

PART THREE

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# **RACE AND REGIONALISM**



# Gentleman's Agreement: Discrimination in Metropolitan America

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Almost as old as cities themselves, walls have a long and useful history. For centuries in Europe, walls offered protection against invading armies and rampaging bandits. During times of danger, residents from miles around would race toward the gates, there to find shelter within the city. Indeed, the walls of medieval and early modern towns even formed a spiritual boundary, preserving those within from the evil outside.

During most of its history, the United States has had a different experience. On this continent the very absence of walls was part of its lure. Whereas the Old World was bounded and limited, the New World was expansive, open, and limitless. After all, what was the need for walls in a country where land was inexpensive, and potential enemies were far away? For that matter, what is the use of walls today? The American republic currently stands astride the world like a colossus—vast, rich, powerful, and without external enemies capable of making war against it in a serious way.

Robert Frost put it well in his poem “Mending Walls”:

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, since 1914, when Frost published his complaint against walls, the United States has come to be filled with them. In our time the most obvious manifestations of this trend are gated communities, those residential areas with fences, guardhouses, and restricted access designed to privatize normally public spaces. Like the medieval cities of old, they feature visible walls. Across the nation, in new suburban developments and in older inner-city areas retrofitted to provide security, perhaps 4 million Americans have found this new form of refuge. Not only are new communities “forting up,” but existing neighborhoods are increasingly using barricades to isolate themselves.<sup>2</sup>

This essay is not on gated communities and visible walls, but rather on the invisible fences that surround entire municipal jurisdictions in the United States. We may not see them, but they are as real and effective as both the fortifications of medieval Europe or the gated communities of our own time. These are the boundaries between our cities and our suburbs. As the mayor of St. Louis noted a generation ago, the walls between his city and its suffocatingly surrounding suburbs in 1961 were more secure and inviolable than the wall that then divided East and West Berlin.<sup>3</sup>

To be fair, invisible fences are not unique to the United States. All communities in all societies have boundaries—the definition of a city requires it. Thus Beijing has a legal or corporate limit, as does London, Tokyo, Paris, Siena, or any city. But American walls are more numerous, effective, and insidious than those of other countries for four reasons.

First, economic inequality is greater in the United States than in other advanced nations. It is true that the Dutch, British, and French have recently become accustomed to derelicts camped in tunnels, under highways, along fashionable shopping streets, and inside train stations, and that in Tokyo the Shinjuku train and subway station, like many others, fills up at night with homeless people. And even the Germans, long noted for their neatness and generous social services, now occasionally see broken glass or encounter beggars as they walk along their streets. But the American people now accept squalor, slums, and misery as inevitable. And nowhere in the developed world are slums and poverty more noticeable than in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the rich and poor are not evenly divided across the Amer-

ican landscape. The typical pattern, understood even by young children, is that suburbs are rich and central cities are poor. Indeed, so common and well understood is this "North American pattern" that the opposition between wealth and poverty in the shared urban space of a single metropolitan region has become a classic theme of sociology. The concept was first developed at the University of Chicago in the 1920s, when Louis Wirth and Robert E. Park transformed the way scholars looked at social pathology.<sup>5</sup> From their work came social stratification theory, which posits that the geography of the large metropolis is socially, economically, and racially differentiated in terms of residence and amenities.<sup>6</sup>

Third, the United States is more suburbanized and balkanized than European and Asian nations. Its metropolitan regions stretch over hundreds and sometimes thousands of square miles, dwarfing the geographic spread of even the largest agglomerations elsewhere. Because municipal annexation has not kept up with the outward movement of the American population, the number of little governments in metropolitan regions has proliferated. The New York metropolitan area alone is dotted with more than 1,400 separate taxing authorities.<sup>7</sup>

Fourth, political balkanization is more important in the United States than in comparable nations, because land-use controls, public education, and police and fire protection are *local* responsibilities in the American system of decentralized authority. Indeed, this arrangement is practically enshrined in the Constitution. Thus when middle-class families move from cities to suburbs, they take with them needed tax revenues. In Europe and Japan, by contrast, outward population movements have little effect on schools, crime, or fire protection. Similarly, municipalities, landowners, and small businesses in the United States have successfully resisted the centralization of land-use controls, which remain mostly under local jurisdiction. Other nations have local planning and zoning boards, but they are typically subservient to regional or national bodies.<sup>8</sup>

These American "peculiarities" have long been well understood by scholars. In fact, the causes and consequences of inequality have been occupying them for generations. Similarly, municipal boundary changes have been an important political issue since the nineteenth century. Finally, we now understand in a general sense the suburbanization process and why it is that the American landscape does not look like that of Germany, England, or Australia.<sup>9</sup>

But why do communities in the United States differ so much among themselves and so much more than is the case in other nations? Of course, there is no reason to believe that all places should be similar, especially given the importance of region, class, economic structure, and dominant transportation system in place at the time of a community's greatest growth. Perhaps municipal differences are part of the natural order of things, like the rising sun, the barking of dogs, or the mutual attraction of male and female. But this essay posits that the socioeconomic variation in American towns and cities is not random or natural. Rather, it is determined by government, and especially by those who have controlled it. And it is not fair. Every metropolitan region offers examples of disparate communities. Ladue outside St. Louis, Winnetka outside Chicago, Beverly Hills outside Los Angeles, Park City outside Dallas, Germantown outside Memphis, Grosse Pointe outside Detroit, and Atherton outside San Francisco are at one economic extreme. Ford Heights outside Chicago, East Orange outside Newark, Camden outside Philadelphia, and Compton outside Los Angeles are at the other.

Why is this so? Why are some places commercial and others residential, some full of promise and others full of despair? How have public policy decisions influenced the trajectory of individual communities? How has the American system of rewards and punishments shaped municipal choices? My hypothesis is that the peculiar confluence of four separate issues—residential deconcentration, social inequality, governmental balkanization, and local control and support for education, fire, and police—inhibits the search for solutions to such basic problems as poverty, crime, environmental destruction, and excessive energy consumption. If history demonstrates anything, it is that what happened was not inevitable and that the range of potential choices at any given time has always been broader than it appears in retrospect. One role of a historian is to reveal how one particular kind of thing happened and other kinds of things did not happen and which things could not have happened. Hopefully, through that process we arrive at a place where we can define more broadly the options that are available to us in the situations we face now.

This chapter focuses on the thirty-one-county, three-state, 20-million-person New York metropolitan region and especially on three small areas within it: a 36-square-mile swatch of Fairfield County, Connecticut, comprising the towns of Darien and New Canaan; the 23.6-square-mile city of Newark, New Jersey, in Essex County; and a 10-

square-mile section of Westchester County, New York, that makes up the entire city of White Plains. Each of these areas was originally settled in the seventeenth century, each is within fifty miles and an hour's commute of midtown Manhattan, each has long been suburban and subordinate to the same great metropolis, and each has included African Americans and other minorities among its population for more than three hundred years.

There the similarities cease. In fact, few places could be more unlike than Darien, New Canaan, Newark, and White Plains. Darien and New Canaan are separate and adjacent communities with a similar demographic and economic profile. They are exclusive, affluent suburbs in the richest part of the richest state in the United States. Darien is the older and smaller of the two. Indeed, at 12.9 square miles, it is the smallest town on Fairfield County's Gold Coast. A sailing mecca, it has a gorgeous shoreline with coves, bays, and ice-skating ponds. New Canaan, which since 1899 has called itself "the next station to heaven," comprises twenty-two square miles of heavily wooded and rolling countryside. Together, they had a combined population of 38,000 in 1990, when each ranked among the most affluent communities in the United States. Both are among the top ten communities in the nation, based on the number of *Who's Who in America* entries per capita. They boast expensive shops, fleets of Mercedes and BMWs, gracious homes, prestigious and well-equipped public schools, and attractive and well-kept parks. But the price of admission to their quiet precincts is steep: in 1999 new houses in both communities typically sold for more than \$1 million, available building lots were priced at \$700,000, and several builders specialized in tearing down older homes to make room for massive luxury structures costing between \$2 million and \$4 million. Incredibly, much of this building was speculative and without buyers on hand.<sup>10</sup>

Predictably, Darien and New Canaan citizens live in relative peace, free from most urban ills. With the exception of two widely publicized acquaintance rapes in 1989, for which a star local athlete was finally convicted eight years later, the police there are mostly concerned with teenage parties and with the various depredations of skunks, raccoons, and deer. Virtually no one is on welfare, and there is little public housing. Darien and New Canaan have few poor and minority residents (each has a sprinkling of live-in, African American servants), and they have long been regarded as inhospitable to Jews. In fact, the chapter title, "Gentleman's Agreement," is borrowed from the 1947 novel of

the same name (later made into a movie starring Gregory Peck) that dealt with anti-Semitism in Darien.<sup>11</sup> In short, these two suburbs have been and are exclusionary in almost every sense of the term.

Newark is also a statistical leader, but not in categories most persons would find desirable.<sup>12</sup> By almost any measure, it is among America's most troubled cities. In the past half century, it has lost most of its job base and 40 percent of its total population. Two-thirds of those that remain are African Americans, and a staggering one-third are on some form of public assistance. Its once bustling commercial streets are now ghostly thoroughfares of burned-out and boarded-up buildings, littered with blowing paper, used condoms, liquor bottles, and tattered plastic from the hidden dens of the homeless. Newark's once legendary theaters and nightclubs are closed, and its schools are so bad that they were taken over by the state in 1996. The city suffers from extraordinary rates of slum housing, property taxes, venereal disease, and infant mortality. It typically ranks at or near the top in most categories of the annual FBI Uniform Crime Reports, and the head of the police department was himself arrested, indicted, and convicted in 1996 for stealing public funds. Crack and heroin drops along Springfield Avenue are known even to children, and the illegal drug trade is among the biggest employers of Newark's young and desperate.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, White Plains is a paradigm of yet another kind. Located halfway between the Tappan Zee Bridge and Long Island Sound, the city is a commuter's dream, with direct access to three major highways and to the busy Metro North commuter rail line. It includes four separate malls within a short walk of each other. Indeed, in New York State it ranks second only to Manhattan in retail sales. As Mayor Sy Schulman noted early in 1995, "White Plains is a place that is carefully trying to straddle polar opposites of city and countrified suburb."

Few American cities anywhere, however, have changed as quickly and radically as White Plains in recent years. Partly as a result of a gigantic urban renewal effort, dozens of major buildings, including the Galleria Mall and the Westchester Mall, have transformed the physical landscape since 1970. The population of White Plains is now racially and economically mixed, and its neighborhoods include mansions as well as public housing projects. The well-funded White Plains schools spend about twice the national average per student, and both the middle and the high schools have been named Schools of Excellence, a federal designation based on the quality of the curriculum and teaching staff. In 1993 the district was rated among the top ten in

the nation by *Expansion Management Magazine*, a publication for families involved in corporate relocation.

Although these communities are just small parts of a continental nation, they represent a larger national pattern. Any of the two dozen largest metropolitan areas in the United States could have provided similar examples. In Philadelphia, for example, Camden could have substituted for Newark, King of Prussia for White Plains, and Bryn Mawr for Darien and New Canaan. Similarly, Chicago could have provided Gary, Schaumburg, and Winnetka; the St. Louis area might suggest East St. Louis, Clayton, and Ladue. The questions would be similar: Why do communities differ? How do wide demographic disparities among small governmental jurisdictions affect the nation?

In 1870 New Canaan and Darien were rather ordinary places. During the course of the next century, they adopted restrictive zoning ordinances, refused public housing, and turned away the poor and the weak. In other words, they built invisible fences to transform themselves into elite residential areas of wealth, prestige, beauty, and gracious living. Similarly, Newark in 1870 was a prosperous and successful city with enormous potential. It had beautiful parks, distinguished public schools, a solid economy, and a thriving central business district. Indeed, as late as 1911, the superintendent of schools could remark that "I doubt whether there can be found anywhere in the world a population of 365,000 souls more universally happy, contented and prosperous than the residents of Newark." But it welcomed ethnic and racial minorities, allowed industry to grow, refused to adopt restrictive residential zoning, and encouraged public housing. For its efforts Newark lost the confidence of the middle class and of federal agencies that encouraged home ownership. Finally, in 1870 few people could have foreseen that White Plains would be, on a proportionate basis, a bigger magnet than Manhattan.

## Darien and New Canaan

The first persons to settle what is now Darien arrived about 1641. The area was originally part of Stamford, but it became Middlesex Parish in 1737 and was incorporated as the town of Darien in 1820. For more than two centuries, it was a quiet farming and commercial fishing village, replete with millers, carpenters, blacksmiths, tanners, and teamsters. By the middle of the nineteenth century, a town center had

developed near the railroad station, with a general store, a blacksmith shop, and a coal yard.<sup>14</sup>

New Canaan developed along relatively similar lines. Initially settled late in the seventeenth century, it was established by the Connecticut legislature as Canaan Parish, a religious entity. The right to form a Congregational Church was granted to the families there so that they might avoid having to travel long distances to churches in Norwalk or Stamford. It was finally incorporated as a separate town in 1801.

Early in the nineteenth century, New Canaan became a center for shoemaking. Indeed, by the 1820s, the town was among the top half-dozen shoemaking places in the United States, and it maintained its industrial status for many decades. The 1850 census, for example, revealed that there were more shoemakers in New Canaan than farmers and that its factory work force was proportionately as large as that of any other community in Connecticut. By the 1870s, however, the 50,000 handmade pairs that New Canaan produced annually could not compete with the new machines of bigger companies in bigger places. Shoemakers soon began to move away from New Canaan to make a living. The Excelsior Shoe Factory on Linden Avenue was the last remnant of that once flourishing industry.

In sum, a century and a quarter ago, neither Darien nor New Canaan was particularly pretentious or successful. What happened to change their circumstances?

### *Demographics*

An influx of wealthy weekend and summer residents began around the turn of the century; this especially affected Long Neck Point and Tokeneke along the Darien waterfront and Oenoke Ridge along the high ground in New Canaan. Although these new, rich families never made up more than a small percentage of the total town populations, they employed a large number of blue-collar workers as gardeners, maids, chauffeurs, and cooks and began to set the tone for the community.

### *Zoning Restrictions*

Both towns were quick to adopt zoning and use it to limit residence to families in comfortable circumstances. Zoning in the United States began in New York City in 1916 as a method of controlling the

height of buildings and the use of commercial and industrial space. Although it represented an extraordinary growth of government power, nearly everyone supported zoning, in part because it seemed a convenient way of preserving class segregation and property values. It surely was popular: by 1926 seventy-six communities, Darien among them, had adopted ordinances similar to that of New York; by 1936 an astonishing 1,322 towns and cities (85 percent of the national total) had zoning laws, and they were affecting more property than all national laws relating to business.<sup>15</sup>

Darien was on the bandwagon early and adopted the new methodology in 1924. Over the decades it slowly ratcheted up restrictions so that apartments, condominiums, and other relatively affordable units were effectively excluded from the community. For New Canaan the pivotal zoning moment came on February 27, 1932, when a town meeting voted to create a zoning commission. Amazingly, that commission drew up a zoning code in less than three months, and the town approved New Canaan's first zoning map on May 23, 1932. The classification of land was important, because there were still about thirty-five farms in the town in at that time, totaling more than 4,000 acres. How would this open space be zoned for future development? Town leaders set aside a small space for industry and zoned the town center for commercial development. For virtually everything else they decreed *two-acre-minimum* lot sizes, an astonishingly high figure for the time. Moreover, within a few years they added a *four-acre-minimum* lot zone and eliminated industrial space altogether.

### ***Transportation Investments***

Public investment in railroads and roadways on a scale unknown by outlying locations in other nations transformed all of Fairfield County, Connecticut. The New Haven Railroad, for example, provided a dependable and speedy commute to Manhattan, and by 1923 *National Geographic* magazine could write that "even Connecticut, as far as Stamford, Greenwich, and New Canaan is peopled by those who work in Gotham by day and sleep in the country by night." Moreover, the opening of the Merritt Parkway in 1938 and Interstate 95 in 1958 made automobile travel more attractive. By 1950 Connecticut had the most extensive road system in the United States with 3,000 paved miles, an unusual total for a state with fewer than 5,000 square miles of territory.

### *Lending and Tax Policies*

Discriminatory use of various forms of Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veterans Administration (VA) loan and mortgage guarantees, coupled with America's unique practice of allowing the deduction of mortgage interest and property taxes from total income, encouraged the suburbanization of the wealthy. In June 1933 Congress established the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), and in June 1934, the Federal Housing Administration. Together they lowered interest rates for potential homeowners and made possible the long-term, self-amortizing mortgage with uniform payments spread over the whole life of the debt. Their impact on the United States was immediate and enormous, although their greatest influence was felt after World War II.

When federal HOLC appraisers evaluated Darien and New Canaan in the 1930s for the relative safety of mortgage loans made there, they liked what they saw, and they colored the secret Residential Security Maps they prepared for the two towns mostly with green and blue. There was none of the red or yellow that dominated Newark and other places with "inhospitable racial or minority groups."<sup>16</sup>

### *Discrimination*

Both Darien and New Canaan were inhospitable to persons who were racially, religiously, or culturally different from the white Protestant establishment in both towns. In fact, socioeconomic homogeneity was one of the reasons that federal appraisers rated them so well. To be sure, there was a small Italian and Irish community that comprised most of the "townies": the grocers, cleaners, gardeners, and plumbers who kept Darien and New Canaan running. But these groups scarcely affected the WASPish image of either place.

Jews and blacks were another matter entirely, and until recently, both groups were routinely discriminated against in the area. In the 1930s, when African Americans represented less than 1 percent of the population, they were not welcome in stores, restaurants, or the Darien Playhouse, and doors were slammed in their faces when they tried to rent places to live. One person recalled, "The negro minister's wife used to tell me stories where people who were maids used to come and gather in her house and used to sit there in rocking chairs on their day off because they were not welcome in the stores." Simi-

larly, a Jewish attorney in New Canaan recalled that in 1940 his father agreed on the price of a home and put down a deposit. His money was then returned when the owner decided against transferring the property to a Jew. As late as 1974, a young white couple was in a New Canaan realty office looking for a home when the telephone rang. The realtor seemed exasperated and then said to the waiting pair, "My mother just wants to make sure I am not showing any houses to Jews."<sup>17</sup>

### *Avoiding Low-Income Housing*

Another cause of the current situation in Darien and New Canaan has been extreme class discrimination, brought on partly by the fact that neither community has exploited the possibilities for low-income or affordable housing. In 1937, for the first time in American history, the federal government accepted responsibility for the construction of decent, low-cost homes. The legislation empowered the United States Housing Authority to develop public projects by funding local housing agencies. So enthusiastic was President Franklin D. Roosevelt about the new possibilities that when work began on the first five projects in 1938, he wrote to his chief housing official, "Today marks the beginning of a new era in the economic and social life of America. Today, we are launching an attack on the slums of this country which must go forward until every American family has a decent home."<sup>18</sup>

On one level, public housing was successful. By the end of 1938, thirty-three states had passed enabling legislation, and 221 local authorities had been established. By the end of 1962, more than 2 million people lived in the half-million units built under various public housing programs. Even if the quality and design of the new structures frequently invited derision, they were usually superior to the dilapidated hovels they replaced.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, federally assisted public housing never achieved the high purposes set out for it by its founders. One major reason was the decentralized nature of the program. Essentially, every American community had to make its own decision as to whether or not a need existed. The resulting application for federally subsidized housing had to be *voluntary*. Because municipalities had discretion on whether, when, and where to build public housing, the projects almost always reinforced racial segregation. An exclusive suburb, or one that wished to become exclusive, did not have to tarnish its image

by providing shelter for the needy within its boundaries. The preferred method was simply to refuse to create a housing agency. In such circumstances, no national or state official could force a town to do otherwise. By contrast, in Great Britain the municipality is itself the "housing authority," and in Japan the national government typically buys land on the *periphery* as the best means of acquiring space for public housing projects.<sup>20</sup>

Needless to say, Darien and New Canaan avoided most of this federal largesse, and whenever housing projects were proposed, they were the subject of intense scrutiny. The towns scarcely even considered low-income, public housing. Their only discussion was about moderate-income programs for divorcees, empty-nesters, grandparents, teachers, and fire and police officers.

In the 1950s, on the grounds of the old Fitch's Soldiers' Home, Darien did build fifty-three units of moderate-income housing for returning World War II veterans, and in 1987 it built thirty units of low-income housing specifically for the elderly. That was it. Otherwise, every attempt to build affordable units was beaten back by coalitions of concerned residents. Even housing for town employees or the elderly was typically rejected. In 1984, for example, a Darien referendum killed a proposal for thirty apartments for fire and police officers, teachers, and the elderly. Similarly, litigation against using park lands and funds for anything other than public open space stopped the proposed Cherry Lawn Project (thirty units) in Darien.

New Canaan was similar. The eighteen-unit Millport apartment complex was for low-income families, but only if they were already residents of the town. Such local residency preferences, administered by suburban officials, functioned as a mechanism for discrimination. By giving preference to town residents, equally qualified out-of-town families were effectively excluded, particularly when the number of qualified local applicants exceeded the number of units available, which was virtually always the case.

In both Darien and New Canaan, as most citizens see it, the question has not been housing for the regional poor, but whether *any* apartments or condominiums should be permitted. In 1987 Darien became one of the last places in the Northeast to permit any condominium construction, on the theory that the persons who would occupy such dwellings might degrade the community. But this did not mean that the needy were about to breach the invisible fences of the bucolic suburb. Instead, new "affordable" units were sold at mar-

ket rates, which meant hundreds of thousands of dollars for the smallest condominiums. As the president of a local real estate firm remarked, "There is a need for affordable housing, but the minute the town acquires a piece of property, the term 'affordable' goes out the window."

## Newark

Founded in 1666 on the banks of the Passaic River by Puritans from Connecticut, Newark is, after New York and Boston, the third-oldest major city in the United States. But it remained mostly agricultural until 1800, largely because it was cut off from New York City by vast salt marshes and three large rivers. Slowly it became a transportation hub, as the Morris Canal from Phillipsburg to Newark opened in 1831 and the Morris and Essex Railroad opened from Newark to Dover in 1845. With improved transport facilities came industrial opportunities, which were exploited by master shoemakers who hired farmers who were underemployed in winter. By the time of the Civil War, Newark was among the American urban leaders in manufacturing.<sup>21</sup>

The economic boom continued after the Confederate surrender at Appomattox, and Newark soon solidified its ranking as the largest city in New Jersey and one of the dozen largest in the United States. By 1890 it also had become a major center for banking, insurance, legal, and government services. The Prudential Insurance Company, for example, began in Newark as the Widows and Orphans Friendly Society, while the giant Ballantine Brewing Company became one of the largest single enterprises in the Northeast. By the turn of the century, more than 90 percent of the patent leather in the United States was produced in Newark, and the city was also a leader in manufacturing trunks, drugs and chemicals, electrical machinery, jewelry, and varnish and paint.

In many respects Newark continued to grow and prosper into the 1930s. By 1910 its population had risen to 450,000 (eighth largest in the United States). Port Newark opened in 1915, Newark Airport in 1928, and Newark's Pennsylvania Station in 1935. By 1931 both the airport and the local intersection at Broad and Market Streets were touted as the busiest in the world. The city had become a leader in hats, hardware, jewelry, leathers, brewing, thread, carriages, and insur-

ance, and the thriving central business district featured three big department stores, several elegant movie theaters, and such outstanding cultural institutions as the Newark Museum and the Newark Public Library. The cherry blossoms and shade trees of Branch Brook Park and the spacious houses along High Street around Military and Washington Parks were as attractive as any anywhere. Newark boasted of exciting nightclubs and of a sports team that was legendary. Indeed, the 1937 Newark Bears baseball club is widely regarded as the finest minor league team of all time.<sup>22</sup>

Not surprisingly, confidence and euphoria were in the air, and local boosters confidently predicted that Newark would one day rival New York as a world city. A 1925 futuristic portrait of Newark, for example, predicted that by 1975 its central business district would be as prominent as any on earth and would be chock-a-block with impressive skyscrapers. In fact, as late as the 1930s, Princeton economist James G. Smith predicted that Newark had potential “comparable to the phenomenal growth of Los Angeles.”<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, Newark did not fulfill such expectations. In fact, it deteriorated so far so fast that in 1970 incoming mayor Kenneth Gibson remarked that “wherever urban America is going, Newark will get there first.”<sup>24</sup> It was a prescient comment. By 1998 the city counted only 260,000 residents, barely half the number that had been there a half century earlier. The job loss was equally stark. Some firms, like the once imposing Ballantine Brewery, just closed their doors. Others, like the Spring Air Mattress Company or the Barton Press, moved out of town. Still others, like the Prudential Insurance Company, technically remained in Newark while shifting many operations to other locations.

In the end, however, statistics are less revealing than individual experience. For example, Philip Roth’s best-selling novel *Goodbye, Columbus* was written in the late 1950s, when the Jewish exodus from Newark was reaching its peak. The journey west was toward the “promised land,” which in terms of the protagonist Neil Klugman meant suburban Short Hills, where Brenda Potamkin lived. Similarly, in 1991, when the South Orange High School Class of 1961 held its thirtieth reunion, one young woman thanked her parents for getting her out of Newark in the 1950s.<sup>25</sup>

There were as many reasons for Newark’s transformation as there were people hustling out of town in the great suburban land rush of the postwar era. But six issues have been of particular importance.

### *Failure to Expand*

Newark's city fathers at the beginning of the twentieth century were unable to secure the necessary space for future growth. Like all cities, Newark had grown by 1900 from its tiny beginnings into a larger municipality. In 1869, for example, Newark added Clinton to its boundaries, and in 1871 it added Woodside. The remainder of Clinton Township followed in 1897 and 1902, and Vailsburg became part of Newark in 1905. That ended the era of Newark's expansion. While other ambitious American cities were turning suburbs into neighborhoods, Newark remained stuck at a miniscule twenty-three square miles. Even St. Louis and San Francisco, the smallest of other major American cities, became twice as large as Newark.

This public policy failure was the result of poor municipal leadership. During the 1890s, for example, adjacent Harrison and Kearny were willing to join Newark. But the mayor and council delayed, and by the time their annexation plans had solidified, the two Hudson County towns had industrial strength of their own and spurned Newark's marriage proposal. Still, Newark leaders were confident, and in 1900 the mayor, not foreseeing the day when his booming city would be surrounded by hostile suburbs, said, "East Orange, Vailsburg, Harrison, Kearny, and Belleville would be desirable acquisitions. By an exercise of discretion we can enlarge our city from decade to decade without unnecessarily taxing the property within our limits, which has already paid the cost of public improvements."

But the wish did not father the fact, and Essex County came to be filled with small, independent municipalities—Maplewood, Glen Ridge, Milburn, Caldwell, Montclair, Irvington, Nutley, and the Oranges—that might otherwise have been simply neighborhoods within an enlarged city. Thus when wealthy and middle-class Newarkers began moving away from central areas, they took their tax dollars to independent suburbs. Not surprisingly, historian Paul Stellhorn found that more than half of the members of the elite Newark Chamber of Commerce had left the city by 1930.<sup>26</sup> As Frank Kingdon gloomily noted in 1936, "The more people with money move into residential areas outside the city, the less money will be available from highly assessed properties and for privately maintained social agencies. Either the city will have to maintain such agencies or else it will pay a heavier bill for crime. In either case taxes will rise. As taxes rise, business will move out to avoid them."<sup>27</sup>

The situation was also costly for African Americans. For those black Newarkers who experienced financial success and bought larger homes, their quest typically took them outside the city's boundaries, often to East Orange. Thus their leadership skills were lost to those who remained behind.

### ***Weak Land-Use Control***

Unlike Darien and New Canaan, which excluded industries, and unlike other cities, which typically required more cleanup efforts from polluting factories, Newark allowed obnoxious enterprises to coexist in proximity to residential neighborhoods. Leather goods and tanning, paint and varnish manufacture, and brewing caused enormous pollution problems.

As a consequence of its industrial orientation, Newark became progressively lower middle class as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth. The city typically did not enforce even the minimal environmental ordinances that were on the books. As early as November 1, 1883, the *Newark Evening News* complained, "In consequence of the widespread reputation for nuisances of this city, its property is mainly of a poor and cheaply-constructed class, there being very few first class dwellings within the city limits. Even the manufacturers will not build for themselves good houses, for before they are finished it is more than probable that some vile nuisance will be located in the neighborhood, destroying the investment."<sup>28</sup>

"Nuisance" was an understatement. Industries were poisoning the inhabitants before the turn of the century. Sewers were also inadequate. There were 10,000 cesspools in Newark in the 1880s, "each one of them a generator of disease and the cause of much of the sickness and death in the city." On August 2, 1883, the *Newark Daily Journal* described how three residents had been overcome by carbolic acid fumes in a fatal attempt to eliminate an intolerable stench emanating from a thirteen-foot cesspool that was shared by several families living in two adjacent buildings. Their bodies were drawn to the surface with grappling irons, "the three ghastly corpses making up a picture that will never be forgotten by those who witnessed it."<sup>29</sup>

The situation did not soon improve. Asked if she were troubled by an unpleasant aroma, one woman remarked in 1884, "Unpleasant! That don't begin to describe it. It is a perfect barrier against a breath of pure air." Another resident echoed, "No matter how sultry the

night might be we are compelled to have all the windows closed." An investigator from the *Newark Evening News* offered this first-hand account: "The odor became stronger as each succeeding step brought this reporter nearer to the ditch and when it was reached the stench arising from the black and sluggish water was so overpowering that only a strict sense of duty prevented a hasty retreat. At the opening from which the sewer empties at the railroad crossing, the bloated carcasses of two large dogs were floating, upon which a cloud of flies was banqueting, the surrounding atmosphere being poisoned with a sickening stench."<sup>30</sup> In 1883, when the Republican mayor was beaten for reelection by former schoolteacher Joseph E. Haynes, he said he "was glad to be defeated; it was no honor being Mayor of Newark."<sup>31</sup>

Industrial pollution increased in the twentieth century as chemical plants increased in complexity and size. During World War I, for example, Newark's vaunted reputation for making almost everything brought to the city a variety of military contracts for hardware, munitions, paint, clothing, uniforms, machine parts, and truck components, the production of all of which created toxic agents that found their way into the air or the ground. The problem continued into the modern era. One of the worst local polluters was the Diamond Alkali Company, which made pesticides along the Passaic River from 1951 to 1969, as well as ingredients for the chemical defoliant Agent Orange. During the Vietnam War, when the firm was operating twenty-four hours a day, Diamond Alkali and other companies released dioxin, a cancer-causing compound that is a byproduct of chemical processing, into the water, putting the lower Passaic River on the Environmental Protection Agency's list of the nation's most endangered waterways.<sup>32</sup>

### *Redlining*

The FHA and HOLC, discussed earlier with regard to Darien and New Canaan, also contributed to the contemporary Newark crisis. The HOLC and FHA initiated the policy of residential "redlining." When government appraisers looked at Newark in 1939, for example, they did not regard a single neighborhood as worthy of an "A" rating. So-called "high-class Jewish" sections like Weequahic and Clinton Hill, as well as non-Jewish areas like Vailsburg and Forest Hill, all received a second grade or "B." Average Newark neighborhoods were rated even lower: the well-maintained and attractive working-class sections of Roseville, Woodside, and East Vailsburg were given third grade or "C"

ratings. The remainder of the city, including immigrant Ironbound and every African American neighborhood, was redlined as fourth grade or “hazardous.” As might be expected, Essex County FHA commitments went in overwhelming proportion to suburbs.<sup>33</sup>

Not only did the HOLC damage Newark through its own actions, but it influenced the appraisal decisions of private banking institutions. During the 1930s, for example, the Federal Home Loan Bank Board circulated questionnaires to banks about their mortgage practices. Those returned by savings and loan associations in Essex County indicated a clear relationship between public and private redlining practices. One specific question asked, “What are the most desirable lending areas?” The answers were often “A and B” or “blue” or “FHA only.” Similarly, to the inquiry, “Are there any areas in which loans will not be made?” the responses included “red and most yellow” or “C and D” or simply “Newark.”<sup>34</sup> Obviously, private banking institutions were privy to and influenced by federal residential security maps. This meant that it was difficult to secure even ordinary loans for residential properties in Newark itself, even while suburban areas were being treated generously. Meanwhile, Washington’s income tax policies of mortgage interest deductions and its transportation policies of subsidizing the private motorcar also damaged Newark while benefiting the suburbs.

### *Poor Governance*

The fourth cause of Newark’s difficulties has been a long tradition of incompetence and corruption in its own government. For example, Louis Danzig, the long-time director of the Newark Redevelopment and Housing Authority, ruled his domain with both an iron fist and an iron brain. Between 1949 and 1962, he received seven times as much federal urban renewal money per capita as the legendary Robert Moses in New York City. But Danzig was even more ruthless than the “Power Broker” in his slum clearance programs, and he destroyed entire neighborhoods, some of them healthy and vibrant, in a vain and ultimately unsuccessful effort to “modernize” the city.<sup>35</sup>

Danzig’s personal corruption was never proven, even if his arrogance and misjudgments soon became apparent. But other Newark officials were caught with their hands in the till. In 1970, for example, Mayor Hugh J. Addonizio and other high city administrators were convicted of extortion and income tax evasion. In 1996 the commis-

sioner of the Newark Police Department was himself indicted in federal court for thirty-seven counts of theft and fraud. Various members of the city council were taking payoffs, and the chief aide to Mayor Sharpe James resigned in disgrace because of similar charges. Such revelations have been particularly damaging because they have given ammunition to those who want to blame local corruption, rather than the normal process of American development, of which they are themselves a part, for the troubled circumstances of New Jersey's largest city.

Moreover, even when honest, Newark's municipal leaders too often sacrificed long-term interests for short-term advantages. For example, Jean Anyon has recently shown that contrary to popular belief, public education in Newark was of poor quality long before African Americans came to power in the 1970s. Instead, most of the schools in Newark were declining by the mid-1930s, even as those in nearby New York City were famed for excellence.<sup>36</sup>

### *Racial Unrest*

A devastating race riot in July 1967 gave Newark a black eye that took decades to heal. The tragedy began on a hot summer evening, when white policemen allegedly abused a black driver for a minor offense. Within hours, thousands of angry demonstrators were shouting and throwing rocks at the precinct headquarters, demanding an end to business as usual and overwhelming the ability of the police department to control the situation. The disturbances lasted for days, and images of Newark in flames were flashed to television screens across the nation by the three major networks. Ultimately, after twenty-seven people had been killed, after thousands of state police and National Guardsmen had been ordered to the city, and after dozens of fires had caused tens of millions of dollars in property damage and leveled blocks of stores, quiet returned to the community. Springfield Avenue and many lesser streets were devastated. More important, middle-class whites decided that Newark was a place to avoid and escape. Some had already held that view, but the riots and the racial wounds they exposed deepened the psychological gulf between the city and the suburbs. The once grand movie palaces of Newark went out of business, and the downtown department stores, including even Bamberger's, closed. By 1998 the city had barely half the population it had fifty years earlier.<sup>37</sup>

### *Providing for the Poor and Minorities*

Finally, Newark's problems became more severe *because* the city attempted to help poor and minority citizens and *because* it was a leader in civil rights, at least in comparison with the suburbs. To be sure, the Newark power elite generally ran the city in their own interests, and from their citadels in the exclusive Essex and Downtown Clubs, they erected formidable walls to keep out the Irish, Italians, Jews, and Portuguese. African Americans experienced the worst prejudice and suffered from the most limited residential and employment options. Such discrimination should have had no place in a nation that had recently fought a world war against racism run amok. But comparatively speaking, Newark was a haven for blacks, if only because nearby suburbs followed the lead of privileged communities elsewhere in closing their hearts, their wallets, and their subdivisions to the dispossessed.

Comparatively speaking, Newark was exceptional in terms of the economic opportunity, decent schools, and affordable housing it offered to minorities. James Baxter, for example, was one of the foremost black educators in the nation when he came to Newark from Philadelphia in 1864 to run what was then called the city's "Negro School." He retired in 1909, after serving for forty-five years as a principal in the Newark City Schools, and he died within six months of first receiving his monthly pension of \$60. Moved by his example, the Newark Board of Education resolved on July 28, 1909 that "there shall be no more segregation of colored children by massing them in one school. The committee voted to recommend the abandonment of the Commerce Street Colored School and the placing of its pupils in the schools of the districts in which they reside." It was a small step, and it did not end school segregation in Newark, but it was a step that few other American communities were taking at the time.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, during the 1930s, Newark became a national leader in building housing for the poor. In 1931, for example, the Prudential Life Insurance Company developed group housing in the Third Ward for families with annual incomes below \$1,000. The object was to provide "modern facilities" for black families able to pay only eight to twelve dollars per room per month.

Later in the decade, Newark became one of the first cities in the United States to apply for public housing, and it ultimately built more units per capita than any other place in the nation. As elsewhere,

these dwellings were racially segregated, beginning on June 14, 1941, when the James B. Baxter Homes opened for all-black occupancy. Four other housing projects admitted only white families. But Newark was still ahead of the suburbs in building anything at all for African Americans.

## White Plains

The first inhabitants of what is now central Westchester County were Siwanoy Indians, a peaceful people who lived in houses built of poles covered with bark; for centuries they inhabited the land between Long Island Sound and the Bronx River. Their premodern world came to an end in 1683, when they sold the area they knew as *Quarropas* to a group of men from Rye. They had little concept of permanent land ownership, however, and were apparently unaware that the sale meant that they were not supposed to trespass on the property or sell it again.<sup>39</sup>

During the seventeenth century, White Plains was merely a cluster of houses along what is now Broadway. Roads were built, and churches and stores were established in the decades leading up to the American Revolution, when White Plains played a crucial role. On July 9, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was adopted by the New York Provisional Congress sitting in the courthouse on Broadway. Three months later, the Battle of White Plains proved to be a pivotal event in the military conflict.

For half a century after the American Revolution, however, White Plains returned to relative insignificance. It was simply a crossroads village whose storekeepers, millers, mechanics, and keepers were dependent upon the farming economy of central Westchester County. Largely because small-scale industries were usually located along waterways, and White Plains was not on water, the town did not match the early development pace of nearby Hudson River communities like Ossining and Yonkers, let alone booming Newark. The Red Bird Stage Line did make daily trips to New York City from Purdy's Store on Main Street, and scheduled connections were available to Manhattan, Boston, and Hartford. But White Plains remained isolated and quiet. Population growth was slow: the 505 inhabitants of 1790 had increased to only 689 by 1830.

The next thirty years witnessed increased economic develop-

ment, however, and by 1860 the town had almost 2,000 inhabitants. An event that proved critical in the history of White Plains was celebrated on June 1, 1844, when the New York and Harlem Railroad made the village its new northern terminus. No longer isolated, the cornfields of White Plains were suddenly brought within an hour of Manhattan's bustling streets. By 1846 the *Journal of Commerce* announced that the yearly commutation charge to the city would be \$90, or about fifteen cents each way. Even so, few persons could afford that much before the Civil War, and in any event, it was unnecessary to move all the way to White Plains in order to enjoy country living.

It took another half century for the intervening towns to begin to fill and for White Plains to become part of the metropolitan orbit of the metropolis at the mouth of the Hudson River. By the 1880s, however, wealthy citizens of New York City were beginning to discover central Westchester County as a place to build comfortable homes convenient to the rail line. Not surprisingly, between 1880 and 1910, the population of White Plains doubled every decade, and it doubled again between 1910 and 1930, when the population stood at about 36,000 persons.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, White Plains became a kind of harbinger of what the rest of the nation would later become. Suburban, middle-class, prosperous, and increasingly automobile oriented, it represented success and status. Its small immigrant Italian population and respected black community were not allowed to detract from the image of a commuter's and businessman's paradise. Business opportunities expanded in turn, and the city soon had thousands of new jobs as New York City grew to the north.

As White Plains assumed its modern configuration before 1975, six public policy decisions shaped its development.

### *Zoning*

First, unlike Darien and New Canaan, White Plains did not adopt exclusionary zoning for most of its area. Instead, it permitted a wide variety of housing types, and its zoning ordinance would have allowed 123,000 persons to live within its zoning envelope. In fact, White Plains never grew beyond 50,000 inhabitants. Thus it was never an exclusively wealthy town. Moreover, unlike Newark, it essentially zoned out industry in the 1920s even though it had been an early cen-

ter of automobile manufacture, with more than one hundred vehicles being produced early in the century.

### *Becoming a Transit Hub*

White Plains officials continuously lobbied to retain the town's early transportation advantages and to convince railroad and highway officials to make the community the transit hub of Westchester County. Ultimately, White Plains became the only suburb on the entire Harlem Division of Metro North where every local or express train routinely stopped. Similarly, when Interstate 287 (known as the Cross Westchester Expressway) was begun in the late 1950s, it cut directly across the northern edge of White Plains. When the controlled-access road opened in 1961, it redirected Westchester County's business and commercial traffic away from Yonkers, New Rochelle, and Mount Vernon and toward White Plains, because Interstate 287 was easily the best east-west route available for a dozen miles in either direction. Meanwhile, the White Plains airport expanded its commercial offerings and became the nation's busiest corporate airfield.

### *Recruiting Business*

White Plains officials aggressively recruited both retailing operations and corporate offices. It was no accident that B. Altman's Department Store opened its first suburban branch in White Plains in 1930, or that Macy's and Alexander's soon followed, or that Sears Roebuck and Company built its largest store east of the Mississippi River in White Plains. By 1965 White Plains had the third-highest level of retail sales per capita in the United States (trailing only Beverly Hills, California, and Paramus, New Jersey), and by the 1990s, White Plains boasted two of the most successful megamalls in the nation. In New York State, it then ranked ahead of downtown Brooklyn, as well as Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, and Yonkers in retail sales.

White Plains was especially successful in attracting corporate headquarters. In 1954 the General Foods Corporation moved from its home office in midtown Manhattan to a spacious, low-slung campus in White Plains surrounded by acres of trees and free parking, initiating a corporate exodus from downtown America that would continue for the next half century. White Plains was one of the prime benefi-

aries of the shift, and the Cross Westchester Expressway became so dotted with office parks that it was nicknamed the “Platinum Mile.”

### *Civil Rights and Integration*

White Plains followed a moderate course in civil rights issues and became a national leader in school integration. African Americans had played a prominent role in White Plains for more than two centuries: in 1790 blacks made up 11 percent of the town’s population; by 1930 White Plains had a proportionately larger African American population than did Darien, New Canaan, or Newark.

The city’s progressive racial course became clear in the late 1950s, when its school system became one of the first in the nation—along with those of Sausalito, California, and Teaneck, New Jersey—to integrate without major controversy. Faced with the need for a second high school, the White Plains Board of Education correctly determined that two high schools would inevitably lead to segregation, no matter where they were built. Consequently, in 1960 a new, modern, comprehensive high school, large enough for the entire city, opened on Bryant Avenue, and its handsome former building was converted to a junior high school. The elementary schools also were integrated. Led by Superintendent Carrol Frye Johnson and supported by the Board of Education and fifteen local clergymen, White Plains closed the perfectly good Rochambeau School, which was virtually all black, and initiated a controversial busing plan to ensure that no school would be more than 30 percent nor less than 10 percent black. The proposal survived litigation, a tough election fight, and the popular charge that the name of the city be changed to Black Plains.

### *Accepting Public Housing*

Unlike Darien and New Canaan, White Plains embraced public housing, and unlike Newark, it was successful. After an investigation by the Mayor’s Committee on Housing in 1941, a majority report recommended the building of a publicly assisted housing project. The White Plains Common Council officially approved the document on April 14, 1941. World War II put almost all housing construction on hold, but what finally emerged in 1948 was a project of five nine-story buildings containing 450 apartments. The Winbrook complex included two playgrounds, four social and recreation rooms, and a

demonstration kitchen, and it increased the number of persons living in the area from 500 to about 2,000. Initially integrated, it gradually became a segregated island in the middle of White Plains. In 1968, for example, it was 90 percent African American. But compared to the residential options for poor people in surrounding suburbs such as Scarsdale, Bronxville, Armonk, and Larchmont, White Plains was exemplary, and its building of low-income units was a positive response to a demonstrated need.

### ***Downtown Redevelopment***

White Plains became the site of one of the largest downtown redevelopment programs in the United States. In 1949 Congress passed the Urban Renewal Act (subsequently expanded in 1954) that allowed municipal governments to condemn slum areas, clear the land, and then resell the acreage for new commercial or residential purposes. In White Plains the program involved 130 acres between the old courthouse and the railroad station, and it resulted in the razing of 580 buildings; the uprooting or destruction of 500 businesses in a densely settled, mixed-use area; and the displacement of almost 6,000 persons, most of them black or Italian. The destroyed buildings were typically decrepit, and a few, like the Senator Hotel, were infamous. But most housed successful businesses and law-abiding, ambitious families, and their owners and residents charged that the redevelopment project was simply an official way to displace black and Italian families and replace them with glittering commercial buildings. In the end, 1,271 families were evicted, and 917 units of low-rent or middle-income housing ultimately went up in their place. By that time, most of the persons who had lost their homes had long since left White Plains.

### **Breaching the Walls**

“We gonna win. My God, we gonna win,” exclaimed an elderly man listening to the election returns in the Georgian Room of Newark’s Robert Treat Hotel. “Black power,” charged a younger group, their fists raised. “Beep, beep, make way.” And they did win. In the spring of 1970, thirty-seven-year-old Kenneth Gibson became the first black mayor of Newark and indeed the first African American chief executive of any major eastern city.<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately, the blacks of Newark did not win much, because as more than one person noted, the city was an empty shell, containing few jobs, little money, and deteriorated housing. A community that once boasted the world's busiest intersection (at Broad and Market Streets) was already open only eight hours a day, and the central business district was a ghost town after 6 p.m.

This result was not foreordained by God, nor was it unrelated to what was happening in bucolic suburbs at the same time. The cities discussed here are part of a continuum: Darien and New Canaan are at one extreme of the nation's municipal experience, Newark is at the opposite end, and White Plains is somewhere in the middle. How did they come to be so different?

Certainly, geography and nature have been important. Each city has a particular and unique location. They were not and are not interchangeable. In 1900 Newark was already an industrial and working-class community on the major road and rail corridor in the Northeast. By contrast, White Plains was more distant from industry and instead was directly in the path of the suburban flow. Similarly, Darien and New Canaan were almost rural until 1945, and they were accessible only after a long and expensive commute. Even if their decisions had been different, Newark would not likely have been a bucolic preserve for the wealthy, nor is it probable that White Plains, Darien, or New Canaan could have become symbols of the Rust Belt.

Yet these patterns are not simply the result of geography or natural phenomena, nor are they inevitable. Instead, they result from a process that is as perverse as it is clear. Darien and New Canaan achieved status by becoming progressively more expensive and more exclusionary. They zoned out industry, raised minimum lot requirements for new houses, refused public housing, restricted their schools and even their beaches to the wealthy and the comfortable, and discriminated against minorities. For those self-centered decisions Darien and New Canaan have been rewarded by the American system—and they are not unique. As former secretary of labor Robert Reich has warned, “America's elite is retreating into a private utopia.”

Newark, by contrast, encouraged industry, welcomed minorities, provided for entry-level housing, integrated its schools, and constructed public housing. For its pains it became one of America's poorest and least attractive cities. Newark has experienced some signs of life in recent years, most notably the glittering New Jersey Performing Arts Center, a new minor-league baseball stadium, and a proposed

two-mile esplanade along the Passaic River. It also offers cost-effective office and industrial opportunities. Yet Newark has not recovered from decades of decline and decay, and perhaps it never will.

White Plains would seem to be the solution to the urban dilemma, lacking the excesses of snooty suburbs and depressed inner cities. A successful and pleasant community, it has high property values, an economically and racially diverse population, numerous corporate offices, and a thriving central business district replete with clean, modern, and efficient Bauhaus skyscrapers.

But White Plains is not America's solution. It is itself scorned by residents of surrounding towns precisely because it has opened its doors to the poor and integrated its schools. More important, every community cannot be a combination government center, corporate center, and retailing center or have more jobs than residents. What has worked with reasonable success in White Plains cannot be a blueprint for most towns and cities.

What then is the possible solution to municipal inequality and governmental balkanization in urban America? The major conclusion of this analysis is that no one city or suburb can alone do much about poverty and discrimination. If communities jointly support the needs of the poor, this can be an effective solution to metropolitan ills and disparities. In short, the histories and the futures of Darien, New Canaan, Newark, and White Plains are linked. Affluence and despair, in the modern American context, are as intertwined as day and night, as the wind and the rain. The New York metropolitan area, the largest and most complex in the United States, is really an interconnected job and housing market. If Wall Street investment banks lay off thousands of employees, Darien, New Canaan, Newark, and White Plains all feel the repercussions. Any solution to America's urban ills must begin with the recognition that residents of metropolitan regions share common challenges. Few people benefit when inner city schools are dysfunctional, when public housing projects become armed camps, or when minority jobless rates are double those of the middle class. Similarly, city dwellers should recognize that on balance, it is a benefit to them if the region includes a variety of residential and educational options, including many in the suburbs.

The "gentleman's agreement" of the United States is the shared willingness to ignore or to attribute to natural causes the maldistribution of poverty and wealth among local governmental jurisdictions. The problem will not be solved unless the local, state, and national

governments, encouraged probably by the court system, develop policies that can earn the contingent consent of most people. This is to say that successful solutions and conditions must earn the willing and active approval of the electorate, who must believe that other citizens are doing their share. Several approaches are possible:

### *Annexation*

Reduce balkanization by extending the boundaries of cities so that, as was the general case in nineteenth-century America, most of the people in a given metropolitan area would live within the same municipal jurisdiction. Thus Philadelphia quadrupled its population and expanded its area from 2 to 130 square miles in 1854. Chicago's largest annexation took place in 1889, when 133 square miles and most of what is now the far south side were added. Boston added about fifteen square miles by joining with Roxbury in 1868 and Dorchester in 1870, while New Orleans absorbed Carrollton in 1876 to give the Crescent City most of the area it occupies today. Baltimore more than doubled its size in 1888. If Newark were to expand to include all of Essex County, for example, the city would grow from 23 to more than 120 square miles and broaden its tax base by incorporating a dozen middle-class suburbs. Even so, the city of Greater Newark would be smaller by far than Houston, San Diego, Oklahoma City, Memphis, or Jacksonville.

But the lesson of the past is that suburbs, especially in the Northeast, have been rejecting annexation to larger cities for more than a century, and it is unlikely that such circumstances will soon change. White Plains might have a better chance of absorbing Westchester County, but that community is not in dire financial straits, and neighboring suburbs could be expected to vigorously oppose any such notion. Darien and New Canaan, prospering in their isolation, would not likely see advantage in greater size.

### *Regionalizing Governmental Functions*

Move the fire, police, and educational functions of government to state or regional levels, which would have the effect of broadening the tax base without adding to city boundaries. This is essentially the approach of Germany, Australia, Japan, France, and Great Britain, all of which have many municipal subdivisions, and all of which vest

much greater power and financial responsibility in national or regional governments than is the case in the United States. Unfortunately, the American system delegates much power to local governments. Indeed, in recent decades the tendency has been to push responsibilities lower, not higher, on the governmental food chain.

### *Fair-Share Agreements*

The third potential solution is to require regional planning and to encourage the development of a regional consciousness, especially as regards a fair-share distribution of the poor. Thus far, the most important example of this approach comes from New Jersey. In that state so-called “snob-zoning” litigation led to a Supreme Court ruling in 1975 affecting Mount Laurel Township that provides a model for other states. In effect, the court ruled that New Jersey was constitutionally obligated to provide realistic opportunities for constructing in each community a “fair share” of the regional need for affordable housing. While the results of the Garden State experiment are not yet clear, and while various New Jersey legislative compromises have watered down the original intent of the decision, the idea remains salutary. It suggests that every municipality in a given area set aside a certain percentage of its total housing stock for the needy. Within those basic parameters, each city, town, or village could move in different directions: high-density versus low-density development; exclusively residential versus mixed use; emphasis on excellent public schools versus emphasis on better parks or livelier entertainment districts.<sup>41</sup>

In the absence of such fair-share agreements, some jurisdictions—such as Darien and New Canaan—will remain privileged, while others—such as Newark—will have to deal with the full range of urban ills. Indeed, as Anthony Downs has noted, American urban development occurs in a systematic, predictable manner. It leads to results that are manifestly unjust and that contribute to crime, abandonment, and every other form of urban pathology. Affluence and despair are structurally linked in that there is a correlation between the development of large urban centers (together with manufacturing districts and immigrant neighborhoods), the construction of efficient and fast transportation technologies, and the desire of affluent families to escape from responsibility. Some separation is inevitable in a free and competitive society. But walling off central cities like Newark and walling in exclusive suburbs like Darien and New Canaan means that low-income

housing is most needed in those jurisdictions where it is least wanted, and that most municipal jurisdictions have no incentive to improve the condition of the poor. When one type of community has much more than its share of economic resources and less than its share of the poor, some other place must bear a disproportionate burden.<sup>42</sup>

In 1957, soon after the Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Men hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don’t know each other. They don’t know each other because they can’t communicate with each other. They can’t communicate with each other because they are separated from each other.”

Tearing down the very visible racial walls built by Jim Crow was King’s dream for his people and his country. Tearing down the equally restrictive racial and economic walls built by public policy decisions in exclusive suburbs like Darien and New Canaan would mean redirecting public investment in infrastructure, housing, and schools away from exclusion and toward collaboration. Achieving the American dream of a single-family house on a separate parcel of land in a safe and supportive environment does not require the exclusion of less-affluent persons from particular communities. As Robert Frost wrote and as Martin Luther King implied, there should be something in all of us that doesn’t love a wall, that wants it down.

## Notes

1. Robert Frost, “Mending Walls,” in Edward Connery Lathem, ed., *North of Boston: Poems* (Dodd, Mead and Co., 1977), p. 6.

2. On gated communities, see Evan McKenzie, *Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government* (Yale University Press, 1994).

3. The boundaries between cities and suburbs have had important political ramifications, a topic explored by Thomas Byrne Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (W. W. Norton and Company, 1991).

4. The literature on homelessness in the United States is vast. See especially Eric H. Monkkenon, ed., *Walking to Work: Tramps in America* (University of Nebraska Press, 1984); John C. Schneider, “Skid Row as Urban Neighborhood, 1880–1960,” *Urbanism Past and Present*, vol. 9 (Winter-Spring 1984), pp. 10–20; Kenneth T. Jackson, “The Bowery: From Residential Street to Skid Row,” in Rick Beard, ed., *On Being Homeless: Historical Perspectives* (Museum of the City of New York, 1987), pp. 68–79; and Brendan O’Flaherty, *Making Room: The Economics of Homelessness* (Harvard University Press, 1996).

5. See Robert E. Park, E. W. Burgess, and R. D. McKenzie, *The City* (Univer-

sity of Chicago Press, 1925); Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 44 (July 1938), pp. 1–24.

6. For a fine summary of the link between poverty and segregation, see Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Harvard University Press, 1993). See also Michael N. Danielson, *The Politics of Exclusion* (Columbia University Press, 1976).

7. Robert C. Wood, *1,400 Governments: The Political Economy of the New York Metropolitan Region* (Harvard University Press, 1961). An excellent brief history of municipal annexation is provided by Jon C. Teaford, *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850–1970* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

8. Sidney Plotkin, *Keep Out: The Struggle for Land Use Control* (University of California Press, 1987).

9. For a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

10. On the trend toward "McMansions" in New Canaan, see *New York Times*, September 27, 1998.

11. Laura Z. Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement* (Simon and Schuster, 1947).

12. There have been dozens of thoughtful newspaper articles on contemporary Newark in the past three decades but no sustained analysis. A 1970 snapshot, somewhat flawed, is provided by Ron Parambo, *No Cause for Indictment: An Autopsy of Newark* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

13. A kind of nadir was reached on February 20, 1992, when the official car of the Essex County prosecutor was stolen while he was speaking at a Newark church on the problem of automobile theft. *New York Times*, February 22, 1992.

14. As might be expected, there are few studies of New Canaan or Darien. Sources used for this section are Mary Louise King, *Portrait of New Canaan: The History of a Connecticut Town* (New Canaan Historical Society, 1981); J. Benjamin Corbin, *A Historical Account of Events in the Order of Time Which Have Taken Place Between 1641 and the Present in Darien* (Darien Historical Society, 1948); Charlotte Chase Fairley, "History of Canaan Parish From Founding to 1801," in *Readings in New Canaan History* (New Canaan Historical Society, 1949), pp. 123–56; and Charlotte Chase Fairley, "A History of New Canaan, 1801–1900," in *Readings in New Canaan History*, pp. 157–281.

15. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 241–43.

16. For the best studies of federal housing programs, see Mark I. Gelfand, *A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban America, 1933–1965* (Oxford University Press, 1975); Calvin Bradford, "Financing Home Ownership: The Federal Role in Neighborhood Decline," *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, vol. 14 (March 1979), pp. 313–35; and Henry Aaron, *Shelter and Subsidies: Who Benefits from Federal Housing Policies* (Brookings, 1972).

17. Neither Darien nor New Canaan continues to be overtly anti-Semitic, but both continue to have a decidedly WASPish reputation and few Jewish residents. Because the Census Bureau does not inquire about religion, precise statistics are not available.

18. Housing Files, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y.

19. *Annual Report of the United States Housing Authority for the Fiscal Year 1938* (1939), pp. vii, 38.

20. On occasion the federal government has threatened to withhold federal grants from communities that refuse to accept public housing, but such efforts have almost always been overridden by local congressional representatives. Some suburbs, such as Greenwich, Connecticut, manage to maintain an exclusive image despite the presence of public housing, but this is the exception and not the rule. See Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 219–30.

21. This analysis draws upon James O. Drummond, "Transportation and the Shaping of the Physical Environment in an Urban Place: Newark, 1820–1900," Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1979. The only general history of Newark in print is a booster volume aimed at a secondary school market. It does, however, provide a readable overview of the city's development. See John T. Cunningham, *Newark* (Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1966). Other studies of the city used as sources for this section are William Shaw, *History of Essex and Hudson Counties* (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1884); Joseph Atkinson, *The History of Newark, NJ* (Newark: William B. Guild, 1878); David Lawrence Pierson, *Narratives of Newark From the Days of Its Founding, 1666–1916* (Newark: Pierson Publishing Company, 1917); and Joseph Fulford Folsom, ed., *The Municipalities of Essex County, 1666–1924*, 4 vols. (Newark, 1924). The many excellent monographs on specialized topics include Susan E. Hirsch, *The Roots of the American Working Class: The Industrialization of Crafts in Newark, 1800–1860* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978); and Samuel H. Popper, "Newark, N.J., 1870–1910: Chapters in the Evolution of an American Metropolis," Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1952.

22. Barbara J. Kukla, *Swing City: Newark Nightlife, 1925–1950* (Temple University Press, 1991); and Ronald A. Mayer, *The 1937 Newark Bears: A Baseball Legend* (Rutgers University Press, 1996).

23. James G. Smith, "Newark at the Crossroads: An Economic Survey of the City and Its Environs," *Journal of Industry and Finance* (November 1930), pp. 7–24. See also L. H. Wendrich, "Greater Newark: A Quarter Century Vision," *Journal of Industry and Finance*, vol. 29 (1940), pp. 654–69.

24. Quoted in George W. Groh, *The Black Migration: The Journey to Urban America* (Weybright and Talley, 1972), p. 248. On recent Newark politics, see also Wilbur C. Rich, *Black Mayors and School Politics: The Failure of Reform in Detroit, Gary, and Newark* (Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 91–127; and Katherine Yatrakis, "Electoral Demands and Political Benefits: A Case of Two Mayoral Elections in Newark, N.J.," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1981.

25. Another kind of personal reminiscence, beautifully accompanied by photographs of the ghetto, is found in Helen M. Stummer, *No Easy Walk: Newark, 1980–1993* (Temple University Press, 1994).

26. Paul A. Stellhorn, "Depression and Decline: Newark, N.J.: 1929–1941," Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1983, *passim*.

27. Frank Kingdon, "Newark a Hundred Years Hence," *Newarker*, vol. 1 (June 15, 1936), pp. 72–73.

28. The basic source on this topic is Stuart Galishoff, "Public Health in Newark, 1832–1918," Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1969, p. 62.

29. *Newark Daily Journal*, August 2, 1883.
30. *Newark Evening News*, June 10, 1884.
31. *Newark Evening News*, October 11, 1883.
32. *New York Times*, August 5, 1998.
33. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 190–218.
34. These records are available in the HOLC City Survey Files (Record Group 195) in the National Archives.
35. For a somewhat more favorable account of Danzig, and of urban renewal generally, see Harold Kaplan, *Urban Renewal Politics: Slum Clearance in Newark* (Columbia University Press, 1963).
36. Jean Anyon, *Ghetto Schooling: A Political Economy of Urban Educational Reform* (Teachers College Press, 1997). Still useful is Marion Thompson Wright, *The Education of Negroes in New Jersey* (Teachers College Press, 1941).
37. On the 1967 riots in Newark, see Joe Feagin and Harlan Hahn, *Ghetto Revolts* (Macmillan, 1973); and Tom Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark: Official Violence and Ghetto Response* (Vintage Books, 1967). On their impact, see Stanley B. Winters, ed., *From Riot to Recovery: Newark After Ten Years* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1979). Another riot broke out at a Puerto Rican Labor Day festival in Branch Brook Park in 1974 after mounted police broke up a dice game. In two days of rioting, punctuated by rumors that a young girl had been trampled to death, two people were killed and sniper fire was aimed at police from rooftops. *Star-Ledger*, November 5, 1998.
38. The Newark Board of Education never granted Baxter a salary equal to his position and responsibilities. In 1884 white elementary principals were paid \$1,800, while Baxter was paid \$1,200. Similarly, *The Forty-Fourth Annual Report of the Newark Board of Education, 1900* (p. 21) indicated that while white elementary principals were paid \$2,000, the black principal made only \$1,500. See Ralph K. Turp, "Public Schools in the City of Newark, 1850–1965," Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1967, p. 83. See also John R. Anderson, "Negro Education in the Public Schools of Newark, New Jersey During the Nineteenth Century," Ed.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1972.
39. The published work on White Plains is not strong. The leading expert who has produced several small books aimed at a local audience is Renoda Hoffman, *Yesterday in White Plains: A Picture History of a Vanished Era* (Tuckahoe, N.Y.: Little Art Graphics, 1981). See also Edith Phillips, "The Development of White Plains," *Westchester County Historical Bulletin* (1948), pp. 104–18; and Ernest Freeland Griffin, *Westchester County and Its People*, vol. 1 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1946), p. 235.
40. *New York Post*, February 10, 1970.
41. The best account of the Mount Laurel decision is found in David L. Kirp, John P. Dwyer, and Larry A. Rosenthal, *Our Town: Race, Housing, and the Soul of Suburbia* (Rutgers University Press, 1995).
42. Anthony Downs has written often and effectively on this point. See especially Anthony Downs, *Opening Up the Suburbs: An Urban Strategy for America* (Yale University Press, 1973).