

# The Decline of Inner Suburbs: The New Suburban Gothic in the United States

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## Abstract

In this article, we critically examine transformation and decline in US suburbs. We identify four distinct, chronological phases of development: suburban utopias, suburban conformity, suburban diversity, and suburban dichotomy. An element of this new suburban dichotomy is what we term suburban gothic. We theorize that the forces of an aging housing stock, land-use planning, and deindustrialization contribute to the divergent realities of US suburbs.

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## *Introduction*

In the first half of the 20th century, metropolitan growth in the United States was dominated by central cities. They were magnets for immigrants, attracting some 25 million between 1900 and 1950. Cities were the economic backbone of the national economy, hubs of manufacturing, entertainment, and shopping. Cities were the center of metropolitan gravity dominating the business, cultural and intellectual life of the nation.

Large-scale urban decentralization has transformed this landscape, particularly in the past 50 years (Beauregard 1989). The rim of urban development is now far from the traditional core, and a new metropolitan terrain has evolved with the rapid development of suburbs and the loss of central city prominence. In 1950, 60% of the metropolitan population lived in cities. In 1960, the US metropolitan population was equally distributed between cities and suburbs. By the end of the century, only 37% of metropolitan residents lived in central cities (Figure 1). Almost two out of every three people in metropolitan United States now live in the suburbs. Suburbs have essentially become the favored site of development in the United States, consistently attracting more and more residents. Jobs, investment and economic growth have also suburbanized. The center of metropolitan gravity has shifted outward. The United States is now a metropolitan society dominated by the suburbs.

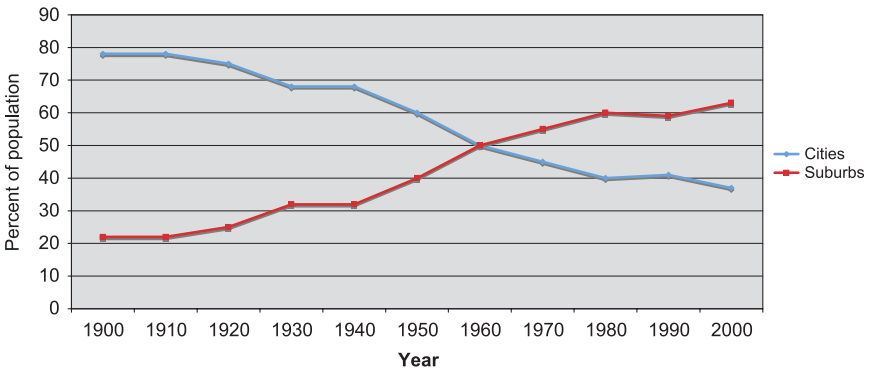


Fig. 1. Metropolitan population in the United States, 1900 to 2000.

Source: *US Census*

The traditional model of this metropolitan landscape posits a declining central city and expanding suburbs. A number of analyses were developed on this simple central city–suburban disparity. However, because of recent, large-scale, sweeping suburbanization, the range of areas subsumed under the category of ‘suburban’ has become more heterogeneous, rendering obsolete the traditional model. Suburbia now refers to a divergent set of areas. This complexity is explored most recently in various suburban typologies, which focus on differences among suburbs rather than between suburbs and central cities (Hanlon et al. 2006; Mikelbank 2004; Orfield 2002). In this article, we focus on this variation and argue that in recent decades, suburbs in the United States have become sites of immense change, presenting dangers and desolation, as well as opportunities. We provide the historical context to these changes.

The more recent spread of suburbanization has undermined the former advantages of the older suburbs. The older suburbs, particularly those built in the 1950s and 1960s, no longer attract new development or new residents. These older places are located near the central city, and they are commonly called ‘first-tier’ or ‘inner-ring’ suburbs (Hudnut 2003). In many cases, these inner-ring suburbs exhibit the very symptoms of decline that US cities experienced some three decades ago. In contrast, newer suburbs, or ‘outer suburbs’, located further away from the core, are the main sites of new development and investment.

This dichotomy has brought what we term a ‘gothic’ element to older, inner-ring suburbs. The term ‘gothic’ refers to the grotesque or desolate, adjectives not typically associated with the suburbs. Yet, many older suburbs, particularly those built in the postwar period, are bleak places. Many older, postwar suburbs struggle to survive let alone thrive in today’s economy. In the following sections, we chart the development of the US suburban frontier during the 20th century. Then, we examine the forces

that contribute to the making of this suburban gothic. We offer concluding thoughts on the prospects of the new suburban landscape and present a direction for future research on suburbia.

### *Evolution of the Suburban Frontier*

We employ the term 'frontier' to indicate the transformations involved in large-scale, relatively rapid suburbanization. The term has been employed in US urban studies for some time (Short 1991). In 1965, Charles Abrams employed the term in the title of his book, *The City Is the Frontier*. Abrams focused attention on the problems of declining central cities and outlined a set of proposals to renew the city including, increasing the amount of green space, making the city more attractive for leisure, preserving neighborhoods rather than knocking them down, enhancing walkability, making cities more female- and child-friendly. Other urban scholars also have used the term. Wade (1959) used it to describe the life cycle of Western US cities. 'Frontier' also was used as a rhetorical device to pinpoint a new locale of biting social concern. Neil Smith (1996) employed the frontier imagery to describe the process of gentrification in selected inner-city neighborhoods. Kenneth Jackson (1985) used the term 'crabgrass frontier' in his study of American suburbanization. Joel Garreau's 1991 books, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*, invokes the term to refer to forms of urban living at the edge of the metropolis and to evoke the buoyant optimism and individualism of the Western frontier.

The historical evolution of the US suburban frontier during the 20th century can be charted as a cycle of four phases: suburban utopia, suburban conformity, suburban diversity, and suburban dichotomy (Table 1).

#### SUBURBAN UTOPIA

During the 19th century, suburbs acquired the image of ideal places for healthy living. They provided refuge for the rich from the harsh environment of the city. The concentration of smoke-belching factories in the central city core made life unbearable for many city dwellers. The elite sought to distance themselves from the factories and the working-class, slum areas (Ashton 1978). Wealthy families escaped to the fringes of the city. Suburbs in this initial phase of suburban development, what Fishman (1987) describes as 'bourgeois utopias' were considered exclusive, safe, clean, and moral. They invoked an anti-urban bias and a sense of escape from the wilderness of the city.

#### SUBURBAN CONFORMITY

In its second phase, suburbia took on a new cultural form with the massive decentralization of housing and employment after World War II

**Table 1. Phases of US suburban development.**

Phase	Characteristics	Period
Suburban utopias	Ideal image of suburbs as healthy and wholesome	Late 19th to early 20th century
Suburban conformity	Suburbs are homogeneous, built in a cookie-cutter style	1945 to 1960
Suburban diversity	Race, class, and ethnic divisions rise in the suburbs	1960 to 1980
Suburban dichotomy	Declining older suburbs and booming newer suburbs	1980 onward

(Jackson 1985; Singleton 1973). This was the era of mass production of standardized, Levittown-style housing, the age of the subdivision, all combining to produce the classic image of American suburbia as a homogeneous place of conventionality (Baxandall and Ewen 2000; Kramer 1972; Palen 1995). Examples of major suburban tract developments include Levittown, New York; Lakewood, California; and Park Forest, Illinois. These areas typify suburbs that were celebrated in such popular television shows as *Leave It to Beaver*, *Ozzie and Harriet* and *Father Knows Best*. These shows, and the suburbs they portrayed, embodied an era of domesticity and conformity that preceded the counterculture of the civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s (Alves 2001). The role of the housewife was both celebrated and scripted by new household appliances and gadgets, and television became the new medium to promote endless consumption and the model family. The standardization of housing design added to this sense of conformity, and, as developers aimed to cut costs, they built thousands of 'almost identical 800-square-foot houses, with a living room, kitchen, two bedrooms, one bath, and a driveway' (Hayden 2003, 134).

The prevalence of these tract housing developments in the 1950s and 1960s spurred studies of suburban uniformity and conformity (Mumford 1968; Whyte 1956). While some sought to dispel this myth of conformity (see Gans 1967), it was often assumed that all suburbs were middle class, white, and residential. In reality, America's suburbs were peppered by issues of class and race (Nicolaidis 2002).

#### SUBURBAN DIVERSITY

A number of important studies in the 1960s and 1970s began to recognize the increasingly heterogeneous nature of suburbia. The identification of working-class suburbs (Berger 1968), and the rise of black suburbanization (Schnore et al. 1976) contributed to the sense that the suburbs were not only the residences of white, middle-class families. These early studies

emphasized racial differences (Blumberg and Lalli 1966; Farley 1970), ethnic variety (Kramer 1972), and class distinctions (Dobriner 1963; Pinkerton 1969). More recent studies have continued in this vein as the suburbs have witnessed more pronounced out-migration of middle-class blacks from central cities (Cashin 2004; Wilson 1987), large-scale immigration of the foreign-born and the development of 'ethnoburbs' (Frey 2003; Li 1998). A recent study of 1,652 census places identified a wide distribution of suburbs including manufacturing suburbs, black suburbs, and immigrant suburbs (Hanlon et al. 2006). Despite the dominant cultural representation of suburbs as affluent, white, and residential, it is more apparent that suburbs come in various shapes and sizes with different demographics and economies.

Because the suburbs now stretch across space and eras of building they now comprise more diverse places. The variation among suburban places is often more striking than the difference between the central city and its surrounding suburbs. This variation differs regionally across the United States. For example, in 2000, the difference between the suburbs in the Baltimore metro region with the highest and lowest median family income was \$75,865. Yet, in the St. Louis metro region, the income gap was \$188,126. Other similar studies provide more evidence on the diversity of US suburbs. Lucy and Philips (2000) examined a sample of 554 suburbs in 24 states, and they found that from the 1960s to the 1990s, 20% of suburbs had income declines larger than their central city. This finding is in line with another study that demonstrates that the gap between the richest and poorest suburbs in the United States widened from 1980 to 2000 (Swanstrom et al. 2006). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that there is variety of suburbs in the United States.

#### SUBURBAN DICHOTOMY

This brings us to the fourth phase, a striking suburban dichotomy defined by two contrasting elements: the sprawling edge and the declining inner-suburb that reflect the ongoing rolling frontier and the historical legacy of suburbanization. As the frontier has moved ever outward in both space and time, the early postwar suburbs are being left behind, literally and metaphorically. The continued outward suburban expansion is coupled with the simultaneous decline of older suburbs located near the central city. The industrial, working-class suburbs, for example, that developed during the height of the industrial revolution (Lewis 1999, 2004) have been replaced in recent decades by the office park and retail developments in the outer suburbs (Lang 2003). Some scholars refer to these sprawling suburbs as 'edge cities' or 'boomburbs' (Garreau 1991; Lang and LeFurgy 2006).

Consider the case of an archetypal edge city, Tyson's Corner, Virginia. Once a quiet area located some 20 miles west of Washington DC, Tyson's Corner grew substantially during the 1980s and 1990s, the growth in

large part lubricated by highway construction. The growth of this suburb is characterized not only by surrounding residential growth, but also by an increase in jobs and employment infrastructure. The area boasts more than 25 million square feet of office space and 4 million square feet of retail space. Almost 110,000 people work in the immediate area. It is the 12th largest business district in the United States. Several factors have shaped this pattern of development. The availability of cheap land on the exurban fringe of metropolitan areas has allowed, while the powerful development lobby and its political allies have promoted, unfettered growth and large-scale housing developments. The lack of mass transportation, either bus or rail, has meant that these suburbs rely on automobiles. The results are suburban sprawl, a 'pattern of urban and metropolitan growth that reflects low-density, automobile-dependent, exclusionary new development on the fringe' (Squires 2002, 2).

This brings us to the second element of the suburban dichotomy, first tier suburban decline. It is impossible to decouple the phenomenon of suburban edge sprawl from the demise of older suburbs (Orfield 2002). While much research focuses on the decline of US central cities and the growth of sprawling suburbs, in more recent years, scholars have also turned their attention to decline in suburban areas (Bollens 1988; Hanlon and Vicino 2005; Hudnut 2003; Lee and Leigh 2005; Listokin and Beaton 1983; Lucy and Philips 2000; Orfield 2002; Smith et al. 2001).

Typically, decline occurs in older suburbs characterized as communities with slow population growth, few local resources, and declining local economies. Some mature suburbs that were once vital centers of economic activity are facing severe fiscal problems, increasing minority populations, and an aging housing stock (Lucy and Phillips 2006). The infrastructure of roads, schools, and houses in these suburbs is old and decaying, and the residents are aging without a future generation to replace them. The decline in these suburban areas, which we characterize as the emergence of a new suburban gothic, contrasts sharply with the boom in newer suburbs.

### *Suburban Gothic*

The ultimate force shaping the new suburban gothic is continued decentralization. During the course of the 20th century, people and jobs continually moved away from the urban core in the century city to the suburbs. As decentralization has continued it is evident that some of the areas that were first to suburbanize are now ailing. Among the myriad of forces contributing to this phenomenon we will identify three. First, there is a strong demand–supply nexus that promotes greenfield development. The demand for larger housing units and in association with the very powerful development-building lobby, which influences local land use planning, leads to the construction of new housing and commercial buildings on the outer suburban fringe. Capital disinvestment in the housing stock

of inner-ring suburbs fuels the decay and aging process. Second, land use planning and exclusionary zoning at the local scale results in greater suburban differentiation, separating desirable suburbs from those deemed less attractive. Third, deindustrialization of older suburbs leaves these places with a smaller economic base for opportunity and mobility. Let us examine each of these forces in more detail.

#### THE DEMAND—SUPPLY NEXUS

Suburbia has witnessed a housing boom that is now over 60 years old. Once prized as the ideal location for families, many suburbs now exhibit symptoms of aging. Those built during the postwar period of mass suburbanization are particularly outdated (Lucy and Phillips 2006). Innovative and highly desirable when first built, the postwar Cape Cod or suburban ramblers now represent a bygone era. This housing stock lacks the size and amenities to compete with newer housing on the outer fringe of the metropolitan area. Housing in the postwar suburbs is far smaller than newer housing. Today, there is an unabashed desire for large developments and the typical contemporary house is more than 2,200 square foot in size. This is more than twice the size of the average house built in 1950.

In a few locations such as the older suburb of Pimmit Hills outside Washington DC, modest postwar houses are either expanded or are torn down and replaced with larger, newer housing (Straight 2005). In the 1950s, Pimmit Hills was the largest subdivision in Fairfax County, Virginia. Located inside Washington DC's Capital Beltway, the original housing in this suburb was typically comprised of three bedrooms, one bath and less than 900 square feet in size. However, in the majority of cases, local residents, who pay a premium to reside in close proximity to nation's capital, have made at least one addition to their houses. On almost every street, there is at least one extremely large 'McMansion-style' house that replaces the original boxy structure.

This type of expensive upgrading only occurs in selected metropolitan regions where there are still large-scale downtown employment opportunities, an affluent middle-class and an overheated housing market. Elsewhere, in less popular locations, small postwar suburban housing is rarely upgraded. For instance, in Lansdowne, an older suburb of Baltimore, housing typifies suburban tract development of the 1950s and 1960s and is now considered poor quality stock in need of repair. Unfortunately, with 14% of local residents living in poverty, and the median household income of this older suburb 40% below the median household income in the Baltimore region, there is little immediate likelihood of private investment by homeowners or landlords to rehabilitate these aging structures. Thus, the older postwar suburb has become the devalorized urban form. The notion of devalorization is typically used to explain the decline of central city neighborhoods. Neil Smith (1996), in his analysis of gentrification in the

city, suggests that inner-city properties were devalorized or devalued because of the reallocation of capital to the suburbs. In a similar manner, the aging housing stock in the postwar suburbs is devalued. Despite the need for an injection of capital, disinvestment is widespread. These suburbs lose out to edge city development and the revitalization of housing in central city neighborhoods. Caught between city gentrification and outer sprawl, many postwar suburbs are currently losing the battle for investment resources. This devalorization is aided by the powerful development lobby that works to continually promote new building. Development on green field site is especially favored because of its ease, speed, and hence greater profitability.

The new suburban gothic is one of devalorization of older suburbs. This process began in the US central city. Now, it has spread out to the inner-ring suburban areas as residents and capital decentralize even further from the metropolitan core. The result is a downward spiral of declining investment and socioeconomic status.

#### LAND USE PLANNING

Because of the metropolitan fragmentation of local government, the typical US metropolis is composed of a central city surrounded by politically separate suburban municipalities, and suburbs often compete with the central city and each other for new investments in the built environment. Each suburban municipality seeks to attract new development in order to increase its tax base. The result is continual development throughout the suburban frontier of the metropolis. There is a limit to the progrowth stance of suburbs as more established residents may lobby for slow growth or no growth in order to resist the declining quality of public life brought about by too rapid growth. Many of the more affluent outer suburbs are generating slow growth movements prompted by popular resistance to the increasing costs of congestion, school overcrowding, increased journey to work times, and a general sense of a decline in the quality of life.

From a comparative standpoint, public intervention was very different in other countries. For instance, there was a significant effort to contain suburban development in the UK, particularly with the establishment of greenbelts around large urban areas. Growth was more controlled through the preservation of open space around large conurbations. Limits were placed on suburban growth. In comparison, there have been fewer restrictions on growth in most metropolitan areas in the United States. There has traditionally been no national government role in curbing suburban development. Land use planning decisions are locally based, and suburban jurisdictions compete for developments.

Decentralized, disparate, and uneven land use planning is characteristic of the new suburban gothic. In Western Europe, in contrast, there is a greater metropolitan mandate to conduct planning and that limits suburban

sprawl. In the United States, suburban jurisdictions act independently, without regard for a regional public good. This enables particular suburbs to exclude public infrastructure, subsidized housing, or any other socially exclusionary measure. The suburban gothic landscape is defined by marked social and economic disparities.

#### DEINDUSTRIALIZATION

Working-class suburbs have long existed in the United States (Nicholaides 2004), and heavy industry has been located in suburban districts outside American cities since the mid-19th century (Lewis 1999). An illustrative example of an industrial, working-class suburb that developed during this period is Dundalk, an inner-ring suburb of Baltimore. Dundalk was largely undeveloped until 1887 when the Pennsylvania Steel Company recognized its prime location as a tidewater port for steel production, with important access to the Atlantic Ocean. In 1916, the area was purchased by the Bethlehem Steel Company, and the steel mill in the Dundalk area expanded to become one of the largest steel production sites in the world (Reutter 1988). A year after buying the site, Bethlehem Steel bought a thousand acres of land for expansion, formed the Dundalk Company and built houses for its workers. The Dundalk Company hired E. H. Bouton, designer of the prestigious, elite residence of Roland Park on the other side of town, to design a 'workingmen's Roland Park' close enough to commute to the Bethlehem Steel plant. Dundalk was the ideal company town, but because the company significantly downsized, it has suffered from tremendous social and economic decline.

Baltimore is by no means unique in the early development of industrial suburbs. Boston also had a large suburban ring of industrial and commercial districts by 1900 (Warner 1978). Employment in Boston was diffused throughout the metropolitan area by the late 19th and early 20th century. Similarly, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and New York also witnessed substantial industrial suburbanization as early as the mid-19th century. The decentralization of industry from older central cities to the suburban fringe accelerated after World War II. New York City lost 6% of manufacturing jobs while its surrounding suburbs gained about 37% between 1947 and 1958. During the same period, Chicago lost over 18% of its manufacturing employment while the suburbs gained almost 50%; and Cleveland lost 22% of manufacturing jobs while manufacturing employment in the suburbs grew by nearly 100% (Berry and Cohen 1973).

Just as industrialization led to the growth of some suburbs, deindustrialization led to their decline. The economic shift away from heavy manufacturing resulted in the loss of relatively high-paying, unionized jobs for middle-class residents in many older suburbs. This greatly impacted the local economies of these communities (Bluestone and Harrison 1982). The economic restructuring of the economy away from manufacturing

and toward services favored the growing, outer suburbs, as well as the central business district. Spatial inequalities result because greater economic opportunity relocated to outer suburbs, thus reinforcing the decentralization of people and jobs in regions. In the traditional manufacturing regions of the United States, older, blue-collar suburbs have witnessed the effects of runaway industry (Hanlon et al. 2006) and, in the case of metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, the abandonment by such industries as aerospace and defense has tremendous impacts on older suburban areas (Davis 2005). Deindustrialization follows the trail of industry, and just as inner-city plants were often the first to close; now it is the turn of inner-ring suburban plants. One element of the new suburban gothic is the blue-collar job loss in the wake of deindustrialization.

### *Inner Suburbs and Inner Suburbs*

We should note that there is diversity even within the category of inner suburb. Using counties as their basic unit Puentes and Warren (2006) identify what they call 'first suburbs', defined as counties that were metropolitan counties adjacent to a metro core in 1950. They identify 64 first suburban counties with a total population of 52.3 million people in 2000, approximately 18.6% of the national population. Table 2 shows these inner suburbs in the Megalopolis region that extends along the northeastern seaboard from south of Washington DC to just north of Portland Maine. Megalopolis is an urban region with a concentration of inner-ring suburbs that comprise a total population of 16.7 million people. Rather than give basic data for all of these counties, Table 2 notes the more extreme figures for four variables. In terms of foreign born they range from the more cosmopolitan counties such as Arlington, Virginia; Hudson, New York; and Montgomery, Maryland, where the foreign born constitute from one in four to one in three of all residents. These are the immigrant gateways described by Audrey Singer (2005). There dynamic immigrant gateways contrast sharply with the more economically depressed suburbs such as Lackawanna, Pennsylvania, that fail to attract recent immigrants. The classic notion of suburbs is of an area with high levels of owner occupation and areas such as Nassau, New York, meet this standard. However, many of the immigrant gateways such as Arlington and Hudson have high levels of private renting. There is also a wide disparity in median household incomes from the affluent suburban areas such as Montgomery, home to the National Institutes of Health and a booming biotechnology sector, Arlington and Nassau to the older industrial suburban districts of Lackawanna and Providence, Rhode Island. In terms of a black population, the range is enormous from Prince George's County, Maryland, where more than two out of very three are considered black to Lackawanna with less than one in fifty. The national figures, given for comparison, provide a telling comparison. The data reveal that inner-suburban counties differ

**Table 2. First suburbs in Megalopolis.**

	Percentage of foreign born	Percentage of owner-occupation	Median household income (\$)	Percentage black
United States	11.1	66.2	43,318	12.8
Arlington, VA	27.8	43.3	66,943	
Baltimore, MD				
Bergen, NJ	25.1			
Berks, PA				
Bucks, PA				
Burlington, NJ				
Camden, NJ				
Delaware, PA				
Essex, NJ		45.6		
Fairfield, CT				
Hampden, MA				
Hartford, CT				
Hudson, NJ	38.5	30.7		
Lackawanna, PA	2.3		36,632	1.7
Lehigh, PA				
Middlesex, MA				
Middlesex, NJ	24.2			
Montgomery, MD	26.7		75,546	
Montgomery, PA				
Nassau, NY		80.3	71,226	
New Haven, CT				
Norfolk, MA				
Northampton, PA				
Prince George's, MD				66.1
Providence, RI			38,681	
Union, NJ	25.1			
Westchester, NY				
Worcester, MA				

Foreign born data are for 2000; owner-occupation data are for 2000; median household income data are for 2003; and percentage black data are for 2005.

widely from cosmopolitan to noncosmopolitan, from owner occupation to private renting dominance, from economically depressed to economically buoyant and from majority white to majority black. A more detailed analysis of these inner-ring suburbs is given in Short (2007).

There are significant differences between first suburbs in the north and central parts of the region in states such as Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York compared to the faster growing counties around Washington DC in Virginia and Maryland. While Worcester, Massachusetts, saw only a 5.8% increase in population from 1990 to 2000, Montgomery County experienced a rate of 14.5%. The difference in

growth rates relates to the more recent nature of extensive growth in the southern first suburban counties compared to more fully built out counties in the central and northern counties.

Counties are coarse grids to identify the patterns of decline. Decline is most easily discernible at the census place level (Hudnut 2003; Orfield 2002). Hanlon and Vicino (2005) used census places in their analysis of inner-ring suburbs around Baltimore. They were able to pinpoint areas of little or no population growth, increasing poverty rates and declining property values. Decline was most prevalent in suburbs that had witnessed loss of manufacturing employment.

Some older suburbs exhibit classic symptoms of decline while others advance. Moving further afield than Megalopolis, an example of a declining older suburb is Forest Park in the Atlanta area. The poverty rate in this older suburb more than doubled and income fell to 40% below the suburban income of the Atlanta metropolitan area from 1980 to 2000. Coupled with this decline is an increase in the minority population. The percentage of Hispanics doubled and the black population increased from 7% to 35% of the population from 1980 to 2000. Forest Park is an example of a minority, older suburb struggling to adapt to changing population and income dynamics.

A telling counter example is Kenilworth, a small lakefront community of 815 housing units north of Chicago City. The median household income of this older, inner suburb was \$130,000 in 1980, increasing to the maximum reported median household income of \$200,001 by 2000. This small community was well to do in 1980 with income levels more than two and half times the suburban income that year. It became wealthier as income grew to more than three times the suburban norm by 2000. Almost three quarters of the housing stock in Kenilworth was built before 1939, an exclusive, old-style housing stock located along the lakefront.

The coexistence of Forest Park and Kenilworth illustrates that, even among older suburbs, there are the advantaged and disadvantaged. However, the more general trend is one of declining older suburbs and expanding outer suburbs. A recent study compares older suburbs to ensuing tiers of suburban development (Hanlon 2006). This examination of almost 3,500 suburbs across different metropolitan areas of the United States found that two-thirds of suburbs in extreme decline are older, inner suburbs. The remaining third are newer suburbs on the outer edge of each metropolitan area. Three in every twenty older, inner suburbs in the sample fit this category compared to one in every twenty newer suburbs.

In the most problematic areas, there are issues of a housing stock that is no longer marketable, infrastructure that is in need of repair and residents that are dying off without a younger generation to replace them. Many of these suburbs experience economic and social problems normally associated with central cities such as rising crime rates and poor school performance.

*Concluding Thoughts*

Suburbia in the United States has fully matured. Initially, the home of the elite, then the middle class, now suburbia houses a range of people from the wealthy to the poor and a range of local economies from the economically buoyant to the economically depressed. Suburbia has emerged as a place of disparate and diverging realities. Problems are apparent in some of the older inner-ring suburbs, many now more than 50 years old. Population growth in older suburbs has stagnated. The residents of these areas have grown poorer and the housing stock has aged significantly. These older neighborhoods built primarily in the immediate postwar period are part of a new suburban gothic of places of desolation and decay in the suburban landscape of the United States. In this article, we identified three forces that have led to the emergence of this suburban gothic: the demand–supply nexus, the nature of land use planning in the United States, and deindustrialization.

A number of important questions remain. The first refers to identifying the mix of factors making some inner suburbs decline more than others. Second, what if anything can be done to manage or even overturn the decline of inner suburbs. Public policies have been fashioned to deal with central city decline and suburban growth; there are few policy guidelines to cope with suburban decline. Finally, to what extent is marked inner-suburban decline an example of US exceptionalism, and to what extent is the US experience a harbinger of likely developments in Western European metropolitan regions as their first tier suburbs begin to age.

The phenomenon of suburban decline is not unique to the United States. Let us briefly consider the case of the Paris, France. In 2005, social unrest and a wave of riots plagued many of the inner-ring suburbs situated to the northeast of Paris. The suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois, in particular, became the epicenter of a series of protests and riots. For years, a lack of growth, well-paying jobs, and adequate housing has plagued the inner-ring suburbs of Paris. These suburban areas have traditionally welcomed heavy manufacturing plants, and they have housed historically disadvantaged minorities, including large Muslim and African communities in Clichy-sous-Bois. Police violence and arson ignited the riots in 2005; yet, over time high unemployment and discrimination fueled the persistent riots.

These events caught the attention of French president Jacques Chirac. Acknowledging the problem of suburban decline, he commented at a press conference that, 'there is a need to respond strongly and rapidly to the undeniable problems of underprivileged neighborhoods around our cities' (Associated Press 2005). While the violence and riots were quickly extinguished, the government has yet to combat the systematic decline of Paris' inner-ring suburbs.

Similarly, the inner-ring suburbs of London, England, and Sydney, Australia, have also experienced significant socioeconomic decline in

recent decades. These examples illustrate that the existence of suburbs in crisis touches many parts of the world.

More substantive research is needed to address these issues: in particular, to identify local and regional scale factors of decline, to fully understand the effects of different planning and public policy strategies and to assess whether suburban gothic is a uniquely US phenomenon.

### *Biography*

John Rennie Short is Professor of Public Policy and Geography at University of Maryland, Baltimore County. His research includes the political economy of cities and exploring the connections between globalization and the city. He has published 28 scholarly books and numerous articles. His recent publications include *Alabaster Cities* (2006), the forthcoming *Liquid City* (2007), *Cities and Economies* (2007), *Nature and the City* (2007), as well as *Urban Theory* (2006), *Global Metropolitan* (2004), *Making Space* (2004), and *Global Dimensions* (2001).

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