

A house for every single American. A chicken on each of the tables. A wife, a dad, and two kids playing on a well-manicured lawn framed by a white picket fence.

This is the picture of the American family of the twentieth century: suburban home-owning, family-oriented.

For certain people, this kind of peaceful, suburban lifestyle is seriously enticing. You might very well be one of them, potentially. The American Dream was represented in the suburban lifestyle for much of the past century, as it gave individuals the freedom synonymous with homeownership and the anonymity and tranquility of a life beyond the polluted, pollution-ridden city.

This review will remind you, though, how the truth of suburban life is not reflected by this idyllic picture of the good life. Far from that: in a life of isolation, unhealthiness, and standardization, suburbanites languish.

Not just that, you would be surprised to hear how in these "great" American communities, violence and suffering have found their way. In reality, shifting demographics and social norms have left many people questioning if they are still involved in suburban life.

Chapter 1 - A cultural and financial fascination with house ownership drove the rise of the suburbs in post-war America.

When you picture the American Dream, what is the initial thing that comes to mind? This fantasy also included aspiring to own a car and, most specifically, a suburban home from the early 1930s onwards: a peaceful, pleasant spot well above the hustle and bustle of the busy city streets.

What was it that drove this dream of near-universality? In reality, it was primarily the product of acts taken by banks and the government of the United States.

As a means of reflecting prosperity and stability and encouraging loyalty and "true citizenship," the government aggressively promoted homeownership. It established the Federal Housing Administration in 1934, which supported private lenders to provide willing house buyers with mortgages by guaranteeing them if the debts went overdue.

Banks, too, promoted the borrowing of mortgages as a way of growing their own income. One way to achieve this was to transform loans into shares that buyers were then willing to sell. They allowed more and more individuals to purchase their own homes by taking out loans to boost this profit potential.

Such programs have been a big success, resulting in millions of new homeowners.

Builders and architects began constructing in more and more undeveloped areas as demand continues to grow. Since the value of homes grows with the number of homeowners, to gain affordable land and thus more homeowners, builders will also build in locations further away from city centers. Many that are eager to own a home are not turned off by the lengths: their main problem was locating a house they could afford to purchase, a "drive until you qualify" concept.

As a consequence of all this external development, by 2009, 3 million Americans lived in the suburbs merely because of the need of their families to get their own small piece of land.

The ability to live the American Dream, or at least this iteration of it, has severely deteriorated over the years, though. You'll hear more in the subsequent sections on why.

Chapter 2 - Life in the suburbs carries consistency with it that not everyone considers desirable.

For many Americans, it has long been their desire to live in the suburbs. Who wouldn't want to live in a large yard home, miles from the disorientating, dirty towns? But suburban life, concealed under this picturesque exterior, still has its issues.

Life in the suburbs, for one, restricts people to social habits that send millions into despair.

In the suburbs, there is not much room for growth: most people live in identical households, consume the same kinds of food, shop in the same stores, and have the same expectations and dreams.

This uniformity may contribute to anxiety and depression, particularly among those without employment or who remain at home all day and lack other stimuli.

In mass culture nowadays, where the media covers the blandness and uniformity of conventional suburban life, we see this mirrored. Just think of movies like *Blue Velvet* and *American Beauty* or the *Desperate Housewives* television series.

And this occurrence is not new. Reports from academics have long been prompted by the lack of personality of suburban living.

For instance, sociologist and urban historian Lewis Mumford claimed that imagination was restricted by the uniformity of suburban life, worrying that suburban life restricted people to eating the same packaged, distasteful foods, making friends only within the same social status, and embracing the same mass-produced culture, particularly while watching television.

Furthermore, writer Jane Jacobs saw in all this modern suburban growth the devastation of "true" existence. She complained that in open, lush, natural spaces beyond the city walls, following the illusion of a peaceful life simply contributes to the loss of natural rural variety. Built on what used to be a natural landscape and habitat are all the modern homes, highways, and shops.

That takes us to our next issue: what makes the suburbs more standardized than the city, precisely?

Chapter 3 - A lack of variation and mobility is encouraged by the division of suburbs into separate areas of activity.

How long do you have to stroll until you arrive at the closest Chinese restaurant or charity shops if you live in the city? Not that much, possibly. In the suburbs, where access to stores and entertainment is restricted, it's just not the equivalent.

That's because residential space appears to be more narrowly divided, unlike urban areas, where homes, condos, warehouses, and stores are all muddled together. This function-based distinction is referred to as single-use zoning, initially adopted in 1926 by the Supreme Court and ruling that it was not possible to create areas designed for residential buildings for anything else.

This planning policy has many opponents, though, given its effort to build quieter urban space. One architect has also compared zoning for single-use to an unmixed omelet. The different ingredients are kept separate instead of mixing all the products; eggs over here, cheese over there, and salt in its own section. Your food wouldn't be about as enjoyable as if they were all put together if you were consuming these products on your own.

The development of bland, impersonal neighborhoods has been the product of single-use zoning. Sure, there are definitely pitfalls to living in the area, but it is also full of possibility and enthusiasm.

Living is the opposite of the suburbs. Getting new encounters involves jumping into the car and taking a trip because it is distant.

For instance, upon living in New York City, the writer explains how one woman feels after switching to a suburb. She realized that she was almost chronically lonely, and even started to miss things about the city that irritated her, like her old apartment's grumpy doorman, and even noticed herself being more conversational due to the absence of stimulation.

Chapter 4 - Life in the suburbs creates a dependency on automobiles, creating economic and wellness challenges in return.

The automobile is, by far, the most essential commodity of suburban life.

As the suburbs are developed too far away from commercial and manufacturing centers, to get around, suburbanites need a vehicle, or two or three.

The architecture of the suburbs themselves, in particular, represents the need for drivers to feel happy. The cul-de-sacs and looping avenues, for instance, allow quick navigation. And the highways, called arterial highways, between suburban areas, appear to be wider to allow for traffic to travel between neighborhoods easily.

That being said, sadly, this reliance on vehicles causes health concerns.

For example, the chances of physical fitness are significantly restricted by spending too much time in the vehicle. Moreover, for those who would like to cycle to get somewhere, the car-centric suburban architecture makes it impossible.

Admittedly, over-reliance on vehicles has contributed to significant results for the overall health of US people, rising the incidence of heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. Indeed, more than a third of all American adults are classified obese, the amount of kids overweight has doubled since 1980, and the amount has tripled among teenagers.

In comparison, large roads allow cars to travel quicker, which makes it riskier for pedestrians as a result. Currently, more people are killed on any other form of the street on the arterial roads between suburbs.

In an era of rising petrol costs, this reliance on vehicles is becoming more troublesome. Fuel was inexpensive for much of the history of the suburbs. The cost of petrol has, however, gradually risen since the turn of the Millennium. In reality, oil prices rise by a whopping 80 percent from 2000 to 2008.

The price of petrol is getting unsustainable for people living in the suburbs. This was seen in a survey showing that suburban households with lower wages spent more money on travel than on housing, i.e. 29% and 28% of their income, respectively.

Chapter 5 - Increasing violence and suffering in the suburbs are making people dream about moving back to the cities.

Through most of the twentieth century, people correlated the ultimate expression of stability and wealth with life in the suburbs, while towns were viewed as a site of sin and violence. This pattern has changed in recent years, though.

Unemployment and violence are indeed increasing at an unprecedented pace in the suburbs. Partly, this is because many middle-class Americans have been pushed into debt by the economic meltdown.

The population make-up of today's suburbs has to do with another reason. For example, the prosperity of building and service workers in the suburbs prompted many foreign workers to migrate there for employment in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Such positions were, though, hit particularly hard after the financial crisis, causing most of the suburban immigrants to face severe difficulty. In particular, the number of poor people in the suburbs grew 53 percent to 15.3 million between 2000 and 2010, a rate of growth twice that found in the cities.

And violence is a result of poverty.

While in previous years, the total number of murders in the United States has declined, it is currently increasing in the suburbs and climbing steadily. The number of murders in the US suburbs increased by 17 percent between 2001 and 2010.

Additionally, the migration to the city to live and work happens with the increase of these concerns in the suburbs. In 2010, for instance, for the first time in sixty years, Philadelphia experienced a rising population. Even after the 9/11 attacks, New York City, too, saw its metropolitan population grow by 40,000 in just ten years.

Indeed, although the suburbs are filled with violence and poverty, many cities have seen major progressive improvements. There are now coastal marinas, multiplexes, loft apartments, conference centers, theme parks, etc, where there were once deserted warehouses and run-down homes. And the list continues.

We have now learned how and why the suburbs have been deteriorating in the past few years. The fate of the suburbs will be the focus of these final pages.

Chapter 6 - The appeal of the suburbs has diminished because the ambitions of young people no longer consist of starting a family.

What kind of family did you imagine as you depicted the typical American Dream during the first section? Maybe two parents and two children: a traditional family unit.

While this arrangement has long been considered to be the American norm, shifting trends have made the nuclear family less prominent in society.

For many young women, getting married and starting a family has no longer been the primary goal of the last decade. In numbers, we can see this lack of curiosity expressed.

In 1957, for instance, the birth rate hit a high of 122.7 births per thousand individuals in the USA. This figure was almost halved in 2011 at 63.2 births per thousand persons.

In comparison, in 1950, "married families" constituted 83% of the population. That figure is just above 48 percent now.

The suburbs have lost their attraction as a consequence of the declining enthusiasm of young people in establishing and growing a family.

In their neighborhoods, today's youth seek liveliness and opportunity instead of peace and calm. They would rather live in the cities, where there is more abundance of their educational and entertainment resources.

This, in return, leaves the suburbs with a community that is rapidly 'greying'. Understandably, the mean age of suburban inhabitants rises as young people move to the cities, which has a direct impact on suburban infrastructure.

Facilities such as colleges and youth programs tend to close their doors or are reconfigured with an elderly community lacking young families to sustain them. A local school closed down in one neighborhood and turned into a senior center.

For retirees, these improvements are wonderful, but they end up making the suburbs much more unattractive to younger residents.

Chapter 7 - With the correct planning, the suburbs could be resurrected.

Today, in recent times, we have seen the growth of the suburbs as an American dream and its rapid descent. But is it doomed completely to die out? Or is the destiny of the suburbs somewhere else?

That depends. On the one side, suburbs have a lifestyle that is still appealing, but they still struggle from poor architecture, making it impossible to grasp this lifestyle.

The suburbs also cater to the need for confidentiality by Americans. In fact, what motivated many to move to the suburbs in the first place is the opportunity to enjoy relative calm against the confinement and disorder of cities. There is very little opportunity for anyone to annoy them until suburbanites make it behind their locked doors.

The suburbs have also been identified by some suburbanites as supplying them with their own 'personal sphere.'

So, part of the attraction is already there at least. That being said, for the twenty-first century, if the suburbs are to be rescued, they need to be properly built. The suburbs could again become an attractive area to reside if they could transcend their bland uniformity and over-reliance on automobiles.

Fortunately, some young urbanists or builders aim to create communities that facilitate walking, all looking for innovative methods of designing and improving conventional planners, scholars, and property developers.

Based on common planning ideals, one proposal is to create communities: constructing the main street with clusters of houses near together. This type of growth, much like a town or village in the nineteenth century, attempts to build a feeling of society and liveliness that was otherwise missing in suburban development.

As a means to promote less commuting, another proposal is to boost mass transit. The authorization of a \$1.6 billion light rail line in Maryland, connecting the suburbs between New Carrollton and Bethesda, is one such step in the right process.

There's the promise; creators just need to work out the way.

The End of the Suburbs: Where the American Dream Is Moving by Leigh Gallagher Book Review

The typical neighborhood is a distant memory today. Whereas inexpensive petrol, land, and convenient access to loans made it the most coveted place to live, the evolving economic and social circumstances of today have made the suburbs less appealing. If developers will boost

the reputation of the suburbs, residents are expected to move back in ever-higher numbers to the cities.

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