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The Reluctant Metropolis

The Politics of
Urban Growth in Los Angeles



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GUIDE TO CALIFORNIA PLANNING

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California increases, and as the hassles mount, it's inevitable that California-style anti-tax, anti-growth fervor will rise sooner or later. In the end, there is little doubt that Las Vegas will become another Los Angeles—not just in the short-term economic opportunity it will provide for working- and middle-class refugees from Los Angeles, but also in the eroding quality of life those refugees sought to escape by leaving California in the first place.

CHAPTER 13

Cocoon Citizenship and Toon Town Urbanism

Toward the middle of June in 1993—when Carl Boronkay was retiring from the Metropolitan Water District, and Maria Vanderkolk was struggling to hold the Ahmanson Ranch deal together, and John Gray and Gary Squier were touring South Central looking for affordable housing sites—one of L.A.'s few truly regional controversies came to a head.

At the time, a consortium of eleven oil companies was promoting a plan to build a new oil pipeline from offshore rigs at Gaviota Point (past Santa Barbara) to refineries in El Segundo and Wilmington. To the oil companies, the Pacific Pipeline was a vital piece of economic infrastructure, allowing them to leave behind the constant environmental controversies associated with shipping the oil by tanker through the Santa Barbara Channel. But everyone else had an opinion too.

The pipeline snaked along a circuitous one-hundred-seventy-one-mile route through Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, around Bakersfield, way out past Riverside, and finally back in through urban Los Angeles. Along this route, the pipeline stirred up every conceivable emotion. Oil and construction workers spoke frequently about the pipeline's potential to create jobs, and environmental consultants with connections to the oil industry also looked forward to more work. Ever protective of the natural environment near the Pacific Ocean, Santa Barbara environmentalists were critical of the project. And local officials along the pipeline's route in urban Los Angeles came out strongly against the pipeline for a somewhat different reason: they claimed that plowing yet another major project through their neighborhoods constituted "environmental racism."

The climax of the debate on the Pacific Pipeline came during the week of June 14, when the California Public Utilities Commission conducted four hearings in Southern California—one in Santa Barbara, one in Ventura, one in downtown Los Angeles, and one near the refineries in Carson. Sometimes tedious and occasionally boisterous, the meetings were never without drama. Sober Santa Barbara environmentalists presented their case. Crowds of unemployed union members shouted their support in Ventura and Los Angeles.

Most dramatically, the minority neighborhoods turned out in force at the Los Angeles hearing on Monday, June 14, to object to environmental racism. They complained about a lack of translators, and cheered when L.A. City Councilman Mike Hernandez, who has lived all his life along the proposed route, stepped forward to complain. "You need to understand that this pipeline goes through the most densely populated area of Los Angeles," Hernandez shouted into the microphone. "I say this as someone who has been evicted twice from my house!" "*Gran trabajo, Mike!*" Hernandez's inner-city constituents exclaimed. Good job!

You wouldn't have learned this entire story, however, just by reading your local edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, especially if you lived in the northern and western suburbs in the San Fernando Valley and Ventura County. With a daily circulation of more than 1.1 million, the *Times* is the second largest metropolitan daily in the country, and one of the few institutions in the Los Angeles area with enough breadth and scope to bring regional issues like the Pacific Pipeline into clear perspective. Yet in covering the pipeline, sometimes the *Times* seemed to be covering two different stories. Because what you read depended on where you lived.

If you lived in inner-city Los Angeles, you found the kind of heavy-duty, in-depth coverage you'd expect from one of the nation's best newspapers. In particular, the paper's acclaimed "City Times" section covered the pipeline and inner-city opposition to it. (City Times was a special section devoted to local news in the inner-city neighborhoods and nearby suburbs; it was eliminated, along with some suburban sections, in a 1995 cutback.)

On Sunday, June 13, City Times published an impressive four-page spread by reporter Lucille Renwick, complete with color maps and diagrams, outlining the project and the environmental racism angle. (The article was also printed, more or less in its entirety, in the paper's South

Bay and Long Beach editions.) After attending the Los Angeles hearing on Monday, June 14, and the Carson hearing on Tuesday, June 15—which was heavily attended by labor union supporters of the pipeline—Renwick produced a shorter follow-up story covering both sides of the issue. The follow-up article appeared under the headline "RESIDENTS JEER, UNION CHEERS" in the South Bay edition on Friday, June 18, and in the weekly City Times edition on Sunday, June 20.

If you lived in the suburban areas of the San Fernando Valley and Ventura County, however, you got a somewhat different story. These editions were put together not at the *Times* headquarters downtown, but in a suburban printing plant in Chatsworth, in the western San Fernando Valley. No one in these areas ever read one word of Lucille Renwick's comprehensive twenty-three-hundred-word story. In fact, these readers barely knew that inner-city environmental racism was an issue. The only time this aspect of the story was mentioned in their zoned editions was when the *Times* ran a one-hundred-eighty-word summary in May reporting that the Los Angeles City Council had taken a formal position against the project. (This was true even though the City of Los Angeles encompasses the San Fernando Valley, including Chatsworth, within its borders.)

Instead, what *Times* readers in the Valley and Ventura County got was a completely different spin, which ignored the inner-city angle and reflected the local values and political dynamics of their own communities. The Pacific Pipeline didn't run through the populated areas of Ventura County, but the county stood to benefit from it economically. Like many oil industry supply companies, Pacific Pipeline Systems Inc. was based in the City of Ventura, as were many of the unionized workers who would be hired if the pipeline were built.

When the PUC conducted the June hearings, Valley and Ventura readers were not given a well-rounded view of the debate. Instead, all they got from the *Times* was a straightforward news story reporting on the PUC's hearing in Ventura, held on Thursday, June 17, where testimony was stacked by union leaders supporting the project. Headlined "WORKERS PACK HEARING TO SUPPORT OIL PIPELINE PLAN," this story appeared in the Ventura edition on Friday, June 18—the same day that the South Bay edition ran Lucille Renwick's four-page spread reporting on the two hearings in the Los Angeles area. But the Ventura story carried no account of inner-city opposition to the pipeline, or of the con-

trovsky over translators, or of Mike Hernandez's "*gran trabajo*" in appearing before the PUC in Los Angeles four days earlier. In fact, the Ventura version of the *Times* story did not mention the other three hearings.

The *Times* did not begin to tell its Valley readers much about the Pacific Pipeline until three years later, when a somewhat different proposal came before the Public Utilities Commission and Richard Alarcon—a Latino member of the Los Angeles City Council who represents parts of the Valley—made it an issue. In April 1996, the PUC approved the project and its environmental documentation, and the City of Los Angeles sued. This story was covered by the Valley edition of the *Times*. By then, however, its Ventura County edition had stopped writing about it altogether.

The reporters and editors of the *Los Angeles Times* did not deliberately set out to deceive their readers, or to deprive them of the full story about the Pacific Pipeline proposal. Rather, the pattern of coverage on this issue (and others) is the result of editorial practices deeply imbedded in the newspaper's approach to "targeting" its readers. And that approach, in turn, is derived from the desire of typical Southern Californians to disassociate themselves from the metropolis in which they live.

More than most metropolitan dailies in America, the *Times* has had to decentralize in order to retain readers and advertisers that have fled from the city. The paper has opened local editions in outlying areas, offering "partial run" advertising to local businesses, and has built satellite printing plants in Costa Mesa and Chatsworth. All these are common practices among metropolitan dailies. But in adapting them to an especially reluctant metropolis, the *Times* has fundamentally altered the way it covers news. In the process, this venerable institution has embraced anti-urban, parochial thinking wherever it is expedient, just as L.A.'s growth promoters have done for a century or more.

Much of the *Times*'s thinking has been shaped by its lengthy, costly, and (so far) unsuccessful war with the Orange County *Register*. When Orange County boomed in the 1970s, the *Times* moved in, thinking that it could dominate the market simply because it was the *Los Angeles Times*. Despite a substantial investment, however, the *Times* has never caught up with the *Register*, and the reason is obvious. From the beginning, the *Register* has respectfully treated its readers as Orange County residents, first and as citizens of the great Los Angeles metropolis only incidentally. In the columns of the *Register*, L.A. is portrayed as a distant metropolis of passing interest, much like San Francisco or London,

while Orange County emerges as an independent metropolitan power hurtling toward inevitable greatness. The resulting success in the marketplace is indisputable. Once a small newspaper with a libertarian philosophy that spilled over into the news columns, the *Register* is now the twenty-fifth largest paper in the country, and usually ranks second (only to the *L.A. Times*) in ad lineage. It's also far ahead of the *Times* in Orange County circulation.

In order to compete, the *Times* has now adopted the *Register*'s philosophy, not just in Orange County but in all suburban areas. Most of the paper's local news appears not in a unified Metro section produced downtown, but in the special zoned sections (or reconfigured Metro sections) put together in Chatsworth and Costa Mesa. In essence, suburban *Times* editors now produce a series of separate newspapers distributed under the *Times* banner.* And *Times* marketing reinforces this idea. Newstrack posters advertise not "*Los Angeles Times*" but "*Times Valley*" or "*Times Ventura County*," and reporters introduce themselves the same way. Freeway billboards feature local images and emphasize that the *Times* is deeply committed to whichever suburb the freeway driver happens to be passing through.

In short, the *Times* has decided that the way to remain a great metropolitan newspaper is to deny that there is a great metropolis. If suburbanites are determined to wrap themselves up in little cocoons—social, economic, or political—then the *Los Angeles Times* is determined to make sure that those cocoons are manufactured of newsprint provided by Times Mirror Inc. But the *Times* is not completely at fault here. The newspaper may be pandering to the "cocoon citizens" of the suburbs—but the *Times* didn't invent them.

The suburb, as the great urbanist Lewis Mumford once wrote, emerged from the chaos of the nineteenth century industrial city as its antidote, a saner and more humane way of life. Where the city enveloped residents in a coffin of concrete and asphalt, the suburb would release them into a

* In some cases this is literally true. After closing several suburban sections in 1995 as part of a cost-cutting program, the *Times* contracted with a community newspaper group to produce special supplements for those zones, which the *Times* distributes as part of its own newspaper. Predictably, these supplements do not have the same editorial depth and insight that even the *Times*'s own suburban zones contained.

green expanse of open space. Where the city poisoned people with foul air, the suburb would allow them to breathe free. Where the city produced mechanized noise, the suburb would provide a natural quiet.

There is no denying the suburb's appeal, and for more than a century the Los Angeles metropolis has served as the real-life American city that has come closest to a suburban ideal. Originally, of course, Los Angeles was meant as a suburb for the whole country, and even after it industrialized the city provided a comfortable suburban way of life for many people (African-Americans, the working class) who could not achieve it anywhere else.

Yet Mumford also pointed out that suburbs are only partial communities, and suburbanites themselves only partial people. Removed from the fully rounded reality of urban life, suburbanites find themselves succumbing to "the temptation to retreat from unpleasant realities, to shirk public duties, and to find the whole meaning of life in the most elemental social group, the family, or even in the still more isolated and self-centered individual."

"What was properly a beginning," he concluded, "was treated as an end."

Close to forty years have passed since Mumford wrote those words, and in that time the suburbs have changed. They are more diverse; they have skyscrapers and mega-malls, not just houses and neighborhood stores. Some have mutated almost beyond recognition into what Joel Garreau has called "Edge Cities," while others are aging ungracefully into little more than single-family slums. Much more of the real work of living (and dying, both naturally and violently) occurs in suburbs nowadays.

Suburbanites are often driven, and bound together, not so much by what they are heading toward as by what they are running from, and what they are running from is their perception of the ugly realities of urban life. This has always been the case, of course, but today there is a different and more desperate quality to this escapism—all across America, but especially in Los Angeles.

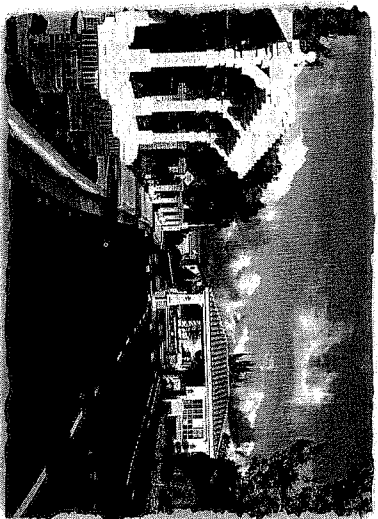
Ironically, as historian Greg Hise has shown, L.A.'s neighborhoods were originally designed to be a different kind of suburb—not the "economically inert bedroom community populated predominantly by middle- and upper-income white families" but "complete communities for balanced living, affordable for workers and families." In a way, they

were intended to fulfill Mumford's dream of a garden metropolis, with small, balanced communities serving as stars in a metropolitan constellation. Yet the result in Los Angeles has been, if anything, attitudes more intensely suburban. In Los Angeles you could leave everything behind—not just your old house in the inner city, but your old job as well. Now there was nothing at all connecting you to the rest of the metropolis.

Whatever its faults, the early postwar suburb at least was a place where new residents were eager to build a community. Indeed, as Alan Ehrenhalt pointed out in *The Lost City*, the pressure to participate in community life was so great that many suburbs developed a social structure every bit as rigid and unforgiving as the crowded ethnic wards that the new suburbanites had left behind. Whether they were inclined to or not, these suburbanites were literally forced into building their community.

Today the hard work of community-building is left mostly to the developers, who are called upon to create not just houses and streets but also parks and schools and shopping centers and even homeowner associations that will govern the community long after the developers have finished their work. For the new suburban residents buying into this prepackaged set of amenities, the task of citizenship consists mostly of making sure that the walls keeping the metropolis at bay remain in place—in other words, that outsiders do not pierce the cocoon.

More than ever, of course, the cocoon is literal. As any real estate developer will tell you, the hottest idea in new suburbs these days is the gated community, the subdivision not merely surrounded by a wall but protected by a gate that residents control. Whether secured by a guardhouse or operated by remote-control, the gate offers suburbanites a sense of security and exclusivity. Indeed, the idea of a gate is so compelling that it is literally impossible to sell a suburban subdivision to homebuyers above a certain income category—upper-middle-class and up—if it comes without a gate.



Cocoon Citizenship: Entrance to the Rancho Conejo subdivision in Thousand Oaks.

Nowhere is the phenomenon of the gate more pronounced than in suburban Los Angeles, where fear and snobbery are so prevalent that gates are *de rigueur* even in the safest suburbs, especially in upscale areas like south Orange County and the ring of second-generation suburbs surrounding the San Fernando Valley. The tiny city of Hidden Hills is entirely behind gates. Forty percent of the residents of Calabasas live behind gates, including many prominent local politicians who began their careers as homeowner association activists. One tract in Santa Clarita attracted national attention in 1992 by installing hydraulic ballards originally developed to stop terrorists at embassies and airports. Try to "run" the gate, and your car is impaled on two three-foot-long steel cylinders. Predictably, it wasn't long before those impaled began to sue and residents themselves were impaled because of accidents and malfunctions.

Once the gate is up, making sure that it is operative and performing the task of keeping others out becomes the major focus of community activity. "There isn't a week goes by," one homeowner activist in Camarillo told me in an interview, "that I'm not down there fixing the gate or putting in a new gate or calling the gate people." And whatever political power residents can muster is devoted to assuring that only the right suburbanites are permitted behind the gate. When one prominent developer in Thousand Oaks sought to build an apartment building behind his gate—an apartment building everyone knew about, because it was called for in plans approved by the city—the new residents who had just bought houses came unglued. "It's not that I have anything against people who live in apartments or that they are unwelcome," one homeowner said. "It's just that what's the point of having a gated community when it's going to be a free-for-all?" The apartment building is now being built behind a separate gate. And all this controversy took place in a city regularly rated by the FBI as one of the two or three safest cities in the country—so safe that many FBI agents choose to live there themselves.

The suburban cocoon can be figurative as well, keeping outsiders away through financial and political means. Special taxing districts established by cities and developers after the passage of Proposition 13 have woven financial cocoons around many suburban subdivisions. Unable to pay for roads, parks, and schools out of property tax revenue, the cities essentially bill the residents of new subdivisions for the cost. Also since

Proposition 13, suburbanites have turned increasingly to the practice of seceding from the surrounding metropolis by creating new cities.

It should not be surprising, then, that people living inside these suburban cocoons become cocoon citizens, defining the common good as that which benefits only those inside their particular cocoon. Far from identifying themselves as citizens of a region or a metropolis, they often have trouble identifying themselves even as citizens of the small suburban cities of which they are a part.

In Calabasas, even some politicians who live behind gates lament the fact that residents feel isolated from one another and appear united more by what the city is not—it is not the San Fernando Valley—than by a positive vision of what it is or could be. At the same time, many suburbanites who live in special taxing districts understandably develop a proprietary attitude about the pieces of public infrastructure they are funding. Why should others be permitted into their parks and schools, even if they are technically public, when only those inside the cocoon are footing the bill?

At bottom, of course, cocoon citizenship is built on the foundation of L.A.'s traditional anti-urban bias, and cocoon citizenship, in turn, forms the basis for the slow-growth and no-growth attitudes that are prevalent all across the region. Because once inside their cocoon, the suburbanites see no butterfly-like value in emerging. They only seek to stay inside forever, petrified in their tracts, like ancient fossils.

So removed are cocoon citizens from the totality of metropolitan life that they can no longer see the full range of activities a metropolis encompasses, or that they are part of it no matter what they do. All they can do is try to define the breadth of metropolitan life by what they've observed inside their cocoon. "We're diverse!" a former member of Agoura Hills City Council once stated, a little defensively, at a public meeting. "We have custom homes *and* tract homes." It is no wonder that even a great regional institution like the *Los Angeles Times* would rather pander to this attitude than challenge it.

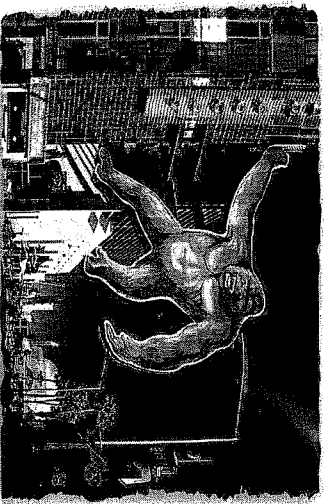
Of course, even cocoon citizens must draw upon the larger metropolis every now and then—for jobs, for goods, for recreation and amusement and stimulation. In a more traditional city, this broader understanding of the interconnectedness of metropolitan life would be called "urban-

ism." But in Los Angeles, this term cannot be applied unvarnished. Angelenos do leave their cocoons to conduct all these activities: to work, to shop, to play. But it is not their intention to engage themselves with the full range of urban life. Instead, they simply trade one cocoon for another, leaving a residential cocoon for a working cocoon or a spending cocoon. In this way, they don't practice real urbanism, but a kind of Toon Town Urbanism, a fantasy version of the real thing—with few of the risks, and few of the rewards.

Toon Town, of course, is the mythical, cartoonish part of town that was overlaid on live-action reality in the Disney movie, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* Now it's also a real-life fake neighborhood in Disneyland, complete with doorknobs that squeal, a tiny roller-coaster, and Mickey Mouse's house. Toon Town is good fun as far as it goes. But you're less likely to think of the place as fake if you've emerged from your residential cocoon and paid to enter Disneyland to experience it. There's something about the audible thunk of \$26 at the entry booth that makes Toon Town seem more real—and, in the process, makes every so-called urban experience in Los Angeles feel like a knockoff of Toon Town.

In 1993, for example, MCA-Universal unveiled, with great fanfare, another exercise in Toon Town Urbanism: the highly publicized CityWalk on the Universal Studios' property in Universal City, a mountaintop location in between Hollywood and Burbank. In point of fact, CityWalk was simply a shopping center, carrying with it the usual pointless array of consumer items, that filled the space between the Universal parking lot and the gate to the studio tour. But thanks to the clever vision of architect Jon Jerde, a leading devotee of Toon Townism, CityWalk actually touched off a lengthy and serious debate about urbanism in Los Angeles.

Toon Town Urbanism at University CityWalk.



Collecting and reassembling certain physical Los Angeles icons—Hollywood Boulevard, for example—Jerde managed to make CityWalk into a *faux* version of real life (if, indeed, it is possible to make a *faux* version of Los Angeles at all). And he cleverly interspersed real-life activities at CityWalk to further blur the line between the actual city and the

virtual one. It wasn't long, for example, before UCLA Extension, the adult education division of the university, leased space in a building along CityWalk and began offering classes there. At first glance, it's unclear what's real and what's not. Is UCLA Extension really located here? Or has Jerde simply appropriated it as an icon?

All this is clever enough—urbanism with mirrors—but as Jerde himself knows it is not a substitute for a real-life urban experience. In fact, Jerde's CityWalk is actually a knockoff of an unbuilt concept he proposed for the area two miles away around the Mann Theater on Hollywood Boulevard—a real urban place, for better or worse. But most people in Los Angeles don't seem to know the difference. As the Boston architect Steven Cecil once pointed out, only in Los Angeles would CityWalk be taken seriously enough to spark a public debate about urbanism. In Boston everyone would understand that it's nothing more than a theme park with stores. There's a fundamental difference between how people feel about a park, a downtown, a public space, and how they feel about a theme park or a shopping mall. Urbanism means taking responsibility as a citizen for the public areas in your town, feeling like you are connected to them and care about them. Toon Town Urbanism involves surrendering yourself to the commercial forces that are in control of the spending cocoon.

It's not simply that people in Los Angeles are missing something by choosing spending cocoons over street life. All successful public spaces are cocoons of some sort, places where people feel comfortable because they are protected by gates, by entry fees, or simply by social customs enforced with a stern glance. Central Park in the 1860s, at the height of the carriage-trade promenades, was no less a cocoon than CityWalk is today. And there's nothing inherently wrong with surrendering yourself to a commercial cocoon like Disneyland or CityWalk every now and then. But there is more at stake when everything becomes a cocoon, when the citizens of a metropolis spend their entire lives protecting themselves from the full range of urban experience. Because it is inside these cocoons that citizenship, pride of ownership of a larger community, breaks down.

Life in Los Angeles today is little more than an exercise in Cocoon Citizenship and Toon Town Urbanism. It's a constant caravan between the residential cocoon, where citizenship is exercised only in narrow, self-interested ways, and the spending and working cocoons, where

citizenship is totally surrendered to the commercial forces that run the place. The result is an erosion of real citizenship, a disintegration of common ownership of the metropolis, just when real citizenship is needed most.

A century ago, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared the closing of the American frontier in a now-famous paper delivered to the American Historical Association. Turner's paper had a somewhat narrow purpose—he was challenging the biases of the Eastern establishment in historical scholarship—but it had a powerful impact on the popular imagination. The frontier had shaped American individualism and democracy in the West, Turner argued, and now the frontier era was at an end. Henceforth there would be no uncharted territories to explore and conquer, no new land on which Americans could pursue the dream of self-reliance and agrarianism that dated back to the founding of our country.

Confronting the closing of the American frontier required a radical shift in American thinking. Back to the founding of our colonies—indeed, back a thousand years to medieval Europe—the progress of our civilization had been built on the assumption that if life got too expensive or complicated or difficult, some people could simply start over by creating a new place.

In *The City in History*, Lewis Mumford pointed out that many of Europe's now-venerated older cities began as "new towns" designed to accommodate spillover population and the speculative financial dreams of kings and noblemen. European colonization of North America, Australia, and other continents furthered this pattern. And as Daniel Boorstin has so eloquently explained in his synthesis of American history, eighteenth and nineteenth century Americans extended this pattern still further, often simply abandoning played-out land in the East or the South in order to pursue new dreams farther West.

In the century since Turner delivered his paper, we have simply transferred the pioneer spirit from the fringe of our country to the fringe of our metropolises. Generation after generation of suburban pioneers has left the familiar confines of central cities and struck out onto the suburban prairie, hoping to wrest middle-class happiness from its newly developing terrain. As we did so, we impoverished the

communities left behind by robbing them of their most affluent, motivated, and productive citizens. But it has not been in the nature of Americans to dwell on what we have left behind. Instead we dream of what is ahead. Los Angeles, the eternal suburb, was quite literally built from this dream. And it is this dream—however debased, however hobbled—that we cling to as we spin our suburban cocoons, hoping to keep the realities of the larger metropolis at bay.

Yet we cannot keep them at bay. That is clearly the message drawn from the collapse of the Los Angeles growth machine over the last thirty years. Reluctant or not, a metropolis is woven tightly together and cannot be easily unraveled. It is possible for us to escape or hide, but sooner or later our connections to the metropolis pull us back to it—and it to us. Slow down growth in Santa Monica or Agoura Hills, and that growth goes somewhere else. Abandon South Central, and the ring of neglect and violence will grow. Build a Sales Tax Canyon on the edge of the metropolis, and you bring the metropolis to the edge. Try to build a pipeline, and you'll run into people all along the route who don't want it in their backyard. Sooner or later, there is no place left to go.

During the suburban boom of the last half-century, we have extended the promise of a peaceful and pastoral suburban life to working people who previously couldn't afford one. But to keep the suburbs serene, we have practiced a domestic version of the containment policy our national government used against Communism during the Cold War. Inner-city neighborhoods were increasingly impoverished and dangerous, but as long as we kept the bad guys and scary people contained inside them, they couldn't do us any harm.

The urban riots of the last thirty years have done nothing to dispel this idea. When civil disorder erupts in an inner-city neighborhood, its target is usually close at hand. Even the 1992 Los Angeles riots, though broad in geographic scope, reinforced this notion for many suburbanites. Vermont Avenue was firebombed by local residents, but no one bothered to drive thirty miles to the Simi Valley courthouse and burn it down. And after the riots, the impulse of residents and business owners alike—black and white, Korean and Latino—was to move as far out as possible.

Yet the social problems that once characterized the inner city alone now afflict all communities and, to a lesser but still significant extent, all neighborhoods. Divorce and family instability is rampant everywhere. The thirty-percent illegitimacy rate that led Daniel Patrick Moynihan to

declare a crisis among black families a generation ago has now spread to all families everywhere, black or not, urban or not. Crime may rise or fall depending on the year or the place, but it strikes in cities, in suburbs, even in small towns where, according to conventional wisdom, it has no business going. In Los Angeles today—in America today—the containment policy has failed. There are no suburbs here. There is only a mirror reflecting the pathology of our society into every community.

And there is nowhere else to go. Today we are seeing the closing of the suburban frontier, just as we saw, a century ago, the closing of the American frontier. Today's sprawling megalopolises, Los Angeles chief among them, have become too big and unwieldy to accommodate much more in the way of outward expansion.

The core members of the growth machine don't believe this, of course. To the land developers and homebuilders, there will always be another Orange County or Moreno Valley. And so there may be, at least for a while. But not forever. It might be possible to squeeze another generation of suburban sprawl out of Las Vegas (or Phoenix or Fresno or even Moreno Valley), but sooner or later the day of reckoning will come for the growth machines there as well. In purely environmental terms, the fragile ecology of the West may not be able to withstand this onslaught. And in a world dominated by instant communication and rapid travel, sixty miles—or three hundred—is an insufficient barrier to protect these emerging suburban paradises from urban social pathologies. A punk with a gun can find Moreno Valley and Las Vegas just as easily as a thirty-year-old couple with a down payment.

And so we are left with ourselves, with each other, and with all those neighborhoods and communities we seek desperately to escape. Instead of escaping, we must confront them, help them tackle their problems. We must redefine the American dream so that it does not rest on the assumption that we can throw old places away and create new ones in the middle of nowhere.

To do this we need not surrender the basic components of the American dream, any more than we needed to surrender them when we transformed the dream from an agrarian to a suburban vision. Privacy, self-reliance, choice—all these can and must remain core American values. Yet so too must we remember that other core American value, the value of community. And we must redefine community more broadly to include not just our street or our tract, but our town, our metropolis, our region.

To do this we need not move from our own neighborhoods, but simply find ways to puncture the cocoon and reconnect with other people and other towns. No matter which edition of the *Los Angeles Times* we read, we must find ways to make other places—places different than our own—meaningful to us once again, so that we care about them and provide the political will required to nurture them. Simply put, we cannot afford to practice Cocoon Citizenship and Toon Town Urbanism anymore. We can no longer afford to be suburbanites, no matter where we live. We must, instead, learn once again to become citizens of the metropolis, no matter how reluctant a metropolis it may be.