DEMOGRAPHIA

The Role of Urban Planning in the Decline of American Central Cities

By Wendell Cox

SUMMARY

Throughout the high income world, nearly all urban growth over the past four decades has been in suburban areas. Core areas have, with few exceptions, generally lost population. But the population losses have been much greater in US core cities.

Many analysts claim that "White flight" was the problem --- White households leaving the central city to avoid living with African-American (Black) households who were moving in. In fact, the unprecedented migration of African-Americans from the South to the urban areas of the North meant that White households would be displaced and to blame the decline of US central cities on "White flight" is an over-simplification.

In fact, urban planning played a considerable role in the decline of US cities. Urban renewal and often related highway construction programs destroyed low income neighborhoods, both African-American and White. This disruption created an unstable real estate market in which "blockbusters" operated to facilitate the quick replacement of White households with African-American households. Virtually no relocation assistance was provided. Many low income African-American households had no alternative but to move into high rise public housing where conditions were prison-like.

There were also "push" factors, that accelerated the exodus of households that could afford to move, such as poor city services, political corruption, high crime rates, poor education performance and mandatory school busing.

Nonetheless, core cities are experiencing a renaissance. There is considerable core residential development, and in some cases, population growth has been registered. The bulk of the population growth continues to be in the suburbs.

Suburban World

For decades, nearly all growth in high-income world urban areas has been suburban. Among metropolitan areas of more than 1,000,000 population in the high-income world, approximately 95 percent of urban growth has been in the suburbs. In the United States, Canada, Japan and

Oceania (Australia and New Zealand), more than 90 percent of growth has been in the suburbs since 1965. In Western Europe the share of growth in the suburbs has been even greater, at 114 percent, reflecting the continuing central city population losses (Figure 1).[1]
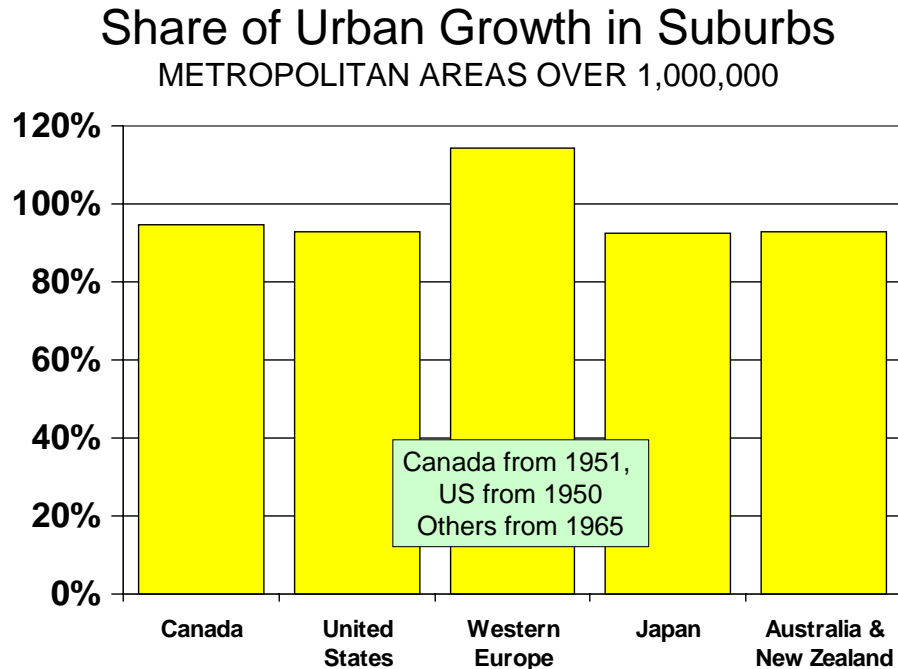
Share of Urban Growth in Suburbs
METROPOLITAN AREAS OVER 1,000,000

Canada from 1951,
US from 1950
Others from 1965

Figure 1

The Unique Decline of US Core Cities

Core city population losses have generally been greater in the United States than in other high-income nations. Among the 14 largest US core cities that did not expand their boundaries and had virtually no room for fringe development,[2] 12 experienced population losses greater than can be explained by falling household sizes. In some cases the losses have been staggering --- St. Louis lost nearly 60 percent of its population, a larger loss than that of any major city in the world. Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Detroit and Cleveland lost approximately one-half of their population. These four cities are the core of the American "rust belt," which suffered serious industrial losses as international competition increased, beginning with the European and Japanese recoveries from World War II. The two cities in which the loss can be explained by falling household sizes are San Francisco, which lost only 4 percent of its population from 1950 to 2004, and Chicago, which lost 20 percent of its population.

At the same time, other core cities, such as Portland, Atlanta, Houston, Denver and Seattle expanded their boundaries and experienced growth. Analysts often make the mistake of assuming that because these cities grew, they somehow escaped the difficulties experienced in the non-expanding cities. In fact, in most cases, core population losses have occurred, which

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[1] www.demographia.com/db-highmetro.htm.
[2] Since 1950.

have been masked by increases in population due to annexation, consolidation or "greenfield" development that looks virtually no different than the suburban development surrounding cities that did not annex.

Misunderstanding Core Cities

There is a wide range of differences between core cities. Some are very small compared to their metropolitan areas. For example, the cities of Atlanta and Boston have 10 percent or less of their respective metropolitan populations. At the other end of the scale, San Antonio has nearly two-thirds of its metropolitan area's population. Obviously, it can be expected that the core cities that are smaller in relation to their metropolitan areas will have greater poverty and lower incomes that the core cities that represent a larger share, because poverty and lower incomes are concentrated in the urban cores.

But misleading conclusions can be drawn from comparison of what are radically different core cities. This is illustrated by the work of David Rusk.[3] Rusk, a former mayor of Albuquerque, has proposed a "city elasticity" theory. Among his observations is that more elastic cities --- those that can or have annexed suburban areas, have less poverty and higher incomes than cities that have not been able to annex. But, this "city elasticity" theory simply measures the characteristics within what are arbitrary municipal boundaries. In fact, poverty is lower in the urban areas that are *less* elastic, while average incomes are *higher* (Figures 2 and 3).[4] Rusk also claims that metropolitan areas with elastic core cities have less racial segregation. It appears, however, that the driving force is growth. In a Brookings Institution report, Edward L. Glaser and Joseph L. Vigdor show that segregation has declined most where population growth has been the greatest.[5]

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[3] See David Rusk, *Cities Without Suburbs:* Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995.
[4] Calculated from 2000 US Census data.
[5] http://www.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/es/urban/census/glaeser.pdf).

Poverty Rate by City Elasticity
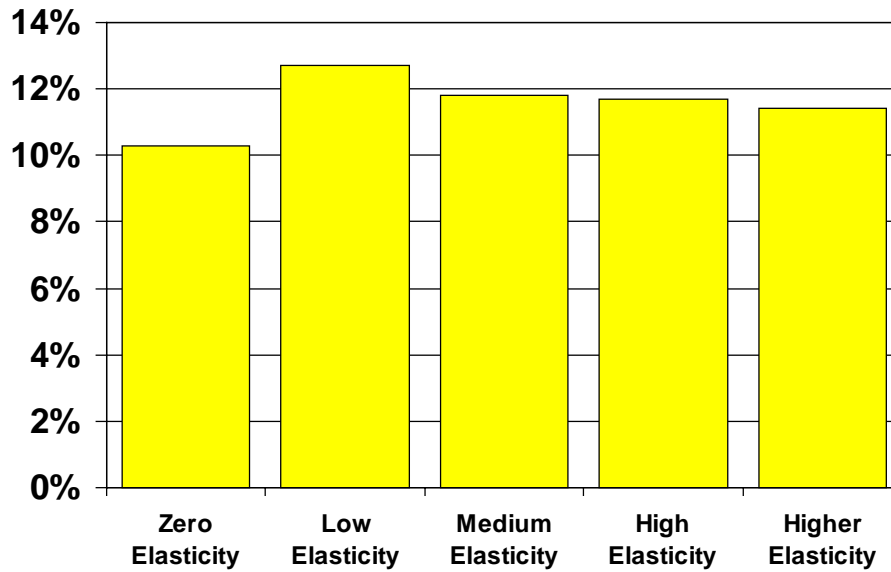## URBANIZED AREAS: 2000

Figure 2

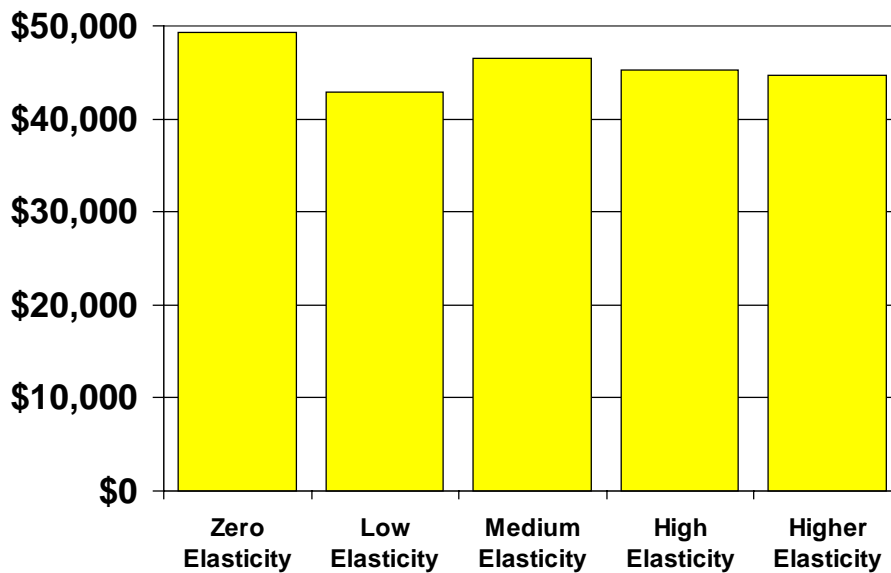# Median Income by City Elasticity
URBANIZED AREAS: 2000

Figure 3

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This same difficulty is evident in other research. A Brookings Institution report on the 2000 Census outlines income trends in major US cities and classifies cities from "balanced" in terms of their array of income groups to "stressed," where there is a higher concentration of low income households.[6] The city of Louisville, Kentucky is rated in the least healthy category, as "distressed." The seat of the University of Kentucky, Lexington, is rated in the most healthy category, as "balanced." Not surprisingly, the poverty rate in the city of Lexington is less than in the city of Louisville. But matters are different when the entire urban area is considered. The Lousville poverty rate is less than in Lexington. The difference is that Lexington had combined with its suburbs in a city-county merger, while Louisville had not. The higher poverty rates in the city of Louisville, is thus the simple and arbitrary matter of where municipal boundaries boundaries are drawn.

Urban areas are not constrained by political or administrative boundaries. Municipal boundaries can be drawn virtually anywhere. Core cities represent substantially varying percentages of urban area populations and are thus very different. Comparisons between core cities are, as a result, often misleading.[7]

As noted above, the core areas of US cities have generally experienced similar population loss trends, whether or not the core cities themselves have annexed or consolidated. Within their boundaries the same movement of people from the core to the former suburbs has continued.

"White Flight"

It has been said that history is written by the victors, or at least the survivors. This has been the case with respect to the post-World War II development of US central cities. The general story line is that US cities were decimated by "White flight," as a uniquely prejudiced White population refused to live with African-Americans, and moved to the suburbs instead. The reality is not so simple.

This is not to suggest that racial prejudice was not a factor in the decline of US core cities. But, analysts have been far too hasty to suggest that racial attitudes in the United States are worse than they might have been in other countries with similar challenges. Around the world, racial tensions tend to increase where there is an influx of visible minority (a Canadian term) populations and segregation is likely to occur. For example, a visit to some public housing estates in Stockholm will find few blonde native Swedes, and a preponderance of residents born in countries whose residents have less fair skin. The British Broadcasting Company has referred to internal migration trends in France as "white flight," as natives distance themselves from rising populations that look different.[8]

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[6] Alan Berube and Thacher Tiffany, "The Shape of the Curve: Household Income Distributions in U.S. Cities: 1979-1999," *Living Cities Census Series*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, August 2004, p. 7.

[7] Since the 2000 census, Louisville has combined with its suburbs that are in Jefferson County.

[8] Catherine Wyatt, "France forming ethnic ghettos," London: British Broadcasting Corporation, July 6, 2004 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3871447.stm, accessed December 8, 2004).

Of course, there is no justification for racial prejudice. But it is an oversimplification to indict Americans of the last 50 years as being inherently more prejudiced than others. They faced different challenges. There is no doubt that race-based "white flight" was a factor in the decline of US core cities, but there is much more to the story.

The Great Migration

The economic boom that accompanied and followed World War II attracted virtually millions of African-Americans off the farms of the South to large urban areas in other parts of the country, especially in the Northeast and Great Lakes area. On the eve of World War II, the 1940 census found that less than one-quarter of African-Americans lived outside the South. This was to change radically. From 1940 to 1970, nearly 80 percent of African-American growth occurred outside the South. This "great migration" added at 5.4 million people to the population outside the South compared to what would have been expected if the African-American population distribution had remained the same as in 1940 (Figure 4). Most of the gain was in the large urban areas. Even in the South, African-Americans were moving in large numbers into the large urban areas and away from the rural areas where there was little economic opportunity.

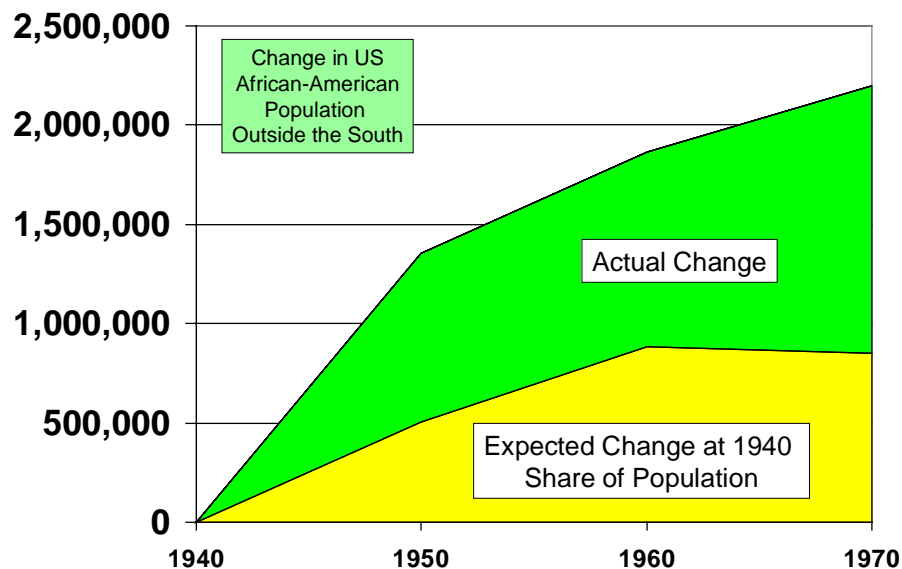## African-American Growth Outside South
1940-1970

Figure 4

Regrettably, the new residents were to find pervasive racial prejudice outside the South, though much less of it was imbedded in law. African-Americans could, for example, generally send their children to the same schools as Whites, because segregated school systems had not been established. But they faced serious legal barriers with respect to housing and were barred, often by deed restrictions, from living in many neighborhoods.

But this was a time of great growth. During the 1950's, the nation's population increased more than in any other post-War decade, at approximately 20 percent. Virtually all of the growth was in urban areas, as people, African-American and others left rural areas. Under any set of circumstances, accommodating the new residents would not have been a simple matter. It would be particularly difficult with respect to a largely poor, visible minority.

How Planning Hastened Core City Decline

But the challenges of rapid population growth, low-income migration and African-American migration might have been more gracefully accommodated had it not been for the destructive role of urban planning. The culprits were urban renewal and urban freeway construction.

Urban renewal and urban freeway construction were not confined to US urban areas. Nor was the devastation of urban planning limited to the United States. For example, Romanian dictator Nicolai Ceaucescu tore down thousands of homes and churches to build his "Palace of the People"[9] (Figure 5) and the monumental boulevard leading to it (Figure 6). But, generally, US urban areas experienced more planning based devastation than in other nations.

Figure 5: Ceaucescu's Palace of the People, Bucharest

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[9] Third largest building in the world

Figure 6: Ceaucescu's Monumental Boulevard (Bucharest)

It is often implied that these programs were imposed from the outside on the cities, by the federal government or by the highway lobby. In fact, urban renewal was a part of a deliberate effort by city leaders, downtown business interests and urban planners to remove what they deemed to be blight. The freeways were not imposed on the cities, their Washington lobbying effort required them. Mayors objected when early drafts of Interstate highway legislation failed excluded urban freeways, and made sure that ample miles were added.[10] Both of these programs were products of urban planning. According to housing advocate Catherine Bauer:

> "The planners saw redevelopment as the means for more rational and efficient organization of central cities, by removing wasteful and inappropriate land uses and facilitating new development in conformance with some kind of plan for the area."[11]

Moreover, these programs provided the impetus for an unprecedented growth in the number of urban planners[12] and may be considered to be the foundation of the profession's present influence.[13]

These post-war urban planning strategies were a principal cause of the more intense city core destruction that occurred in the United States. In the 1950s and 1960s, cities bulldozed large swaths of inner cities for urban renewal and construction of freeways. Generally low income housing areas adjacent to downtowns were removed for new development. Little thought was given to replacement housing for the dispossessed. Those fortunate enough to own their homes were compensated, but they were by no means the majority. Indeed, the urban renewal sites were

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[10] Bernard J. Friedan and Lynn B. Sagalyn, *Downtown, Inc.,* Cambridge, England: MIT Press, 1990, pp. 20-22.

[11] Quoted in Marc A. Weiss, "The Origins and Legacy of Urban Renewal," *Federal Housing Policy & Programs: Past and Present,* Edited by J. Paul Mitchell, Piscataway, NJ: The Center for Urban Policy Research/Rutgers, 1985, p. 259.

[12], Wiess, p. 254 & 269.

[13] The devastation of urban planning is not limited to the United States. Romanian dictator Nicolai Ceaucescu condemned thousands of homes and churches in the core of Bucharest to construct a new governmental center, the core of which is the "Palace of the People," the third largest building in the world.

often empty for years following the demolition. For example, some lots cleared in the 1960s Los Angeles Bunker Hill redevelopment project were still undeveloped 40 years later (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Los Angeles Urban Renewal Parking Lots 40 Years Later

Moreover, planners appear to have chosen the routes of least political resistance for their urban freeways, which meant that income areas were leveled to a greater proportionate extent other neighborhoods. As a result, the urban freeway projects became virtual extensions of the urban planning "slum-clearing" initiatives.[14]

The areas that urban planners deemed to be slums or derelict development, however, were home to the residents who lived there, the small businesses that served them. The strength of many such communities was either not perceived by the planners or of not interest to them. The leveled communities were often occupied by African-Americans who had recently arrived from the rural South. Noting that "blight, like beauty is in the eye of the beholder," Mindy Thompson Fullilove describes the African-American core city neighborhoods that were to be destroyed by urban renewal:

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[14] Friedan and Sagalyn, pp. 25-27.

> "Although they were areas of filth, crime and poverty, those funky neighborhoods provided the doorway to the American dream."[15]

At the same time, the White households who perceived themselves to be forced out of their neighborhoods by the new African-American entrants created just as much demand for housing elsewhere. The neighborhoods that the Whites left, like the bulldozed neighborhoods of African-Americans were communities. The selling households sought new housing elsewhere in the urban area, which fueled artificially high demand for new houses, mostly in the suburbs.

Besides the cleared lots that sometimes remained vacant for decades, where new residential units were constructed, they were usually well beyond the means of the displaced residents. Portland is proud of its south side urban renewal project that removed low income households and businesses to provide leafy boulevards and high-rise residential buildings far too costly for the long since displaced residents. Los Angeles drove low income residents out to build a museum and performing arts center, albeit decades later. There was land for the tall skyscrapers, such as those in downtown Los Angeles long since vacated by bank headquarters that have moved away.

A federal commission headed by Illinois Senator Paul Douglas estimated that more than 400,000 houses had been demolished by urban renewal programs from 1949 to 1967. Fullilove indicates that 1,600 neighborhoods were destroyed. The commission report estimated that 330,000 additional houses had been demolished due urban freeway construction, and projected a further 250,000 demolitions in the next five years. These two federal programs alone would destroy nearly 1,000,000 housing units and many thousands of businesses. But there was more demolition going on. The commission cites a National Association of Homebuilders report, which estimated total government demolitions in urban areas, including those not related to federal programs at 2.4 million.[16] The 1.0 to 2.4 million demolished through government programs could have housed between 3,000,000 and 7,000,000 or more people.[17] This is at the same time that millions of people, Whites and African Americans are moving to the urban areas, and at a time of strong population growth.

And, little, if any provision was made for the displaced. Fullilove notes that less than 11,000 new homes were built under urban renewal programs --- 97 percent less than would have been needed to replace the demolished 400,000 homes.[18] Nor was relocation assistance provided. The urban freeway programs had virtually no relocation assistance element through most of its implementation. The underlying, "let them eat cake" philosophy on relocation had been expressed by the President's Commission on Home Building and Home Ownership decades before, in 1932:

> "We do not concur in the argument that a slum must be allowed to exist because there are persons dwelling in them who could not afford to dwell in better surroundings. It is our view that the slums must, nevertheless, be removed for the benefit of the community. We

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[15] Mindy Thompson Fullilove, M.D., *Root Shock: How Tearing up City Neighborhoods Hurts America and What We Can Do About It,* New York: Ballantine Books, 2004, p. 24 (%%%both quotations).

[16] Douglas, pp. 80-87.

[17] Based upon 1950 average household size.

[18] Fullilove, p. 59.

are confident that a large portion of the group displaced by slum clearance will be able to find suitable accommodations elsewhere."[19]

Thus, these programs, the cooperative efforts of the federal, state and local governments, took homes away from millions of households, many of which were low-income. The federal Housing Act of 1949 had anticipated building millions of units of public housing, but this was not in anticipation of urban renewal, it was rather a strategy for addressing the housing shortages that followed World War II.

The impact on minority businesses may have been as great. For example, the African-American communities that were dismantled by urban planning were served by local businesses, owned by people who lived in the neighborhoods. There were professional offices, such as medical doctors and dentists. As is typical of small businesses, many of these operated on low profit margins and their proprietors could not afford to move. Those who owned their properties were, of course, compensated, but most did not.

And, like the residents forced out, the uprooted businesses would receive virtually no assistance from the governments that were displacing them. Even if they could move, their customers would have been dispersed and a new customer base would need to have been developed. To planners who often fail to understand the mechanisms of entrepreneurship and wealth creation, the impact of their policies on small businesses may see slight.

Public Housing Prisons

Some of the displaced moved into new public housing. But the long public housing waiting lists made this difficult. Some households managed to find accommodations in the high-rise tower apartment blocks built consistent with the urban planning doctrines of the time. This was a further disaster.

The now-demolished Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago are a good example. This line of 16 story apartment blocks stretched along the east side of the 12-lane Dan Ryan Expressway. The land cleared for this public housing project and the freeway may have dispossessed more low-income African-Americans than any other "urban improvement" project in the United States. Yet, the urban planners of the day saw this as a singular triumph of urban planning.

But what looked so ideal to the urban planners was a virtual "hell" to its residents. The Robert Taylor Homes and the many smaller but similar complexes around the nation often resembled prisons both in their design and environment.

My university colleague, Officer Walter Schwalm (Retired) of the Cook County, Illinois Sheriff's Department describes the squalid conditions in the Robert Taylor Hoes and other city of Chicago public housing projects.

> "Conditions at the CHA housing projects for the most part could only be described as grim and inhumane. The worst conditions were at the high-rise projects where large

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[19] Quoted in Weiss, p. 257.

numbers of poor people were packed into high density multi-floor buildings. Elevators in these buildings were frequently out of order, requiring tenants to walk up many floors to their apartments. The stairs in the buildings were unheated and open to the elements. Often the stairs and hallways smelled of urine and were littered with trash and garbage. And frequently the lights on the landing of the stairs were out requiring tenants to walk up the stairs in total darkness.

Many of the CHA high-rise buildings had boarded up and abandoned apartments. I remember sometimes whole floors of a building were boarded up due to a fire or some other reason.. Thus tenants in a building might be living in an apartment where all of the apartments above or below them were boarded up and unrented. Abandoned apartments were often broken into and used by street gangs for various criminal activities such as drug sales, hideouts for gang member, etc.

Many of the high rise buildings were designed so that each apartment was accessible only from an outdoor hallway which was open to the air and fenced in from floor to ceiling by a metal screen. This gave the CHA the tenants the feeling that they were living in a huge cage, almost like animals at a zoo.

I remember an elderly woman who lived on one of the upper floors of one of the projects telling me that crime was so bad at the projects that once the sun went down at night she never left her apartment for any reason until the next morning. The combination of unreliable elevators, dark and unlit hallways and stairs, street gang activity in the stairwells and abandoned apartments all created an unsafe environment for housing residents and visitors. " [20]

Many of the conditions described by Officer Schwalm would not have been allowed to exist in much of the city's regulated private rental stock. But, government has routinely been ineffective in regulating itself, which is why the team members from one side are not allowed to be the referees in a basketball game.

But climbing the stairs was just the beginning. Chicago is a very cold place in the winter. Its temperatures are routinely far below those reached in most other major US urban areas and few, if any, Western European urban areas have such bitterly cold weather. In addition, the summers are humid. The staircases at the Robert Taylor Homes were unheated and exposed to the weather. Apartments opened to hallways that were themselves exposed to the weather. Chain-link fences were on one side of the hall, and apartment doors on the other.

"Blockbusting:" Manipulating the Market

Other displaced households with somewhat greater resources sought housing in the private market. The combination of the African-American migration from the South and the urban planning inspired uprooting of African-American households through urban renewal created a huge and virtually unprecedented demand for housing. The real estate industry responded to this market distortion by a distortion of its own, "blockbusting." Blockbusters were real estate agents

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[20] Personal email from Cook County Sheriff Deputy (Retired) Walter A. Schwalm, October 8, 2004.

who relied on fear to generate sales that converted White neighborhoods to African-American neighborhoods. For the blockbuster, the incentive similar to the concept of "printing money" --- there was a substantial opportunity to receive commissions from sales that were far higher than would have been possible in normal circumstances. White residents feared that allowing African-Americans into their neighborhoods would lower property values. There was also a perception that crime rates would rise

As planners and their principally downtown business allies implemented their dreams of more tidy cities, they intensified and even created opportunities for blockbusters. It is perhaps the ultimate irony that in seeking their good intentions of a better city, urban planners helped to destroy communities beyond those they bulldozed and had assumed, in effect, a market development role for blockbusters.

The blockbusting process is described by W. Edward Orser:

> "First, real estate operators would try to find a house for sale on an all-white block, often specifically alluding to the prospect of potential racial change in the area and to the threat of lowered property values for those not wise enough to see the handwriting on the wall. As an inducement to sell, the agent typically offered a buying price at or above the current market value. Second, having secured the first house by such means, he quickly installed a new African-American tenant in the house --- renter or buyer … Third, as soon as the new tenant had taken up residence, if not sooner, the operator moved on down the block, alerting homeowners to the initial sale, warning them of the prospect of increased African-American settlement and offering to buy their houses as well. Those who were among the first to sell might be offered prices above the market value; the next several sales might approximate the actual worth of the house; those who sold later suffered a considerable loss."[21]

This destroyed some households financially and certainly left most victim households considerably less affluent than they had been before. Obviously this only made the achievement of racial harmony more difficult. White victims tended to blame the new African American residents for their losses, rather than the urban planners or even the blockbusters, whose profits were so unwittingly facilitated by the planners.

1960s Urban Disorders

All of this dislocation was not without its consequences. US central cities experienced destructive civil disorders in the middle and late 1960s, in which there were many deaths and massive destruction, by fire, of principally African-American neighborhoods. A number of these actions were precipitated by law enforcement incidents and a number immediately followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Kerner Commission, empanelled to report on the disorders linked urban renewal, along with other factors to the discontent that fueled the disorders.[22]

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[21] W. Edward Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore,* Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994, p. 102.
[22] Fullilove, p. 68.

Increasing the Demand for Suburban Housing

Even without the destructive urban planning policies, there would have been some "White Flight," because the lowest cost available housing tended to be in working class White neighborhoods near the urban core. By virtue of their lower incomes, the new African-American households gravitated to these core areas. It is thus to be expected that every African-American household that moved into a White neighborhood would displaced a White household. It was, in fact, not possible for cities to retained their White working class population and, at the same time, accommodate the millions of new African-Americans from the South. There just wasn't enough room.

The demand for suburban housing was thus driven, in large measure, by the "great migration" of people from small towns and rural areas. But, had it not been for the urban planning policies that destroyed neighborhoods and communities, it is likely that the demand for suburban housing would have been somewhat less. Today's core cities would have had more residents --- their losses would be more similar to the losses that have occurred in virtually all Western European core cities --- and they might have been spared much of the distress of the last one-half century.

This is not to suggest, however, that suburbanization would not have been the dominant form of urban development. Urban areas would be somewhat more compact, but not compact enough to make them materially different from a land use or transportation perspective. Instead of looking like lower and middle density urban areas like Atlanta or Portland, they might look more like higher density urban areas, like Los Angeles and San Jose.

Learning from History

By the early 1970s, it was becoming clear that serious mistakes had been made. Jane Jacobs had questioned the entire direction of urban planning in her 1961 book, *the Death and Life of Great American Cities.*[23]

The huge Pruitt-Igoe complex in St. Louis was demolished less than 20 years after it was opened. Many were to follow, including the infamous Robert Taylor Homes. The Chicago Housing Authority Robert Taylor Homes internet site indicates that the *Robert Taylor property became a national symbol for the errant philosophy of post-war public housing.* This assessment would have shocked the Chicago and federal planners of the time, whose commitment to what they believed was good for the community involved building these prisons.[24]

Of course, it is not possible to turn back the clock to undo the mistakes of urban planning that had so much to do with the decline of the American central city. What is important is to learn the lesson. The urban planners of the post-World War II era believed very much that they were doing right. They had no intention of destroying the city. Yet their good intentions were insufficient to annul the negative consequences that they could not at the time either foresee or understand. The post-war urban planners believed that they were "doing good." But, in fact, they were doing wrong, and it was very wrong.

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[23] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities,* New York: Vintage Books, 1961.
[24] http://www.thecha.org/housingdev/robert_taylor.html, accessed November 22, 2004.

There is an important lesson for today and the future. Urban planning doctrines have consequences. The doctrines of the 1950s destroyed communities, families and lives. The doctrines of the early 20th century are already destroying the hope of home ownership, and its attendant advantages, for many households, which could lead to economic losses that could spread throughout the urban economy, not just the core cities.

"Push" Factors

There were other factors that contributed to the decline of US city cores. These are referred to as "push" factors, because they tended to push core city residents to the suburbs. For example.

- **Inferior Municipal Performance:** US core cities have historically been characterized by high taxes, poor services and high comparative expenditures per capita. Suburban areas generally had lower taxes and better municipal services. Moreover, core city governments are more susceptible to special interests, which virtually always seek higher expenditure levels. This includes, for example, business interests seeking subsidies, and municipal employee labor unions, which also use their political power to bar cost saving service delivery options.

- **Political Corruption:** US core have, through their history, been objects of political corruption. Corruption can occur in smaller municipalities, but it is likely to be far less pervasive, both because the potential rewards for the wrongly inclined are less and because governments tend to be more responsive to voters, whose individual influence is much greater because it is not diluted in a much larger electorate.

- **High Crime Rates:** Generally, crime rates have been higher in core cities. This has been a particular concern because of the perception that the judicial system had become far too tolerant of crime.

- **Poor Educational Performance:** Core city educational systems perform poorly. As a result, households often leave the core cities by the time children enter school and households with school-age children generally do not move to the core cities. And, it is not a matter of insufficient financial resources, since many core city school systems have higher than average spending levels.

- **Mandatory School Busing:** School busing was an important "push" factor,[25] as anyone who had children in affected school districts at the time can attest. Legal interventions to eliminate de-facto racial segregation in city school systems often resulted pupils having to be transported, by school bus, long distances to school, instead of being able to walk to school. This, combined with a concern for the security of their children, led households to move to the suburbs, beyond the forced busing programs. Forced busing started in the

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[25] See http://www.ce.umn.edu/~levinson/pa8202/Case02.html. This article summarizes research on the relationship between White flight and mandatory school busing. Much of the research suggesting no material connection between White flight and mandatory school busing was published before the late 1970s, while most of the programs were still in operation.

1970s. That decade was by far the period of greatest central city loss. More than one-half of the 1950 to 2000 core city population loss occurred during the 1970s (Table 1). It is ironic that current urban planning doctrines have now come full circle, embracing the neighborhood schools that the social engineers did so much to destroy in the core cities.

	Population (in Millions)	Change from Prior Decade (in Millions)	% Change from Prior Census	Share of Change from 1950
Table 1 Population Trend: Core Cities with Boundaries Similar to 1950				
1950	25.0			
1960	23.9	-1.1	-4.4%	20.4%
1970	22.8	-1.1	-4.6%	20.2%
1970	19.7	-3.1	-13.6%	57.0%
1990	19.1	-0.5	-2.8%	10.0%
2000	19.5	0.4	2.2%	-7.7%
Calculated from US Census data. Includes the 22 core cities with more than 100,000 population in 1950. New York borough of Richmond (Staten Island) excluded due to large undeveloped areas in 1950.				

And the "push factors" did not just drive White residents out of the city. For some years, "Black Flight" has been underway, as African Americans who can afford it have been moving to the suburbs. Suburban Prince George's County in Maryland has a majority African-American population, with many residents having fled the education and public disaster that is the nation's capital, Washington, DC. Data from the 2000 census indicates that at more than 40 percent of the more than 1,000,000 new residents added to suburban Atlanta in the last 10 years were African-American. Along with an influx of Hispanics and Asians into the suburbs, the new White residents represented less than one-third. Of course none of this should be surprising. There is a universal preference for a better quality of life and households throughout the high-income world have been flocking to the suburbs for just that for decades. It is not a matter of "White" or "Black."

A Brighter Future: The Urban Renaissance

It is perhaps surprising that, despite their victimization by urban planning policies, US core cities are now experience a renaissance. Even in St. Louis, which has probably lost more of its population than any core city since the Romans sacked Carthage, there is substantial new apartment and loft construction in the core area, after decades of decline. Some core cities that have lost large amounts of population have shown signs of population growth, such as Minneapolis, Chicago and Boston.[26] There is virtually no chance that they will ever recover to their peak levels, but at least the losses have been stopped.

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[26] Each of these central cities gained population in the 1990s. More recent Census Bureau estimates (2003) indicate that modest losses have begun to occur in each.

There are reports that builders have run out of old commercial loft space for conversion and have begun building new loft buildings in the core of Chicago. The South Bronx, with destruction that looked like Dresden at the end of World War II when Presidents Carter and Reagan visited (separately) has been reborn as a vital, prospering community.[27] Something clearly has changed in the American core city.

- Generally, cities are no longer involved the process of slum clearance, perhaps simply because there is no more money. This means that communities are allowed to thrive with less government intervention. Governments at the federal, state and local level are no longer in the business of driving inner city people out of their homes.

- Improving crime rates are a major factor. The cities are becoming far safer, at least in the areas where the new housing is being built or converted. Former Mayor Rudolf Guiliani's ground breaking programs that reduced New York City's crime rates have been copied, successfully around the nation.

- Demographic trends are also favorable. Millions of "baby-boom" and younger households are now "empty-nesters." The children have gone, and they are now in their suburban homes with plenty of space. Some, though by no means most, empty nesters are moving to the new condominiums and lofts in places like downtown Seattle, Kansas City, Minneapolis, St. Louis, and Denver. But these new residents do not leave their suburban life styles behind. The large new condominium buildings on Chicago's north side have ample parking to accommodate the cars brought by the new urban residents from the suburbs. The same is true elsewhere. In a number of areas, single-family detached housing is being developed that looks no different than the new housing in the suburbs.

But poor educational performance remains an issue. Mandatory school busing has been abandoned in many places. But many households with children are still deterred by decrepit core city educational performance

But all in all, the American core city faces a more attractive future than in the past. Some of the current residential renaissance in the core is subsidy driven, either by direct payments or by tax incentives. But some of it has little to do with subsidies, and the prospect is that the market will look more kindly on core cities in the future. Core cities will never be the dense urban centers that they were in the past. Nor will they be dominant in their respective urban areas.

The trends occurring in US core cities can be described as the "suburbanization of core cities." But a trip around nearly all old US city cores will reveal an amount of development and vibrancy that is without parallel over the past one-half century.

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[27] See Paul S. Grogan and Tony Proscio, *Comeback Cities: A Blueprint for Urban Neighoborhood Revival,* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000, pp. 11-30.

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KEY WORDS
African-American, blockbusting, Bucharest, Ceaucescu, central cities, Chicago, Chicago Housing Authority, cities, city elasticity, compact city, David Rusk, green belt, Hispanic, mandatory school busing, public housing, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Robert Taylor Homes, San Francisco, segregation, smart growth, St. Louis, suburbanization, urban consolidation, urban containment, urban disorders, urban planning, urban renewal, white flight