

Bourgeois Nightmares: Suburbia, 1870–1930. By Robert M. Fogelson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005. 264 pp. Notes, index. Cloth, \$30.00. ISBN: 0-300-10876-1.

Reviewed by Kenneth T. Jackson

This is an important book. Suburbanization is the quintessential physical and social achievement of the United States and is more representative of our society than fast cars, wide roads, tall skyscrapers, and big stadiums. And with all the government and economic incentives to achieve home ownership, it is no surprise that the number of persons living in suburbs now exceeds those residing in cities and rural areas *combined*. As much as anything else, newcomers have flocked to our shores for generations, less for political freedom than for the opportunity to someday, somehow, enjoy the expansive yards, the generous family rooms, the safe and well-funded public schools, the friendly neighborhoods, and the low crime rates that presumably attend to life in the leafy green towns that surround virtually every American city.

Of course, the story has always been more complicated. In recent years, for example, Andrew Wiese, author of *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (2004), and Becky M. Nicolaides, author of *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920–1965* (2002), have reminded us that suburbia was never as white or as affluent as legend would have it. And the larger topic of population deconcentration in metropolitan areas has been attracting attention ever since Sam Bass Warner opened up the topic in his masterful book, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870–1900* (1962).

But *Bourgeois Nightmares* is the first serious book about the underside of the American achievement. After all, the most exclusive of our outlying communities—Beverly Hills and Palos Verdes Estates in California; Llewellyn Park and Saddle River in New Jersey; Forest Hills Gardens, Tuxedo Park, and Bronxville in New York; Barrington Hills, Kenilworth, and Winnetka in Illinois; Country Club Plaza and Ladue in Missouri; and New Canaan and Darien in Connecticut—have been defined as much by those who have been kept out as by those who have been allowed in. In this book, Robert M.

Fogelson, one of America's most prolific historians, examines the legal mechanisms by which those with dark skins, low incomes, strange religions, or unusual lifestyles could be excluded from certain places, especially before 1930, when minimum-lot zoning took hold in the United States. For at least six decades before that date, a favorite strategy of developers and builders was to insert restrictive covenants into residential property deeds that spelled out in precise language the proscription against African Americans' living there. Domestic servants were excepted for obvious reasons. White ethnic groups also found themselves on the wrong end of such covenants.

Fogelson interprets the explosion of interest in restrictive covenants after 1870 to fear of change. Boston's South End, for example, had been fashionable before being overrun by working-class immigrants, together with their saloons and parochial schools, soon after the Civil War. Similarly, in Manhattan, the rich moved up the central spine of the island to escape an immigrant horde that was turning the area south of Fourteenth Street into the most densely settled place on earth. And to remind us that prejudice knew few bounds, Fogelson observes that working-class sections also used restrictive covenants—they did not want black neighbors either.

The most interesting questions raised by the book are as appropriate in the twenty-first century as they were in the nineteenth. Why is it that we are attracted to a building, a development, a neighborhood, or a suburb if it is "exclusive"? Why is it that a "restricted" area, the code word for "no Jewish persons allowed," seemed for so long to add to, rather than detract from, the selling price? Why is it, to paraphrase Groucho Marx, that we do not want to join clubs that accept us as members?

I wish Professor Fogelson had included illustrations and carried his story beyond 1930. After all, in 1940, the Federal Housing Administration was still recommending covenants that were more restrictive than any mortgage. And the United States Supreme Court did not rule until 1948 that restrictive covenants were "unenforceable as law and contrary to public policy." Nevertheless, this is a book that will make you think. And weep.

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United States (1985), which won both the Francis Parkman and Bancroft Prizes and is now in its twenty-eighth printing.