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REVIEW ESSAY

SUBURBIA RECONSIDERED: RACE, POLITICS, AND PROPERTY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920–1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African Americans in Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

Andrew Wiese, *Places of their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Among the more newsworthy findings of the 2000 United States Census were those showing the dynamic demographics of cities and suburbs at the close of the twentieth century. New waves of immigrants not only brought economic and social capital to neighborhoods within large cities during the 1990s, but they fueled the growth of adjoining suburbs as well. In fact, the Census showed, more of the immigrants residing in U.S. metropolitan areas in the year 2000 lived in suburbs than in cities. The suburban migration of immigrants, many of whom were Latino and Asian, accompanied a concomitant increase in the rate of African American suburbanization. While a good portion of these new suburbanites were relatively affluent, many were blue-collar workers of more modest means.[1] Suburbia, long viewed as the province of middle-class whites, appeared to some observers to have become suddenly racially and economically diverse. Coming on the heels of numerous studies examining the rise of suburban job centers and high-tech corridors in the 1980s and 1990s, the Census data underscored the polymorphous character of late-twentieth-century American suburbia.[2] Many major regional newspapers devoted serial coverage to these demographic changes and analysis of their local significance, presenting the Census data as evidence of a new metropolitan reality that was a significant departure from the urban and suburban America of a generation before.

However, the suburbanization of nonwhites and the working class was neither sudden nor remarkably new. Minority and working-class communities have

thrived on the outskirts of American cities for well over a century, just as suburbs have long served as hubs of industry and commerce as well as being places of residence. Twenty years after the publication of Kenneth Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier* and Robert Fishman's *Bourgeois Utopias* signaled the profession's serious foray into the history of the American suburb, the historical literature has now accumulated an array of article and book-length studies that explore suburbia as a spatial form that long predates postwar Levittowns.[3] During the last decade—as suburbs themselves were undergoing the changes later outlined by the 2000 Census—scholars began also to explore the diversity within and among suburbs in order to move suburban history beyond what, as one essay in this journal called it, the "suburban cliché" of leafy, exclusive, and all-white residential communities. Yet more often than not the scholarly work on suburban variegation has focused on the changes of the last twenty years rather than those occurring in the eighty years before.[4]

The media response to the recent census findings is one indication of how the suburban cliché persists in the popular imagination, and the degree to which it serves as the bottom-line presumption for so many conversations about the shape of American cities. "Suburbs" continue to be defined quite narrowly, and often pejoratively, as places to which affluent whites decide to flee, while giving little consideration to the social and environmental consequences of their decision. Part of the reason for this has to do with the fact that the most visibly changing parts of the early twenty-first century U.S. metropolis are the exurban residential communities filled with large homes and golf courses, often surrounded by walls and gates, and populated by well-off professionals. Newspaper exposés and policy briefs decry the suburban "sprawl" that eats up open space and farmland at the urban edge. Bookstore shelves fill with texts, by both academics and non, that bemoan the environmental and architectural excesses of these sorts of places and the failures of suburbs in general. Suburbs have been assigned responsibility not merely for social anomie but also for a range of societal ills from gun violence to oil dependence to obesity. Read enough of these works, and it is easy to start suspecting that suburbia has brought American society to the brink of complete collapse.[5]

Another reason for the continued equation of the American suburb with the white middle-class consumer, and the persistent characterization of the suburb as a political and urban planning problem in need of a solution, is the history of the postwar mass suburb itself. The post-1945 period witnessed an explosion of suburban residential and commercial development and an unprecedented democratization of homeownership in the United States, developments with tremendous economic and cultural consequences. Jackson led off the subsequent historical discussion of this period by showing that not only were federal housing and highway policies largely responsible for these changes, but that these policies laid down inherently discriminatory ground rules and created a real estate market from which nonwhites were, by and large, excluded. Important studies that followed showed the degree to which these politics of suburban exclusion contributed to the desertion of the city by the white middle class, leaving an economically decaying domain of the most poor and most disenfranchised minorities.[6]

Without disavowing the compelling and disheartening evidence at the core of both the current crop of anti-suburban critiques and the literature documenting the economic, racial, and social crises spurred by postwar urban decentralization, it seems that the focus on the failures of suburbia has perhaps obscured full understanding of the multiple forms and meanings of the twentieth century suburb, the demographic diversity in suburban places, and the affirmative value of suburbs for those who lived in them. The embrace of the suburban home and neighborhood by those Americans who could afford them and whose skin color fit the prevailing criteria attests not only to the economic advantage these places bestowed upon their residents but also to the individual desire for an affordable home in a place that seemed pleasant and safe. The current migration of immigrants to suburbs—and the enthusiasm with which some of the more affluent of these recent arrivals greet the "McMansions" and cul-de-sacs of the new exurban developments—indicates that suburbs continue to be places that people, if allowed, choose over many city neighborhoods. Urban and social historians, even while embarking upon the task of documenting the long and diverse history of the suburb, have seemed to find it hard to embrace the suburban dream to such a degree. We found this history to be one overshadowed by racism and environmental degradation, with suburban ascendance inextricably twinned with urban crisis. And some among us (who in many cases, given the luxury of choice, prefer to live in cities than in suburbs) still had a hard time looking at suburbs without quietly asking ourselves: "Why on earth would anyone want to live there?"

Perhaps the general difficulty in piecing out the full history and significance of the American suburb has stemmed from scholars failing to pose that question directly to suburbanites themselves, particularly to people who were not the "typical" white middle class. While urban history has expanded as a category to encompass economics, politics, class, race and ethnicity, and culture, it has taken more time for the study of the suburbs to widen its focus.[7] Suburban narratives initially tended to be dominated by top-down politics and policy, or explications of real estate schemes and ranch house design, rather than the voices of the people who chose to make the suburban exodus and the suburban dreams of those left behind. Compounding this disjunction was a tendency among urban scholars to bound their studies at city or neighborhood limits and examine "urban" and "suburban" cases separately, an approach that left less room to explore the continuities and interdependencies that flowed across political boundaries.

This is beginning to change. The literature that is filling this gap is by scholars who might well be regarded "political" historians as much as they are urban or social ones, and whose work traces the intricate connections among property, community identity, and political ideology.[8] Old suburban myths are being challenged, particularly by historians who focus their attention on the cities of the Sunbelt and Pacific West. Recent books have shown us that seemingly unplanned suburban sprawl was, in fact, the product of conscientious planning, and that bored suburban housewives were actually grassroots activists at the forefront of the modern conservative movement. And there promises to be more to come.[9]

Four recently published books are at the forefront of the move in this direction, and place suburbanites and would-be suburbanites at the center of their re-

spective narratives. The studies not only broaden the definition of the twentieth-century American suburb and the motivations and political identities of people who inhabit them, but also show the deep roots of the urban racial convulsions and tax revolts of the 1960s and 1970s. These are monographs that consciously build upon the important urban histories of the 1980s and 1990s, particularly Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier* and Thomas Sugrue's 1996 study *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, but that stand on their own as studies that expand the definition of the suburb well beyond suburban clichés and properly situate it in its metropolitan political context.[10] All examine the prewar as well as the postwar period, providing a window onto the changing relationship between space and the formation of social and political capital over time. Better classified as metropolitan histories rather than suburban ones, these studies move beyond the hole-in-the-doughnut paradigm of urban decentralization. It seems hardly coincidental that all four are authored by historians who either were trained in or teach in Western institutions, as the books demonstrate a level of comfort and familiarity with the horizontal and polycentric urban landscape characteristic of the urban West that allows their analyses to move beyond tired attempts to define "suburbs" and "cities" as inherently oppositional concepts.[11]

What these works reveal most vividly is that suburban history is, more than anything else, a story in which *property* equals *power*. In the United States, land and homeownership have provided economic security and political empowerment in a market society that failed to provide a social safety net. Books are never perfect—and it is the job of reviewers to point out shortcomings as well as successes—but it should be noted at the outset that each of these works is a worthy addition to the literature. Some will become enduring additions to graduate reading lists and undergraduate syllabi. As a group, they indicate a powerful new direction in social history that promises to shift the way historians talk and teach about metropolitan America, and that may be able to inject necessary complexity and nuance into wider conversations about suburbia and its meanings.

One book making this kind of contribution is *My Blue Heaven*, Becky M. Nicolaides' rich study of the working-class Los Angeles suburb of South Gate. Developed in the early twentieth century as a home for factories and the working-class people who worked in them, South Gate's historical trajectory is quite different from the Levittowns, Lakewoods, and the other postwar subdivisions that make up the metropolitan sea of Los Angeles. In contrast to the mass building and cookie-cutter planning of later developments, South Gate developed in the early 1920s as a community that featured both developer-built homes as well as undeveloped land available for purchase by families of the most modest of incomes. In Home Gardens, the poorer part of South Gate on which Nicolaides focuses much of her study, the loose building standards and lack of infrastructure fueled the community's early growth, serving as a powerful attraction to working-class white migrants from the South who otherwise would not have been able to afford homeownership. These new suburbanites erected jerry-built homes and supplemented working-class incomes by turning their lots into small-scale agricultural operations, raising chickens and growing vegetables for sale or for the family table. In the postwar period, homes became more

standardized and farm plots abandoned, but South Gate retained a strong and increasingly politically conservative white working-class identity focused upon property ownership, minimal government interference, and, eventually, racial exclusion.

Drawing on interviews, local periodicals, maps, and archival data, Nicolaides paints a vivid picture of a very different kind of *urbs in horto*—a place that "stood midway between farm and city" (p. 4) whose lack of infrastructure and variegated architecture made it look more rural than urban. Yet this landscape was, from its inception, both industrial and residential, home to major facilities for Firestone Tires and General Motors, among others. And it was very much a response to the vagaries of urban industrial capitalism, in which blue-collar workers relied on their modest properties to keep them fed, sheltered, and economically afloat.

The value of property, and its relationship to class and political identity, is a thread that continues as Nicolaides turns her attention to the people, politics, labor, and leisure patterns in prewar South Gate. In the horizontally expanding metropolis, she shows, class and community identity emerged in different ways than in the higher-density working-class neighborhoods of the East and Midwest. The white working class of South Gate could, and did, move freely around the city, commuting to other suburbs for work, to downtown to shop, to the beach in their free time. Metropolitan Los Angeles had far fewer immigrants than other large American cities during this period, but, while overwhelmingly native-born, South Gate was economically diverse. Home Gardens might have been solidly blue-collar, but other parts of South Gate were home to a mercantile and professional middle class. The economic mix in South Gate led to local-level class antagonism that, Nicolaides argues, precluded metropolitan-level class radicalism. Instead, South Gate was "a town united most tenaciously around the shared identities of race, homeownership, family status, and nativity" rather than class (p. 64). Distinctive state and local conditions affected residents' political identity as well. Nicolaides' discussion of the Mattoon Act, a special property assessment enacted by California in 1925, provides a vivid illustration of how the financial ruin brought on many working-class homeowners during the Great Depression shaped their subsequent attitudes towards property taxation.

As Nicolaides turns to the postwar period in the second half of *My Blue Heaven*, the suburban story becomes more familiar. Manicured lawns and ranch homes gradually replace South Gate's jerry-built homes and chicken coops; residents enjoy the benefits of new federal housing and infrastructure programs and Los Angeles' postwar industrial boom. The postwar generation had a "heightened intolerance of mixed land use" that "strongly suggested that postwar residents desired a different kind of community" (p. 121). Yet Nicolaides deftly shows how the suburb's prewar experiences linked to its postwar politics. The plain-folk Americanism and resistance to taxation seen in the early migrants developed into an anti-tax and anti-integrationist conservatism by the late 1950s and 1960s. The suburb's strong working-class character and labor activism of some South Gate residents persisted into the postwar period, Nicolaides argues, but "workplace militancy was a means for improving their lives as suburbanites, rather than challenging the economic system more broadly" (p. 246). Sim-

ilarly, property ownership provided the frame within which South Gaters resisted racial change, creating a political rhetoric that "focused more on protecting white rights rather than attacking blacks" (p. 312).

Nicolaides is at her most compelling and original as she explains the multiple meanings and functions of suburban space, the importance of property and its relationship to shifting political ideologies, and in showing how this suburb and its residents fit into the larger metropolitan landscape of Los Angeles. South Gate residents' experiences as homeowners shape their politics in both expected and unexpected ways, spurring their resistance to municipal taxing and spending in the suburb's early years, their receptivity to Upton Sinclair's message of economic equity in his 1934 campaign for governor, and their resistance to racial integration in the civil rights era. This book shows the deep roots of 1960s conservatism and 1970s tax revolts, and in doing so highlights the critical interplay between property ownership and shifting political ideologies.

Nicolaides is somewhat less convincing in making broader conclusions about the formation of a distinctive class-based or community-based identity. As her evidence shows, the nature of property ownership and the arrangement of urban space meant that South Gate residents valued *home* over *hometown*, willing to sacrifice municipal infrastructure improvements for the sake of lower taxes, willing to keep their city schools substandard if it meant that they could stay majority-white. Collective identity often was experienced outside city limits: at their workplaces, on outings to the movies or the beach, in church. In fact, Nicolaides is so effective in showing how South Gaters blended into the larger metropolitan canvas that sometimes the community-study approach she takes—detailing local demographics, community institutions, work and family life—seems forced. In a decentralized metropolis, how much can a community study tell us? Is this a story distinctive to South Gate, or to Los Angeles as a whole? Does it show a particularly Western urban culture or are its findings applicable to other parts of the nation? Rich in detail at the beginning and more hurried at the end, *My Blue Heaven* leaves us asking some of these bigger questions. But these are small quibbles, and the greater value of this book is that it has its readers asking such questions in the first place. This book not only presents the other, white working-class side of the suburban coin, but it also enriches our understanding of how homeownership provided economic security and shaped personal and community politics throughout the twentieth century.

Josh Sides' *L.A. City Limits* serves as a good companion piece to Nicolaides, as he focuses on the African American community that was literally next door to South Gate, asking many of the same questions about its group identity, community institutions, family economies, and aspirations for homeownership. Sides presents his study as a West Coast response to Sugrue's *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, arguing that "Chicago and Detroit are not, as it turns out, synonymous with urban America" (p. 5) and that "the pursuit of equality and opportunity in Los Angeles has been shaped by at least three distinctive features of the city's history: its diverse racial composition, its dynamic economic growth, and its dispersive spatial arrangement" (p. 6). As Sides shows, the familiar narratives of black hyper-segregation, white flight, and concomitant deindustrialization don't fit the

story of twentieth-century Los Angeles. However, while these local conditions may have at times mitigated some of the harshest effects of racial discrimination, the city was hardly the racial utopia hoped for by its black migrants.

Sides begins his discussion in prewar Los Angeles, detailing the work of individuals and institutions that worked for the political and economic empowerment of the black community. The presence of other groups—Mexicans, Asians—simultaneously eased residential segregation and increased discrimination against blacks in the workplace. In ways similar to another study set in prewar Los Angeles, George Sanchez's *Becoming Mexican American,*[12] Sides traces the city's black migrants back to their Texan and Louisianan roots, exploring how racial discrimination in their home cities drove African American workers West. Moving into the postwar period, Sides shows the degree to which blacks were excluded from the postwar housing market that was transforming Los Angeles—only 2.4 percent of FHA units built in the city between 1950 and 1954 were open to nonwhites (p. 108)—and explores the degree to which economic mobility depended on home ownership. By placing African Americans at the center of his narrative, Sides provides a sense of the multiethnic metropolis that is nearly entirely missing from Nicolaides, as well as showing the different situations and aspirations of L.A.'s blacks.

The people and places discussed in *L.A. City Limits* vividly illustrate how "urban" and "suburban" categories elide in horizontal cities like Los Angeles. There, the African American struggle for social and economic equality took place on a metropolitan stage, in neighborhoods that looked far more like suburban Levittown than the inner-city Bronx. Just as Nicolaides delves into the prewar roots of postwar conservatism, Sides shows that the civil disturbances of Watts were the culmination of a fifty-year process of exclusion from economic opportunity and free movement across metropolitan space. However, the book is not as rich or as deeply-sourced as it might have been, and some chapters—particularly the one discussing the civil rights movement in Los Angeles—could have been better-organized. This is a first book that Sides produced with commendable speed; as a result, it can be a fresher and livelier read, but it also misses opportunities for broader analysis. So much of what Sides discusses speaks not only to the historical literature but also to the economic and sociological; many elements of this story alternately reinforce or refute social scientific theories like spatial mismatch and the social effects of ghetto isolation, but there is little reference to these wider scholarly debates in the text or notes.

This book may not fundamentally change the way we think about cities and suburbs, but it does add an important Western and Sunbelt perspective that has been missing from much of the literature on African American urbanization. Sides is particularly conscientious about delineating the social and economic diversity within the African American community, and its changes over time. He makes the important distinction that the spread of African American settlement in Los Angeles was not "ghetto sprawl" but was, in part, upwardly mobile suburbanization. As Sides reminds us, focusing the story of black Los Angeles on the tumult of the Watts riots obscures much bigger transformations: the ideological fragmentation of the black community, growing white conservatism, and

the widening economic divide resulting from the decline of unionized manufacturing jobs. *L.A. City Limits* fills in these gaps.

Robert O. Self's *American Babylon* should take a prominent place on the social historian's bookshelf. The book's blending of political, social, and urban history creates a multi-layered narrative that speaks to the central questions of all three sub-disciplines. Of the four books discussed here, this is the most conscientiously *metropolitan* study—one that brings together the story of the ghetto and the story of the garden suburb and shows how the two histories are mutually dependent. *American Babylon* unites the actors and events at the center of the two previously discussed books, plumbing the nuances of black politics and the roots of white conservatism, and arguing that space has everything to do with it. Self seeks to move the American West to the center of the African American struggle for civil rights, and in doing so constructs a detailed portrait of a half century of racial politics that illuminates the intertwining of property ownership and political power. The story he tells is more complicated than that of suburban "winners" and urban "losers." It is one in which centrifugal expansion produced a metropolitan checker-board where some places were more privileged than others, and where this privilege almost always correlated with race.

The first part of *American Babylon* explores the forces that built the postwar metropolitan landscape and defined the structures of economic and social opportunity across urban space. The pro-growth leadership of the postwar East Bay fostered a physical and economic expansion that was "suburbanization recast as urbanization" (p. 27). And these suburbs were not alike; working-class suburbs like San Leandro and Milpitas courted industry in order to keep their taxes low, while middle-class towns like Fremont instituted strict planning guidelines to maintain larger lot sizes and green space. Other historians have explored the effect of these kinds of pro-growth politics on the residential and industrial decentralization of the metropolitan Sunbelt,[13] but Self examines these planning efforts in the context of other, contesting visions of the region's future put forth by labor leaders, civil rights activists, and suburbanites themselves. The resulting discussion conveys the finely-tuned complexities of local politics and their larger significance over space and time. Political actors whom historians often examine separately—trade unionists, liberals, civil rights leaders, the urban poor—are here examined side by side, revealing a political give-and-take that becomes articulated in terms of property rights and municipal identity. The mid-century politics of race and class in the East Bay created a place that may have looked to the casual observer as an undifferentiated low-density suburban landscape, but that "was in reality a set of distinct property and employment markets, tax bases, zones of affluence, segregated by race and divided by municipal political boundaries" (p. 129).

In the second part of the book, Self moves fully toward an exploration of the racial tensions that are a persistent sub-theme in the first. Like their counterparts in other cities, the civic and business leaders of Oakland turned to urban renewal in the 1950s as an end-run against "obsolescence" and economic deterioration; as in other cities, black neighborhoods paid the highest price in these renewal schemes. Although the politics of "Negro removal" are a familiar

story, Self provides a well-articulated discussion that ties the process into the larger political economy. Oakland's blacks found themselves in an "insidious double bind" when arguing "both that neighborhood self-determination was a right and that blighted conditions were not a product of this self-determination" (p. 144), but instead resulted from the systematic exclusion of African Americans from structures of political power and from the benefits of the welfare state, broadly defined. While urban renewal threatened the community viability and economic sustainability of black city neighborhoods, suburban resistance to the integration of federally-subsidized housing markets simultaneously curtailed opportunity for black migration beyond city limits. Making effective use of maps here as elsewhere in the book, Self addresses the complex class and racial dynamics of housing desegregation in the East Bay set in place by property markets and illuminated by the passage of the anti-fair-housing Proposition 14 in 1964. Resistance to integration was not simply the result of working-class hostility to their African American neighbors but also came from liberal elites who, partly because of the configuration of metropolitan space, "understood property rights as sacrosanct expressions of their personal freedom and had little daily contact with African Americans" (p. 168).

The third section of *American Babylon* moves into an examination of how the War on Poverty shaped, and was shaped by, local-level markets and politics. The discussion is anchored by a particularly strong chapter on the politics of poverty policy and black power, a movement that Self argues "stood in the main currents of American politics of the 1960s and 1970s" but "[a]s a product of liberalism and its failures, it represented a poignant effort to advance a political strategy beyond desegregation" (p. 218). Meanwhile, the possibilities for entry into metropolitan housing and job markets became more limited as suburbanites further entrenched themselves in a "white noose" that choked and disempowered the blacks of the inner city. The battle over space, property rights, and government spending culminated in the property tax reductions enacted by 1978's Proposition 13, a measure that "signaled a fundamental shift in the public's relationship to liberalism and the long legacy of the New Deal" (p. 326). Already well-studied by political scientists but only beginning to be addressed by historians, Self's discussion of Proposition 13 provides valuable new insight into the tax revolts and broadens our understanding of their racial and economic context.

This book takes the broader narratives of the civil rights struggle, federally-enabled suburbanization, and rising white conservatism and shows the degree to which all of these politics are local and inextricably bound up in personal and group struggles for economic security and political viability. By taking a metropolitan perspective, *American Babylon* becomes a work that transcends the limitations of the community study, whose conclusions speak to broader national issues but that also forcefully demonstrate the degree to which micro-level politics of race and property matter. Like Nicolaides, Self is particularly good at showing the gradual accretion of political attitudes over time. He explores the long history behind the black radicalism of the 1960s and tax revolts of the 1970s, shows us why one fell short and the other succeeded, and the economic and social price paid as a result.

I temper these encomia with two observations. First, despite being set in a metropolis that was increasingly multiracial, *American Babylon* falls short in its portrayal of Latino and Asian politics and how the presence of these communities changed, or did not change, the patterns of economic and political empowerment. While Latinos figure in the discussion in the cases of older Mexican communities displaced by East Bay suburbanization, the civil rights struggles detailed in the book are, by and large, those of African Americans. The interesting questions left mostly unanswered here are the degree to which this multiracial demography affected black access to jobs and housing, and how the civil rights activism of the region's other racial and national groups complemented, or impinged upon, that of Oakland's blacks. A second regret is that this rich book can be *too* densely packed at times. Full of information and insight, *American Babylon* nonetheless could have benefited from more judicious editing, as some of its descriptive and analytic passages reiterate points well-discussed elsewhere. In this shortcoming, the book has plenty of scholarly company, and it leads one to express a general wish that works of such rigor and acuity could also manage to be more streamlined reads. Nonetheless, these are relatively minor concerns in light of this book's significant contributions. This is an ambitious, impressive work of history.

Andrew Wiese's *Places of Their Own* moves these arguments about suburban diversity, civil rights, and property to a national stage. This is another valuable addition to the historiography, presenting a long history of black suburbanization that has been largely obscured by the focus on white middle-class suburbanites and the *de jure* and *de facto* segregation of mass suburbs. Wiese demonstrates that African Americans shared in the middle-class suburban dream and that their suburbanization could reinforce racial and community identity rather than dilute it. Drawing on an array of case study examples, Wiese is able to delineate distinctions not only in terms of class but also of region, showing how paths of suburban opportunity for blacks played out differently in the South, West, Midwest, and East. Importantly, Wiese reminds us that the suburban cliché itself has served to structure racially-biased market opportunity, as "the idea of suburbs as white and middle- or upper-class space, places where a 'better' class of people lived, played an important part in sustaining the spatial advantages that adhere to these places still" (p. 32).

Once again, elements of this book echo and complement the themes of the others discussed here. Some of the African Americans living at the suburban edge in the early twentieth century engaged in self-building and made productive use of their homes in ways similar to the early South Gate residents described in *My Blue Heaven*. The migration stories of these working-class suburbanites also parallel those of the Southern whites described by Nicolaides, and his narrative presents equally vivid and personal characterizations of these migrants and their families. Wherever there were prewar suburbs, there were African Americans—not only in working-class factory towns or unincorporated areas at the urban fringe, but also in black enclaves within "bourgeois utopias" like Evanston, Illinois and Pasadena, California. Black suburban migration during this period was a "highly gendered process" (p. 50) delineated by labor mar-

ket opportunities, where men moved to suburban factory towns while women moved to affluent residential areas to work as domestic servants.

Black suburbanites remain at the center of Wiese's analysis as the book explores what suburban communities meant to those who lived there, and the aspirations of blacks to a comfortable suburban existence that were markedly similar to those of whites of the same class. National periodicals like *Ebony* "promoted a consumer-oriented vision of suburban living" to African Americans in the postwar period that presented suburban homes as something to which black people could aspire without sacrificing racial solidarity. Real estate developers and agents marketed residential subdivisions to black customers using language and imagery nearly indistinguishable from that used in marketing efforts aimed at whites.

The shape of postwar suburbanization differed by region. While housing opportunity for African Americans in the North resulted from a combination of urban racial transition and black settlement in older suburbs, "African American communities in the urban South grew in large measure through the construction of new housing on the metropolitan fringe" (p. 165). Wiese's discussion of the Southern case of urbanization-by-suburbanization again emphasizes the wide variety of suburban forms, from leafy enclaves of single-family homes to more high-density landscapes of apartment buildings and mixed-use areas. And it demonstrates that this suburbanization often happened as the result of the concerted activism of black leaders, who fought to keep African Americans included in the suburbanization process in some way. If blacks would not be admitted into the new white subdivisions, they should be able to move into subdivisions of their own.

In the 1980s and 1990s, African American suburbanization accelerated into what Wiese terms "the next Great Migration" and "the new suburbanites were a diverse group with social, political, and cultural affiliations as deep and wide as the black nation itself" (p. 255). This diversity is not economic, however, and Wiese's discussion of this period focuses almost entirely on the suburban "haves"—denizens of gated communities and beneficiaries of new educational and job opportunities in the post-civil-rights era. The working-class suburbanites of the earlier part of the book fall out of the picture, reflecting the enduring legacy of the postwar period of suburban standardization in which many prewar black suburban communities were bulldozed out of existence. The late twentieth century black suburban landscape described by Wiese is one of "the concurrent magnification of privation and privilege: grinding economic misfortune for the poor and working class coupled with the rise of a well-educated, home-owning middle class" (p. 259). Throughout the postwar period, while the move to black suburbs heightened racial awareness and community pride among the middle class, their new upward mobility heightened class divisions within the black community.

Wiese adds new insight and complexity to the African American urban story, and while the national scope of his project prevents the intense level of local social analysis found in the other books discussed here, he is able to compare differences among regions and between classes and genders that the single-region studies cannot. By conscientiously placing black suburbanites at the center of

his narrative, Wiese shows that suburbanization was not something that happened *to* African Americans but that blacks themselves *made* their own suburbanization, working where they could to create paths of economic opportunity and equity through property ownership. This study is particularly well-timed, being published on the fiftieth anniversary of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, an event that occasioned the release of a number of books examining black upward mobility and the state of integration.[14] Just as blue-collar whites in suburbs like South Gate and San Leandro maintained a strong working-class identity while simultaneously developing a language of property-based individual rights, middle-class blacks reinforced their racial and community solidarity while also embracing the suburban ethos of homeownership and individual upward mobility.

Each of these books speaks to the other three, filling in missing narrative elements, moving from a local stage to the national and back again. Some of their subject matter closely overlaps, but each brings fresh perspectives to the discussion. Read together, they are a powerful demonstration of how much the field of urban history is changing into something that might more accurately be described as "metropolitan history," bringing together the study of city and suburb while continuing to connect community-level analysis to broader regional and national-level political and social change.[15] Nicolaides, Self, and Wiese have all produced exciting and original monographs that are likely to have a lasting impact on the historiography of American suburbs. The books impress the reader with the depth of their research and the broad sweep of their analysis. Sides' approach is less ground-breaking but nonetheless provides a valuable reinterpretation of the "urban crisis" story, breaking it out of its Rustbelt frame and illuminating the distinctive patterns of opportunity and exclusion that emerge in the horizontal cities of the Sunbelt and West.

These books show that urban and suburban history is moving in a direction that not only leaves behind the old suburban clichés but also challenges past interpretations of urban crisis, local politics, and race relations. These four works move beyond the comparative categorizations of Rustbelt vs. Sunbelt; they not only show the widely differing patterns of opportunity in postwar boomtowns, but also illustrate the fundamentally interlinked fates of the "haves" and "have-nots." They remind us that white flight is only one strand in the complex bundle of forces spurring America's urban decentralization, and that the suburbanization of the working class and minorities has served to reinforce, rather than fracture, group identity. Conceived and written during the relatively prosperous American 1990s—a period marked by continued public-sector devolution, demographic diversification, and urban gentrification—these books convey a comfort level with a wide range of political and spatial categories that is absent from an earlier generation of urban studies. These authors are able to talk in more serious and dispassionate terms about political conservatism, analyze the multiple meanings of the American suburb, and adapt classic questions about race, class, and gender to the social and spatial landscapes of the low-density, polycentric city. As the metropolitan United States moves towards an increasingly multiracial and multiethnic future, and as "city" and "suburb" become less

distinguishable from one another in terms of both population and function, this turn in the literature provides crucial historical grounding for the new urban reality.

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ENDNOTES

1. The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy program has sponsored some of the more widely-noted urban research using 2000 Census data through its *Living Cities Census Series*. See in particular white papers by Audrey Singer, "The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways" (February 2004); Shannon McConville and Paul Ong, "The Trajectory of Poor Neighborhoods in Southern California, 1970–2000" (November 2003); Roberto Suro and Audrey Singer, "Latino Growth in Metropolitan America: Changing Patterns, New Locations" (July 2002); William H. Frey, "Melting Pot Suburbs: A Census 2000 Survey of Suburban Diversity" (June 2001), all accessible at <www.brookings.edu/urban>(29 July 2004). Much of this work is collected in *Redefining Urban and Suburban America: Evidence from Census 2000,* ed. Bruce J. Katz and Robert E. Lang (Washington, D.C., 2003).

2. Influential studies published during the 1990s included Myron Orfield, *Metropolitics* (Cambridge, Mass. and Washington, D.C., 1998) and Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York, 1991). A related literature was that of the "new regionalism" that emphasized the social and economic interconnectedness of city and suburb, see in particular Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom, *Place Matters: Metropolitics for the Twenty-First Century* (Lawrence, 2001); David Rusk, *Cities Without Suburbs* (Washington, D.C., 1995), Neil R. Pierce, *Citistates: How America Can Prosper in a Competitive World* (Washington, D.C., 1993).

3. Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, 1985) and Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York, 1987). Other notable work in this vein includes Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820–2000* (New York, 2003); Margaret Marsh, *Suburban Lives* (Rutgers, N.J., 1990); John R. Stilgoe, *Borderlands: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820–1939* (New Haven, Conn., 1988).

4. James L. Wunsch, "The Suburban Cliché," *Journal of Social History* vol. 28, no. 3 (Spring 1995), 643–659. Much of the historical work to date on suburban diversity has appeared on the pages of scholarly journals; see in particular the special issue on suburbs of the *Journal of Urban History* vol. 27, no. 3 (March 2001). Recent research on suburban variety includes Robert Lang, *Edgeless Cities: Exploring the Elusive Metropolis* (Washington, D.C., 2003); Myron Orfield, *American Metropolitics: The New Suburban Reality* (Washington, D.C., 2002). For cross-national comparison, see *Suburban Form: An International Perspective,* ed. Kiril Stanilov and Brenda Case Scheer (New York, 2004).

5. The titles of such books aptly describe the mood, for example: Jane Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead* (New York, 2004); Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York, 2001); Jane Holtz Kay, *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America, and How We Can Take It Back* (Berkeley, 1998); James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape* (New York, 1994).

6. See for example Paul A. Jargowsky, *Poverty and Place: Ghettos, Barrios, and the American City* (New York, 1997); William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York, 1996); Douglas S. Massey and Nancy M. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).

7. For a review, as well as a review of the reviews (as he observes, "historiographical essays on urban history, many focusing on the difficulties of defining the field, virtually constitute a genre unto itself") see Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "White Cities, Linguistic Turns, and Disneylands: The New Paradigms of Urban History," *Reviews in American History*, vol. 26 (March 1998), 175–204.

8. In recent years, political history has undergone what might be called a revival but is perhaps better termed a reclassification. The "political" encompasses not only national politics but also state and local policy, grassroots activism, and the formation of community and individual political identities, and studies often blend the research methodology and bottom-up approach of social history with the study of policy formation and implementation, For discussion of this redefined political history and various directions of the historiography, see Meg Jacobs and Julian Zelizer, "The Democratic Experiment" in *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History*, ed. Jacobs, William J. Novak, and Julian E. Zelizer (Princeton, N.J., 2003), 1–19.

9. Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore, Md., 1997); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J., 2002). Other recent work includes Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton, N.J., 2003); Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York, 2001); Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen, *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened* (New York, 2001); Bruce D. Haynes, *Red Lines, Black Spaces: The Politics of Race and Space in a Black Middle-Class Suburb* (New Haven, Conn., 2001); Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875–1975* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

10. Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J., 1996).

11. Other historians of the urban West who have explored this new urban model and its implications include Carl Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West* (Tuscon, 1995); John M. Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture* (Berkeley, 1992)

12. George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1940* (New York, 1993).

13. See for example Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier*; Roger Lotchin, *Fortress California: From Warfare to Welfare, 1910–1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); John C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1945–1990* (New York, 1992).

14. Providing a counterpart to Wiese's arguments from this group is Sheryll D. Cashin, whose *The Failures of Integration: How Race and Class are Undermining the American Dream* (New York, 2004) elaborates further on the social costs of persistent racial segregation in middle-class suburbs.

15. The question of whether “metropolitan” is a more apt historiographical descriptive was one element of a stimulating recent electronic discussion on the “new suburban history”; see thread responding to Amanda Seligman, “TEACHING: New Suburban History Course Reflections,” 19 December 2003, H-URBAN
<http://www.h-net.org/~urban> (29 July 2004).