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## City and Suburb in Symbiosis: The Urban Problem in New Perspective

WHATEVER one may or may not know about the urban situation in this country, he knows that "the cities of America are in desperate crisis." Newspaper writers and TV commentators never tire of repeating this threadbare cliché. And, like a good many clichés, even journalistic clichés, this one is true in some sense. But in *what* sense? What is there that is happening to our cities today that might justify such a drastic judgment? The usual explanations show very little understanding of the problem, even very little knowledge of the facts. Let us consider the two or three most familiar of these accounts.

The cities are in crisis, it is sometimes said, because they have suddenly been overwhelmed with new problems in this new age. But what are these allegedly new problems that threaten to destroy us? Just a hundred years ago, in 1871, a not undistinguished member of Parliament noted that:

*The cities, the poor, and the schools are three of the most important questions which can occupy the House of Commons, and make up perhaps three-fourths of its business.*<sup>1</sup>

These were the problems of a century ago; are they not among the same problems we are facing today, the allegedly new problems that are producing the present-day crisis in the cities? They are problems that have been with us in the West since the emergence of urban industrial society, and they cannot account for the special situation of the cities

today, if, indeed, there is any such special situation.

Nor can we trace the blame to the vast outflow of people from the cities to the suburbs that seems to be characteristic of every section of the country today. The outflow from what we now know as the inner city to outlying areas has been going on in this country for many generations. But this movement has, until recently, been masked by the vast inflow into the city from rural areas and from overseas; and by the fact that earlier suburbs into which the inner cities drained off were usually the so-called "street-car suburbs," outlying areas within city limits, and therefore not obviously noticeable as suburbs. In more recent times, in the past half-century or so, the inflow into the inner city has been drastically curtailed, and the suburban movement has broken through city limits, converting many small towns into suburban developments. It is true, the pressure to get out of the inner city has become intensified in recent decades, but the so-called "flight to the suburbs," so often mentioned with disapproval in certain circles today, is essentially a continuation of the centuries-old movement that brought people from the old

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1. Quoted by Walter L. Arnstein, "Votes for Women," *History Today*, August, 1968.

world to the new, from east coast westward, from "downtown" to "uptown" in the cities, from central areas of cities to outlying districts. Only today, made possible by growing affluence and by new means of communication and transport, this movement has broken out of city limits and is encompassing small towns and even erecting suburbias out of nothing. Of course, all this has its impact on the urban situation, but the problem remains: how and in what way?

More recently, the cry has gone up that the urban crisis is really an ecological crisis. This term, "ecological" has been torn out of its older scientific context, signifying the dynamic relations among the various elements of our terrestrial environment, particularly the relation of the human species to its "home" on this planet; the term "ecological," I say, has been torn out of this older scientific context and converted into a kind of fearsome terror, threatening mankind with extinction—"ecological suicide" is the shudder-inspiring phrase, whether it is the so-called "population explosion," the "pollution" of the environment, the extinction of species, unsightly billboards along the roadsides, or any combination of these horrors. And the city, of course, is seen as both the infecting source and the devastated area of this latter-day plague. The city, we are told, is being destroyed by "ecological suicide."

I hardly think it is necessary at this point to undertake a serious criticism of this "doomsday syndrome," as it has been called. John Maddox, the well known editor of the prestigious scientific journal, *Nature*, and others like him, have already done that, and to very good effect. Admittedly, pestiferous conditions affecting various parts of our environment exist, and have to be dealt with as soberly and as effectively as possible. But these do not constitute solely an urban problem, and, insofar as they do constitute primarily an urban problem, a serious consideration of the facts of the case would show that, within the limits of advancing industrialization, ecological conditions have been steadily improving rather than the reverse. There is a serious problem involved here in



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this strange upsurge of "ecological" hysteria among certain sections of the American people—one British commentator makes so bold as to call them "ecomaniacs"—but it is a socio-psychological problem in a demographical setting, and it certainly does not justify seeing the urban crisis as an ecological crisis in the popular sense.

There are a number of other alleged explanations of the urban crisis, all bringing forward something allegedly new to account for it, and all alike unable to withstand serious criticism. Yet there is something new in our demographical situation that may help to cast light on some of the more acute problems of urban survival. And to this new demographical constellation—which I may, rather melodramatically, designate as "city and suburb in symbiosis in the megalopolis"—to this new demographical constellation, with some of its more important consequences and implications, I now turn.

#### Dynamics of the Population Movement

**B**UT first, a few words as background, on the dynamics of the small town—big city—

suburban population movement. I have no intention of trying to rehearse, or even to list, all those factors that have been brought forward, after decades of careful study, to account for urbanization and for the vast inflow into the urban centers of this country in the past two centuries. But there is one aspect of this population movement, as part of a larger movement, that has not, I think, received the attention it deserves.

I have in mind the double movement which I am sure all of us are familiar with—the movement from the rural or semi-rural small town to the big city, and the concomitant movement from the big city to the surrounding suburbs. What has been happening, and why? I think some light on an important aspect of this problem can be cast by looking back upon the regional novels of the 1920's, of which Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* is a superb, but not untypical, example. The protagonist in these novels, usually a young woman—in *Main Street*, it is Carol Kennicott, a former schoolteacher, now married to a small-town physician—who suffers from the aridity and constriction of small-town life. In a small town such as Gopher Prairie, Carol Kennicott finds there is no privacy, no freedom, no culture, no possibilities for the imaginative life of the spirit; everybody knows you, everybody is always watching you, everybody is always keeping tabs on you, everybody is always gossiping about you. She longs for the anonymity of a large city, where no one knows you, no one watches you, and you can move about freely, as you please. Usually, in these novels, and in the actual life they reflect, the heroine escapes to the big city nearby, and there, generally, the story ends. Carol Kennicott, it is true, finds no salvation in Washington, to which she has fled. Washington is nothing but congeries of small towns, she discovers, and she has to go back to Gopher Prairie; it might have been different had she sought refuge in the Twin Cities, in Chicago, or even in New York, as so many of the other heroines, and heroes, of similar novels did. From the dull and oppressive small town to the free and exciting big city: that is the first movement in this paradigmatic pattern.

But only the first movement. Suppose Carol Kennicott had successfully escaped from the small-town spiritual confinement to the freedom of big city anonymity, consider the plight of her granddaughter. (I am inventing the granddaughter for purposes of illustration.) Her granddaughter, in the 1950's and '60's, finds in the anonymity of the big city not liberation, but depersonalization. You know nobody, nobody knows you; nobody cares about you; vast impersonal masses swirl about you, always threatening to engulf you in nothingness. Even apart from its violence, the big city is a dessicating desert. She cannot imagine herself bringing up her children in what she sees as a vicious jungle. The suburb beckons. As soon as it becomes financially possible, they move to a nearby suburb: her husband becomes a commuter; she settles down comfortably, herself and her growing children. This is the second movement in the paradigmatic pattern. Let me repeat the two movements: from the small town to the big city, yearning for the freedom of anonymity; from the big city to the suburb, seeking viability, sociability, community. Of course, I am not asserting that these are what we ordinarily call the motives in the population movement, especially in the movement to the big city; there are other well known economic and social factors involved. What I am saying is that this double movement—from small town to big city, from big city to suburb—has spiritual and psychological aspects we tend to overlook, but which are very significant in the total picture.

#### Emergence of Megalopolis

WHAT, then, is the picture that emerges? It is not enough, it may even be misleading, simply to say "the cities are stagnating or shrinking, the suburbs are growing fast"; that is largely true, but singularly unilluminating. What is significant is that a new demographical unit is emerging, consisting of a central city, surrounded by a number of satellite suburbs, bound together by the very closest of economic, social, cultural, and sometimes even political ties. It

will be convenient to call the central city the *metropolis*, a not inappropriate term, since "metropolis" originally meant "mother city"; and the whole, metropolis and suburbs, *megalopolis*, or giant city. Then what we have, and this is true for virtually every urban area of this country, is the urban giant, the megalopolis, embracing metropolis and suburbs, each with its own line of development, but sharing a dynamic pattern for the whole. Let us take a preliminary look of each part of the whole.

Taking, first, the metropolis, the central city, that which we generally think of when we speak of the city, we are presented with a picture of decay, of "urban blight," to use the familiar phrase. The population is not static by any means. There is generally considerable inflow continuing, but it is largely of regional, ethnic, and racial migrants, economically and culturally of lower-class, lower-caste status. This inflow is more than matched by the outflow to the suburbs, consisting of better-class, higher-caste people, able, at last, to make the escape from the city. What remains in the city with this inflow, and after this outflow, are, first, the residual industrial, commercial, and financial establishments, although, for some fifteen years, business houses have been moving out of the city, but leaving, generally, a head office in the metropolis; then, cultural institutions, museums, theaters, and the like; also, in choice spots, some luxury housing, a kind of protected sanctuary, with its own security system; but, most of all, of course, lower-class, lower-caste housing in the form of ethnic-racial ghettos, new and old, constituting what is usually called the "inner city." Two qualifications must be made before this picture can take on some of the aspects of reality. In most of the metropolitan central cities, first of all, middle-class elements still remain, holding on uneasily pending the time when removal to some nearby suburb will prove possible. In the second place, it must never be forgotten that what are demographically outlying suburban areas may well be administratively part of the central city, such as some parts of Queens, Staten Island, and upper Manhattan in New York

City, and similar parts of Philadelphia, Chicago, and other metropolises. With these two qualifications in mind, the picture I have so hastily sketched is near enough to reality to be useful for our purposes.

This picture of what is happening to the central city in the megalopolitan complex is a bleak one, quite saddening to those of us who are prone to remember what the city—*civitas, polis*—has meant in the life of the West and of Western civilization. But more on this later. What about the other side of the megalopolitan complex, the suburb? What is it in its inner reality, and how is it related to the metropolis?

### The Suburban Dream

THE trek from city to suburb is perhaps the most characteristic demographical movement of our time. What do these migrants expect to find in the suburbs, what is the suburban dream? First, it is escape. Escape from what? From the gigantism, the anonymity, the impersonality, the violence, brutality, and crime of urban life; but also, and, perhaps just as important, from the pressures of the encroaching ghetto, once Irish and Italian, now Negro and Puerto Rican. But the suburban dream has its glamorous positive side as well. It is the dream of recapturing the "good life" in a community seeing itself as a kind of happy synthesis of small town and big city. In this dream, a way of life develops which I do not believe has yet received adequate study, descriptive, critical, or evaluative.

What are some of the features of the suburban way of life, considered generically, over against that of the big city, on the one side, and the small town, on the other? First, its *amiability*. "It's a good place to live in, and to bring up children": I've heard this response, in just so many words, in every inquiry I've ever made, and the same is true of other investigators. Furthermore, it's true. The Roman poet, Horace, knew what he was talking about when he sang, "*Dulcis est urbs sub urbe*," "Sweet is the city beyond the city" (that's where we get the word "suburb" from

though Horace was thinking of what we today would call "exurbia," not suburbia).

The most amiable aspect of this amiable way of life is perhaps the sense of *community recaptured*. It is not the kind of community that Carol Kennicott fled from, it is not felt to be oppressive; just the reverse. True, as some of its critics have noted, it is *community prefabricated*: it is not necessary for you to have lived in town for thirty years before you cease being a "foreigner"; you fit in right away. And with the prefabricated community comes *instant sociability*. In the big city, there is no community, and sociability is limited to a very narrow circle of personal friends or fellow-workers; not so in the suburbs. With all this easy sociability and community, however, there is a *yearning for roots*, probably engendered by the inevitably shallow rootage of suburban life, and certainly intensified by the extraordinarily high mobility of the suburbanites, who may be, and often are, shifted by the corporations at short notice from one part of the country to another. In three suburban communities that I have studied, there are special shops where you can get "ancestor" portraits for your home, not *your* ancestors, but authentic-looking ancestors anyway, in the style of the early 19th-century limners. This yearning for roots shows itself in a phenomenon that I am sure many of you must have noticed—the building of new houses in the suburbs out of old bricks, so that the house looks as though it's been there for decades and decades. At first, I understand, bricks taken from old houses were used for these new houses; but now, brick-making concerns specially manufactured old-looking bricks for the special purpose I have indicated. Where the natural roots are shallow, the yearning for roots is intense.

For all its sense of community, the normal suburb remains organically bound to the metropolis of which it is a satellite; the suburb, made up of refugees from the big city, remains in essential ways oriented to the big city. It is tied to the big city economically. Except for those who conduct the business establishments in the suburban town itself, a high proportion of the men—as high as 75

percent in some localities—and a certain number of women as well, commute to the metropolis to follow their occupations or professions. (In the northern New Jersey suburban area, incidentally, there are three metropolitan centers to which the surrounding satellite suburbs are tied in this manner—New York City, Newark, and Jersey City. There are such complexes in other parts of the country as well.) Economically, too, the suburbanite is tied to the metropolis as consumer. The large department stores, ladies' outfitters, and other concerns in the metropolis have generally acted to open branch establishments in the nearby suburbs, building up what are known as suburban malls; but it is still something to look forward to for the suburban housewife to go to the big city to do some shopping and, perhaps, take in a show as well.

The cultural bond is even tighter. Some efforts are being made to establish cultural institutions in the suburbs, but, with the best will in the world, these efforts have not proved very impressive. Culture has always been essentially an urban affair, and, I think, it is likely to remain so indefinitely.

But, perhaps, the most significant bond between suburb and metropolis is spiritual. The suburbanite, no matter what he may think or even say, is *not* a small-towner; he, or she, is, in fact, a kind of expatriate big-city man or woman, whose orientation is toward the big city and who would feel himself a fish out of water if suddenly domiciled in an authentic small town.

Let me say something before moving on about the class-caste system as it has been developing in our suburban communities. A word about the differential inflow. Protestant middle-class and upper-middle-class people were the first to begin moving out to the suburb as a permanent place of residence, distinct from the much older summer homes or country estates of the rich. Then, after a rather long interval, came affluent middle-class Jewish families. Most, though not all, of the Jewish migrants to suburbia looked for, and managed to settle in, Jewish neighborhoods, thus developing what has been called the "gilded ghetto." The Catho-

lic middle class came next, with something of the same residential pattern. Only recently, in the past two or three decades, have suburban communities sprung up for the lower middle class, workers, white collar employees, and the like. Six years ago, in 1967, nearly 50 percent of all union workers were living in suburbs, while as many as 75 percent of union workers under forty were to be found there. Most noteworthy is the emergence of middle-class Negro suburbs, in New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and other suburban areas. The residents of these middle-class Negro suburbs have often shown themselves as resentful at the invasion of lower-class blacks in low-rental housing as white suburbanites anywhere.

I cannot undertake a discussion of religion in the suburbs; it would carry us too far afield. What I want to say at this point is simply that religious identification and church membership are very high in the suburbs; indeed, some of the suburban communities are probably the most churched areas in the entire country. Churches there are community institutions, and have considerable influence in structuring the community. Of considerable importance would seem to be the fact that, in a good middle-class suburban community, where most of the men, and even many of the women, are college graduates, the clergy are no longer superior in class, education, or culture to the people in the pews, as the clergy have usually been in city churches. The ministers, priests, and rabbis are generally younger men, some recently out of seminary, personally quite influential in their communities, again unlike the case generally in the cities. When an adequate study comes to be made of the structure and functioning of community life in the suburbs, I have no doubt that the central institution will turn out to be the church.

#### Poverty, Delinquency, and Crime

**I**N spite of this rather sketchy and admittedly inadequate treatment of the subject, I think I have done something to show that central city and attendant suburbs form

parts of one super-system, one megalopolis, in close economic, social, and cultural relation, one part depending on the other. In a figurative sense, it is indeed a kind of symbiotic union.

The inner reality of this demographical super-system reveals itself once we go beyond the underlying economic and social structures and attempt to grasp the moral significance of the whole and its parts. To turn to the central city first.

Almost everywhere, the distinctive and expanding part of the metropolitan central city is the so-called inner city, and the cultural mark of the inner city is poverty. For poverty is not merely a condition of deprivation; it is, in the exact sense of the term, a culture, forming the basic texture of life in the inner city and permeating every aspect of its existence. We have had, in this country, a vast experience with poverty groups coming here through the past two centuries as ethnic migrants, mostly of impoverished peasant stock, from virtually every nation, every continent, every part of the world; and we have had our experience, too, with how these poverty groups have managed to rise out of their depressed condition and become part of an advancing America. We would do well if we learned from this experience, and managed to apply it to our present-day perplexities and problems. The one sure lesson we can draw from our experience is that the best—in fact, the only really effective—way we could help the depressed poverty groups to rise in the American system is by letting them alone to help themselves with the very minimum of outside interference, especially of governmental interference, parading as governmental assistance. The notion with which liberal bureaucrats and would-be social engineers have been operating for the past three or four decades has been that all that has to be done to “abolish” poverty and wipe out the inner-city pest-holes known as the ghetto slums is to pour public money into the pockets of the poor and move them from their slums to decent public housing, in the expectation that, poverty being merely an external deprivation, removal to public housing would mean leaving slum life be-

hind. Unfortunately for the liberal social engineers, there is vast and accumulating evidence from all parts of the country that such self-styled anti-poverty measures are counter-productive. They but intensify and aggravate the problem; the low-rent public housing that was supposed to replace the slums becomes a slum itself in very short order. No; poverty as we know it in the slums is not just an external deprivation of good things; it is a culture, permeating and coloring virtually all of life. It is the culture of the inner city of the metropolis.

The most obvious mark of this poverty slum culture is the high incidence of delinquency, violence, and crime. There is nothing new in this; all ethnic-migrant groups have had their periods of delinquency, violence, and crime in the past, varying, in kind, extent, and intensity, with the character of the ethnic-migrant group. But we would do well to look at this problem a little more closely, especially as it confronts us today.

Slums breed crime, we are told, because of wretched housing, inferior schooling, and miserable living conditions generally. But it is not as simple as all that. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck of Harvard, who have given this problem of delinquency and crime close and continuous attention for nearly a quarter of a century, have a rather different and much more complex story to tell. They find that what differentiates delinquents from non-delinquents is not so much bad housing or inferior education but (and here I quote) "what is probably the most significant aspect of life—marital and family relationships."<sup>2</sup> It is the cohesion of the family, with each of the parents playing his or her proper role, that is decisive. In families where there is proper discipline of the boy by the father, less than ten percent (9.3%) turn out to be delinquent, while of those whose discipline by the father is classified as "erratic," nearly three-quarters (72.5%) fall into delinquency and crime. Where proper supervision by the mother is present, again



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less than ten percent turn out delinquent, while where that is not forthcoming, for one reason or another, over eighty percent (82.2%) fall into delinquency and crime. Cohesiveness of the family is what counts, the Gluecks tell us; where the family is not properly "integrated" (their term), the impact of delinquency and crime reaches over ninety percent (96.9%).<sup>3</sup> "By contrast," they point out, "it would be of little value to employ such a factor as residence in an underprivileged area as a predictive factor, since even as to the most markedly deteriorated urban region [that is, a slum], some 80% or 90% of the boys therein resident manage *not* to become delinquents."<sup>4</sup> Something more is needed to precipitate delinquency and crime, and that something is disintegration and breakdown of the family.

It is obvious, of course, that the family suffers, and has always suffered, its worst dislocations and disintegrations in the poverty areas of the slums. Today, to take the most important ethnic migrants of our time—rural Negro families migrating to urban

2. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, *Delinquents and Non-Delinquents* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 89.

3. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, *Predicting Delinquency and Crime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 16-17.

4. *Ibid.*

areas in the North, but increasingly to some of the urban centers of the South as well (Birmingham, for example)—we see how the once cohesive family becomes broken and dislocated in the new urban environment, resulting so frequently in a matri-focal family with no man permanently present, a thoroughly disintegrated form of the family, if family it can still be called, just about the most prolific breeder of delinquency and crime we know of.<sup>5</sup> And this has been true, it still is true, as well of other ethnic-migrant groups living in inner-city slums, though perhaps not to the same extent or degree. In recent years, governmental welfare programs have, in general, only aggravated the situation, in effect, putting a premium on broken families and on living on welfare from generation to generation, instead of working, if the work available appears to be not particularly attractive or profitable.

The poverty culture of the inner-city slums does not, of course, pervade the whole of the metropolis, but it does give it its distinctive character. What can we say of the other part of the megalopolis, the satellite suburbs? Here the problem is more difficult to define because the amiability and glamor of suburban life tend to obscure it. But suburban life has its dark side as well, and it is a dark side that seems to be growing darker and more threatening as the years go by and suburban life begins to reveal some of its hitherto undiscerned aspects.

#### Moral Crisis in Suburbia

THERE is a deepening social and moral crisis in suburbia. If, in the inner-city slums, conditions prevail that make for the disruption of an appalling number of families and therefore for the conditions that breed delinquency and crime, the suburban family on its part, is being seriously weakened, "bent," as some one has put it, by the

5. See Daniel Patrick Moynihan's celebrated report on the Negro family, included in Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1967).

diminishing role of the father—he is, in many cases, really an absentee father—and the erosion of his authority in the family. That, too, makes for growing delinquency, and even crime. The integrity of the family is the basis for the integrity of society; and, where there is a serious crisis in the family, the whole social order is threatened.

Middle-class suburban society is, in general, a thoroughly permissive society; in fact, it rather prides itself on this sort of "progressive" attitude, as it is called. Virtually anything goes, so long as you have a good time. Norms of authority, norms of morality, tend to fade away; "have fun" is about the only imperative that many middle-class suburbanites take seriously, virtually the only imperative that is enforced by public pressure and common consent. I trace this permissive attitude to the spreading prevalence of what David Riesman calls the "other-directed" character type, with its undisguised contempt for the older "inner-directed" work ethic—the "Puritan ethic," they sneeringly call it—and the shift of emphasis from producing to enjoying, to what is called "gracious living" as against a disciplined life. Middle-class suburbia seems to be the natural habitat of this kind of "other-directed" permissiveness. And that has its consequences. . .

What is so particularly sinister is something that observers have noted in the past two decades—the forced maturation of children as vehicles of vicarious display. Children are initiated into the prevalent fun-morality at a very early age, when they are hardly out of the nursery, and the externals are not forgotten: note the miniaturized adult fashions for children, and the adult-type social forms, such as parties, proms, cap-and-gown graduations in the kindergarten, and the like. This is not just innocent foolishness; forced maturation never is. The children are converted into status symbols, serving to display, promote, and protect the status of the suburban family as a whole.

The gravest problem that seems to me to confront middle-class suburbia is one that is just coming to be recognized by observers. It is the problem of the middle-class house-



wife in affluent society. Affluence and the proliferation of gadgets in the form of domestic labor-saving devices have freed her from what she is pleased to regard as "old-fashioned drudgery." But, having freed herself from this drudgery, she finds that she has evacuated her life. The basic vocation of the mature woman, defined by and embedded in our religious and cultural tradition, is home-making and family-upbringing; now affluence has undermined the one and permissiveness eroded the other. Life becomes empty, boring, vacuous; and this vacuity is not to be filled with endless coffee-klatsches, fanciful schemes of continuing education, or the fatuous busy-work of the League for Women Voters. As a very intelligent middle-aged, middle-class suburban housewife put it, "We keep on wanting our cake, after having eaten it!" The round of activity that once gave meaning to the housewife's everyday life is gone, at least for considerable sections of affluent suburban society, and there is nothing to replace it. This leads to a most painful situation, often with far-reaching complications. Psychologists and sociologists have begun noticing the problem. A well-known psychiatrist, Manfred Lubrin, writes:

*Boredom and emptiness of life are the great 'white plague' of our time [the great 'white plague' in former days was tuberculosis, you remember]. It affects with particular devastation middle-class and upper-middle-class women in the suburban communities in this country.*

But we are no nearer to a solution. Some of the younger women who find themselves in this plight have taken to breast-feeding their infants, apparently to give themselves the sense of doing something significant for their families. A growing number of suburban women are baking their own bread and cake, instead of buying it in the bakery, again so as to give themselves the feeling of home-making. These activities, and others like them, are indeed worthy efforts, but they will not and cannot fill the void, the empti-



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ness, that so afflicts the typical affluent middle-class suburban housewife. Out of this emptiness, out of this boredom and the spasmodic attempts to allay it, there is engendered the notorious proneness of the suburban middle-class housewife to fall in with the endless succession of frantic causes, from the bomb-shelter craze of a decade or so ago to the "ecomania" of today, that give the appearance of meaningful life where all genuine meaning is being drained away by the realities of suburban life.

#### The Drug Problem in City and Suburbia

OBVIOUSLY, even the most sketchy account of urban-suburban problems would be incomplete without some mention of drugs. Unfortunately, despite all the publicity devoted to the matter, we know very little about the social and cultural aspects of the drug problem. But we do know something. For one thing, we have some idea of the demographical and class impact of present-day drug abuse. The so-called "hard" drugs, particularly heroin and its derivatives, seem to afflict the inner-city ghetto slums with particular virulence, while the so-called "soft" drugs, such as marijuana

and the assorted "pep" pills, are the problem of the suburban youth, with LSD and the like in the offing.

Why the "hard" drugs should have this appeal to certain elements in the inner-city ghetto slums, we do not really know. The familiar explanation is that these drugs come as a reaction to the dreariness, misery, and hopelessness of inner-city ghetto life; that may well be, but no real evidence is available. On the other hand, we do know something significant about youthful drug addiction in the suburbs. Young people in the suburbs take to drugs—in the proportion that they do, and this must not be exaggerated—not out of the alleged "generation gap" in an act of alienated defiance of their parents, but just the reverse. Recent research, especially the work of Richard H. Blum of Stanford University, a distinguished psychologist and probably the country's outstanding authority on the drug problem, has shown that youthful drug addiction in the suburbs is an aspect of the permissive ethos that governs the suburbs, and is directly related to it. Blum's thesis, emerging from carefully conducted studies, including research in depth, is that it is the "mod" parents in the suburbs, with their moral laxity and "progressiveness," with their contemptuous rejection of traditional standards and inhibitions, who open the way for the precipitate fall of their drug-taking children. This account runs so obviously counter to the received ideas of our time and culture that a further elaboration would seem to be desirable. Dr. Blum has presented his findings in a book with the suggestive title, *Horatio Alger's Children*, and an excellent summary by August Gribbin has appeared in *The National Observer* less than a year ago.<sup>6</sup> "Consciously or unconsciously," avers Blum—I am quoting from *The National Observer* article—"permissive parents show the way for their offspring. . . . 'It comes back to the exceptionally simple notion that

parents teach and children become like them. Always with some variations, but not with great variations.' " In pretest interviews, the families studied had been classified as "high-risk," "low-risk," and "moderate-risk," "according to the extent of the family's involvement in drug usage." "Low-risk" families, it was found, "tended generally to venerate the 'God-Country-Family' creed. More often than 'high-risk' parents, they professed the importance of disciplining their children, while still 'attending to the child's preferences'. . . . More often than 'high-risk' couples, 'low-risk' parents attended church. . . . Children in the 'low-risk' families 'were more obedient and got along well. . . . Parents in [the 'high-risk' group] put a low premium on family life. They gave their youngsters greater freedom, but less guidance, while playing down belief in God and self-control. . . ." Here is the conclusion, so far as it relates to the suburban drug problem: "Children take drugs to please [I should say rather: to go along with] their mostly liberal, often mod parents who have rejected old-time family traditions." Nothing could be clearer or better confirmed. (I should mention that Dr. Blum's subjects were all college students, all white, all coming from middle-class or upper-middle-class families.)

I cannot close this discussion without quoting Dr. Blum's brilliant, if somewhat facetious, account of the nature and fallaciousness of middle-class permissiveness.

*These people believe, as everyone would like to believe [he writes] that children are free spirits and require no tutelage. Discipline is a bad thing to them; punishment ruins people. 'Just let the kiddies grow,' they say. It's a marvelous notion. But it doesn't work with flowers, corn, or money. It certainly doesn't work with children. You have to invest energy. And it seems you must put in ten pounds of energy for every single pound of healthy, flourishing child.*<sup>7</sup>

Here we have the spotlight thrown on the

6. Richard H. Blum, *Horatio Alger's Children*. The summary referred to is August Gribbin, "A Study Explodes Old Logic," *The National Observer*, June 24, 1972, pp. 1, 17.

7. *Ibid.*

moral disease that is ravaging the affluent middle-class suburb, so very different and yet the counterpart of the moral ethos of the inner city.

#### **Cultural Confrontation and Shock**

CENTRAL city and suburb: the two symbiotic parts of the larger demographical unit—the megalopolis. Between the two there is significant cultural distance, and encounter involves a real cultural shock. Each part, central city and suburb, sees itself in terms of its own self-image, of course, but also in terms of the reflected image, one in the other. The denizens of the central city—and here I am thinking primarily of the inner city—view the suburbs and the suburbanites with envy and resentment. The suburbanites, on their part, view the inner city and its hordes with a shudder of distaste and

disgust, even fear, all thinly papered over with liberal platitudes and condescending pity. These sentiments are engendered out of the social-class and demographical situation, and are hardly likely to be dissipated by mere expressions of good will, on the one side or the other. Those of us who want to understand the emerging megalopolis, and even more, those of us who want to do something, however limited and however short-range, for the improvement of urban-suburban conditions, had better recognize the realities of the situation, and not fly off into idealistic phantasies, on the one side, or into nihilistic nightmares on the other.

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