on Route 11 about 2 miles to the Exhibit Center.

By bus from Philadelphia—Take Levittown Express Bus or Bridge Street station about 2 miles to the Exhibit Center.

By car from Camden—Drive out Route 130 (Burlington Pike) to Burlington. Turn off Elmwood Street to Exhibit Center.

By car from Trenton—Drive out Route 130 (Burlington Pike) to Burlington. Turn left and drive bridge to Levittown. Turn right on Route 11 (two miles to Exhibit Center).

By car from Trenton—Cross the bridge into Pennsylvania, turn left on Route 11 (about 1 1/2 miles) to Route 11 (Levittown) and turn right on Route 11.

Levitt and Sons
INCORPORATED

U. S. ROUTE 11 • LEVITTOWN, PA. • Telephone WINDBOR 6-1100

Philadelphia Inquirer—November 14, 1954
Philadelphia Bulletin—November 12, 1954
Camden Courier-Post—November 12, 1954
Trenton Times—November 12, 1954

Note the no down payment for veterans, low monthly payments, and \$10 total closing costs touted in this 1954 advertisement for the new Levittown being built outside Philadelphia.

(Courtesy of Levitt Homes)

Levittown house ad. Courtesy of Levitt Homes

Congested Acres Estates or Flood Plains Hollow, while perhaps more accurately named, would not have the same sales appeal.

METRO SPRAWL: 1990-2010

Across the nation, year by year, acre after acre of once-rural land is relentlessly being consumed by urban sprawl. *Sprawl* is the term commonly used to refer to the automobile-dependent, low-density housing and commercial development taking place in the outer reaches of metropolitan areas (see Chapter 12: Housing Patterns, Sprawl and Smart Growth). Developers love new outer areas for their quick profits and ease of building, and the new homeowners like having more space for less money. Sprawl, however, is inherently economically inefficient, wasteful of time and resources, and destructive of the environment. Sprawl means the outlying parts of metropolitan areas, whether surrounding Atlanta, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, Denver, San Antonio, or Los Angeles, increasingly look the same, with open scars where farms and forests once stood, new large houses (often in gated communities), and look-alike shopping centers surrounded by huge asphalt parking lots.

Dispersed growth brings larger new homes, but also congestion and gridlock. Paradise is being paved. The average commuting time in Atlanta is 80 minutes, and commuting time is expected to increase to an hour and a half.¹¹ For those on the exurban edge times are even longer.

In 1950 Scottsdale, Arizona, was a tiny suburb of Phoenix with barely 2,000 people living in its one square mile. Today Scottsdale is three times the size of San Francisco, and the commute into Phoenix is far from the fast scenic desert drive it once was. It can take an hour to drive from Scottsdale to Phoenix. Phoenix is becoming what it most feared: another Los Angeles. Actually, at 469 square miles Phoenix sprawls over more space than does Los Angeles. Phoenix, where people once moved seeking clean desert air, now is tied for having the second worst particulate pollution in the nation.¹⁰ Those with health problems are increasingly warned to stay inside because of air pollution.

During the housing boom prior to 2008 outer ring suburbs grew rapidly. However, since the subsequent housing recession outer-ring McMansion homes have

been the slowest to sell. During the housing recession inner-ring suburbs and cities fared better.

Sprawl has moved to among voters' top concerns nationally, along with the economy, crime, taxes, and education. Nonetheless, in spite of spreading talk of "smart growth" and the "new urbanism," sprawl—so far—is the pattern for the twenty-first century. This issue will be discussed at length in Chapter 12: Housing Patterns, Sprawl, and Smart Growth, and in Chapter 13: Planning, New Towns, and New Urbanism. For now we will return to our discussion of how we became a suburban nation, and what this means for the future.¹²

CAUSES OF SUBURBAN GROWTH

POSTWAR EXODUS

How did the U.S. become a suburban nation? Why the postwar suburban exodus? Six factors largely account for the postwar suburban boom.

First, and most important, government policies—whether by intent or not—acted to directly subsidize suburban growth. New Veterans Administration (VA) loan guarantees made mortgage loans available to veterans at rates below those for conventional mortgages. A similar Federal Housing Administration (FHA) program that made loans to non-veterans had made some 22 million new home loans by 1994. (Canada had a small program for veterans only.) VA loans could be obtained with no money down and a twenty-five-year repayment schedule. Prior to this time mortgages commonly required 50 percent down and could only be obtained for five years with a balloon payment at the end. However, with the government guaranteeing housing, loan banks suddenly were competing to make loans to middle- and lower-middle-class families that they otherwise would have ignored. Both VA and FHA programs required that communities be "homogeneous areas," thus reinforcing racial segregation.

Developers streamlined the application process so all the paperwork could be completed during a Sunday drive to see the model house at the proposed development. The VA and FHA initially made loans only on new houses, and once a developer's model home was approved, all similarly built homes automatically qualified. Not surprisingly, young families flocked to subsidized suburban houses.

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The affluent increasingly isolate themselves in suburban gated communities. © 1000words/Dreamstime.com

Second, beginning in the late 1950s the federal government further subsidized out-movement by financing the construction of a system of metropolitan expressways. The resulting national interstate freeway system has been described by a secretary of commerce as "the greatest public works program in the history of the world."¹³ Since the federal government paid 90 percent of the construction costs, city mayors pushed for having new freeways cut through their cities in order to bring shoppers downtown. They forgot that the new roads would go both ways. Without the federally funded freeways many of the new suburban developments would have been impossible to reach.

Third, in the eastern and northern sections of the country, almost all the land within the legal boundaries of the city had already been developed by the 1950s. This is both the most obvious and the most overlooked factor in explaining suburban growth. Most established cities couldn't annex, and without annexation all additional growth of the urban area would, by definition, have to be suburban growth. The Depression years of the 1930s saw little building, and private home building was prohibited during World War II. Thus by the 1950s there was a tremendous pent-up demand for

new metropolitan-area housing, and most available open land was, by definition, suburban.

Fourth, overall suburban housing costs were initially lower than costs in central cities. With a city housing shortage, buying older homes in the city required larger down payments. To new families just becoming economically established, this was a major consideration. Young marrieds went to the suburbs not for togetherness or to escape the city, but because new houses in suburban sub-developments were frequently cheaper than housing in the city.

Today, when closing costs commonly run thousands of dollars, it is useful to remember just what a bargain the new suburban homes were. The *total* closing costs for a 1954 Levitt-built home were \$10. Taxes in the new suburbs were generally lower than in the central city. Many suburban developers did not include in their purchase price tax-supported "extras" such as city water, sewers, sidewalks, street lighting, parks, and museums. Thus, the initial front-end costs of housing were frequently lower and easier to finance in the newer "package" suburbs than in the central city.

Fifth, suburbanization was "caused" by demographic changes. Prosperity and the return of veterans

created a "marriage boom" that was quickly followed by a "baby boom." In the decade after the war, some 10 million new households were created. The existing housing in cities could not absorb large numbers of additional families. New city housing had not been built in decades, existing housing was badly overcrowded, and landlords were not inclined to be tolerant of young children. Thus, young couples with children were forced toward the suburbs, since they were not welcome as renters in city apartments and could not afford to purchase city houses. The suburban "baby-boom" children (born between 1946 and 1964, the "baby-boom" years) created a need for new housing—a need that suburban developers were delighted to fill.

Sixth, survey data show decisively that most Americans prefer the newer single-family houses on their own lots that are most commonly found in the suburbs. Even those who see suburban sprawl as a result of deliberate decisions made by powerful capitalists acknowledge that people want suburban single-family homes.¹⁴ Planners and architects may feel that such housing defiles the landscape, but the public overwhelmingly prefers suburban sprawl to high-rise luxury apartments or even townhouses. This is true even of those without children. Given a choice, North Americans would rather live in single-family housing outside the city. Most families residing in apartment buildings view their tenancy as a temporary step before moving to a single-family house. If a suburban single-family home is too expensive, a suburban townhouse or even a garden apartment complex may substitute.

Among other things, this means that North Americans are getting pretty much what they want in housing design. Suburban sub-developments succeed because even when alternatives are open, most people prefer suburban locations. The fact that many professional urban planners and architects deplore the cookie cutter "little boxes all in a row" has had little impact on most of the population. Residents perceive individuality and differences even in the largest look-alike sub-developments.

NON-REASONS

There is a tendency to project contemporary factors back into the past. Thus, the "cause" of suburban growth is frequently equated in the popular media with the

decline of cities. Contributing to this decline are said to be the deterioration of central-city services, poorer-quality city schools, higher urban crime rates, and the high proportion of minorities in city neighborhoods. The problem is that *none* of these factors had much impact during the first two decades of massive postwar suburbanization.

This is not to say that urban decay, poor schools, race, and crime don't affect some contemporary suburbanizing. However, "common-sense" explanations such as "white flight" had only minimal impact on the massive postwar suburbanization before the late 1960s. The reason white flight was not a major factor is because, prior to the Fair Housing Act of 1968, all city housing in the U.S. was racially segregated. Residential segregation was the law in the South, and enforced even more rigorously by custom and practice in the North. Since whites lived in completely segregated all-white neighborhoods, the idea of massive white flight from minorities made no sense prior to the 1968 open housing legislation. Blacks and whites were in separate housing pools, and publicly sanctioned racial segregation kept blacks within specific racially segregated neighborhoods. The massive postwar suburban growth during the 1950s and 1960s represents more a movement *toward* values associated with suburbanization—privacy, space, cleanliness, and other amenities—than a fleeing from perceived central urban ills.¹⁵

Nor were people fleeing city economic or social problems during the first two decades of suburban boom after World War II. Cities during this period were doing reasonably well in terms of taxes, schooling, and crime. Today we may associate cities with higher crime rates, but that was not the case in most cities during the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. For example, New York City in 1942 had only 44 murders in the entire city including gangland hits and family fights. It is important not to automatically project contemporary patterns into the past. From the 1920s through the 1950s uptown Harlem nightclubs were filled nightly with affluent white New Yorkers who went "Up to Harlem" after the downtown clubs closed. The streets of Harlem were safe for both whites and blacks at 2:00 a.m.

A cliché of movies of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s (especially musicals) was a young couple strolling through Central Park at midnight (and breaking into

song and dance as the Irish cop strolling his beat (looked on). At that time Central Park was quite safe at night for couples.

CONTEMPORARY SUBURBIA

Suburbia today is remarkably diverse. There are affluent commuter suburbs, working-class suburbs, suburbs of condominiums, industrial-park suburbs, and commercial edge cities. Historically, suburbs were considered "sub" because they were not economically self-supporting but rather were smaller appendages of the central city, serving as dormitories. Today some "suburbs" are quite large. The Phoenix suburb of Mesa has a larger population than Minneapolis. Also, in the past suburban residents had to commute to the central city in order to earn their livelihood.

That no longer holds: today suburbs are the major centers of employment. Even three decades ago in New York City, the legendary citadel of the commuter, only one-fifth of the suburban workers actually commuted into New York City. Our image of the suburbs, obviously, has not caught up with reality. Today's suburban commuter is much more likely to commute to another suburb than to the central city. Three-quarters of suburbanites who work now work in the suburbs. One is over twice as likely to commute between suburbs rather than to commute from suburb to city.

There are now more large corporate headquarters in areas surrounding New York City than in the city itself. In terms of number of Fortune 500 corporations, Fairfield County, Connecticut, alone is second nationally to New York City. For two decades corporate headquarters have been moving south and suburban.¹⁶ As a result, reverse commuting is becoming more common. One now lives in Dallas, Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago while working not downtown, but beyond the city limits. Moreover, suburbs are increasing their lead as places of employment.

Washington, DC, as the nation's capital, enjoys an employment advantage over other older cities. While other cities were losing jobs, Washington was adding them. Yet the District, which held half of all metropolitan jobs in 1970, by 2000 was down to only a quarter of metropolitan-area workers. Three-quarters of Washington-area workers actually work in the

Virginia or Maryland suburbs. In fact, of the 230,000 Washington area jobs added between 1990 and 2005 a remarkable 45 percent were located in Fairfax County, Virginia.

Figures such as these definitely indicate the increasingly diversified notion of suburbia. The old image of the suburb as an exclusive area of single-family homes is obsolete. Even putting aside the questions of commercial and industrial construction and examining only residential building, it is clear that suburbs are building up as well as out. High-rises and apartment units, whether rentals or condominiums, whether for young singles or the elderly, have become commonplace. Suburban apartment complexes are now accepted as a part of suburbia. In spite of rising suburban housing costs and central-city "gentrification," there has been no long-term decline in the movement to the suburban periphery.¹⁷ The out-movement of shopping malls, industrial parks, and suburban office complexes, in fact, means that moving "closer to the action" often means moving out rather than in.

CATEGORIES OF SUBURBS

Suburban growth is not as chaotic as it might seem. While suburbs may vary in many respects, there is a predictable pattern to the variation. There are persistent systematic differences that contribute to predicting the development of suburban areas. Suburbs can be differentiated in many ways: old versus new, rich versus poor, incorporated versus unincorporated, ethnic versus WASP, growing versus stagnant, residential versus commercial. Suburban settlements are so diverse that no single typology can adequately encompass them all.

Suburbs also differ systematically with regard to housing characteristics. Residential suburbs have the highest proportion of new housing, the highest percentage of owner-occupied units, and the highest percentage of single-family units; the employment suburbs are lowest on these measures. Older typologies that distinguished between those suburbs that function essentially as dormitories—"residential" suburbs—and those that are basically manufacturing or industrial areas—"employment" suburbs—no longer fit the poly-centered nature of contemporary suburbia.

Suburbs also can be distinguished on the basis of lifestyle, separately from their legal definition as a suburb. Old industrial suburbs and poor minority suburbs, for example, don't fit the conventional image of suburban lifestyle, yet they are legally suburbs. On the other hand, a place such as River Oaks, inside Houston, is very suburban in lifestyle but is legally within the city. Similarly, Buckhead in Atlanta fits our image of a suburb far closer than that of a city district.

PERSISTENCE OF CHARACTERISTICS?

Since World War II most neighborhoods within central cities have undergone profound changes in terms of the characteristics of the residents and often even the physical structures. We take it for granted that city neighborhoods will change in socioeconomic status over time. One-time prosperous neighborhoods are expected to decline and possibly be rebuilt or gentrified. This model of local community status change is basically a lifecycle model. The previously discussed Burgess concentric zonal theory posited neighborhood change due to competition for land and the outgoing movement of affluent populations.¹⁸

However, when our focus shifts to suburbs, the assumption of status change is replaced by the assumption of status consistency. It is as if suburbs are not subject to the same laws of aging and change. The status persistence model suggests that early in a suburb's history its socioeconomic status tends to fix its position in the metropolitan area's ecological structure. Research done by Farley and by Guest indicates that there is considerable persistence in characteristics over time in the suburbs, especially affluent older established suburbs.¹⁹ The socioeconomic status of individual suburbs was generally the same as it had been twenty or forty years earlier. In fact, a sound prediction of the educational level of a suburb can be made if one knows the school attendance rate of the high school-age population of forty years earlier. Individual suburbs are thus said to change far less than central cities. For example, Darien, Connecticut; Wilmette, on Chicago's North Shore; Chevy Chase, just outside Washington; Grosse Pointe Shores near Detroit; and Beverly Hills, surrounded by Los Angeles, occupy positions of social status remarkably similar to the positions they occupied in 1920. Farley suggests that suburban

persistence may result because a suburb originally establishes a distinct social composition, so that the people who tend to move to it have socioeconomic characteristics similar to those already there.

Logan and Schneider, on the other hand, found that there were wide regional variations in suburban persistence, and suburban employment improved the relative income level of poorer suburbs.²⁰ Stahura found that as suburban growth rates slowed there was a tendency toward crystallization of the status differences between suburbs.²¹ Thus, unless circumstances change, it does not appear that there will be major changes in the status ranking of suburbs.

Established wealthy suburbs do appear to be relatively immune to downward changes in status. An elite suburb such as Lake Forest, north of Chicago, has maintained its position for almost a century and half. Suburbs can also maintain their position by using their considerable resources to control who can move into the suburb.²² This can be done through high tax rates or by passing zoning regulations that mandate certain size homes and/or large-size lots. Such practices have the effect of excluding the non-wealthy. Established wealthy suburbs are also able to employ their social prestige of being exclusive areas to attract prestigious residents. Such suburbs use their political knowledge and power to protect and enhance the value of their investments. It also should be noted that during the 2008–2012 housing recession the new, very expensive outer suburbs containing so-called McMansions suffered the steepest property value declines. As this is written, inner, older suburbs are gaining in value, while newer, large homes on the car-dependent urban fringe remain financially underwater.

A political power model is usually associated with scholars taking a conflict perspective, while the status persistence model is usually associated with those holding an ecological model. However, in this instance both approaches seem to reinforce rather than contradict each other. Older and more affluent suburbs have had the greatest success in maintaining their favored position. There also is regional variation. Specifically, in the North and Midwest involuntary annexation of suburbs had ceased by the beginning of the twentieth century, while in much of the Southwest annexation is still possible. Thus one would expect to find the

greatest number of affluent suburbs practicing exclusionary zoning in the North and Midwest.

Demographically, even more important than keeping "undesirables" out is attracting new high-status residents. Here a self-fulfilling prophesy seems to occur for affluent suburbs. A suburb having an established reputation as a high-status area employs its social prestige to attract new high-status residents. Realtors also play a major role by steering higher income newcomers toward what are perceived as the more prestigious areas. Reputation creates a reality that in turn reinforces reputation. In this fashion older suburbs such as Beverly Hills maintain their upper-status positions.

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS VARIATION

Within the metropolitan area different ethnic, religious, and racial groups historically often followed specific patterns of suburbanization. In Atlanta, for instance, blacks went south and whites went north. "Spillover" black suburbs were often extensions of the black ghettos across the city boundary. In Chicago, Polish heritage populations moved from the near north side, to the northwest side, and into northwest suburbs such as Niles. The Chicago Jewish housing pattern was from poor central neighborhoods to the north side, and then middle-class Jews moved into northwest suburbs such as Skokie, and wealthy Jews moved along the North Shore to Glencoe and Highland Park. Italian heritage populations, on the other hand, moved progressively west, and in time into western suburbs such as Melrose Park. WASPs, by contrast, moved up the North Shore to Evanston, Wilmette, and Winnetka. Thus, the pattern of ethnic inner-city neighborhoods was in modified form carried to the suburbs.

HIGH-INCOME SUBURBS

The nineteenth century saw the first examples of exclusive suburbs designed as refuges for the wealthy. Then, as now, upper-status suburbs usually featured large imposing homes built on extensive properties that were screened off from casual external observation by shrubbery and trees. Today new upper-class suburbs are often gated. Generally high-status suburbs have been located at the outer suburban edges, but there are some clear exceptions, such as centrally located Grosse

Pointe, bordered by Detroit, and Beverly Hills, surrounded by Los Angeles.

However, what gives most upper-status suburbs their character is not so much their housing style as their style of life and demographic patterns. Demographically high-income suburbs tend to have a somewhat older median-age population and a lower proportion of women employed in the labor force. Particularly in the East and Midwest, the older elite suburbs were, and in many cases still are, socially WASP-dominated communities. Older elite suburbs have never been home to multiculturalism. In the past racial minorities and those whites having southern or eastern European ethnic heritage were automatically disqualified for residency, as were Jews and Catholics. When the Kennedy family bought a large home in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, several neighbors moved out on the grounds that with the moving in of the Irish Catholic Kennedy family the community was surely going downhill. Opposition remained even after John Kennedy became president of the United States. Similarly, one of the richest suburbs in the country, Kenilworth on Chicago's North Shore, both has a median family income over \$200,000 and a historical reputation for having discouraged Catholics and Jews as residents. Catholics and Jews who were excluded from WASP suburbs often responded by founding their own exclusive suburbs and country clubs. For example, on Chicago's North Shore wealthy Jewish families developed Glencoe and Highland Park as heavily Jewish suburbs.

In today's newer upper-income growth suburbs, ethnicity and religion tend to have lesser relevance, so long as one has sufficient cash. The Census Bureau announced in 2006 that the most affluent county in the U.S. was not an old established area, but fast-growing Loudoun County in northern Virginia.²³ Loudoun County is essentially a bedroom community for Washington, DC professionals and their young children. In the growing suburbs of the West and South money trumps ethnicity. In the affluent suburbs of Florida, Texas, and southern California one's heritage and religion is of little importance compared to one's bank balance. Elsewhere in the world Jews and Arabs may be in deadly conflict, but in Beverly Hills wealthy Arabs and wealthy Jews live as neighbors. Another change is

that wealthy suburbs are no longer solely communities of single-family homes. Luxury high-rise condominiums increasingly are found in newer suburbs for the well-to-do.

As a cautionary note, there is a tendency to equate the high costs of housing with affluent residents. This is generally the case, but it can be misleading insofar as it might suggest that counties with the highest housing costs, such as those in California, necessarily also have the highest percentages of affluent householders. For example, even the comfortably-off have trouble affording a house in Santa Barbara, California, where the median house sales price was \$1.2 million in 2007. Unbelievably, subsidized housing was built in Santa Barbara for families earning as much as \$177,000.²⁴ In Palo Alto (surrounding Stanford University) the average house sale price is over \$1 million. While Silicon Valley has many wealthy, it also has many in other economic strata.

The census indicates that the counties having the most affluent householders are still concentrated on the East Coast. Of the twenty counties having the greatest proportion of population with households earning \$100,000 or more, fully half are found in the suburban ring of the New York Consolidated Metro Area. Leading the list is Westchester County, New York. Just behind are Morris County, New Jersey; Fairfield County, Connecticut; and Nassau County, New York. Another four counties—Loudoun, Virginia; Montgomery, Maryland; Fairfax, Virginia; and Howard, Maryland—are in the Washington, DC–Baltimore suburban ring. Only a quarter of the top twenty are west of the Mississippi. Marin and San Mateo Counties in the San Francisco metropolitan area ranked 5th and 16th respectively, Santa Clara County (San Jose) was 19th, and Orange County in southern California just made the list at 20th.

GATED COMMUNITIES

A newer form of exclusive suburb is the gated community. While exclusive communities are nothing new, and cities such as St. Louis and Toronto have longstanding gated communities, the number of such new communities and the number of people living in them is increasing.²⁵ As of 2011, over 25,000 gated communities housing over 11 million people had been built,

especially in the Southwest, California, and Florida. Some 15 percent of the new housing in the South now is in gated communities. The well-to-do in other areas are quickly following the pattern.

Gated communities are no longer largely for retirement areas. They now are being built in the suburbs of the largest metropolitan areas. Moreover, within cities, four out of five new housing developments are now gated. These are self-segregated areas that are physically walled-off from their neighbors with access only through roads controlled by electronically controlled gates or security guards in guardhouses. In such communities it is definitely not "a free country." Those not possessing a valid pass are refused entry.

For some, living behind the walls is part of a fortress mentality that seeks to exclude anyone who might possibly be disruptive or threaten their quality of life. The gates are supposed to exclude crime and protect property values. They also promote social and economic segregation.²⁶ Inside the walls you can live in an exclusive cocoon where property values are protected without your having to look at poor people who are not gardeners or servants. Others see gated communities as a way of affirming their own affluence and status. The gates don't serve so much as a physical barrier as a symbol of who belongs and who does not. They are the chosen insiders; all others are outsiders. Finally, some gated communities, especially in southern and southwestern states, are retirement communities where children, and other tax-consuming residents under age fifty-five, are barred by community bylaws. No children means no noise or other disruptions of life. Most importantly, no children means no schools. And no schools means no school taxes, and thus very low property taxes.

COMMON-INTEREST DEVELOPMENTS

Most gated communities are legally what are known as CIDs or common-interest developments. Although not all CIDs are gated, CIDs are private, self-governing, homeowner-membership associations to which everyone in a development must belong as a condition of purchase. CIDs are essentially private governments that set the rules for the community. For a monthly mandatory association fee, the CID provides its members facilities within the community that can include parks, swimming pools, community buildings, and even golf

courses. Within the community the CID also performs what are usually thought of as government functions, such as policing, street maintenance, and even trash collection.

CIDs are not a fringe development. They represent a major social change and are rapidly proliferating. In 2000 they already included more than 200,000 developments housing over 42 million people. Local governments like CIDs because they save money by privately providing services that otherwise would have to be paid for by taxpayers. The local government is relieved from its usual service obligations. The downside for CID residents is that common-interest developments have a reputation for being highly autocratic and undemocratic. Theoretically, CID directors are periodically elected by the homeowners. However, in reality the directors usually are a small, self-perpetuating group.

Courts have held that since homeowners voluntarily agree to CID restrictions when joining the association, the CID can enforce detailed regulations that local governments cannot. And if a homeowner doesn't follow all CID regulations (such as prohibitions against flying more than one flag on Flag Day—a local case in the author's metro area) the CID can fine the offender or use the general membership funds to take the dissident to court. CID regulations are usually quite specific, detailing everything from what color you can paint your front door, to what plants you can put in your garden, to whether you can be fined for leaving your garage door open. Moreover, the CID homeowners' association agreement, which each homeowner signs when moving into the CID, provides that if an individual sues the CID and loses, the CID can seize his or her home to ensure payment of any court penalties or fees.

Moving into a CID community means that you can remove yourself from the rest of the metro area and live in a privatized, totally predictable, socially segregated, homogeneous community. For this, however, you have to be willing to surrender some personal freedom, taste, and individuality. Many affluent homebuyers apparently like the trade-off.

WORKING-CLASS SUBURBS

Before the mass suburbanization following the Second World War, working-class suburbs were older industrial

factory suburbs. An example would be Cudahy, south of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which was established when the Milwaukee city government refused to allow Patrick Cudahy to build a stockyard and slaughterhouse works within the city. Another example would be the working-class suburb of Cicero, west of Chicago. Cicero achieved national notoriety during the 1920s as the headquarters of Al Capone's operations when a short-lived reform administration in Chicago temporarily forced the Outfit to move its headquarters to the suburbs. Most prewar working-class suburbs, however, were simply factory towns. Plain but generally well-kept houses with small yards were the norm.

Following World War II, GI loans allowed blue-collar workers, as well as the traditional middle class, to successfully apply for long-term mortgages. It is sometimes forgotten that the new postwar working-class suburbanites that followed the factories to the suburbs were not fleeing decaying city neighborhoods. More often than not, they were somewhat reluctantly leaving tight ethnic neighborhoods with high levels of social interaction.

Bennett Berger studied the lifestyle of some one hundred blue-collar Ford assembly workers and their families who were forced to move from Richmond, California, to the suburb of Milpitas, California, north of San Jose, in order to work at a new Ford automobile plant.²⁷ He found that suburbanization had little or no effect on the workers' style of life. They did not see the move in terms of social mobility; they had no great hopes of getting ahead in their jobs. They had no illusions of wealth; their wage level was dependent on the union contract. As a consequence of becoming suburbanites, they didn't change their political affiliation (81 percent Democrat), go to church more, or join community organizations. They participated only minimally in formal groups. What they did do is continue their traditional working-class pattern of tight, informal socialization with long-term friends and neighbors. In brief, they lived life patterns quite similar to those workers living in blue-collar central city neighborhoods. Their new suburban homes were not seen as way stations on the road to social mobility, but rather as permanent places of residence.

Now many of these postwar blue-collar suburbs are experiencing the same job losses, tax losses, and

physical decline suffered by central cities. But they have fewer resources and are less able to cope. Losses of suburban industrial and manufacturing jobs mean that those living in older inner-ring suburbs have to make long commutes to service jobs in outlying edge suburbs. The Ford automobile factory in Milpitas that triggered the move Berger described itself was closed in 1983 for being technologically out-of-date. Some 2,400 auto workers lost their jobs and the community declined. However, Milpitas was in the path of a growing Silicon Valley and by the 1990s sprouted scores of new manufacturing plants (largely electronic). The actor Tom Selleck and his father bought the Ford site for \$100 million, and in 1994 a giant shopping mall opened on the site of the abandoned Ford assembly plant. Today, once-blue-collar Milpitas is distinctly up-scale.

Most blue-collar suburbs aren't so lucky. As factories and then businesses close, the commercial tax base sharply erodes. As a result, class divisions between types of suburbs are becoming sharper, rather than blurring. Older working-class suburbs with their low-cost housing were those most likely to attract minority families escaping the city. Deteriorating job prospects for blue-collar workers in a postindustrial economy means that such workers can now find themselves trapped in aging suburbs with high service needs and declining tax bases. Some inner suburbs are struggling to cope with unemployment, strained public schools, rising crime, and deteriorating housing.²⁸ Poverty rates are now increasing faster in suburbs than in central cities. Poorer suburbs lack both the tax base of other suburbs and the basic amenities and public services found in the central city.

COMMERCIAL DEFINITIONS

Since defining a model-type suburbanite, or a model suburban lifestyle, is becoming less and less possible, one way out of the difficulty is not to even try. Rather than seeking overall similarities, business-oriented researchers now more often focus on the differences that will aid politicians and marketers to fine-tune their advertising campaigns to meet specific needs and markets. A marketing research firm named Claritas Prizm Nielson has developed a system that places every zip code in the country into one of 66 different types of

communities on the basis of the dominant economic, family life-cycle, and ethnic racial characteristics of households and the physical characteristics of the areas in which they live.²⁹

In effect they have tried to create homogeneous ethnographic areas, what Chicago School sociologists of the 1920s referred to as "natural areas." They have done this using statistical cluster analysis techniques to explain the relationship between physical space and social behavior. These areas have become a virtual Bible for market researchers, but thus far they have had limited use by academics more concerned with universality of standards.

The strength of the system is that it provides fairly detailed information on areas as small as zip codes, but the limitation is that some of this detail may be spurious. This is because postal zip codes are sometimes anything but homogeneous, and the cluster analysis technique gives the average characteristics for the area. Therefore, if population or housing characteristics are diverse within the area, there is a serious risk of committing the "ecological fallacy" of attempting to predict the behavior of individuals from the characteristics of an area. The more homogeneous the zip code, the greater the validity of the coding. Of the 66 lifestyle communities Claritas identifies, over twenty that have a suburban or other outer location. From upper income to lower some of these areas and their characteristics are:

- Blue Blood Estates Wealthy Older w/ Kids
- Country Squires Upscale Middle Age w/ Kids
- Kids & Cul-de-Sacs Upper Mid Younger w/ Kids
- Suburban Sprawl Midscale Older w/o Kids
- Suburban Pioneers Downscale Middle Age
- Family Mix
- Shotguns & Pickups Lower Mid Younger w/ Kids

EXURBS

The term *exurb* refers to the upper-middle-class settlement that is taking place in outlying semi-rural areas beyond the second ring of densely settled subdivisions. Fringe exurban areas have more widely separated homes, often with woods between, and the homes tend to be large and expensive. Sometimes exurbanites settle

around old villages or small towns. In fact, a preferred place for longer-range commuters fleeing suburbia is older small towns. The inflow of newcomers is not always greeted enthusiastically by existing residents who welcome the influx of new money, but don't welcome the new taxes newcomers are more willing to pay to improve school systems and roads.

Exurbanites often are affluent, well-educated professionals. Sometimes these individuals work in fields such as communications, advertising, and publishing that allow them to work at home and avoid daily commuting by using their computers and smartphones to stay in touch with their offices. These are not country folk. Basically exurbanites are urbane seekers of the American Dream who want to reside in rustic settings. They are urbanites living in the country. They want to move out of the city but not away from its advantages and services. If their base is New York, they may live in Fairfield County, Connecticut, or northern New Jersey; if the office is in Philadelphia, then Bucks County, Pennsylvania; and if in San Francisco, then Marin County, California.

Unfortunately, the study of exurbia that first gave the area its name, *The Exurbanites*, presents a caricature of suburban lifestyles.³⁰ Exurbanites were portrayed as hyperactive, upwardly mobile strivers who are desperately trying to find meaning in their lives. Working in highly competitive industries where the standards for judging performance are subjective and fickle, they seek solace by escaping the city. According to the stereotype, living in exurbia also puts considerable pressures on wives, who find themselves locked into a schedule of maintaining the house and providing shuttle service for children and commuting husbands while attempting to maintain their own careers and interests.

If the above sounds familiar it is because this general outline has served as the plot for dozens of novels, television soaps, and movies. The TV show *Desperate Housewives* is a contemporary version. The problem is that broad stereotyping is often taken as a reflection of reality rather than inventive fiction. Contemporary novels probing the dark underside of life in suburbia simply perpetuate the myth.

A study by Nelson and Sanchez using American Housing Survey data debunks the idea that exurbanites

differ significantly from other suburbanites.³¹ In reality exurbs have a way of turning into reluctant suburbs as more and more people move into the same area, all seeking to escape urban life.

RURBAN AREAS

Harder to pin down are those places beyond the exurbs that are *not* oriented toward a major city. While by official definition these areas may still be within a metropolitan area, the orientation of residents is more rural than urban. Housing in these in-between areas that are not truly rural, but are probably never destined to become suburban, is often of marginal quality. This is the home of the double-wide. Some of those living in such *rurban* areas are barely getting by economically in spite of low housing costs and low taxes. These are the areas between suburban and rural.³² It is not uncommon for rurban residents to commute long distances to work at low-income jobs. They are anything but affluent suburban commuters. They are people on the economic margins living in marginal areas.

Adding to the confusion over what is suburban are places such as outlying college towns that the census has defined as metropolitan but that are not really urban in character. One of these is Centre County, Pennsylvania, the home of Pennsylvania State University. Because of its population, Centre County is a metropolitan area named State College, but it is clearly neither urban nor suburban. The county includes a widely dispersed and mixed population having a wide range of interests and occupations. There are 165 acres for every person in the metropolitan area.³³ The consequence is a metropolitan area that is known for its hiking trails, numerous lakes, trout streams, and mountains.

In practice, residential suburbia, to say nothing of the commercial and business edge cities discussed in Chapter 5, has become remarkably diverse, so diverse in fact that calling an area "suburban" doesn't really tell us much anymore. As suburbia has come to house and employ the largest segment of the American population, the characteristics that define a "typical suburb" and "typical suburbanites" have become even more difficult to define.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUBURBANITES

Who, then, are the suburbanites, and does the popular image of suburbanites as being white, middle-class homeowners with children fit the facts? Not really. Suburbs are now a microcosm of America. Suburbanites do tend to be homeowners. Approximately three-quarters of suburban housing units are owner-occupied, as compared with half of those in the cities. Homeownership usually provides greater economic security, not to mention tax benefits. However, young singles, elderly widows, and other such "non-family households" now outnumber married-with-children homes in the nation's suburbs.

SUBURBAN POVERTY

In terms of numbers in poverty, central-cities and suburbs have changed places. As of 2010, there were 1.6 million more suburban poor than city poor.³⁴ Cities, and even rural areas, have traditionally had programs to elevate poverty. Suburbs, by contrast, are served by fewer social service organizations. Suburban poor are both less served and less seen. The collapse of housing values hit newer suburban areas particularly hard. Declining property values reduced local government revenues, just when needs were increasing. Suburbia today is no longer the Promise Land.

Nor is suburbia overrun with children. With the maturation of the baby boomers, suburbs ceased to be baby factories. Suburbs are growing, but the number of children under eighteen is declining. Inner-city areas, especially black and Latino neighborhoods, actually have more children per household. The big difference, however, is not in the numbers of suburban and city children, but in the fact that suburban children are far more likely to live in two-parent families. Twice as many city children as suburban children live in families headed by a single female parent. This is in part the reflection of the racial composition of cities since 72 percent of black infants are born to single mothers. Child poverty is found in a third of city households, but less than a quarter of suburban households.

A pronounced difference between cities and suburbs remains their racial composition. In spite of heavy black suburbanization the percentage of blacks in suburbs is

only half of what would be expected given random distribution. (Minority suburbanization trends are discussed later in this chapter.)

THE MYTH OF SUBURBIA

Over the years the suburbs have become more than mere places of residence. Suburbia has become endowed with a long list of physical and even psychological attributes: ranch-style houses, neat lawns, SUVs, good schools, clean, safe neighborhoods, a small town atmosphere, and overscheduled parents and children. This caricature has been called the "myth of suburbia," the myth being the belief that there is, in fact, a uniquely suburban way of life.³⁵ According to the myth of suburbia, people living in suburbs are, or become, somehow different from those who remain in the city. Upon moving, non-communicative people become friendly neighbors and Democrats become Republicans.

These myths refuse to die. For example, both the public and popular writers continue to assume that suburbanites are more likely to vote Republican.³⁶ The reality is that suburban voters tend to be independents who vote on the basis of issues rather than party. Bill Clinton won the suburban vote in both 1992 and 1996, Al Gore won slightly more suburban votes than did George W. Bush in 2000, and Barack Obama won the suburban vote in both 2008 and 2012.

Post-World War II stereotypes of suburbia were frequently less than complimentary. The suburban way of life was supposedly one of wide lawns and narrow minds in which family life was child-oriented rather than adult-oriented. Critics described the suburban family as surrendering all individuality and creativity. Funnier is Malvina Reynolds' 1963 folksong *Little Boxes* (made famous by Pete Seeger, and used for the opening of the TV show *Weeds*). (See Box 6.1.)

In terms of lifestyle, suburbanites—particularly those in the newer suburbs—were said to be gregarious. Numerous parties were interspersed with extensive informal visiting or neighboring. Togetherness was a way of life. Organizationally, suburbanites were said to be hyperactive joiners, with hobby groups, bridge clubs, neighborhood associations, and church-related social activities taking up several nights a week. On top of this, there was a proliferation of women's

BOX 6.1 THE SUBURBS IN SONG

Little Boxes

Little boxes on the hillside,
 Little boxes made of ticky tacky,
 Little boxes on the hillside,
 Little boxes all the same.
 There's a green one and a pink one
 And a blue one and a yellow one,
 And they're all made out of ticky tacky,
 And they all look just the same.
 And the people in the houses
 All went to the university,
 Where they were put in boxes
 And they came out all the same,
 And there's doctors and lawyers,
 And business executives,
 And they're all made out of ticky tacky,
 And they all look just the same.
 And they all play on the golf course
 And drink their martinis dry,

And they all have pretty children
 And the children go to school,
 And the children go to summer camp,
 And then to the university
 Where they are put in boxes
 And they come out all the same.
 And the boys go into business
 And marry and raise a family
 In boxes made of ticky tacky
 And they all look just the same.
 There's a green one and a pink one
 And a blue one and a yellow one,
 And they're all made out of ticky tacky
 And they all look just the same.
 From the song, "Little Boxes"

Words and music by Malvina Reynolds
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groups, scout troops, and *kaffeeklatsches*. Husbands were said to spend their weekends cutting grass, watching football games, picking up kids, going to parties, going to church, and watching more football games.

The earlier myth of suburbia now has been replaced with a new myth that sees the compulsive group conformity of the postwar years replaced by competitive self-advancement and manic self-fulfillment. Status and money supposedly are the new suburban icons. The home is less a place to relax than a site for showcasing goods. Middle-class suburbia is said to have gone "from glorifying group bonding to glorifying individual happiness and achievement."³⁷

For all the talk, the number of scholars studying suburbs remains limited. The urban racial and fiscal crises of the late 1960s and 1970s resulted in "urban research" becoming defined as research on the inner city. The vacuum left by the absence of hard research on suburban lifestyles was filled with popular books and articles dealing with suburban conformity, adultery, alcoholism, divorce, and plain boredom. Even the best of the American literature on suburban life (e.g., John Updike's short stories and novels) paints a highly selective picture.

The best known of the postwar studies of new suburban communities was Whyte's influential book *The Organization Man*.³⁸ Unfortunately, many of Whyte's imitators were not as careful. Early suburban studies suffered from three liabilities. *First*, the postwar suburban studies were highly selective, focusing attention on the large new subdivisions built for young families, and paying little attention to industrial suburbs, working-class suburbs, or even older established suburbs. The end result was that the image of suburbia was loaded by emphasizing brand new tract-housing suburbs. *Second*, it appears that some of the communities chosen for study were selected precisely because they were in some respects atypical and thus presumably more interesting. *Third*, many of the observations were based on a single look at a suburb immediately after the first wave of settlement. Another look ten or twenty years later, after the community had "matured," would almost certainly have shown a different picture.

The reality is that although suburbs have greatly changed, our images of them haven't. Suburbia, housing over half the nation's population, has become diverse and multicultural. Over half of the nation's poor live in suburbs. Over half of all Asians, approaching half of all

BOX 6.2 CASE STUDY: LEVITTOWN

Probably the most thoroughly studied suburb is *The Levittowners: Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community*, Gans's case study of the social organization of the third Levittown, built in New Jersey, east of Philadelphia.* The various Levittowns were prototypes of the postwar "package suburbs" that can be found near all of the country's larger cities. The Levittown Gans studied later changed its name to Willingboro to escape the Levittown stereotype.

Gans's findings were based on interviews and on his observations made while living in Levittown for two years. Gans suggests that the sociability found within the community was a direct result of the compatibility or homogeneity of the backgrounds of the residents (discussed in the text as compositional theory). Homogeneity was most evident in terms of age and income. Diversity in regional backgrounds, membership in ethnic groups, and religious beliefs provided some variety for the community. Even the similarity in income did not necessarily indicate homogeneity. One family might be headed by a skilled worker at the peak of earning power, another by a white-collar worker with some hope of advancement, and a third by a young executive or professional just at the start of a career. Active sociability emerged only when neighboring residents shared common tastes and values, were similar with regard to ethnicity and class, and shared similar beliefs regarding child-raising practices. Residents saw family togetherness as a positive attribute of the community. Parents and children all felt that they spent more time together as a family. Residents of the mass suburb were generally content with their housing, lifestyle, and general environment. Although the popular literature was rather heavy with criticism of suburban anomie (normlessness) and malaise, boredom was not a serious problem in Levittown.

However, the community was said to be particularly hard for teenagers, owing to the lack of recreational facilities and places to go. (On the other hand, songwriter Billy Joel remembers the first Levittown on Long Island as being a great place to grow up.) Levittown was designed for families with young children, not adolescents. Thus, bedrooms were small and lacked the privacy or soundproofing necessary to allow teenagers to have their friends hang out.

Gans found that suburbanites differed little from similar city dwellers. Overall, Gans's description of Levittown shows a community that was not overly exciting but one that generally met

the needs of its residents. The worst thing that could be said about the community was that for someone having cosmopolitan tastes, it was rather dull. But, then, Levittowns weren't built for cosmopolites.

Popenoe's later examination of another Levittown community northeast of Philadelphia, came to similar conclusions.** Residents spent their leisure time in locally based informal activities with friends and in watching television, rarely going into downtown Philadelphia. Life was comfortable, family-based, and not overly exciting. As in Gans's study, Popenoe suggests that young teenagers found the residential environment most wanting. While the various Levittowns had recreational facilities such as pools and parks, they, like many similar suburbs in the United States, had few places just to hang out and see and be seen.

The historian Barbara Kelly's 1990s restudy of Levittown found essentially what Gans had found more than three decades earlier. Kelly says, "I went to Levittown expecting to find people who lived in cookie cutter houses living cookie cutter lives. I went to find women who were stunted and men who were emasculated, and instead I found people who were extremely grateful to be where they were, who took their homes and expanded them as they moved into the middle class, and along the way their lives expanded with them."¹

Today the original Levittown on Long Island has urban-style problems of crime and an aging physical plant, but overall is doing well. Given the original similarity of all the housing, the homes look remarkably diverse. Virtually all the homes have been enlarged and changed over the years. In fact, when in the mid-1990s it was decided to designate Levittown as a National Historic Landmark, it was difficult to find an original home that had not been modified or expanded. The New Jersey Levittown Gans studied (now named Willingboro) today is a diverse community. It is two-thirds black, and one in eight residents is sixty-five or older.

*Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

**David Popenoe, *The Suburban Environment: Sweden and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1977).

¹Barbara Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

MINORITY SUBURBANIZATION

Post-World War II suburbs lost their social-class exclusiveness, but not their racial exclusiveness. Black suburbanization is noticeable by their absence. Suburban zoning mandating large lot and dw...

Hispanics, and over one-third of African Americans are now suburbanites. And larger changes are on the way. Nonetheless, TV, movies, and novels often still miss the ethnic and racial mix that has become the reality of contemporary suburbia.³⁹ Suburbs have outgrown their clichés.

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	Largest N
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1	Atlanta-Sar
2	Houston-S
3	Washington
4	Dallas-Fort
5	Miami-Fort
6	Detroit-Wa
7	Chicago-N
8	Baltimore-T
	Hispanics
1	Riverside-S
2	New York-N
3	Houston-S
4	Miami-Fort
5	Los Angele
6	Dallas-Fort
7	Chicago-N
8	Washington

*Suburbs with at lea
Source: William H. F

keep out both the poor and minorities. The general conclusion of researchers in the 1970s and 1980s was that black suburbanization was increasing, but only marginally.⁴⁰ Latino and Asian suburbanization was largely ignored.

SUBURBAN DIVERSITY

However, the last decades have seen considerable change. While one sometimes still hears reference to "lily-white suburbs," and the media often give the impression that minorities reside overwhelmingly in central-city neighborhoods, the reality is that minorities represent 35 percent of suburban residents, similar to their share of the American population.⁴¹ In large metro areas of more than a million residents, more than half of all minority groups live in suburbs.

The twenty-first-century suburb is increasingly multiethnic and multiracial. Breaking the total minority figures down into the Census Bureau racial/ethnic group categories of white, black, Asian, and Hispanic (the last being defined by the Census as an ethnic rather than a racial category), the data indicate considerable ethnic diversity. In the nation's one hundred largest metro areas over three-quarters of whites (78 percent) now reside in the suburbs. Blacks have increased from 37 percent suburban in large metro areas in 1990, to 44 percent in 2000, and 51 percent in 2010. Latino's at 59 percent in 2010, and Asians at 62 percent show even greater concentration in the suburbs of large cities.⁴²

While whites are still more likely to be suburban residents, minority suburban growth rates considerably outdistance those for whites. For example, between

TABLE 6.1 LARGEST BLACK AND HISPANIC POPULATION INCREASES, METROPOLITAN SUBURBS, 2000–2010

Largest Numeric Gains (Suburbs of Metro Area)		Highest Growth Rates (%) (Suburbs of Metro Area)*	
<i>Blacks</i>			
1	Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA	503,239	1 Indianapolis-Carmel, IN 150
2	Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX	216,823	2 Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA 146
3	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	193,524	3 Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ 137
4	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	192,576	4 Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI 129
5	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	183,381	5 Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton, PA-NJ 104
6	Detroit-Warren-Livonia, MI	133,488	6 Milwaukee-Waukesha-West Allis, WI 90
7	Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI	116,622	7 Scranton-Wilkes-Barre, PA 87
8	Baltimore-Towson, MD	98,195	8 Austin-Round Rock, TX 84
<i>Hispanics</i>			
1	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	659,355	1 Scranton-Wilkes-Barre, PA 416
2	New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA	572,337	2 Knoxville, TN 214
3	Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX	557,132	3 Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, TN 192
4	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	549,675	4 Indianapolis-Carmel, IN 183
5	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	443,170	5 Columbia, SC 177
6	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	417,175	6 Charleston-North Charleston-Summerville, SC 177
7	Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI	412,255	7 Birmingham-Hoover, AL 176
8	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	331,555	8 Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord, NC-SC 171

*Suburbs with at least 5,000 members of racial/ethnic group.

Source: William H. Frey's analysis of 2000 and 2010 decennial census data.

2000 and 2006 the white population of large city suburbs grew 7 percent. During the same period the black suburban population grew 24 percent, the Asian American population 16 percent, and the Latino suburban population 60 percent.⁴³

With half of blacks living in larger metro areas having a suburban rather than a central city address, African American suburbanization is a social fact. As a group black suburbanites have income levels slightly below white suburbanites, but twice those of black city dwellers. Old patterns of token suburban integration have been replaced by major population transfers. A major example is the Atlanta metro area, where during the last decade the African American population increased to 1.7 million. During that time the number of black metro area residents increased by 503,000. At the same time suburban black populations were increasing the city of Atlanta lost 29,000 blacks. More dramatic than the numerical increases is that over 90 percent of blacks in the Atlanta metro area now live in the suburbs. For Washington, DC, over three-quarters of the metro area black population is suburban.

The critical question today is not whether African Americans will suburbanize, but whether future black suburbanization will reflect increasing housing integration or the growth of more affluent, self-segregating black suburbs. The average Atlanta African American suburbanite has a 56 percent chance of living in a majority black suburban neighborhood.⁴⁴

Major suburban African American growth nationwide is not in the older inner-ring suburbs but rather in the newer suburbs on the suburban edge. Prince George's County, Maryland, south and east of Washington, DC, is two-thirds black and has more black residents than Washington itself. And many of these residents are middle-class or above.

Blacks (and to a lesser extent Hispanics, but not Asians) live in suburbs that have lower proportions of whites, and lower average-income levels than would be predicted using socioeconomic characteristics alone.⁴⁵ Decades of racial segregation have ensured that most suburbs remain predominately white. Also, suburbs are mostly white because whites constitute the overwhelming majority of the population. Thus, so long as whites continue to live in suburbs, the suburbs will retain their mostly white complexions.

BLACK FLIGHT

White flight to suburbs is history. For the last quarter century the exodus of middle-class families leaving the city for the suburbs has been disproportionately black, not white. In Washington, DC, for example, over half the households departing Washington for the suburbs are black.⁴⁶ The smaller numbers of households moving into the District are overwhelmingly white. As a result of black suburbanization both a decreasing number and lower proportion of the African American population is living in central cities. Major cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC, have had declines in their numbers of black residents. The last decade witnessed especially heavy black flight from Detroit.⁴⁷ Large central cities continue to have a high proportion of blacks only because of somewhat higher black birthrates. Interestingly, the white population is increasingly dispersing to exurbia, small towns, and even rural areas, while a growing proportion of the black population is living in suburbs. Upper- and middle-class whites who want to move to suburbs have already done so. Whites moving into the city tend to be middle or upper-middle class. New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles added whites between 2000 and 2013.

INTEGRATION OR RESEGREGATION?

Does increasing black suburbanization represent housing integration or merely the growth of suburban African American enclaves? Research prior to the 1980s substantially showed a pattern of black spillover from central cities into older inner-ring suburbs.⁴⁸ Suburban blacks were more likely to live in suburban communities that had lower average family income, less adequate housing, and strained local finances.

However, the last three decades show less of the racial displacement of the invasion-succession model, and more of the parallel growth of both racial groups. Racial spillover is not today's pattern in major metropolitan areas. The reality is that rather than invasion-succession, with one group supplanting another, stable multiracial suburbs are now more common.⁴⁹ The old model of the racial tipping point has less and less empirical validity.⁵⁰ However, the invasion-succession model of racial change retains adherents in spite of its decreasing validity. Rather than spillover, the pattern

now is more likely to be a leapfrog effect with blacks moving over older suburbs into newer subdivisions on the periphery.⁵¹

It also should be noted that not all suburban blacks want to live in racially integrated neighborhoods. To significant numbers of African Americans, "fair housing" means nondiscrimination in housing purchases, not integration.⁵² While research shows that blacks are generally more open to integrated housing than whites, some African Americans are making affirmative decisions to live in predominantly black suburbs. Among these are affluent black suburbs such as Rolling Oaks in the Miami area, Brook Glen and Wyndham Park near Atlanta, and many of the newer outer subdivisions in Prince George's County outside Washington, DC. Black suburbanites in such areas often say they find it more comfortable to live with black neighbors.⁵³

The changes noted above suggest that while racial equality has not yet arrived, suburban middle-class blacks are becoming more similar to suburban middle-class whites. In metropolitan areas of a million or more, black suburban families have incomes 55 percent higher than the average for blacks living in the city.

The overall pattern offers both hope and discouragement. Old patterns of suburban racial segregation are increasingly becoming history, but four decades after the Fair Housing Act of 1968, racial steering by real estate agents and discrimination by banks, lending institutions, and insurance companies still persists. Suburban racial changeover is no longer automatically triggered by the presence of minority residents, but whites continue to exhibit reluctance to move into predominantly minority areas. Some racial steering by real estate agents and discrimination against minorities by mortgage institutions still continues. Higher-income blacks still have significantly higher rates of home loan rejections than do same-income whites. However, in spite of all the obstacles, African American suburbanization is the contemporary reality.

LATINO SUBURBANIZATION

The Hispanic-origin population of the United States, according to Census Bureau estimates, numbered 53 million or 17 percent of the total U.S. population

in 2012.⁵⁴ (See Chapter 10: Diversity: Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans.) Only Mexico has a larger Hispanic population. Half the population growth in the United States now is Hispanic. Latinos are the nation's largest minority population, and over half the Hispanics in the United States today are suburbanites.⁵⁵ For the last two decades Hispanics have accounted for over a quarter of all suburban growth. Latino suburban growth is greatest in the areas of the country showing the greatest economic opportunities. Half of all Latinos live in either California or Texas. The eight metropolitan areas having the greatest number of Latino suburbanites are all in the Sunbelt: five in California, two in Texas, and one in Florida. The Los Angeles metropolitan area counts over 2 million suburban Latinos.

For Latinos suburban residence is closely associated with higher income levels.⁵⁶ Suburban residence is also associated with less spatial segregation, and more association with non-Hispanic whites.⁵⁷ Among the fastest-growing Hispanic suburbs are the predominantly Cuban growth areas in Florida, especially the areas surrounding Orlando and Fort Lauderdale. According to the Census Bureau as of 2012 Hispanics constituted 64 percent of the suburban population of metropolitan Miami and approaching half of the suburban population of Los Angeles. Half of New Jersey's population growth since 1990 is Latino.

Cities of the Southeast such as Charlotte and Atlanta are now points of destination for Latinos. Atlanta's Latino population exploded from 55,000 in 1990 to 269,000 in 2000 to 477,000 in 2010. While nationally over half of all Latinos are suburbanites, in Atlanta the figure is over 90 percent. The Latino future is increasingly a suburban future.

ASIAN SUBURBANITES

Asian Americans as of 2010 constituted 6 percent of the U.S. population. Asians, numbered 17.3 million in 2010 (dramatically up from 7.3 million in 1990 and 11.9 million in 2000).⁵⁸ Asian background persons are the most suburban minority group, with six of ten Asians in America living in suburbs. Unlike earlier immigrant groups who first settled in the city, most current Asian immigrants bypass the city and go directly to the suburbs.

Asian immigrants having educational skills tend to move directly into those suburban neighborhoods where employment and schooling opportunities for children are greatest. The suburbs are where the best employment opportunities are found and a majority of the suburban-bound immigrants speak fluent English and hold advanced degrees. Asian Americans living in the suburbs have average household incomes 25 percent higher than Asian American populations in the central city.³² Central city populations are both less educated and more likely to be illegal immigrants.

Generally Asians live in suburbs that have a strong Asian presence but are not predominantly Asian. An exception is the east Los Angeles suburb of Monterey Park, which is the first Chinese suburb in America. Monterey Park, a suburb of 60,000, which was 80 percent Chinese in 2000, has experienced a series of growth and land-use controversies as it has been transformed from a low-density suburb to a more urban, high-density "Little Taipei."³³

Part of the controversy reflects cultural differences in the use of land. Americans value open spaces around suburban houses, while Taiwanese and Hong Kong newcomers are accustomed to a more urban environment, and thus build more urban-looking buildings right up to the property line. (For further discussion of Asian Americans, see Chapter 10: Diversity: Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans.) Asian Americans do not constitute a majority of all suburban residents in any wider geographic area. However, they do constitute more than 10 percent of the northern California residents of San Francisco and Oakland, the southern California metro areas of Los Angeles and Orange Counties, and the Middlesex-Somerset-Huntington suburban area of New Jersey.

SUMMARY

The twenty-first century is a suburban century. At mid-twentieth century, less than one-quarter of the U.S. population was suburban. Today 55 percent of Americans live in suburbs. The first nineteenth-century suburbs were generally well-to-do communities along railroad lines. The rapid spread of the electric streetcar a century ago allowed the middle class to move out to the new streetcar suburbs.

The automobile suburbs of 1920 to World War II were often affluent places of well-built single-family homes. Our image of suburbia is still shaped by this era. Although American suburbs have existed for over 150 years, mass suburbia is a post-World War II phenomenon. Federal government lending policies contributed heavily to subsidizing suburban growth. Suburbs have changed dramatically over the past quarter of a century from overwhelmingly residential areas to the nation's primary shopping, office, and manufacturing locations. The last two decades in particular have been characterized by metropolitan sprawl.

The major cause of the postwar suburban housing boom was subsidized no- or low-money-down Veterans Administration (VA) and Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans. Also contributing were federal-government-subsidized expressways, lower suburban housing costs, and the fact that most city land was already developed. Couples sought single-family homes with yards as the postwar marriage boom was followed by a baby boom. White flight from the cities was not a cause of suburbanization for the first twenty-five years after the war since city neighborhoods were racially segregated by law or custom until the 1968 Open Housing legislation.

Today suburbia is remarkably diverse. Older established suburbs have often changed less than city neighborhoods and retained their status positions due to restrictive zoning and attraction of new high status residents. Gated suburban communities now house more than 11 million people. Most are self-governing common-interest developments (CIDs) that are essentially private governments setting binding rules for the community. Many postwar factory-based working-class suburbs are now experiencing declines as manufacturing plants close. Exurbs are upper-middle-class settlements that are taking place in outlying rural or small town areas beyond the second ring of suburbs. Rural areas, by contrast, are economically marginal rural areas that are not socially oriented toward the central city.

The "myth of suburbia" is that there is a unique suburban way of life and that suburban dwellers are essentially different from city dwellers. Suburbs surrounding the nation's one hundred largest cities now house 51 percent of the metro areas' African Americans,

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62 percent of the Asian Americans, and 59 percent of the Latinos. For thirty years African Americans have been suburbanizing from a smaller base but at a faster rate than whites. Today half of metro area blacks are suburbanites. Suburbia has long since ceased to be "lily white." African American suburbanization is a fact of metropolitan life. The 2010 Census documented 1.7 million African American living in the Atlanta metro area. The crucial question is whether future black suburbanization will increase housing integration, or whether it will promote the increase of more affluent, self-segregating black suburbs. Today flight from the nation's largest cities is disproportionately middle-class black flight. Movement into cities is largely middle-class white.

Latinos, with a population of 53 million, are now the nation's largest minority. Some 59 percent of Hispanics living in the one hundred largest metro areas live in the suburbs. Latinos account for over a quarter of all suburban growth, and Hispanic suburban growth is greatest in Sunbelt states (especially California, Texas, and Florida). The Latino future is a suburban future.

Asian Americans are most likely to be suburbanites. Some 62 percent are suburbanites in the largest metro areas. Affluent Asian immigrants bypass the central city and move directly to suburban areas experiencing economic growth. Asians generally live in suburbs that have an Asian presence but are not majority Asian.

Over the decades suburbs have taken justified criticism as being all-white communities, but suburbs increasingly are multiracial and multiethnic. Ironically, the suburbs now have the opportunity to achieve what the cities have largely failed to accomplish: establish stable, economically viable, and racially and ethnically integrated communities.

KEY CONCEPTS

Suburban Dominance
Electric Streetcar Era
Annexation
Automobile Suburbs
Mass Suburbanization
Metro Sprawl
Causes of Suburban Growth
Postwar Exodus

Categories of Suburbs
High-Income Suburbs
Gated Communities
Common-Interest Developments
Working-Class Suburbs
Exurbs
Rurban Areas
Suburban Poverty
Myth of Suburbia
Minority Suburbanization
Black Flight
Latino Suburbanization
Asian Suburbanization

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did nineteenth-century suburbs differ numerically, economically, and socially from post-World War II suburbs?
2. What role did the electric streetcar play in the development of suburbia?
3. What were the major reasons for post-World War II suburban growth?
4. How did the Veterans Administration (VA) and Federal Housing Administration (FHA) change residential housing patterns?
5. What frequently mentioned commonsense "causes" of suburbanization played only minor roles in the twenty-five years following World War II?
6. What are some of the categories of suburbs discussed in the text?
7. What is the "myth of suburbia"?
8. What is the amount and nature of suburban poverty?
9. Are suburbs becoming multiracial and multicultural?
10. How do suburbanization patterns differ among African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans?

NOTES

1. Scott W. Allard and Benjamin Roth, *Strained Suburbs: The Social Service Challenges of Rising Suburban Poverty*, Metropolitan Opportunity Series, No. 7 (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, October 7, 2010); and Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube,