Rethinking the Consensus Suburban History

The Suburbs as America's political battleground

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The American memory of the 1960s and 1970s is one of rapid, often violent, change. A story is told to our history students of cities racked with the violence of racial strife made all the worse by stagnation and deindustrialization. The scene of the calamity is most often the city core, a once gleaming place full of promise now abandoned and troubled by the flight of an emigrant White middle class. The suburbs fit into the story in an important way: as the destination of that White upwardly mobile class. It is a story of migration and decay, but here the story of the suburbs usually ends; or better said, here the story of the suburbs has stalled in the historiography.

What is left on the fringes of the shells of the abandoned cities? If one believes critic Lewis Mumford, the result is "an asylum for the preservation of illusion." He rebuked the suburbs as a childish place, where "one might live and die without marring the image of an innocent world."[1] On the contrary, the famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright, in his *The Disappearing City* saw in the suburbs freedom and the fulfillment of democracy in the realization of the individual. It was the *city* which was "a fibrous tumor."[2] His idealized suburb 'Broadacre City' was "the only possible city looking toward the future."[3] Its parking lots, malls, multi-lane highways, and spacious yards offered residents a chance to exercise their full citizenship in American democracy. Wright's manifesto on the suburbs actually ruined his long-standing friendship with Mumford.[4]

It is these contradictory images of the suburbs and its residents that have fueled recent studies in the subfield. Are the suburbs a place of White consensus, as described by Mumford, where every house is the same, and whose residents are awash in blissful ignorance of urban problems? Or are the suburbs as Wright described a place for self-actualization: a space for individuals to assert their citizenship? To answer this question, a new generation of American

historians have decided to put aside the tried story of economic and social mobility and construct a more political narrative. The suburbs, from this perspective, become less a place of refuge and ignorance, set apart from the problems associated with the cities of the 1960's and 1970's and more an extension of the urban political battleground. These proponents of "the new suburban history," led by Kevin Kruse, Thomas Sugrue, and Robert O. Self, contend that one cannot tell the story of the suburbs without telling the story of their urban cores, and vice versa. Setting aside critics' worries about uninspired cookie cutter houses and sterile sub-divisions, these historians see a diverse, complicated suburban landscape. These are not the childish asylums of Mumford's imagination, but a battleground of democracy and citizenship.

A Review of the Literature of Consensus Suburban History

Accounts of the origins of the suburbs are legion. The subfield was opened by historians of the built environment such as Sam Bass Warner whose 1962 study of Boston's bedroom suburbs described decentralization afforded by modern transportation

[1] Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (NY: Mariner, 1961), 494.

[2] Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Disappearing City* (New York: Wm. Farquhar Payson, 1932), 26.

[3] Ibid., 33.

[4] An engrossing chronicling of this debate can be read in R. Wojtowicz & B.B. Pfieffer, eds. *Frank Lloyd Wright & Lewis Mumford: Thirty Years of Correspondence*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001).

technology.[5] In the 1970's Barbara Posadas did similar studies of Chicago's Jefferson Park and Irving Park subdivisions' late 19th century development as bedroom suburbs.[6] While Posadas and Warner rightly focus on the role of light rail in decentralization, they took cursory looks at the social impacts of the earliest suburbanization. They mirrored the theories of Frank Lloyd Wright and find evidence that freedom was afforded by owning real estate as evidenced by the eager attempts at gardening ornamental and vegetable gardens. (Even more recent historians such as that by self-proclaimed "landscape historian" Dolores Hayden sees these gardens as sources of class self-identity in the suburbs.)[7]

Warner concluded that the suburbs were homogenous zones, where ethnic differences "melted away" in a place made safe by its distance from the mess of ethnic labor strife which plagued the Gilded Age city.[8] This last point is driven home by Joseph Bigott whose studies concluded that the notoriously radical pro-labor Germans who made the move to Chicago's Bungalow Belt went through a process of "Americanization" which found them participating in tax strikes and the ousting of pro-labor liberals they, as working class people, traditionally would have supported.[9]

Although Kenneth Jackson's seminal *Crabgrass Frontier* is generally considered the foundational work of the Suburban subfield, he builds on the much earlier work of Warner.[10] Jackson's suburbs are also made possible by light rail and further expanded in space by the freedom afforded by Henry Ford's accessible Model T.[11] Soon the suburban landscape was dotted by chain stores, parking lots, paved roads, and garages.

Jackson goes further than his predecessors though, and carries the story all the way through the 1950's, painting a complicated multi-causal picture of the genesis of suburbs. The advances in transportation were met with advances in building such as balloon frame construction[12] and aided by New Deal structures in the federal government like the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, a predecessor of the FHA. Of the FHA, Jackson says that "no agency of the US government has had a more pervasive and powerful impact on the American people."[13] Jackson's suburbs are the result of a series of messy decisions. Jackson concluded that the result of HOLC and FHA redlining, corresponding real estate ethics, and restrictive covenants was an artificially White suburbia. African Americans were doomed to drown in the swirling waters of decaying urban cores, while Whites found respite in their homogenous miniature kingdoms.

Jackson's careful narrative of the origins of American suburbs, stitched together with qualitative and quantitative data, opened a new subfield for urban historians and made the case for further serious treatments of the suburban topic. It was followed by a whirlwind of studies that came to similar conclusions about the suburbs' place in history. Notable in the field was Robert Fishman's *Bourgeois Utopias*, which took many of Jackson's ideas and applied it on an international scope, concluding that suburbs no longer really exist.[14] Fishman's suburbs were populated by people using transportation technology to escape the tumor of Frank Lloyd Wright's "disappearing city." Like Jackson, Fishman wrote of restrictive covenants and of a resulting insulated homogeneity. Fishman concluded his study with the description of culturally void "technoburbs," each like the next, surrounding

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[5] Sam Bass Warner, Jr. *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962.)

[6] Barbara M. Posadas. "A Home in the Country: Suburbanization in Jefferson Township, 1870-1889." *Chicago History* 7 (Fall 1978), 134-149. & "Suburb into Neighborhood: The Transformation of Urban Identity on Chicago's Periphery: Irving Park as a Case Study, 1870-1910." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 76, no. 3 (Autumn 1983), pp. 162-176.

[7] Delores Hayden. *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000.* (NY: Vintage Books, 2004.) This discussion of gardens is also made by New Suburban historian Andrew Wiese. *Places of their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century.* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004.)

[8] See these other works for cogent discussion of the streetcar suburbs of Chicago: Donald Miller. *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America*. (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 273-294. & William Cronon, William. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West.* (NY: Norton, 1991), 346-350.

[9] Joseph C. Bigott. *From Cottage to Bungalow: Houses and the Working Class in Metropolitan Chicago, 1869–1929.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

[10] Kenneth T. Jackson. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States.* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1985.)

[11] Ibid., 160-163.

[12] Ibid., 124-128.

[13] Ibid., 203.

[14] Robert Fishman. *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*. (NY: Basic Books, 1987). Fishman studies suburbs of Manchester and London, as well as those of Chicago and Philadelphia as case studies.

the hulking burned-out inner city, an image that satisfies Mumford's predictions.

The ex-burbs depicted by Fishman lead to a pessimistic dystopia articulated best by social critic Joel Garreau in *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*[15].Garreau applies Fishman's ideas about identity in the "technoburb" to what he calls "the edge city," a place where every door must be no more than 600 feet from a parking space. The urban core is completely decayed out according to Garreau as businesses like Sears make the move from the towering skyscrapers of the Loop to spacious and unimposing office parks in Hoffman Estates. These businesses seek proximity to the educated white collar workforce. As this process continues, Garreau predicts that second generation suburbanites will no longer identify with their core cities. These are not suburbs, because they are not sub- anything.[16] These could, instead of being suburbs, be a radically new form of city actually.[17] Exclusion in the edge cities are based on education, rather than racial red-lining and other forms of *du jure* segregation. These "edge cities" are essentially post-racial.[18]

Delores Hayden summarized these perspectives in her critical *Building Suburbia* when she describes "sitcom suburbs."[19] Hayden argues that orthodoxy is created in a place of White middle class consensus. Class and ethnicity were melted away by the interests of petty property ownership. Conservative ideas about domesticity and gender were strictly enforced.[20] Echoing the ideas of Lizabeth Cohen's *A Consumer's Republic*, Hayden argues that the individualistic suburbs are breeding places for privatization. There develops a faith that market-driven policies are synonymous with freedom and choice.[21]

The prevailing suburban historiography of the 20th century then paints a picture of whiteness, affluence, and conformity. It is everything Mumford reviled when he criticized the void of a land where "a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances on uniform roads... inhabited by people of the same class, of the same income, the same age group..." [22] There is nothing here to contest. There is no struggle and no need for change. Christopher Shea of the *New York Times* wrote that the suburbs are depicted in popular culture many ways, but concludes that "what the suburbs *never* seem like is a setting for history."[23]

Then what accounts for the firebombing of the homes of Black residents in Woodmere, Ohio, in 1944? What is the meaning of the rocks being thrown at the Chicago Freedom marchers in Cicero, Illinois, in 1966? What accounts for the rise of an active neo-conservative movement in places like Orange County, California, and Nassau County, New York? What about the riots along Alameda Avenue south of Los Angeles in the 1960's and 1990's? What is happening in Ferguson, Missouri, and the neighboring "ring suburbs" of Saint Louis? The history of the suburbs as a place of blissful White consensus and escape from problems is simply inadequate to answer these questions.

The New Suburban History

Historians seeking answers to these questions gathered at Princeton for a 2004 conference entitled "City Limits: New Perspectives in the History of the American Suburbs."[24] A series of monographs were either just published or in production at this time which would change the course of the suburban subfield. The takeaway from the conference was twofold. First the debates seemed to conclude that the suburbs were far from homogeneous. While this was not a new idea, it also was not the prevailing one.[25] Secondly, it seemed to participants that the suburbs

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[15] Joel Garreau. *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

[16] Many of these ideas about decentralization were originally proposed by geographer Peter O. Muller's "The Outer Suburbs: The Geographical Consequences of the Urbanization of the Suburbs." (1976), found in Becky Nicolaides & Andrew Wiese, eds., *The Suburban Reader*. (NY: Routledge, 2013), 362-368.

[17] Margaret Marsh. "Historians and the Suburbs." *OAH Magazine of History*, 5, no. 2 (Fall, 1990), pp. 47.

[18] Informed by Ross Miller's review of Garreau's *Edge City*, from *Journal of Architectural Historians* 52, no. 3 (Sep., 1993), 349-351.

[19] Delores Hayden. *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000.* (NY: Vintage Books, 2004.)

[20] This argument about domesticity is also evident in Gwendolyn Wright's much earlier work, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983.)

[21] Informed by Suzanne Frank's review in *Journal of Architectural Historians* 64, no. 3 (Sep., 2005), 393-395.

[22] Mumford, 486.

[23]Christopher Shea. "Beyond the Picket Fence." *New York Times,* July 23, 2006.

[24] Kevin M. Kruse & Thomas Sugrue, eds. *The New Suburban History.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), ix.

[25] Barbara Kelly contended that the remodeling of once similar modular homes in Levittown made for a heterogeneous landscape in *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown.* (NY: SUNY Press, 1993.) In Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen's study of the 1940's origins of the

were not a place of White consensus, but rather a political fault line. In fact, conference participant Kevin Kruse later wrote, "Mindful of the diversity of metropolitan America in terms of race, class, and politics, these new studies of the suburbs find more compelling struggles taking place in the struggles over policy, money, and the law." Kruse went on to suggest that these struggles mattered since they shaped the suburbs, which, in turn, shaped the nation.[26]

John C. Teaford was already using political history to question the "lily-white" consensus history of the suburbs long before the Princeton conference. Teaford agreed with Kruse that the suburbs played largely into the story of America's drastic transformation in the 20th century as political power, once relegated to the urban cores, underwent a process of decentralization. Power follows wealth and business. The migration of middle and upper class Whites to the suburbs sparked a chain of events which eventually would have national political implications. This process did not mean that power was no longer contested, as it had been in the 19th century city. Independence paid off if local stakeholders were able to see the passage of laws, regulate their own, unique taxation schemes, sometimes resulting in the influencing of corporate relocations.[27] Teaford argued in his most recent survey *The American Suburb: the Basics* that the suburbs are parochial in nature and that this leads to a great diversity in suburbs.[28] This uniqueness stems from their respective foundations and from their independent governance.

When these powers of self government were threatened by state governments or politicians from the decaying urban core seeking equitable regional management of tax funds, suburbanites revolted. Recent 'new suburban history" monographs delve deeply into this process and paint a picture of the suburbanite that would shock critic Lewis Mumford. The suburbanite is not a childish innocent, but rather an active (and often conniving) political force. The grassroots movements they organized to protect their interests, inspired by the very free market ethos Frank Lloyd Wright championed, not only made local history but moved the nation ever rightward, eventually influencing national elections. This is not the expected past-time of the lobotomized consumer-bots of Mumford's (and Delores Hayden's) imagination.

The politically energized petty landowner is examined through thick description in Becky Nicolaides' *My Blue Heaven*.[29] Nicolaides traces the white working class as it moved from the city into the suburb of South Gate south of Los Angeles in the expanding Sunbelt region. Her migrants came from the industrial cities of the Midwest flush with FHA and VA assistance looking for work in the growing defense industries along Alameda Boulevard. In their new environment these workers cannot rely on labor unions or New Deal policies to insulate themselves from economic hardship as they had in their native cities. They are forced, in the open shop environment, to insulate themselves through the acquisition of real estate. As landowners workers ally themselves with anti-tax conservatives, instead of with labor-friendly liberals because it was believed low taxes equaled financial security for families. Reminiscent of Joseph Bigott's previously mentioned study of Germans in Chicago's 19th century suburbs[30], Nicolaides' workers went so far as to oppose taxes even for such basics as sidewalks and paved streets.[31] "Public culture," Nicolaides writes, "centered around patriotism and Americanism, led by veterans and divorced from any association with labor."[32] These new suburbanites justified their individualistic "siege mentality," hardening especially in the period following the Watts Riots. They maintained a striking line of racial apartheid along Alameda Avenue and joined efforts to fight bussing and integration.

Lisa McGirr's *Suburban Warriors* went right into the homes of middle and upper class activist suburbanites in her examination of Orange County, California. Residents, in organizing tax revolts and

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modern suburb *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened* (NY: Basic Books, 2000), the authors write that the suburbs are "a complicated place, long shaped by conflict and community activism."

[26] Kevin M. Kruse & Thomas Sugrue, eds. *The New Suburban History.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 10.

[27] Jon C. Teaford. *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980.) & *Post Suburbia: Government and Politics in Edge Cities.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998.)

[28] Jon C. Teaford. *The American Suburb: The Basics.* (NY: Routledge, 2008.)

[29] Becky M. Nicolaides. *My Blue Heaven: Life & Politics in the Working Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

[30] Joseph C. Bigott. *From Cottage to Bungalow: Houses and the Working Class in Metropolitan Chicago, 1869–1929.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

[31] Nicolaides, 135.

[32] Ibid., 251.

protests against bussing, sparked a nationwide political movement toward the Right between 1960 and 1980.[33] The ascendant White middle class identified with the conservative values of individualism and self help. The Watts riots led them to put up their guard, launching their champion Ronald Reagan to the governorship. Together the suburbanites and their governor stood behind Proposition 13, a law capping property tax rates which has remained a California institution. The debate over the issue proved a formative test for conservatism, and McGirr argues this (rather than the libertarianism of Barry Goldwater) account for the success of the once fringe Right. In the fears and concerns of White suburbanites the Right found legitimacy.

The same subject was tackled ten years later by Darren Dochuk's *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, but with a religious twist.[34] He followed southern migrants across the Sun Belt, carrying their "plain folk" country religious sentiments to the California suburbs. Here they married the free market individualism Frank Lloyd Wright championed in *The Disappearing City*. The suburbs answer the question not only of the rise of the Right, but also its marriage of convenience with fundamentalist Christianity and all these answers rely on a more contentious suburban landscape than was admitted by Kenneth Jackson and his fellow suburban consensus historians.

Matthew Lassiter (a leading participant in the 2004 Princeton Conference), like Dochuk and McGirr, put agency in the suburbanites of the Sunbelt, in *Silent Majority: Sunbelt Politics in the Sunbelt South*.[35] Lassiter's analysis of the suburbs of Atlanta and Charlotte led him to the belief that it was *not* a top-down Southern Strategy that led to the monumental switch of the Democratic Solid South to the Republican side, but rather a bottom-up movement led by suburbanites entrenched in diverse local arguments over the implementation of suburban space.[36] Atlanta's elite advocated the annexation of White collar suburbs in an attempt to desegregate schools via a "color blind" method. These schools were populated by large majorities of Black students, left in the urban core after the white flight of the preceding decade. Suburban Atlantans, particularly in the White northern suburbs, rose up against annexation policies and managed to shut down integration efforts.[37] These suburbanites saw these efforts as an attack on their privilege and independence (a la Jon Teaford).

Richard Nixon identified these suburban agents as the "Silent Majority," a group Nixon said was made up of "the nonshouters, the nondemonstrators."[38] Lassiter later described a White suburban siege mentality. They felt they were "hard-working, tax-paying Americans whose values were under siege by antiwar protesters, urban rioters, and antipoverty liberals."[39] They were merely defenders of middle class consumer rights and residential privileges.[40] This "color-blind" ideology empowered Southern suburbanites to affirm a color line based on a defense of their freedoms rather than an overtly racist agenda.

Much of Lassiter's work is reminiscent of that of Kevin Kruse, another Princeton conference participant, and one of the leaders of the "new suburban history." Kruse's *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* is in a way confirmed by the work of Lassiter.[41] Like Lassiter, Dochuk, and McGirr, Kruse explores the development of a neo-conservatism in the Sunbelt suburbs through an examination of the white flight phenomenon around Atlanta. While consensus suburban historians like Jackson see white flight as a migration away from the problems of the city core, Kruse sees it as "more than a physical relocation," but also "a political revolution."[42]

Kruse's source pool of personal interviews and use of Atlanta as a case study moves the reader away from the always complicated racial landscape of the northern, Rust Belt and into a place undergoing revolutionary transformations. In Georgia, he finds an environment where Jim Crow *du jure* segregation was

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[33] Lisa McGirr. *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[34] Darren Dochuk. *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt.* (NY: W.W. Norton, 2011).

[35] Matthew D. Lassiter. *Silent Majority: Sunbelt Politics in the Sunbelt South.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.

[36] Ibid., 4.

[37] Ibid., 115-116.

[38] Richard Nixon, "Acceptance Speech, Delivered before the Republican National Convention,"August 8, 1968, from University of Virginia Center for Digital History, http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/HIUS316/mbase/docs/nixon.html, accessed 12/5/14.

[39] Matthew Lassiter. "Who Speaks for the Silent Majority?" *New York Times*, Nov., 2, 2011.

[40] Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 227.

[41] Kevin M. Kruse. *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

[42] Ibid., 6.

engrained and then, as Kruse argues, re-dressed as something else. Upwardly mobile Whites in the Atlanta area reacted to the Civil Rights movement by adopting the 1960's rhetoric of 'rights' and 'freedom' and reordering them to serve the purposes of *de facto* segregation in the suburbs. So even though the rhetoric and strategy of segregationists changed, the aim did not. Radical, low class, and disrespected groups like the KKK are replaced by a more respectable, supposedly color-blind movement. So when African Americans begin to make the move into the Atlanta suburbs in the 1960's, they are not met with firebombs.[43] Instead they are met with neighbors opposed to bussing and integration because their right to "freely associate" with whomever they please, their suburban privilege, is being violated.

Victimhood shifts from Black to White. Working class Whites demand local control of schools and parks, as Black populations increase and as integration seems inevitable.[44] The "neighborhood school" actually means the "White school." The "right of self-government" is called for and, as Teaford explained brilliantly, this independence allows suburbanites to close the door to policies and (Kruse adds) people they do not like. The flames were fanned by threats of block busting and collapse in property values. This collapse in value threatened often what was the only financial safety net of working class suburban families, as Nicolaides explained in *My Blue Heaven*. Families had everything to lose and white flight was seemingly the only choice. Kruse argues that white flight "proved to be the most successful segregationist response to the moral demands of the civil rights movement and the legal authority of the courts."[45] As whites left Atlanta and as suburbs rejected annexation (per Lassiter) in favor of local control, the urban core was left without a tax base. As schools and services in the city went underfunded, Blacks left in the core were tied to a new, more perverse Jim Crow.

White flight in the Rust Belt was explored by Thomas Sugrue, Kruse's editing partner for their collection of essays entitled *The New Suburban History*.[46] Sugrue's study of Detroit, *Origins of the Urban* Crisis, was the first 'new suburban history' to turn the story of white flight on its head.[47] Detroit's fierce race riots of 1967 have often been touted as the reason for white flight; but Sugrue sees white flight occurring as far back as the 1940's in Detroit. Migration to the suburbs, and the resulting depressed tax base and subsequent service limitations, were causes of the riots, not effects of them. As African Americans, attracted to Detroit's once robust WW2 defense industry, moved out to ring suburbs they were met with violence led by a White working class worried for the nest-eggs they invested in their petty real estate holdings. This worry was accentuated by the White working class's struggle with deindustrialization.[48]

A similar story of white flight is told by Robert O. Self's *American Babylon*, this time focusing on Oakland and Alameda County, California.[49] Oakland experienced a boom in WW2 manufacturing as Detroit had and, despite hopes for a new future, also met the same fate of deindustrialization. As the upwardly mobile fled south and east to the suburbs, jobs followed. Soon the city core was in decline. Self explains the complex relationships of race, politics, and space during the postwar years. Space and debate about the use of space, in particular, is seen by Self as the primary way that racial politics is negotiated. Self is not alone in this argument about space. Andrew Wiese also sees racial identity as the product of negotiations over space. These create "devastating material and spatial inequality—differences marked on bodies and inscribed on the land."[50]

These spatial inequalities mean that the story of the civil rights movement should include more than just Alabama and Mississippi. It is the result of white flight from the decaying post-industrial cities, just as much as the struggle against Southern Jim Crow, which motivated the civil rights movement. Black struggles for freedom had roots in fights for local access to light rail, jobs, and services in deindustrializing cities. Suburban Whites, insulated by

[43] As recounted in the work of Andrew Weise on Woodmere, OH.
[44] Kruse, *White Flight*, 107.
[45] Ibid., 8.
[46] Kevin M. Kruse & Thomas Sugrue, eds. *The New Suburban History.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
[47] Thomas Sugrue. *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.)
[48] Informed by Clive Webb's review in *Journal of American Studies*, 33, no. 3(Dec., 1999), pp. 570-1.
[49] Robert O. Self. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.)

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

the independence of their municipal governments, refused to enter into political negotiations over space with inner city Blacks.[51] Soon, in the name of urban renewal, Black families saw their stake in society crushed. Self quotes Black reporter Tom Nash who describes the loss of "homes that it took those people a lifetime to acquire." [52] Despite pleas to attain a voice via other means, Blacks were forced to continue the current unsuccessful quest for material agency, turn to militancy, or resign to the segregation that critics defined as 'urban plantations.' The suburbs were seen by critics as a "white noose."

Self also questions the whether those engaged in white flight were actually fleeing anything. While Jackson and even Kruse focus on push factors for the migration of the white middle class, Self wonders if the pull factors of opportunity to access exclusive markets and freedom were actually stronger motivations for migration.[53]

Another historian turning the idea of white flight on its head is Andrew Weise, whose monograph *A Place of Their Own*, based on years of research and interviews with residents, questions the very idea of a White suburbia.[54] Blacks were also pulled the independence offered by suburbia from the very beginnings of the suburbs in the early 20th century. The suburbs are just as much a destination for those encountering the Great Migration as the industrial urban cores. Wiese provocatively wrote that "historians have done a better job excluding African Americans from the suburbs than even white suburbanites."[55]

He argues that the story of the suburbs is "the *whole* expansion of cities beyond their bounds, not just the celebrated decentralization of the white middle class."[56] The statistics back Wiese's diversity argument up. By the early 1960s there were hundreds of thousands of African Americans in the suburbs and the numbers have been growing ever since. Today one third of US African Americans live in suburbs.[57] Wiese talks of forgotten suburban types like Detroit's Downriver District, an example of the industrial suburb. Industrial suburbs attracted the working class, many of which were African American. Other destinations for Black suburbanites were domestic service enclaves like Pasadena, California, and unplanned rustic suburbs like Chagrin Falls Park, Ohio. There is a diversity of suburbs that consensus suburban historians ignore in favor of the stereotypical Levittown.

Blacks moved to the suburbs for many of the same reasons as whites. They were seeking financial stability through real estate ownership, access to new markets, and political independence. Owning a home was a marker of achievement. The suburbs were an opportunity for "self-transformation" despite the very real obstacles of threats of violence, lending discrimination, and restrictive covenants.[58] Wiese goes so far as to include Black suburbanization as a precursor to the 1950's civil rights movement.

Black suburbanization was different in the South than in the North. In the South Blacks negotiated with white developers for separate zones on the fringes of the metropolis. The purpose of these negotiations was to prevent racial turmoil while allowing for a place for affluent Blacks to aspire to home ownership status. In the North Black suburbs were mostly located in a ring around the city limits, adjacent to Black populations within the city. Northern African American suburbs tended to follow industry and developed in a more unplanned way, but even there a segregated suburban landscape developed.

The integration efforts of the 1950s and 1960s seemed, according to Wiese's interviewees, to cause increased inequality and racial tension. Whites underwent status anxiety which Black residents saw manifested conspicuously and out in the open. Blacks who moved to mostly White suburbs noted a difference in their relationship with neighbors. Suburban Blacks most often felt the brunt of attacks, when they happened.[59] Whites protected their preserve and perceived privilege by further defining spaces by race. Blacks responded by pushing for fair housing legislation and reformation of the FHA. They relied on African American developers and lenders and

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[51] Self., 250-4.
[52] Ibid., 159.
[53] Ibid., 131.
[54] Wiese, Andrew. *Places of their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.)
[55] Ibid., 5.
[56] Ibid., 6.
[57] Christopher Shea. "Beyond the Picket Fence." *New York Times*, 7/23/2006.
[58] Wiese, 38.
[59] Ibid., 9.

some managed to "pioneer" into White neighborhoods. While they may live with Whites in a perceived White region, Black residents do not shed their racial identities.[60] If one believes, as Wiese does, that the suburbs are a diverse landscape, there is no compulsion to compromise racial identity.

Wiese opens a whole new subfield within a subfield with his work and challenges assumptions of even his fellow "new suburban" historians. He agrees with Kruse and Nicolaides and Self in his framework that includes the suburbs as a crucial space for the kind of political discourse that shapes the nation's path. The Civil Rights movement and the conservative rise are suburban stories.

Ignorance of this subfield and its ongoing revision makes comprehension of the important issues of race and politics in the 20th and 21st century almost impossible. Importantly, these suburbs are more complicated and diverse than pioneers in the subfield like Kenneth Jackson acknowledged. The door which was opened by Jackson in 1985 has been opened even wider by the political perspective championed at the Princeton Conference in 2004. We should continue to expect historians to find fruitful areas to do ground-breaking work on what constitutes America's new suburban reality.

When looking at the suburbs through the lens of political history one thing strikes the observer: there is fierce debate going on in the suburbs. The subjects of suburban history are not culture-less, fast-food munching automatons as Lewis Mumford feared they would become. As Wright envisioned, suburbanites are more concerned about civic matters and the role of the individual in democracy. Arguments ranging from those about the distribution of resources, special use, policing, taxation, integration, and school districts are taking place on a suburban battlefield. The suburbs have always been a place of political negotiation and conflict and now that over 50% of Americans call the suburbs home, it is reasonable to assume that it will remain that battleground of American politics.

Works of the "New Suburban History"

Kruse, Kevin M. *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

McGirr, Lisa. *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.

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[60] Here Wiese disagrees with Karyn Lacy.. "Black Spaces, Black Places: Strategic Assimilation and Identity Construction in Middle-Class Suburbia." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27, No. 6 (November 2004): 908–930. & also the ideas of William Julius Wilson.