America has created a new form of urban settlement. It is higher, bolder, and richer than anything man has yet called city.

. . . Most Americans still speak of suburbs. But a city's suburbs are no longer just bedrooms. They are no longer mere orbital satellites. They are no longer sub.


Postsuburban regions have become the most common form of metropolitan development in this country. And this emergence has undeniably transformed our lives.

—Rob Kling, Spencer Olin, and Mark Poster, eds., 
*Postsuburban California*, 1991

**In the last few decades, the United States has become a suburban nation.** Between 1950 and 1980 the number of people living in suburbia nearly tripled, soaring from 35.2 to 101.5 million. By 1990, almost half of all Americans called suburbia home.1 But whereas the

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typical commuter suburbs of the 1950s were almost entirely residential, today's suburbs feature corporate headquarters, high-tech industries, and superregional malls. Consequently, about twice as many people now commute to work within suburbs as commute between them and cities. Rapidly expanding suburbs contain more office space than downtowns and most of the new jobs. As a result, suburbs are in the forefront of American economic development and are far less dependent upon cities than before.

Such explosive growth is having a profound impact on both the landscape and people's conception of suburban life. Condominium projects, office complexes, and industrial parks abound; crowded eight-lane highways lead to commercial strips and vast shopping malls; medical facilities and research centers compete to develop open land. Cultural centers, sports arenas, and multiplex cinemas have proliferated across an increasingly built-up terrain. Meanwhile, the image of the suburb as a pastoral haven from the harsh realities of the city has been shattered by the spread of homelessness, drug addiction, and crime. Relentlessly, the countryside appears to be urbanizing. The city, with its attendant problems and pleasures, seems to be coming to the suburbs.

The rapid transformation of the landscape has prompted critics to redefine the very nature of suburbia and to contend that built-up areas on the urban fringe have become cities in their own right. Some have even declared that suburbia is dead. This article reviews the current literature in order to assess the accuracy of the latest representations of suburbs and to determine the degree to which the social practices and ideals of traditional suburbia still survive.

As we will show, there has been a turnabout in the way suburbs are perceived. During the last two decades, some analysts of contemporary suburbs have begun to sound like apologists. In the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, critics vigorously attacked suburbia for its racial discrimination, patriarchal familism, political separatism, and geographical sprawl and earnestly proposed solutions to overcome these ills. Such influential works as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Anthony Downs's *Opening Up the Suburbs* (1973), Richard Babcock and Fred Bosselman's *Exclusionary Zoning* (1973), and Michael Danielson's *The Politics of Exclusion* (1976) measured the social costs of suburban life. Many accounts stressed the disastrous consequences of suburban development for both the inner city and the nearby countryside.
By contrast, in the 1980s and early 1990s, critics recognized that the problems caused by suburbanization remained unsolved, but they implicitly accepted, and in some cases enthusiastically embraced, suburbia on its own terms. Indeed, the willingness even to consider the “new city” as a utopia in the making—albeit a “bourgeois utopia”—implies that a truly searching critique of it is unnecessary. Margaret Marsh has defined the best postwar studies of suburbia as those that “attempt to understand suburban communities from the point of view of the suburbanites.” Yet such sympathetic treatments, accepting suburban ideology at face value, may sacrifice their own critical distance. This is to a large extent what has happened with the current generation of critics; their conceptualization of the “new city” has been influenced by their own suburbanophilia.

As we will argue, the current literature reflects a skewed perception of city and suburb alike. Section one of our essay outlines the evolution, since the 1970s, of the idea that suburbs have become cities. Section two challenges that claim by pointing to the continuing social segregation within suburbs, a pattern that contemporary critics tend to minimize because they employ functional criteria—such as the increase in office space and retail trade—to measure suburban development. Although suburbs have assumed many of the functions of traditional cities, they are not fully comparable to cities. Nor have they become independent entities. In our view, equating suburbs with cities implies that suburbs possess a diversity, cosmopolitanism, political culture, and public life that most of them still lack and that most cities still afford.

Section three of this essay maintains that recent analysts have misrepresented the actual character of suburbia because they have too readily accepted certain mainstays of suburban ideology. They perpetuate the myths of suburbia’s accessibility to all Americans, its suitability for women, and its harmony with nature, despite evidence that it excludes “undesirables,” offers inadequate opportunities for women, and has a destructive impact on the environment.

Responding to the claim that “suburbia is dead,” section four employs cultural rather than functional criteria to illustrate the tenacity of traditional suburban values. Just as the social exclusivity of suburbia has survived, so too have the fundamental attitudes associated with the “classic” American suburb of the 1950s. One indication of how suburban ideals persist can be found in prime-time television shows
and Hollywood films; despite the increasing variety and complexity of their characters, they frequently promote the stereotyped gender roles and social hierarchies of the early postwar years. Only by considering the cultural and social context in which functional changes occur can scholars hope to assess the status of suburbia today.

I: The Name Game

Over the last twenty years, journalists and scholars have coined a new set of terms to redefine the changing American suburb. In the early 1970s, as concern about the inner-city crisis waned and the decentralization of the metropolis reached new proportions, "the urbanization of the suburbs" suddenly became a topic of national interest. The ensuing flurry of articles and books introduced neologisms such as "outer city," "satellite sprawl," "new city," "suburban 'city,'" "urban fringe," and "neocity" to describe this phenomenon.

If, two decades ago, commentators were taken with the novelty of urbanized suburbs, currently they are stressing the urbanized character of entire regions and their multinucleated form. This shift in emphasis was prompted by the unprecedented scope and pace of suburbanization itself, which called into question the urban-centered models of metropolitan development. By 1991, Mark Gottdiener and George Kephart were using the phrase "multinucleated metropolitan regions" to describe "fully urbanized and independent spaces that are not dominated by any central city.

Whether they focus on particular suburban towns or entire metropolitan regions, observers are unanimous in their belief that suburbs are becoming cities—though of a new sort. This is especially evident in the literature announcing the birth of the "new city." In 1981, Peter Muller called suburbia "the essence of the late-twentieth century American city," and found that its "burgeoning new centers" have further transformed it "into an increasingly independent and dominant outer city." This transformation, he asserted, "represents . . . a wholly new metropolitan reality." In 1986, Christopher B. Leinberger and Charles Lockwood argued that suburban "focal points," such as Century City in Los Angeles, constitute "urban village" cores "amid a low-density cityscape." For them, each core represents "a kind of new downtown—where the buildings are tallest, the daytime population largest, and the traffic congestion most severe." Similarly, in 1987, architec-
tural critic Paul Goldberger maintained that suburban centers are “outlying versions of downtown that have sprung up outside urban cores.” Declaring that “the major urban form of our age” is “the outtown,” he described it as an automobile-oriented, “new-style commercial center” located in places such as Post Oak near Houston and White Plains near New York.

The most sustained arguments for the urban character of suburbia have been provided by Robert Fishman and Joel Garreau. In *Bourgeois Utopias*, Fishman uses examples such as Route 128 outside of Boston and the Route 1 corridor between Princeton and New Brunswick in New Jersey to contend that

> the most important feature of postwar American development has been the almost simultaneous decentralization of housing, industry, specialized services, and office jobs; the consequent breakaway of the urban periphery from a central city it no longer needs; and the creation of a decentralized environment that nevertheless possesses all the economic and technological dynamism we associate with the city. This phenomenon, as remarkable as it is unique, is not suburbanization but a new city.

For Fishman, suburbs become self-sufficient cities when they achieve a “critical mass” of population, industry, construction, and services. Although they lack the “dominant single core and definable boundaries” that distinguish traditional downtowns, their “real structure is aptly expressed by the circular superhighways or beltways” that encircle them. These beltways link various parts of the urban periphery “without passing through the central city at all.” Because the economy of such vast peripheral zones thrives on high-tech industry and operates via highway growth corridors and electronic networks, Fishman calls them “technoburbs.” As a result of being bypassed both physically and electronically, “the old central cities have become increasingly marginal, while the technoburb has emerged as the focus of American life.”

Building on Fishman’s work, Garreau’s *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* is the first book devoted to the cultural significance of the new urban-style developments on the periphery of metropolitan America. Among his prime examples are the Camelback Corridor north of Phoenix, the Perimeter Center north of Atlanta, and the Bridgewater Mall area at the junction of Interstates 287 and 78 in New Jersey. He calls these settlements “edge cities” because they are burgeoning on the
“frontiers” of the urban landscape, and they contain “all of the functions a city ever has, albeit in a spread-out form.” According to Garreau, this “vigorous world of pioneers and immigrants, rising far from the old downtowns,” has emerged “where little save villages or farmland lay only thirty years before.” Like Fishman, Garreau views his emerging “city” as a manifestation of the long-standing American desire, best expressed by Frank Lloyd Wright, to integrate work, residence, and leisure within the natural environment. This “new, restorative synthesis,” Garreau maintains, has “smashed the very idea behind suburbia” as “a place apart.” Thus Garreau’s view that peripheral development reunites the workplaces and homes of the middle class extends Fishman’s claim that “in this transformed urban ecology the history of suburbia comes to an end.”

II: Have Suburbs Become Cities?

What are the implications of claiming that suburbs have now assumed an urban identity? Most importantly, the competition to baptize the “new city” deflects attention from the enduring social realities behind the ephemeral nomenclature. Designations such as Goldberger’s “outtowns” and Leinberger and Lockwood’s “urban villages,” while implying the independence of suburbs from cities, tell nothing about the social, cultural, and political identity of these settlements. Their coiners are curiously silent about some of the most pronounced features of the contemporary suburb. By focusing on morphology and aesthetics, they play down suburban parochialism and separatism. In the process, they lose sight of the fact that, historically, suburbs have sought to preserve social homogeneity and masculine authority. And, in defining the “new city,” critics misrepresent what by implication is the “old” one; they forget that it possesses social and cultural heterogeneity still absent from much of suburbia. This section challenges the “urbanity” that has been claimed for built-up ‘burbs by looking at their racial and class segregation. As we will demonstrate, the functional criteria used by those who regard suburbs as cities lead them to understate the social exclusivity of suburbs while overstating their cultural variety.

Advocates of the “new cities”—such as Muller, Fishman, and Garreau—contend that suburbs have broken away from the older central cities that spawned them. But the relation between the contem-
Temporar...porary suburbs and the central cities is one of continued interdependence. In *The New Suburbanization*, Thomas M. Stanback, Jr., illustrates how even today “city and suburb, linked in a symbiotic yet competitive relationship, together constitute an economic system—the metropolitan economy.” The central city depends heavily on the suburban workforce, while at the same time it sends a considerable number of its own residents to jobs in outlying areas. The urban and suburban sectors of the metropolitan economy constantly exchange goods and services; for example, branch stores and back offices on the periphery are linked to retail and corporate headquarters based downtown. The greatest proof of their interdependence can be found in the location of the “new cities”; they flourish on the outskirts of established urban centers. As Jean Gottmann observes, “these ‘emerging cities’ in suburban areas” are “really satellites of major central cities.” For all the fanfare, suburbs have not achieved full autonomy.

Furthermore, the socioeconomic character of suburbs has not changed fundamentally. In the past few decades, the suburbs have grown markedly more diverse, but overall they remain heavily segregated by race and class. The traditional bedroom suburb of the 1950s was the home of young, white, middle-class families. By the 1970s, however, a single suburban type no longer predominated. Instead, as Muller shows, there was a wide range of community types: upper-income suburbs, middle-class suburbs, working-class suburbs, suburban cosmopolitan centers, and even black suburbs. Yet, despite such diversification, suburbia has remained an essentially exclusive domain. For example, in 1980, blacks constituted just 6.1 percent of suburbanites, as compared to 23.4 percent of city dwellers. That same year, only 8.2 percent of suburbanites reported incomes below the federal poverty line, as compared to 17.2 percent of city residents. Minorities and the poor are still excluded from most suburbs; even when they do relocate to suburbia, they usually settle in heavily segregated areas. “Whether for reasons of race, insufficient income, or both,” Muller says, “these populations are widely refused access to the voluntary congregations of mainstream suburbia and are compelled to cluster behind powerful social barriers in the least desirable living environments of the outer city.”

Neither the mere presence nor the growing proportion of minority groups and poor people within suburbs should necessarily be taken as evidence of “urbanization.” Aggregate population figures provide few
clues to the pattern—let alone the extent—of social interaction occurring within a community. In their introduction to *Postsuburban California*, Rob Kling, Spencer Olin, and Mark Poster make much of the Hispanic and Asian presence in Orange County and its role in bringing about a “shift from provincialism to cosmopolitanism.” Yet, in 1980, the population of Orange County was 87.2 percent white, its poverty level was a mere 5.2 percent, and its minority groups were residing in distinct concentrations: Hispanics in Santa Ana, Asians in Westminster and Garden Grove. As Gottdiener and Kephart point out, “this type of [population] distribution contrasts markedly with that in traditional urban centers, which are more racially heterogeneous, even if they are in many cases fragmented into segregated areas.” Moreover, the traditional centers—with their compact downtowns, public spaces, social institutions, and mass transportation—still generate a greater intermingling of diverse groups than occurs in multicentered, automobile-oriented “new cities.” Eric E. Lampard captured how segregation persists in contemporary suburban America when he wrote in 1983 that “the population was relentlessly spreading out via superhighways and freeways into ‘defensible,’ low density, residential space . . . graded by socioeconomic class, age, and affinity.”

The increasing movement of minorities out of the cities has not substantially diminished racial segregation in suburbs, particularly between blacks and whites. The migration of blacks to the suburbs began to pick up in the late 1960s and accelerated rapidly during the next decade. Between 1970 and 1980, the number of black suburbanites rose an average of 4 percent annually. In comparison, the population of white suburbanites grew at a rate of only 1.5 percent. Consequently, the proportion of all suburbanites who were black climbed from 4.8 percent in 1970 to 6.1 percent in 1980. At the same time, the proportion of all blacks residing in suburbs jumped from 16 to 21 percent. Yet when John Logan and Mark Schneider examined data on over 1,600 incorporated suburbs in forty-four metropolitan regions for 1970 and 1980, they found that black suburbanization had “followed well-established patterns of segregation.” Commenting on this phenomenon, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton noted in 1988 that “once a suburb acquires a visible black presence, it tends to attract more blacks than whites, which leads to neighborhood secession and the emergence of a black enclave.” Citing a half-dozen studies conducted between the mid-seventies and mid-eighties, they concluded that
"suburban secession and segregation" were still being "generated through a variety of individual and institutional mechanisms, including redlining, restrictive zoning, organized resistance to black entry, and racial steering."38

The growing presence of poor people beyond the city limits has not reduced suburban class segregation. The migration outward of the urban poor began in the 1960s.39 Suburbanites living below the poverty line amounted to 5,199,000 (or 7.1 percent) by 1970 and rose to 7,377,000 (or 8.2 percent) by 1980. The uneven distribution of poor people among suburbs is indicated by the large differential in per-capita income between suburbs. A Rand Corporation study noted that

the ten suburbs with the richest residents, including Grosse Point Farms (MI), Beverly Hills (CA), and Scarsdale (NY), had average per-capita incomes of over $15,000 in 1977, but the ten places with the poorest populations—East St. Louis (MO), Mission (Hidalgo County, TX), and Compton (CA), among others—showed [incomes of] less than $4,000 per capita.40

By 1989, the differences in per-capita income between suburbs had grown much larger and the number of suburbanites earning incomes below the poverty line had risen to 9.5 million. Summing up these trends, Newsweek declared that "whites still constitute a majority of poor suburbanites. But minorities—25 percent of all black suburbanites and 22 percent of Hispanics—are the most severely affected: they are increasingly clustered in heavily segregated suburbs. . . ."41

What accounts for these segregated patterns and exclusionary practices? "White flight" has contributed heavily to the mushrooming growth of the suburbs. The reasons why white middle-class Americans have left the cities in large numbers since the Second World War are familiar: the desire to flee crime, drugs, poor schools, expensive housing, and high taxes, as well as the quest for better jobs, home ownership, clean air, recreational space, and a safer place to raise children. That suburbanites effectively wall out those unlike themselves after arriving, however, suggests that a major force driving their migration is the wish to escape racial and class intermingling.42 In the United States, upward mobility and social status are predicated on living apart from racial and economic groups considered inferior. As Michael N. Danielson remarks in The Politics of Exclusion, "most Americans . . . are convinced that a decent home, nice neighborhood, and good schools depend heavily on the absence of lower-income and
minority groups." Thus it is not simply the racism of individuals but also the collectively perceived threat that race and class differences pose to home ownership and social standing that drives suburbanites to keep their territory segregated.

Recent observers understate the significance of suburbia's segregation because they conceptualize the so-called "new city" in largely physical and technological terms. Their chief measures are the extent of its housing, jobs, office space, and shopping. For Leinberger and Lockwood, "high-rise office buildings and hotels, increasingly sophisticated shopping, and high-density housing" signal the presence of "urban-village cores." Similarly, for Goldberger the "outtown" is defined by "strange clusters of office towers and shopping malls and hotels and condominiums that are away from downtowns." Garreau also uses criteria that are "above all else meant to be functional" when he defines his "edge city"; it must have at least five million square feet of leasable office space, at least 600,000 square feet of leasable retail space, and more jobs than bedrooms. In addition, it must "be perceived by the population as one place . . . that 'has it all,' from jobs, to shopping, to entertainment."

At least five writers—Muller, Leinberger and Lockwood, Fishman, and Garreau—also argue that a "critical mass" of such attributes transforms a suburb into a city. "The complex economy of the former suburbs has now reached a critical mass," Fishman writes: "These multi-functional late-20th-century 'suburbs' . . . have become a new kind of city." This line of thought suggests that a certain quantitative change in the economy and built environment—the sheer agglomeration of services, jobs, and buildings—has generated a qualitative transformation that yields the "new city." This is the suburb as nuclear reactor, complete with "core" and "critical mass."

The nuclear metaphor points to the technocratic fallacy operating in these accounts. By stressing the infrastructure rather than the human element in defining cities, these writers minimize the social interaction and cultural variety that are a crucial part of urban life. Like "critical mass," Fishman's neologism "technoburb" focuses on the high-tech economies of industrialized suburban areas, as well as on the transportation and communication networks that make it possible for them to exist apart from cities. Implying that advances in science and engineering make deconcentration inevitable, the term "technoburb" conceals the purposefully segregated arrangement of this brave new world. For,
as Andrea Oppenheimer Dean and others have pointed out, “the new suburban cities” possess “one thing in common: they are growing in white, upper-middle-class areas.”

The preoccupation with functional rather than social measures of urbanity extends even to matters of culture, which those who argue for the “new city” define in terms of consumption. In *Postsuburban California*, Kling, Olin, and Poster describe Orange County as having a well-developed “cosmopolitan culture,” which turns out to be based on the existence of

a ready clientele for ethnic restaurants, European and Japanese cars, a wide variety of imported goods, and cultural events such as modern theater, foreign films, and classical music. Not satisfied with mainstream goods and services that were available in their neighborhood shopping centers, these residents were willing to patronize establishments virtually anywhere in the county that catered to their tastes.

The presence of words like “clientele,” “shopping,” “patronize,” and “cater” reveals that this culture is fully commodified, and the sequence in which the consumables are presented suggests that restaurants and cars have more caché than the arts. The suspicion that fine dining and consumption have become the indispensable marks of urban culture is confirmed when Fishman proclaims that “the new city is a city à la carte.”

Far from promoting cosmopolitanism, the culture of consumption merely reinforces the homogeneity it supposedly erodes. Consumer culture is built to conformist standards because it must appeal to many people to achieve commercial success. At the same time that it solidifies group identity, however, status-conscious consumerism also magnifies the social distinctions that mark off one group from another. Ultimately, such “cosmopolitanism” contributes to the conformity and exclusivity that typify contemporary suburbs. As Goldberger complains about Orange County, this is “community as product more than community as place.”

Just as suburban consumption is equated with cosmopolitan culture, so too private malls dedicated to profit are likened to downtown public space. “Superregional malls are the suburban counterparts of Main Street,” writes Muller. They constitute “a virtual one-stop culture,” notes William S. Kowinski, “providing a cornucopia of products nestled in an ecology of community, entertainment, and societal
identity." In the mall, a palace of consumption takes on the appearance of a civic arena. With fountains and benches, healthmobiles and community information booths, malls convey the impression that they are enclosed versions of town squares. But the mall is not a new downtown; it is private property masquerading as public space. In this policed enclosure, where spending is the only alternative to loitering, the rights of assembly and free speech are not guaranteed as they would be in a city park or square. With its travertine "boulevards" that serve as sanitized streets, the mall is a controlled, artificial environment that screens out undesirable persons and weather and even the passage of time. However much it may assume the guise of a public forum or community center, the entire enterprise is fundamentally dedicated to promoting consumption.

The ability of malls to keep out "undesirables" extends to suburbia as a whole. Because incorporated suburbs have their own governments and services, they bear a superficial likeness to cities. But one of the underlying reasons why suburbanites sought to establish their political independence in the first place was to pass laws to restrict access to outsiders and to preserve a low-density landscape. As Jon C. Teaford remarks, "through the exercise of municipal zoning powers, each of these newly-incorporated communities could exclude whatever seemed obnoxious or threatening." Over the years, the suburbs have devised an array of defensive zoning measures, from the regulation of building lot sizes and construction procedures to prohibitions on multiple dwellings. "Restrictive techniques of land-use control are both innumerable and interchangeable," Richard F. Babcock and Fred P. Bosselman explained in the 1970s. "If a particular device is invalidated it is often easy for the town to substitute a different device that has the same depressing effect." The still widespread stipulation that new housing take the form of single-family homes on large lots pushes up prices and effectively keeps out lower-income groups, in which racial minorities are disproportionately represented. Once established, this socioeconomic uniformity is self-perpetuating. What Danielson found in the 1970s remains true today: "Most suburban jurisdictions are small and have relatively homogeneous populations, which makes it easier to secure consensus on exclusionary policies than is commonly the case in larger and more heterogeneous cities." Thus, for all the claims of "outer city" cosmopolitanism, suburban social engineering succeeds...
precisely because suburbs continue to lack—and actively resist—the varied populations and interests that distinguish urban centers.

III: Suburbanophilia

Evidence that the “old” suburbia still flourishes can be found in the way its ideals tacitly inform discussion of the “new city.” Believing that the suburban way of life holds promise and hoping that the problems of the old suburbia will disappear in the new, recent critics sometimes sound like boosters. For example, although they acknowledge the barriers that restrict entry into suburbs, some authors discuss housing, commuting, and “lifestyle” options available to many suburbanites as though these choices were open to all. The notion that choice is now a key ingredient of suburbia has been developed most fully by Fishman, who contends that in the technoburbs, “families create their own ‘cities’ out of the destinations they can reach (usually travelling by car) in a reasonable length of time.” Only traffic congestion, he argues, can deny “the ready access that is a hallmark of the new city.” Ready access for whom? The rhetoric of free choice negates—but in no way alters—the segregated reality of suburban life.

Kling, Olin, and Poster also disguise the barriers to access within suburbs. They imply the absence of racial and class segregation in Orange County when they mention the minorities living there only as an example of the county’s cosmopolitanism. For them, the tightly clustered ethnic enclaves of Garden Grove, Westminster, and Santa Ana exist by virtue of free choice rather than socioeconomic constraint; these communities are regarded as significant only because of their abundance of ethnic restaurants and cafés. Defining cosmopolitanism in terms of cuisine, they maintain that poor Mexicans and Vietnamese who eat their native food at home enjoy a “more genuine . . . cosmopolitan consumption” than is “accessible to a white diner.” Thus by reducing minority cultures to a matter of culinary expertise and by overlooking the unequal status of minorities in other respects, Kling, Olin, and Poster manage to suggest that the only people without full access in Orange County are members of the white, privileged classes. The euphemisms they employ to conclude their analysis—such as “segmentation” for segregation and “tensions” for social conflict—betray their awareness of the county’s divided character.
Nevertheless, they treat racial and class fragmentation as though it were evidence of Orange County’s “impressive mingling of diverse cultures.”

Another example of the tendency among critics to make the best of suburbia lies in their belief that, by its very nature, the “new city” liberates suburban women from the domestic servitude of the past. Since the late 1950s, a sharply rising proportion of married women has been employed outside the home, especially in retail trade and back-office jobs. According to Fishman, the increased availability of jobs close to home that offer decent pay and permit flexible schedules, has been “responsible for the remarkable influx of married women into the work force.” He believes that the “new city . . . decisively breaks with the older suburban pattern that restricted married middle-class women with children to a life of neighborhood-oriented domesticity.” For this reason, Fishman concludes, “the economic and spatial structure of the new city tends to equalize gender roles.” Garreau goes even further to claim that his “Edge City” represents “the empowerment of women.”

But, while women may appear to be freer in the “new city,” the fact of their paid employment does not guarantee an end to their exploitation. Given the continuing expectation that they will do most of the housework and provide most of the child care—not to mention chauffeuring the children—their opportunity to labor outside the home carries with it an invitation to perform double duty. Moreover, the jobs they usually fill—whether in retail sales or electronic sweatshops—offer low pay, few benefits, inadequate day care, and little security or chance of promotion to managerial positions. Even worse, the word- and data-processing jobs that constitute the mainstay of today’s “information factories” are hazardous to health: “Women complain of physical problems such as eye strain, fatigue, even radiation exposure,” in addition to new levels of stress brought on by computer monitoring of their performance. It is true that married middle-class suburban women are no longer restricted to being home-bound caretakers of house, children, and commuting husband. Yet, even if the “imposed domesticity of the 50s” is disappearing, the expanding role of middle-class suburban women in the labor force has not rescued them from their subordinate status.

Some observers also paint a deceptively rosy picture of suburbia when they portray it in temporal, not spatial, terms. Garreau writes that “Edge Cities are not created in units of distance, but in units of time.”
Similarly, Fishman contends that "the essential element in the structure of the new city" is that it is "a megalopolis based on time rather than space."75 This formulation uses driving time as the main measure of distances that are too large to cover on foot. By transferring attention from the geographical extent of the built environment to the length of time required to traverse it by car, these critics gloss over the physical vastness of the new conurbations. Yet, given the complex patterns of commuting, shopping, and socializing engaged in by suburbanites and the considerable distances that they travel, space has become all the more important as a measure of suburban sprawl. As Gottdiener notes, "with the . . . increase in spatial scale interjecting itself in economic, political and cultural activities," the only way to comprehend these "massive multi-centered regions" is by focusing on spatial relations.76 Maps and aerial views clearly show that contemporary stretch suburbs are consuming ever-greater quantities of once-open land.

Minimizing the suburban hunger for space also helps to sustain the myth that suburbs are ecologically balanced environments. Fishman envisions the "new city" as forming "a marriage of town and country, a reconciliation of nature and the man-made world."77 Garreau likewise imagines "a newfound union of nature and art" enjoying marital bliss along the interstate. But he claims even more for Edge City, describing it as "the most purposeful attempt Americans have made since the days of the Founding Fathers . . . to create something like a new Eden."78 Yet there is a snake in this garden, one brought in by the gardeners themselves. Their Wrightian celebration of wide, open green spaces cannot hide the fact that suburbanization is an ecologically devastating mode of life, one that savages the nature in which it nests. Bulldozing open acres in the name of a spurious balance between human beings and nature, developers gobble up land, carving deeper and deeper into the countryside. Each new suburb is built to reclaim the green tranquillity that the overbuilding of the last suburb has already destroyed.79 Wanting to believe that suburban growth will lead us "back to the garden," post-Woodstock critics fail to expose the peculiar logic of suburbanization: that leapfrogging suburbs recreate the very conditions that suburbanites flee.

What critics in the 1970s were unable to do, and those in the 1980s and 1990s seem unwilling to attempt, is to desuburbanize their thinking: to transcend the traditional American mindset that regards moving ever outward—from cities, to suburbs, to exurbs and beyond—
as the final answer to any problem, from urban decline to peripheral congestion. Rather than accept continued suburbanization and its destructive consequences as inevitable, and rather than treat as natural the subordination of one part of the metropolis to another, critics need to think in regional terms.

Critics in the 1960s were quasi-regionalist in approach; they treated the suburbs as dependent upon the city and thus necessarily focused on the interaction between the two. Yet most of them did not have a vision of the role that outlying rural land would play—both for development and refuge from it—as suburbanization continued. Responding to the unprecedented growth of suburbs since then, recent analysts, with their urban-based neologisms and assertions of suburban autonomy, have tended to regard the suburbs as a bold new world no longer connected to the city and free to encroach on the exurbs. In order to reach a more balanced and accurate understanding of today's cities and suburbs—where conditions are very different from those of the immediate postwar period—we need to devise a new paradigm that brings their interactive relation back into focus while also considering the part played by vulnerable exurbs. Currently, critics overlook the one-sidedness of their analysis; they discuss access without mentioning restriction, time without considering space, women's opportunities without comparing them to men's, the planting of gardens without the razing of forests. They forget that suburbia does not constitute a world unto itself but a particular place and set of attitudes created in response to the overall metropolitan context.

This compartmentalizing of life in suburbia, setting it apart from the metropolitan region as a whole, mirrors the segregated character of the suburbs themselves. Fishman, Garreau, and others regard the "new city" not as an underlying cause but as the ultimate solution to the problems plaguing urbanized regions. Thus they reverse the way scholars and journalists viewed suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s. This reversal is due not only to the conservative course that national politics took during the 1980s and the continuing suburbanization of the United States but also to the life experiences of the critics themselves, many of whom were born, raised, or now reside in suburbia. Having given up on the "old city" as a place where social equity and ecological balance may be achieved, they have extolled a verdant "new city"—rather like the emerald one in The Wizard of Oz—where their dreams of an ideal society may be realized. Their search for redemption through nature
and salvation on the frontier places them within a long American cultural tradition. But as Dorothy and Toto discovered, there is a lot more show than substance to the Emerald City.

IV: Is Suburban Ideology Dead?

Because critics rely on functional rather than cultural criteria to proclaim the birth of the “new city,” they forget that the “old” suburbia represented something more than a bedroom community. Focusing on changes in the suburban infrastructure enables Fishman to declare that “suburbia in its traditional sense now belongs to the past.”83 Similarly, Marsh’s emphasis on new patterns in suburban family life—especially “wives holding jobs outside the home”—permits her to assert that “the suburban domestic ideal . . . no longer holds sway.”84 Both conclusions assume that functional and behavioral changes rapidly ensure liberating ideological ones. The patterns of employment and commuting that defined “classic suburbia”—where the white middle-class housewife and mother was sequestered at home while her husband worked in the city—may have evolved. But the fundamental attitudes underlying this way of life remain potent.85 They include belief in female subordination, class stratification, and racial segregation, all wrapped up in a pastoral mythology. Nearly two hundred years in the making, suburban ideals are still widespread.86 They continue to influence social behavior, particularly through mass culture media, and must be taken into account when analyzing the status of the suburbs today. As this section will demonstrate, television and film have helped keep the “old” suburbia alive.

Representations that reinforce suburban ideals abound both on television and in the movies. Televised images of suburbia are so prevalent that they now operate simultaneously on many levels. Programs affectionately recalling earlier eras—such as “The Wonder Years” (1988–1993), a sitcom which portrays the white-bread homogeneity of a boy’s suburban schooldays in the 1960s—coexist with reruns of the original 1950s celebrations of suburban life—such as “Leave It to Beaver” (1957–1963) and “Father Knows Best” (1954–1962), where dads dispense sage advice to compliant wives and children. These visions of suburban yesteryear are complemented by programs that depict white middle-class life today. Among them are “Growing Pains” (1985–1992), which has been called a “Father Knows Best” for the
1980s, and “Family Ties” (1982–1989), a role-reversal comedy featuring a teenage son who worships William F. Buckley, Jr., espouses Reaganomics, and strives to bring his ex-hippie parents more in line with conventional suburban values. Finally, shows such as “Married . . . with Children” (1987– ), “The Simpsons” (1990– ), and “Dinosaurs” (1992– ) parody the now-classic suburban sitcoms of the 1950s only to recreate in detail for new audiences the very conventions of suburban life they ostensibly subvert.

Cinematic treatments of suburbia offer a similar assortment of takes on a patriarchal world. In the nostalgic Peggy Sue Got Married (1986), an unhappily wed suburban mother of the 1980s magically returns to her youth, where she passively reenters the relationship that will entrap her. Films dating from the “golden age” of suburbia, such as Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House (1948) and The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit (1956), focus sympathetically on the struggle of commuting husbands to maintain their wives and children in pastoral splendor. Contemporary comedies of domestic crisis, such as Home Alone (1991) and Suburban Commando (1991), shore up the embattled patriarchy by relying on stand-in fathers, whether from grammar school or outer space, to protect the home and community against outsiders. Golden-age suburbia has also been the subject of film parodies like Edward Scissorhands (1990), which, in the midst of recounting a cruel fairy tale of suburban ostracism, still fondly reimagines the quaint conformity and rigid gender roles of tract-house life.

Television has played an especially decisive part in the social construction of suburbia. Television came of age during the suburban boom of the 1950s, and, as a home-based form of entertainment, it soon emerged as the perfect vehicle to sell the suburban lifestyle—with its fixation on good housekeeping, the newest appliances, and a late-model car—to a national audience. Television shows and advertisements offered consumer items and behavioral models designed to be attractive to all members of the family. Erasing time as easily as space, television represented consumer-oriented suburbia, with its housebound mothers and commuting fathers, as both perennial and universal; in the early 1960s, the cartoon series “The Flintstones” (1960–1966) and “The Jetsons” (1962–1963) imagined gadget-conscious suburban life as the ultimate human condition, from the stone age to the space age.

To be sure, the effect of television as a socializing agent is much disputed by theoreticians of mass media. While earlier analysts re-
garded consumers as passive recipients of capitalist brainwashing, more recently, proponents of the “uses and gratifications” approach have contended that television viewers are “actively judging and deciding subjects,” who manipulate visual images rather than being manipulated by them. But both of these positions overstate the case. The crux of the matter is, as Stephen Heath points out, that experience and reality “are not separate from but are also determined by television which is a fundamental part of them. . . . [They] are complexly defined, mediated, [and] realized in new ways in which the power of the media is crucial.” Thus, rather than regarding the viewer as incapable of resisting or interpreting images, it makes more sense to view television reception as a partly determined, partly determinative process. As Ella Taylor puts it, television images “both echo and participate in the shaping of cultural trends.”

Representations of suburban life on television help hold social practices in place by sanctioning classic suburban patterns of consumption, social exclusivity, and familial relations. In the 1990s, many television programs continue to reinforce the myth of suburbia as a haven in which white middle-class families live sheltered from the ills of the city. Not only are suburban-based series overwhelmingly populated by well-to-do whites, but when urban outsiders do appear, their working-class behavior makes them objects of humor and suspicion.

segregates its imaginary suburbs to an even greater degree than suburbs are segregated in real life.\textsuperscript{94}

Television’s penchant for suburban sameness is coupled with its preference for traditional male-female roles.\textsuperscript{95} In particular the suburban middle-class housewife has been stereotyped as consumer, home manager, and sexual object.\textsuperscript{96} The “ideal” role of the suburban woman was most thoroughly charted in the situation comedies that originated in the 1950s, such as “The Donna Reed Show” (1958–1966) and “The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet” (1952–1966). These series provided a “natural” environment in which docile homemakers acted out prescribed rituals of social interaction and material consumption. As Mary Beth Haralovich writes, “the suburban family sitcom indicates the degree of institutional as well as popular support for ideologies which naturalize class and gender identities.”\textsuperscript{97}

But if in the 1950s television focused on minor family crises which momentarily disrupted the placid domesticity of suburbia, programming in the 1980s explored the threat to familial harmony posed by working women\textsuperscript{98} and reiterated the message that they belonged at home. In her 1989 study of “prime-time families,” Ella Taylor concludes that many contemporary television shows provide “at best a rehearsal of the costs of careerism for women, at worst an outright reproof for women who seek challenging work.”\textsuperscript{99} Susan Faludi extensively documents in \textit{Backlash} that “in the mid-’80s, [television] reconstructed a ‘traditional’ female hierarchy, placing suburban homemakers on the top, career women on the lower rungs, and single women at the very bottom.”\textsuperscript{100} With a few exceptions, such as “L.A. Law” (1986– ) and “Murphy Brown” (1988– ), network television featured women like Hope Murdoch in “thirtysomething” (1987–1991), who gave up her career to stay home with the kids, or Elizabeth Lubbock in “Just the Ten of Us” (1988–1990), an outspoken antifeminist who proved her womanhood as a homemaker while her gym-teacher husband struggled to make ends meet.

Many Hollywood films also bolster the idea that women must stay at home to preserve suburban domesticity. Sometimes they elaborate a related theme: that women may need to combat outsiders who menace the security of suburban neighborhoods. Two of the most notorious affirmations of the classic female sequestration pattern are \textit{Fatal Attraction} (1987) and \textit{Presumed Innocent} (1990).\textsuperscript{101} In \textit{Fatal Attraction} -
tion, a husband’s efforts to end a brief affair with a career woman he meets at work in the city lead her to attack his family and home in the suburbs. The spurned woman is presented amid trappings of the horror genre—lurid sunsets, oil-barrel fires outside her apartment—and she brings urban evil into the suburban backyard, schoolground, and colonial-style home. She can only be stopped by a bullet, and only the beleaguered wife is able to pull the trigger, thereby rescuing the nuclear family and shoring up patriarchy.\footnote{102} In *Presumed Innocent*, a suburban homemaker makes a preemptive strike; she murders her husband’s lawyer mistress and conceals the crime so well that her husband is almost convicted of it. Both films portray wives fighting the dangerous power that urban career women exert over their husbands. What seems at first to be a feminist twist—the wives, not the husbands, seize the initiative and intervene—in fact reinforces the notion that suburban women are vitally needed in the home to defend their marriages and families against other women who have none. The film critic Kathi Maio neatly sums up Hollywood’s “anti-feminist punch”: “the good/chaste/suburban/wife/homemaker must fend off the attack of the evil/sexy/urban/slut/career woman. When the Mother and the Whore do battle, can the victor be in doubt?”\footnote{103}

Films in which women battle to save home, husband, and children belong to a larger, “home-in-danger” genre that exploits suburbanite fears that their way of life is imperiled by the breakdown of exclusivity, the traditional family, and cultural homogeneity. The genre is predicated on the nineteenth-century realization—explored by Poe, Dickens, and others—that since the bourgeois household appears to be the last refuge from social disruption, nothing will be more terrifying than threats to the safety of the family in its own home.\footnote{104} *The 'Burbs* (1989), one of the best recent examples, is a comic analysis of suburban paranoia in which bickering neighbors unite to spy on peculiar new residents with foreign accents, whom they suspect of being body snatchers. Patient, detached wives mother their inept husbands through futile raids on the newcomers’ house. Momentary doubts prompt the protagonist to shout, “so they’re different—they didn’t do anything to us,” but his plea for tolerance loses all credibility when he discovers that the trunk of the strangers’ car is full of human bones. The film ends with the most aggressive of the vigilantes shouting to television cameras, “I think the message to psychos, fanatics, murderers, nutcases
all over the world is: do not mess with suburbanites, because we’re just not going to take it anymore.” Despite its self-mocking tone, the film vocalizes and validates suburban fears of the immigrant Other.

In films focusing on children and teenagers, the streets and backyards of suburbia belong to kids, who create a microcosmic version of their parents’ world. Among the most-watched films of all time, suburban classics such as *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) and *Back to the Future* (I, II, and III) (1985–1990) follow a “kids save the day” plot in which adults are hopeless bumblers or symbols of sinister self-interest. Only the children, by practicing self-reliance and ingenuity, can eventually restore the social order that their parents taught them and thus maintain its gender and class structures. In *E.T.*, children in a tract-house settlement in California befriend a childlike extraterrestrial whose only aim is to “go home.” While their sister trails behind, boys on their bikes succeed in foiling representatives of the adult world (the U.S. government and the police) so that domestic harmony can be restored.

The *Back to the Future* trilogy uses its complex chronology to convey a similar message: young males must temporarily assume adult responsibility to protect their suburban world from outsiders. With the aid of a father figure, Doc Brown, a teenager named Marty McFly alters history to provide a better life for his family in their suburban California town, “Hill Valley.” In the first film, Marty returns to the 1950s to redirect the course of his parents’ relationship by standing up, in the place of his father, to the local bully, Biff. The second film, set in the near future, echoes Frank Capra’s *It’s A Wonderful Life* (1946) by showing the urban nightmare that would have befallen Hill Valley if Biff’s son had succeeded in turning the town over to developers and to organized crime. As in Capra’s film, the hero realizes that he can save his town only by remaining in it as a loyal citizen and by raising his children there. The third episode of *Back to the Future* journeys to the Wild West period of the town’s history, when Biff’s ancestors were also determined to foment crime and vice. Foiling his enemies one last time, Marty returns to the present and rejoins his passive girlfriend, who has slept through most of the story. He reassumes the conventional role of boyfriend and husband-to-be in a now-stable suburb in the 1980s, the best of all possible worlds.

Thus, despite the growth of the “new city,” the suburbs are still frequently represented as the same old neighborhood, though now they
are besieged by grave new threats—sexual, social, supernatural—that require ever more extreme responses. As these examples indicate, women's opportunity to work in high-rise office parks down the interstate has not brought about the "end of suburbia." Amid a changing landscape, the "suburbanization" of a new generation continues, aided by the long-lived relics of the 1950s suburb. From detergent commercials on daytime television to comic strips such as "The Family Circus," "Blondie," and "Dennis the Menace," the middle-class housewife still stands at the stove while commuting husband and rambunctious kids dominate the action and create piles of laundry around her. In many representations, children assume parental roles and reestablish domestic order so as to preserve a suburban way of life. Through such rites de passage, children are taught to defend and practice the same values as their parents, for the video image performs the same work of socialization on its young audience that it depicts happening to the children onscreen. Thus it comes as no surprise that in 1986 Newsweek ran an article on suburbia subtitled "Boomers Are Behaving Like Their Parents" or that in 1987 a suburban rock group's anthem to teen-age alienation concluded:

And the kids in the basement will carry on the family name
And the kids in the basement will turn out just the same
And the kids in the basement will have more kids to blame.

Far from expiring, the ideology of suburbia—as embodied in film, television, and other forms of mass culture—still aggressively perpetuates the stereotypes upon which the traditional suburb was built.

Thus, while some scholars and journalists have declared that suburbia is now "over," its vitality—whether defined in physical, social, or cultural terms—remains undiminished. Indeed, the forces driving suburbanization have grown even stronger in the last few decades. Since World War II, suburban America has changed in substantial and even profound ways. But the rush to identify its new features has obscured something equally important—the underlying continuity in its character. Prematurely declaring the death of traditional suburbia, observers overlook the persistence of its essential features: a continuing resistance to heterogeneity and a desire to remain apart. Even as suburbia evolves, its ethos is likely to endure. Rather than having come to an end, the history of suburbia is still in the making.
NOTES


5. Baldassare defines the “utopian view” as one of the three major perspectives on the future of the suburbs (Trouble in Paradise, 1–2, 207).


10. Even in the 1970s, geographers such as James E. Vance, Jr., Brian J. L. Berry, and Peter O. Muller began to reject the core-periphery model of metropolitan form in favor of a multicentered one. See Peter O. Muller, Contemporary Suburban America (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1981), 7–9; Brian J. L. Berry and Yehoshua S. Cohen, “Decentralization of Commerce and Industry: The Restructuring of Metropolitan America,” in Masotti and Hadden, Urbanization of the Suburbs, 453; and Peter O. Muller, The Outer City: Geographical Consequences of the Urbanization of the Suburbs (Washington, D.C., 1976).


12. Muller, Contemporary Suburban America, x.


14. Ibid., 43.


18. Fishman, Bourgeois Utopias, 185.

19. Ibid.


21. Fishman, Bourgeois Utopias, 185–86.


23. Garreau, Edge City, 4.

24. Ibid., 14, 397–98.

25. Fishman, Bourgeois Utopias, 186.


27. For an extensive listing of new “edge cities,” organized by the metropolitan areas to which they belong, see Garreau, Edge City, 426–39.


29. Muller, Contemporary Suburban America, 71–89.


32. See William W. Pendleton, “Blacks in Suburbs,” in Masotti and Hadden, Urbanization of the Suburbs. “Blacks appear to participate in the demographic dimensions [of suburbanization], but not in the social dimensions. Black suburbanization is not unequivocally an indicator of social integration” (184).


38. Black suburbanites also live in neighborhoods which are of lower quality than those inhabited by whites. According to Massey and Denton, the “suburbs that attract black residents tend to be older areas with relatively low socioeconomic statuses.” Typically they are “near the central city and relatively unattractive to white renters and home buyers.” In addition, they are often “older, manufacturing suburbs characterized by weak tax bases, poor municipal services, and high degrees of debt. In a less extreme fashion . . . black suburbs replicate the conditions of inner cities.” Massey and Denton, “Suburbanization and Segregation,” 593–94. Winning a settlement in 1992 against a suburban beach club in Westchester County that had locked her out, a black woman told reporters that she “doubted it would alter deep patterns of discrimination. ‘It’s a way of life,’ she said.” “Beach Club Settles Suit on Race Bias,” *The New York Times*, 4 Apr. 1992.


42. “Whites are leaving many big cities in massive numbers, Hispanics are entering in large numbers, and the number of blacks already there is expanding through high birth rates. This transformation is occurring in part because of the white majority’s deliberate policy of segregating itself from both poor and non-poor minority group members. Such segregation is most evident in housing and schools, where it operates by excluding nearly all poor and most minority households from new suburban areas.” Anthony Downs, “The Future of Industrial Cities,” in *The New Urban Reality*, ed. Paul E. Peterson (Washington, D.C., 1985), 285.


44. See Danielson, *Politics of Exclusion*: “most of those moving outward have been seeking social separation from the lower classes as well as better housing and more spacious surroundings. Middle-class families commonly equate personal security, good schools, maintenance of property values, and the general desirability of a residential area with the absence of lower-income groups” (6).


48. Fishman, “Megalopolis Unbound,” 27. See also Leinberger and Lockwood, “How Business Is Reshaping America,” 45; Muller, Contemporary Suburban America, 6; and Garreau, Edge City, 31.

49. The nuclear analogy carries negative as well as positive implications; if in physics the hazardous process of bringing an atom to critical mass releases a powerful yet potentially destructive energy, so in suburbia it unleashes the power to develop and consume, to build and pollute.


52. Fishman, “Megalopolis Unbound,” 38.


55. Muller, Contemporary Suburban America, 126–27.

56. William S. Kowinski, quoted in Muller, Contemporary Suburban America, 125.


60. Danielson, Politics of Exclusion, 4.

61. Fishman, “Megalopolis Unbound,” 38. Choice is also a major theme of Garreau’s work. See also Leinberger and Lockwood (“How Business is Reshaping America,” 52), who speak of “easy access” and the “opportunity for all kinds of Americans to live, work, shop, and play in the same geographic area.”

62. Fishman, “Megalopolis Unbound,” 39. But this is a significant obstacle. By 1980, traffic congestion in suburbia had increased to the point that the average journey to work within suburbia was no faster than that between suburbs and cities. See Robert Cervero, Suburban Gridlock (New Brunswick, N.J., 1986), 34.


64. Ibid., 17, 18.

65. Ibid., 23.

66. Ibid., 21.


68. Garreau, Edge City, 111.

69. On how the suburban dream home is “the least suitable housing imaginable for employed wives and mothers,” see Dolores Hayden, Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life (New York, 1984), 50. The car that supposedly liberates women from the home also confines them behind the wheel for hours at a time as they run errands and drive children between school and various


74. Garreau, *Edge City*, 111.

75. Fishman, "Megalopolis Unbound," 38.


78. Garreau, *Edge City*, 14. Here Garreau not only glosses over the extensive history of American utopian communities from Shaker villages to 1960s communes, but he also forgets that he has described "Edge City" as antithetical to planning and therefore anything but "purposeful."


80. As Kenneth T. Jackson writes, "unfortunately, the edge city phenomenon represents more an escape than a solution," one which uses "the beltways and interstates to keep one jump ahead of the huddled masses" ("The View from the Periphery," New York Times Book Review, 22 Sept. 1991, 11). Or, as Clawson notes, "in the United States the problem of rebuilding older urban areas still tends to be solved by running away from them" ("Land-Use Trends," in Hawley and Mazie, *Nonmetropolitan America in Transition*, 648).


85. In 1976, Barry Schwartz argued that the urbanization of the suburbs was not likely to alter their essential character. The "superimposition in the suburbs of drastic population and economic growth upon a stubbornly permanent sociopolitical base," he found, meant that "the ‘face’ of the suburb is changing" but its "underlying structure—its ‘soul,’ so to speak—is not." "Images of Suburbia: Some Revisionist Commentary and Conclusions," in *The Changing Face of the Suburbs*, ed. Barry Schwartz (Chicago, 1976), 339.

86. As Mary Corbin Sies writes, the "suburban ideal—the assumption that the proper residential environment was one in which every family resided in a one-family home


89. Ibid., 289–90.


93. Urbanites do not necessarily have to be visible to provoke displays of suburban antipathy. In a September 1991 episode of Growing Pains, a Long Island schoolteacher who has taken in a homeless boy named Luke rejects the application of would-be foster parents from the city: “forget about that couple from Brooklyn—I don’t want Luke being raised by people who drag their knuckles on the ground.”

94. As Mark Crispin Miller argues, prime-time segregation “betrays the very fears that it denies. In thousands of high-security buildings, and in suburbs reassuringly remote from the cities’ ‘bad neighborhoods,’ whites may, unconsciously, be further reassured by watching not just Cosby, but a whole set of TV shows that negate the possibility of black violence with lunatic fantasies of containment.” “Cosby Knows Best,” Boxed In: The Culture of TV (Evanston, Ill., 1988), 74.

95. For an analysis of television’s persistent gender stereotyping since the 1950s, see Susan Faludi, Backlash (New York, 1991), 140–68.


98. Literary views of the suburbs during the 1950s, as exemplified by the works of John Cheever and John Updike, were far more critical of the constricting roles that men and women were expected to play. In the 1980s, such authors as Don DeLillo, Gloria Naylor, and Frederick Barthelme continued to emphasize suburban status-consciousness, sexual anomie, and racial and social stratification.


100. Faludi, Backlash, 148.

101. Other recent Hollywood movies suggesting that women belong in the home, caring for their children, are Someone to Watch over Me (1987) and Baby Boom (1987).


104. Some examples of the suburban horror genre include *The Amityville Horror* (1979), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), and their various sequels.

105. The darker side of this genre is represented by films such as *Over the Edge* (1979), in which alienated suburban kids living in still unfinished tract housing are so disgusted with their environment that they lock their parents in the local school and go on an apocalyptic rampage. An outsider explains to the parents, “you all were in such a hopped up hurry to get out of the city that you turned your kids into exactly what you were trying to get away from.”

106. See Maio’s incisive analysis of the difference between male and female time-travel in the suburbs: “*Back to the Future* allows a teenage boy, Marty McFly, to go back and change life for the better. He is able to bring his parents together, improve the lives and lifestyle of his entire family, and save the life of his friend and mentor, Doc Brown. . . . It is an *empowering* vision of what a young man can do.” But in *Peggy Sue Got Married*, where a mother returns to her high-school days in 1960, “a grown woman . . . is totally unable to change even the course of her own life. . . . In a world of happy and successful male time travelers, the female time-traveler is passive in and little enriched by her re-exploration of the past” (*Feminist in the Dark*, 192–93).

107. Although Blondie now has a paying job, Dagwood has yet to assume many of her domestic chores.