

PART FOUR

*A More Humane Metropolis
for Whom?*

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As noted in the introduction to this book, early critics of “urban sprawl” like Holly Whyte, Jane Jacobs, and Ian McHarg failed to recognize the grave socio-economic inequity of white flight from cities to the urban fringe. Yes, the loss of farmland and scenic landscapes was disturbing and often unnecessary. But barely acknowledged—owing to the prevailing mind-set of that generation—was the grievous unfairness of federal tax laws, mortgage guarantees, highway programs, and local zoning laws, all contrived by “organization men” to insulate the prosperous white middle class from blacks and the poor (Platt 2004, ch. 6). Thanks to such landmark studies as *Sprawl City: Race, Politics, and Planning in Atlanta* (Bullard, Johnson, and Torres 2000), there is a growing realization that urban sprawl is intimately related to racial and economic separation within U.S. metropolitan areas and indeed may have been the intentional means to achieve such a polarization by class and race.

Part IV addresses this dimension of the “humane metropolis” through essays by leading members of the urban planning profession (Edward J. Blakely; Deborah E. Popper and Frank J. Popper) and a leader in the environmental justice movement (Carl Anthony). They are joined by a recent graduate of the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Thalya Parrilla, who summarizes efforts to restore a semblance of green and community pride to the South Bronx, based on her summer internship position there.

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Race, Poverty, and the Humane Metropolis

Carl Anthony

The truth is, I hadn't thought much about William H. Whyte for almost a decade until Rutherford Platt came to my office to discuss a conference on the humane metropolis, celebrating Whyte's life and work. I explained to him that I have long been dismayed that most writers I had read on urban design seemed to have little understanding of the role that issues of race had played in the shaping of the nation's cities and land policies. I told him that I had been enthusiastic about the writings of Holly Whyte over the years. I did not, however, see how one could have a contemporary conference about the "humane metropolis" without considering issues of race and environmental justice as set forth brilliantly in the book *Sprawl City*, edited by Robert Bullard and others (2000). A review of Whyte's writings reveals that his work on environment and development from the mid 1950s until his death seemed to move him progressively closer to embracing the challenges of racial diversity. His insight about the importance of containing sprawl and reinvesting in cities helps lay the ground work for a new narrative that brings together the claims of racial and economic justice with those of ecological integrity as essential parts of the quest for a humane metropolis. To incorporate these claims fully, however, we need a larger framework than Holly Whyte developed.

In his influential book, *The Organization Man*, Whyte criticized the homogenizing influence of large corporations and other organizations on the quality of suburban life in the 1950s. He advocated more scope for individual initiative, both within the workplace and in suburban neighborhoods. He was also alarmed by suburban sprawl and advocated passionately for conservation of open space surrounding our metropolitan regions. In his 1957 essay "Urban Sprawl," he criticized the Interstate Highway Act of 1956 and its explicit intention "to disperse our factories, our stores and our people; in short to create a revolution in living habits." (quoted in LaFarge 2000, 132). He complained that affected communities have little to say about how the program, almost entirely in the hands of engineers, would be implemented.

The Exploding Metropolis (Editors of *Fortune* 1957) was perhaps the first book to raise concerns about postwar "urban sprawl." Essays by Whyte, Jane Jacobs, and others discussed suburban sprawl, transportation, city politics, open space, and the character and fabric of cities. "In this second decade of post war prosperity," Dan Seligman writes in one of the less-remembered essays, "in a time of steady advancing living standards, the slum problem of our great cities is worsening."

As noted in the introduction to this volume, Seligman also wrote the laconic statement, “The white urban culture they [poor nonwhites] might assimilate *into* is receding before them; it is drifting off into the suburbs” (Editors of *Fortune* 1957, 97). “Drifting off” is certainly a nonjudgmental way to describe the process of white flight in response to the *pull* of government incentives for suburban development and the reciprocal *push* of central city neglect. See also Ray Suarez, *The Old Neighborhood* (1999).

In *The Last Landscape* (1968), Whyte suggested in great detail a number of practical ways to conserve suburban open space, including the use of police powers, outright purchase, conservation easements, taxing policies, greenbelts, physiographic studies, cluster development, the design of play areas and small spaces, and scenic roadway design. He argued eloquently for increasing the density of urban and suburban communities to reduce costs, improve efficiency, and improve the quality of life of its residents.

In his magnum opus, *City: Rediscovering the Center* (1988), Whyte examined the social life of public plazas, streets, atriums, galleries, and courtyards, with detailed attention to what makes such spaces attractive or uninviting to the people who use them. He conducted detailed, empathetic investigations of the needs of street people, including vendors, street entertainers, people who hand out pamphlets, bag ladies, beggars, political activists, shopkeepers, postal carriers, and sanitation workers. In his observations and recommendations for improving the quality of street life, Whyte acknowledged those who are often left out of official planning consideration, which he termed “undesirables” (as deemed by society, not by him), by which he meant “winos, derelicts, people who talk out loud in buses, teenagers, and older people” (p. 156). Clearly, this new work was moving in the direction of helping city builders understand, acknowledge, and embrace the challenges of urban economic and racial diversity.

Although Holly White did not focus on race, his major works were written against the backdrop of an expanding consciousness about the importance of race in U.S. cities. I was seventeen years old in 1956 at the time that Whyte published *The Organization Man*. I lived in Philadelphia not far from Chester County, where Holly Whyte had grown up. The old road that connected Philadelphia to Chester, completely built up with residences, stores, and apartment buildings, was a block from our house. A trolley ran along Chester Avenue, and the street itself served as a sort of dividing line between our neighborhood, which was changing, and the all-white neighborhood on the other side. As the blacks from the South were moving into our neighborhood, the whites were moving out to the cookie-cutter suburbs that Holly White described in his case study of Park Forest, Illinois, in *The Organization Man*.

Whyte noted that the suburban community of Park Forest was an economic

melting pot in the 1950s, a place for “the great broadening of the middle, and a sort of ‘declassification’ from the older criteria of family background” (Whyte 1956, 298). The suburbs, he observed were, compared with the residents’ original communities, places of religious and social tolerance, provided one had the minimum economic wherewithal to rent or purchase. “This classlessness,” Whyte notes, in the only paragraph I found about racial issues, “stops very sharply at the color line. Several years ago, there was an acrid controversy over the possible admission of Negroes. [For many Park Forest residents who] had just left Chicago wards which had just been ‘taken over,’ it was a return of a threat left behind. . . . But though no Negroes ever did move in, the damage was done. The issue had been brought up and the sheer fact that one had to talk about it made it impossible to maintain unblemished the ideal of egalitarianism so cherished” (Whyte 1956, 311).

Whyte stops short of speculating on the effect of this exclusion on the black families that were not allowed to join Park Forest. Nor does he develop the theme that huge public subsidies were beginning to support a new pattern of racial segregation in the metropolitan regions that by the end of the century were to become the dominant pattern of the nation. (The subsequent history of Park Forest, including its racial and commercial metamorphosis during and after the 1960s, is recounted in a recent video film by James Gilmore titled *Chronicle of an American Suburb*.)

I left home in 1956 and traveled through the American South. Separate drinking fountains and separate seating areas for colored and white were everywhere. Elvis Presley had hit the top of the charts, and Martin Luther King had not yet been elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, where he was to lead the bus boycott that made him famous.

If *The Organization Man* came to dominate some part of the national psyche in the 1950s, then the 1960s were dominated by its “shadow side”: rejection of large organizations and male white chauvinism. By 1968, when *The Last Landscape* was published, the fury of the civil rights movement was reaching its peak. That was the year Martin Luther King was shot. America’s metropolis was seething. Insurrections broke out in 168 cities. Rioting and looting claimed the lives of hundreds of people and resulted in billions of dollars of damage from Newark, New Jersey, to Los Angeles, California. It was the year the Kerner Commission reported that the United States was becoming two societies, one white and one black, separate and unequal. Whyte did not explicitly mention the theme of race in *The Last Landscape*, but by 1968, the dynamic of urban abandonment related to suburban sprawl was already well under way.

By the beginning of the 1990s, shortly after *City: Rediscovering the Center* appeared, the environmental movement in the United States had reached the peak of its influence, but most environmentalists were in denial about cities and race. On March 15, 1990, 150 civil rights organizations wrote a famous letter to ten of the

largest environmental organizations, complaining that the environmental movement was racist. They pointed out that the memberships, staffs, and boards of these organizations included no people of color. Most important, was that environmental groups framed issues in a way that excluded and often went against the interests of communities of color. The disproportionate siting of hazardous waste facilities routinely placed in communities of color was ignored as an environmental issue by environmental groups (Sierra Club 1993).

Despite the advances in race relations during the previous four decades, environmental justice advocates pointed out, residential segregation based on race was more widespread than at any earlier time in U.S. history. The consequences of segregation had devastating effects on families in communities where more than 40 percent of the population lived below the poverty line. Employment opportunities were bleak. Education was poor. All these issues had environmental implications unnoticed by established environmental organizations.

Race, Ecology, and Cities

These issues call for a new narrative that integrates ecological awareness, issues of race, and patterns of metropolitan development. On one hand, advocates of ecological integrity must treat more systematically the concerns of social, economic, and racial justice in our metropolitan regions. On the other hand, proponents of social, economic, and racial justice must help build a shared understanding of the role of space, place, and ecological resources in the issues they care about (Bullard, Johnson, and Torres 2000).

For example, the conventional wisdom about people and nature in North America ignores the experience of communities of color. African American history illustrates why and how we must grapple with a more profound understanding of these relationships. Over the past several centuries, the ancestors of African American populations now living in cities have contributed to urban development and have been alienated from the natural world in many ways (Glave and Stoll 2006).

From the fifteenth century on, African American ancestors in Africa were brutally uprooted from a village context grounded in well-understood ways of life related to the stars and the seasons and adapted to climate, fauna, and flora. They were transported across the ocean and forced to work the land in North America, confined to rural plantations, without receiving the benefits of their labor. Although most blacks were kept away from the cities, the capital extracted and accumulated from their labor helped build the great world metropolises of Lisbon, Amsterdam, and London and, later, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston.

After the American Civil War, blacks were emancipated and promised enough land to be self sufficient: "forty acres and a mule." Although a few ex-slaves were able to re-create their traditional African cultures on the Sea Islands of Georgia

and South Carolina, this promise never materialized for most. Instead, the federal government redistributed hundreds of millions of acres of land acquired from native people to railroad corporations and to new immigrants arriving from Europe. The majority of blacks, legally prevented from migrating to the cities, continued to work the land as sharecroppers and tenant farmers under a regime of state-sponsored terror. The wealth accumulated from their labor supported urban intermediaries in both northern and southern cities.

Finally, in the twentieth century, a combination of crop failure, mechanized agriculture, the boll weevil, and the lack of civil rights forced blacks off the land. Within a single generation a population, which for fifteen generations had been predominantly rural, became predominantly urban.

This journey of African Americans from rural areas to the cities is in many ways unique. Between 1940 and 1970, five million African Americans left the rural South for the urban North in the greatest mass migration in U.S. history. They left behind sharecropper shacks in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas for factory jobs and housing projects in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Detroit, Chicago, and Oakland, California. African Americans arrived in the cities en masse at the moment when the bottom was dropping out of the manufacturing economy. Middle-class whites were leaving in droves and taking their resources with them, abandoning the cities as a habitable environment.

In other ways, this migration of African Americans from rural areas to the cities is typical of people all over the world. The Irish, the Eastern European Jews and Catholics, Italian Americans, and Greeks were migrants who came through Ellis Island. Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and Latinos have also been recent migrants to the city. Indeed, the majority of the world's population has migrated from rural areas to the cities. This story tells us that if we wish to re-create a healthy relationship between people and the natural world, then we must pay attention to the similarities and differences in urban population groups and the continuing challenges of justice and immigration.

The New Metropolitan Agenda

Today, we are living through a remarkable time with unprecedented opportunities to reenvision the way we live in cities. I believe, however, that issues of race and poverty, social and environmental justice, must be central to the way we envision a truly humane metropolis, bringing together people and nature in the twenty-first-century city. In this new century, we need a new narrative that defines the claims of racial and economic justice and ecological integrity as essential parts of the quest for a humane metropolis. As I see it, the humane metropolis must be a process through which major urban settlements made up of multiple centers of cities, towns, and villages can be redesigned, rebuilt and reinhabited based on principles

of compassion and consideration. We must have compassion and consideration for both the human and larger living community from which it draws sustenance. From this perspective, advocates of the humane metropolis must think not only about conservation issues, regional greenspaces, working landscapes, and urban gardens, but also about the challenges of poverty and racism, which are consequences of an uncaring, overly materialistic society.

During the past three or four decades, awareness of the metropolitan regions as a focal point for public policy, governmental corporation, physical planning, and economic strategies has been growing. Beginning with the early work of Holly White and his colleagues who wrote *The Exploding Metropolis*, an increasing number of environmentalists, urban planners, and activists have alerted the nation about the squandering of land and energy resources, the traffic congestion, and the pollution of air and water resulting from conventional suburban development practices.

In the 1998 elections, according to Myron Orfield (2002), 240 state and local ballot initiatives dealt with land use and growth, including coordinated comprehensive planning, state land trusts, and moratoriums on new growth. Voters approved more than 70 percent of these issues. In 1999, 107 of 139, measures, or about 75 percent, passed. In 2000, growth-related ballot initiatives numbered more than 550, and 72 percent were adopted. What is extraordinary is that private citizens in the most affluent sectors of society are going outside the normal decision-making process to implement controls on conventional land development practices (Orfield 2002).

In recent years, many businesses have expressed a renewed interest in metropolitan-level coordination and planning of land use and development. They are looking to find new ways to address traffic congestion, the jobs-housing balance, housing affordability, and workforce training. Typically, corporations use the language of competitiveness to argue for more effective patterns of metropolitan regional decision making. In 1993, the Congress of New Urbanism, made up of well-known designers and developers, was formed to curtail sprawl, redevelop vacant parcels in cities, provide housing for all, and plan for public transit. The group advocated pedestrian-friendly communities and creating healthy places to live and work.

Urban and suburban elected officials are beginning to see the connections between current patterns of metropolitan development and problems of discrimination, social isolation, environmental damage, and economic difference. State legislators, county supervisors, and suburban mayors are learning that the suburbs are not monolithic. They are beginning to see that issues of poverty and race are challenges in the older inner-ring suburbs built in the 1950s and 1960.

In this context, there is an extraordinary opportunity for advocates of social and racial justice, and advocates of ecological cities. To achieve a humane metropolis in

the coming decades, the central cities and the older suburbs must be rebuilt. The emerging metropolitan agenda is an extraordinary opportunity for bringing together the claims of racial and economic justice with ecological concerns to support a humane metropolis for everyone (figure 1).

There are important lessons about the relationship between people and nature in this discussion. First, we must development the habit of seeing the cities in their larger ecological context. Just as the cities of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries were built through the exploitation of slave labor and degradation of land-based communities around the world, so also are our cities reshaping the hinterland. This effect goes beyond global warming and destruction of the rain forest to include the uprooting of traditional societies, causing mass migrations across the planet.

Second, issues of race and poverty are central to the construction of the humane metropolis. People of color have a long history with burdens of urban development. They have long suffered from urban geographic and institutional constraints imposed by racism.

Third, people of color have agency. Their energy and creativity can contribute to urban solutions, but this strength must be acknowledged. Just as Africans Americans historically escaped the plantation to create maroon societies, developed gardens within the confines of the plantation system, and created schools and churches for community survival and development after the Civil War, community development corporations, churches, and social movements within communities of color today have important roles to play in rebuilding the humane metropolis.

Finally, there is an old saying in the environmental field: "Everything is connected to everything else." The farms, the small towns, the suburbs, and inner cities are all connected (figure 2). The humane metropolis must find new ways to balance and reinforce qualities unique to each context. This job is a social, economic, and political task as well as an aesthetic one worthy of all our talents and creativity at the beginning of a new century.

Under the old narrative, we saw that European Americans conquered the North American continent. The natural world was seen as a vast and infinite resource that could be raided for more production and consumption. If there were problems with the cities, then we could pack up and leave, throw them away, build new ones, and "Devil takes the hindmost!" Knowledge was organized around the needs and experiences of the European American middle class. Anything outside these needs and experiences simply did not exist. In short, the world of Ozzie and Harriet was flat. If you ventured too far out, then you would fall off the edge.

Today, ecologists and others are feeling the pangs of guilt and remorse for destroying the ecological basis of life. Many people are beginning to believe that the universe is alive, and this insight has important implications for the ways we design, build, and inhabit or cities. *In the ecologist's story, however, people of color do*



Figure 1 Schmoozing in a downtown minipark in Madison, Wisconsin. (Photo by R. H. Platt.)

Figure 2 Cooperation in community greening, New Haven, Connecticut. (Photo courtesy of Colleen Murphy-Dunning.)



not exist. Their experience, insight, and creativity are not acknowledged as a resource for addressing the challenges of our farms, cities, and suburbs.

At the beginning of this new century, we need a new narrative to bring together claims of racial and economic justice with those of ecological integrity as essential parts of the quest for a humane metropolis. Holly Whyte has made an important contribution to this new story. His studies of the organization man first alerted us to the negative effect of social homogeneity on the quality of suburban life. He outlined the social disintegration caused by the “exploding metropolis.” He gave us tools to protect remaining, vulnerable suburban landscapes. He redirected our attention to the importance of rediscovering the center of our public life in the cities. If he did not deal explicitly and wholly with issues of race and poverty, then he helped lay the foundations for a new narrative into which solutions to these challenges can be incorporated.

As Thomas Berry once wrote in his remarkable book, *The Dream of the Earth* (1988, 123):

It is all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story. Our traditional story of the universe sustained us for a long time. It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purposes, and energized action. It consecrated suffering and integrated knowledge. We awake in the morning and we know where we were. We could answer the questions of our children. We could identify crime, punish transgressors. Everything was taken care of because the story was there. It did not necessarily make people good, nor did it take away the pains and stupidities of life, or make for unflinching warmth in human association. It did provide a context in which life could function in a meaningful matter.

An agenda for the humane metropolis at the beginning of the new century must not only include the rivers and trees, wetlands, and working landscapes. It must also include the whole of the human community.

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Fortress America

Separate and Not Equal

Edward J. Blakely

It says “stay out” and it also says, “We are wealthy and you guys are not, and this gate shall establish the difference.” JAFFE 1992

What attracts people, most, it would appear, is other people . . . urban spaces are being designed, as though the opposite were true. WHYTE 1978, 16

The ability to exclude is a new hallmark for the new public space in the United States. Fear created by a rising tide of immigrants and random violence ranging from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, to the snipers in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., in 2002 has transformed public areas with an explosion of public space privatization.

Gated communities are clear indicators of the spatial division of the nation by race and class. In the 1960s, suburban exclusionary zoning to achieve this result was challenged and, to some degree, rejected through judicial or legislative open housing laws. De facto residential exclusivity has since been pursued through the private housing market, which has built hundreds of gated communities since the 1980s under the rubric of “security” from threats to homes and their inhabitants. These private enclaves, of course, may not explicitly be marketed as racist—racial restrictive covenants are unenforceable—but high prices and marketing practices ensure that they will largely be occupied by upper-middle-class whites.

William H. Whyte had a great deal to say about this emerging form of development that excludes rather than includes. What Whyte opposed was the design of space that reduces human interaction. The new fortress developments are aimed, at least on the surface, at reducing opportunity for social contact with strangers and even among neighbors. If there is little contact, then where is the social contract? If there is no social contract, then who will support the “public” needs of society, affordable housing, parks, health care, education, and so on?

Whyte emphasized in his studies that people may say they want to get away from other people, but their behavior indicates that their real desire is for quality human contact in open settings. “Urbanity,” Whyte wrote speaking of community living, “is not something that can be lacquered on (*like a gate*); it is the quality produced by the concentration of diverse functions . . . the fundamental contradiction in the new town (*gated community*) concept of self containment” (Whyte 1968, 234).

Redefining the City as Walled Common

Gated communities are a new form of residential space with restricted access such that normally public spaces have been privatized. They are intentionally designed security communities with designated perimeters, usually walls or fences, and entrances controlled by gates and sometimes guards. They include both new suburban housing arrangements and older inner-city areas retrofitted with barricades and fences. They represent a different phenomenon than apartment or condominium buildings with security systems or doormen so familiar to Whyte who lived in Manhattan. There, a doorman precludes public access only to a lobby or hallways, common space within a building. Gated communities preclude public access to roads, sidewalks, parks, open space, playgrounds, in other words, to all resources that in earlier eras would have been open and accessible to all citizens of a locality. And, because these amenities are maintained privately through homeowner or condo fees, the willingness to support parallel facilities for the rest of the populace through taxes is accordingly diminished. As many as eight million Americans have already sought out this new refuge from the problems of urbanization, and their numbers are growing.¹

Gated communities are proliferating, as are other elite forms of residential development like the resort developments, luxury retirement communities, and high-security subdivisions with which they overlap. Their rapid spread over the last several years results from a number of socio-demographic trends, especially the expansion of the size of the upper-middle-class with rising disposable income, combined with a rising tide of immigration and the threats of terrorism in public places.

Gates range from elaborate two-story guardhouses manned twenty-four hours a day to rollback wrought iron gates to simple electronic arms. Entrances are usually built with one lane for guests and visitors and a second lane for residents, who may open the gates with an electronic card, a punched-in code, or a remote control. Some gates with round-the-clock security require all cars to pass the guard, issuing identification stickers for residents' cars. Unmanned entrances have intercom systems, some with video monitors, for visitors asking for entrance clearance (figure 1).

All these security mechanisms are intended to do more than just deter crime: they also insulate residents from the common annoyances of city life like solicitors and canvassers, mischievous teenagers, and strangers of any kind, malicious or not. The gates provide sheltered common space, open space not penetrable by outsiders. Especially to the residents of upper-end gated communities, who can already afford to live in very low crime environments, the privacy and convenience that controlled access provides is of greater importance than protection from crime.

Gated communities in the United States go directly back to the era of the robber

barons, when the very wealthy sealed themselves from the “hoi polloi.” One of the earliest was the community of Tuxedo Park, built in 1885 behind gates and barbed wire an hour by train from New York. Tuxedo Park was designed with wooded lake views, an “admirable entrance,” a community association, and a village outside the gates to house the servants and merchants to serve it (Stern 1981).

In the same period, private gated streets were built in St. Louis, Missouri, and other cities for the mansions of the rich. Later, during the twentieth century, more gated, fenced compounds were built by members of the East Coast and Hollywood aristocracies.

These early gated preserves were very different from the gated subdivisions of today. They were uncommon places for uncommon people. Now, however, the merely affluent, the top fifth of Americans, and even many of the middle class can also have barriers between themselves and the rest of us as a sign of arrival into a new separate—but never equal—American elite.

Gated communities remained rarities until the advent of the master planned retirement developments of the late 1960s and 1970s. Communities like Leisure World in Arizona, Maryland, and other states were the first places where average Americans could wall themselves off. Gates soon spread to resorts and country club communities, and then to middle-class suburban subdivisions. In the 1980s, upscale real estate speculation and the trend to conspicuous consumption saw the proliferation of gated communities built around golf courses, designed for exclusivity, prestige, and leisure. Gates became available in developments from mobile home parks to suburban single-family tracts to high-density townhouse developments. Gated communities have increased in number and extent dramatically since the early 1980s, becoming ubiquitous in many areas of the country (figure 2). Today, new towns are routinely built with gated villages, and there are even entire incorporated cities that feature guarded entrances.

These developments are descendants not just of a tradition of elite enclaves but of decades of suburban design and public land use policy. Whyte (1968) in *The Last Landscape* warned that this pattern was antihuman and antinature. Gates are firmly within the suburban tradition of street patterns and zoning designed to reduce the access of nonresidents and increase homogeneity. Gates enhance and harden the suburbanness of the suburbs, and they attempt to suburbanize the city. This suburbanization of the city is precisely what Whyte opposed in his essays on sprawl (LaFarge 2000).

From their earliest examples, the suburbs aimed to create a new version of the country estate of the landed gentry: a healthy, beautiful, protected preserve, far from the noise and bustle of the crowded cities. But demographic, social, and cultural changes permeate throughout society, and the suburbs are changing and diversifying. Suburban no longer automatically means safe, beautiful, or ideal. As the suburbs age and as they become more diverse, they are encountering problems



Figure 1 Access is restricted by electronic gates. (Photo courtesy Kathleen M. Lafferty/RMES.)

Figure 2 Another “waterfront” gated community under construction. (Photo courtesy Kathleen M. Lafferty/RMES.)



once thought of as exclusively “urban”: crime, vandalism, disinvestment, and blight. Gated communities seek to counter these trends by maintaining the ambience of exclusivity and safety the suburbs once promised. They exist not just to wall out crime or traffic or strangers, but also to lock in economic position. It is hoped that greater control over the neighborhood will mean greater stability in property values.

Gated communities are elite not just because of what they include, but also because of what they exclude: the public, strangers, and “undesirables” (Whyte’s non–politically correct but gently ironic term). The result is privacy and control. Gated communities center on this ability to control the environment, in part because home buyers believe it will help protect their property values. Stability in the neighborhood comes from similarity in the makeup of the residents and in the houses in the development, and that is expected to mean stability in property values (interview with Curt Wellwood, Curt Wellwood Homes, Dallas, Texas, November 29, 1994). This consequence is the direct antithesis of the public space that Whyte promoted as the best vehicle to reduce crime and improve community life. Whyte saw public space as an essential ingredient in creating the interactions that promote and preserve community.

Social Security Behind the Walls

Through their homeowner associations and the codes, covenants, and restrictions built into the deeds, the new privatized communities are also able to control and exclude a vast range of down-market markers. From the highest-end developments down to those that are most modestly middle class, gated communities regulate out any possibility of activities and objects considered lower class, such as the unguarded open space, plazas, and parks that Whyte favored.

Status is important to most people, be they working class or affluent; the differences lie in what status symbols are most highly valued and especially which are accessible. According to the American Housing Survey (AHS), among those households that earn more than \$161,481 a year, living in an exclusive neighborhood is considered a symbol of status or achievement by nearly half; among the very wealthy, who earn more than \$400,000 a year, living in an exclusive neighborhood is important to nearly 60 percent (AHS 2002).

Those in the middle class—those just behind this large affluent class—are now more able to afford the symbols of status previously reserved for the very rich. The American middle class has expanded greatly since World War II. Household size has dropped across the board. Household net worth has more than doubled. This transformation is spectacular by any measure, and it has allowed a distinctively new set of economic behaviors to emerge. This new middle class has substantial buying power. The average disposable income is increasing from 1969 when only

8.3 percent of families with children had high disposable incomes to 15.5 percent in 1996 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1997, 23–196). Owning a second home is also part of the new higher-income affluent lifestyle. In 1992, almost 35 percent of all middle class Americans considered having a vacation home an essential lifestyle feature, up 10 percent over the previous decade (“Four Income Families” 1995). While developers are finding it hard to build affordable homes for the average American, there is no dearth of market for resort properties. As a result of high levels of disposable income, moderately wealthy people in their early forties are able to afford very high status properties that they live in for only part of the year. And more and more often, both luxury developments and second home communities are gated.

Gated communities also cater to two large, new submarkets. New, active, affluent retirees make up the first class. Retirees are living longer and better than ever before. There are now more than twenty-five million retirees in the United States, and unlike the 1960s, most of these live independently. They are getting younger; the average retirement age is now only sixty. They are wealthier than in earlier decades as well. People over age sixty-five with incomes in excess of \$40,000 climbed from only about 5 percent in 1970 to more than 15 percent in 1990, and those with incomes below \$10,000 fell from 50 percent to less than 30 percent (Hull 1995).

“Flexecutives,” the new well-paid, status-conscious, and mobile corporate executives, make up the second new submarket. Their numbers are increasing as telecommunications and new forms of corporate structure make smaller organizations the rule rather than the exception. The newest such developments are occurring outside major metropolitan areas. They are now in what were once relatively small towns and the outer edges of exurbia, and in places like Santa Fe, New Mexico, far from the crime and congestion of big-city regions. These communities must offer this new class of executives considerable charm and visual appeal with “unique architecture; culture; outdoor recreation opportunities; high quality, unusual retail facilities; and in particular restaurants—all in a small town setting” (Charles Lesser and Co. 1994). Many gated communities are designed especially for this elite group, providing the distinctive environment and exclusive image the buyers desire.

For developers too, gates are seen as an economic benefit. With their often elaborate guardhouses and entrance architecture, gates provide the crucial product differentiation and clear identity that is needed in crowded and competitive suburban new home markets. And, although there is no clear evidence that gates add a price premium, many builders report faster sales in gated communities, and quicker turnover means thousands in additional profits (Carlton 1990, 1:3).

The gate is part of the package of design and amenities that sell houses by selling a lifestyle image with which buyers wish to identify. As one developer of gated communities in Florida said: “Selling houses is showbiz. You go after the emotions. We don’t go out and show a gate in the ad. But we try to imply and do it subtly. In

our ad, we don't even show houses. We show a yacht. We show an emotion" (interview with Ami Tanel, Avatar Development Corporation, December 12, 1994). In part, it is the emotional response to race and class that these subtle images—codes—help to convey.

What It All Means

A gated community, with its controlled entrance and walled perimeter, is the very image of elite space. A gate means exclusivity, the foundation of what it means to be in an elite group. Although gated communities have traditionally been an option only for the economic elite, the very richest Americans, now they are part of the residential options of the merely affluent and even of the middle class, yet they retain the image of eliteness because they retain the function of exclusivity. The people inside gated communities may not be elite, but their developments share all the traditional markers of the communities of the elite. These communities place the Whyte notion of communal residential space on its head as his notion is transformed into a new mark of exclusivity.

The exclusionary ideal of gated communities arises from the status associated with social distance. Of course, social distance has long been a goal of our settlement patterns; after all, the suburbs were built on separation and segregation. The suburban pattern, which gates are meant to maintain and intensify, erected social and physical walls between communities, compartmentalizing residential space. That is not what Whyte intended. He favored the creation of space that pulled people together, not that created new wedges between them. As Rebecca Solnit and Susan Schwartzenberg say as if speaking for Whyte in *Hollow City* (2000, 75): "A city is a place where people have, as a rule less private space and fewer private amenities because they share public goods—public parks, libraries, streets, cafes, plazas, schools, transit—and in the course of sharing them become part of a community, become citizens."

Today, with a new set of problems pressing on our metropolitan areas, separation is still the solution to which Americans turn. In the suburbs, gates are the logical extension of the original suburban drive. In the city, gates and barricades are sometimes called "cul-de-sac-ization," a term that clearly reflects the design goal to create out of the existing urban grid a street pattern as close to suburbs, which Whyte would oppose. Gates and walls are an attempt to suburbanize our cities. Neighborhoods have always been able to exclude some potential residents through discrimination and housing costs. Now, gates and walls exclude not only "undesirable" new residents, but also casual passersby and the people from the neighborhood next door.

The exclusivity of these communities goes beyond questions of public access to their streets. They are yet another manifestation of the trend toward privatization

of public services: the private provision of recreational facilities, open space and common space, security, infrastructure, even social services and schools. Gated communities are substituting for or augmenting public services with services provided by the homeowners' association. The same is true of all of the private-street subdivisions, which are now the dominant form of new residential development. In gated communities, however, this privatization is enhanced by the physical control of access to the development.

The trend toward privatized government and communities is part of the more general trend of fragmentation, and the resulting loss of connection and social contact is weakening the bonds of mutual responsibility and the social contract. The problem is that in gated communities and other privatized enclaves, the local community with which many residents identify is the one within the gates only. Their homeowners' association dues are like taxes; and the responsibility to their community, such as it is, ends at that gate. At a focus group with public officials in 1994, one city official in Plano, Texas, summed up his view of the attitude of the gated community residents in his town: "I took care of my responsibility, I'm safe in here, I've got my guard gate; I've paid my [homeowner association] dues, and I'm responsible for my streets. Therefore, I have no responsibility for the commonweal, because you take care of your own."

Residents of gated communities, like other people in cities and suburbs across the country, vary in the degree they personally feel the connections and duties of community within and outside their developments. The difference is that in gated communities—with their privatized streets, recreation, local governance, and security—residents have less need of the public realm outside their gates than those living in traditional open neighborhoods. If they choose to withdraw, there are fewer ties to break, less daily dependence on the greater community. *In making this choice, we descend the scale of democracy and do harm to our society and our aspirations as a nation. Holly Whyte would have been amazed and ashamed at this course of our democracy.*

Note

1. Definitive numbers on gated communities are now available from the U.S. Census. According to the American Housing Survey (AHS) conducted by the U.S. Census in 2001, more than seven million Americans live in gated or controlled-access communities. The West has the largest number of gated communities (11 percent of the total), with 6.8 percent in the South, 3.1 percent in the Northeast, and only 2.1 percent in the Midwest (AHS 2002). From surveys conducted by the Community Association Institute, the organization that represents community associations, the average number of units in community associations is 240 (2,995,200 units in gated communities). From 2000 census data, average household size is 2.45 people. Renters are the largest number of persons living behind gates and barricades, accounting for 67.9 percent of all residents. Whites are 80 percent of the population living in walled or controlled-access communities. Blacks are 12.5 percent and Hispanics 12.5 percent (AHS 2002).

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“The Organization Man” in the Twenty-first Century

An Urbanist View

Deborah E. Popper and Frank J. Popper

In his first great book, *The Organization Man*, William H. Whyte (1956) offered a new perspective on how post–World War II American society had redefined itself. Whyte’s 1950s America had replaced the Protestant ethic of individualism and entrepreneurialism with a social ethic that stressed cooperation and management: the individual subsumed within the organization. It was the age of middle management, what Whyte thought of as the rank and file of leadership, whether corporate, governmental, church, or university. Those of us who grew up in the 1950s had *The Organization Man* seep into our consciousness well before we heard of Whyte the urbanist. It formed our ideas about conformity, resistance to it, and the meaning of being part of an organization. The book and its title gave many of us reason to disparage the security the organization promised; that was for others but not for us. The William H. Whyte of *City: Rediscovering the Center* (1988), his last great book, might seem an entirely different person. In the early work, he wrote of people in groups, of their social interactions within institutional structures. The latter was about how people behave in space, not institutions. In fact, it primarily focuses on people using space apart from institutions—the street or the plaza, for example. Seemingly so different, these two books reveal two sides of the Whyte coin, namely the focus on the individual in relation to surrounding context: social, organizational, and physical.

The first book sets out a social analysis and critique that still provides useful guideposts even as society has changed. In the 1950s, the city was still at the center of American life. The 1950 census of population was the last in which large U.S. cities—eastern, midwestern, and western—were still gaining population. By the 1960 census, New York City, Baltimore, Chicago, and Detroit were losing population, their centers thinning as their suburbs grew.

This evolving regional landscape of suburbia was created by and for “organization men” reflecting Whyte’s social ethic in groupthink decisions on location, architecture, space allocation, and landscaping. The outward emblems of suburbia— office complexes, shopping malls, and residential subdivisions (often gated)—in turn reflected the organizations that commissioned them: public agencies, consulting firms, universities, and development corporations. This physical imprint of organization decision making on urban structure validates some of

Whyte's deepest concerns: the dominance of bureaucracy over the individual, scientism and its worship of statistics, and the rejection of "genius" or the idiosyncratic.

In the process, the old Protestant ethic choices of living and working in less pretentious (and more affordable) premises back in the core cities were left behind, literally and psychologically. The "old neighborhood," in Ray Suarez's phrase (1999), trickled down to the nonwhite, the ethnic, and the poor who still sought to improve their lot through start-up enterprises such as convenience stores, small repair shops, nail and hair services, and ethnic groceries and eateries. This process of spatial disaggregation of metropolitan America into underclass-dominated inner-city neighborhoods and organization-centered suburbia has been nurtured significantly by the shaping of tax laws, transportation decisions, and land use zoning by and for the benefit of the organization man society (Bullard 2000; Platt 2004, ch. 6; and also see Introduction to this volume by Rutherford Platt).

Although Whyte did not directly address this dimension of the shaping of the organization world, he did allude to race in at least one pungent paragraph of *The Organization Man*: "The classlessness [typical of Park Forest, Illinois, and its counterparts] stops very abruptly at the color line. Several years ago, there was an acrid controversy over the possible admission of Negroes. [For many Park Forest residents who] had just left Chicago wards which had just been 'taken over,' it was a return of a threat left behind. . . . But though no Negroes ever did move in, the damage was done. The issue had been brought up and the sheer fact that one had to talk about it made it impossible to maintain unblemished the ideal of egalitarianism so cherished" (Whyte 1956/2002, 311). (See also Carl Anthony's essay in this volume.)

The Social Ethic and the Suburb

The Organization Man evolved from a series of stories Whyte wrote for *Fortune*, where he began working in 1946. The book started to take shape with an article that appeared in June 1949: "The Class of '49," a commencement-season piece. Whyte used the opportunity to compare the aspirations of that year's crop of men graduating from college with those of his own class a decade earlier. After many interviews, he found a fundamental shift, a substantive redefinition of expectations and aspirations. America's individualist and entrepreneurial founding culture had given way to what he termed a social ethic. Well-educated, elite American men no longer aspired to start their own companies. Rather than outwardly engaging in competition, particularly with one another, they preferred to take the more secure route of belonging to an existing organization where conflict was muted and conformity to group norms rewarded with raises and promotions.

Whyte followed up that story by examining what happened once the graduating

seniors entered their organizations. The relatively benign world of school carried over in the form of expanding numbers of training programs. Life after college was more a continuation than a break. Just as the college fraternity or the military had instilled a group mind-set, so had the new business world. Further reinforcing this mind-set was the availability of veterans' home ownership loan guarantees, which required evidence of a reliable future stream of income (but screened out most nonwhites even if they were veterans).

Beneath these changes in aspirations lay redefined group dynamics. In essence, the change meant that the organization's pressure on the individual would not be resisted because the individual no longer saw a need for resistance. Whyte found that those entering the world of work after World War II saw their interests as coincident with the group—the organization and their sections within it—rather than in opposition or irrelevant to it. Whyte was less concerned with the whats of the changes than with the whys, but certainly the experience of war and military organization was formative. During the war, the military had applied social science group management techniques extensively. In addition, many of the new management class came from blue-collar backgrounds, with group consciousness developed through unions. Whyte attributed three key beliefs to the social ethic, each reinforcing the group dynamic and managerial orientation: “[1] a belief in the group as the source of creativity; [2] a belief in ‘belongingness’ as the ultimate need of the individual; and [3] a belief in the application of science to achieve the belongingness” (Whyte 1956, 7).

Within American business, management increased in importance throughout the twentieth century as the scale of business increased. Whyte found that management had grown to be nearly an end in itself. The organization and its parts were to operate smoothly; conflict was viewed as undesirable, and when it arose it required skillful application of human relations to bring the workforce back into alignment. Training programs thus emphasized personnel skills, which were treated like a science. Personality tests were administered to ensure good matches. The individual, if properly placed, would not only thrive, but would also have a form for his life with and for the company. Whyte saw this shift to testing as intrusive and misguided. He doubted that the instruments could, in fact, find the best people for the job, but they would needlessly collect personal information, making the individual vulnerable. He also found that the test results that selected for leadership would have screened out most of the companies' actual leaders.

The social ethic might operate against genius, but it required larger organizations. The earlier Protestant ethic emphasized growth through competition, innovation, and cost containment; personal virtue lay in thrift and self-reliance. The organization under the social ethic also required growth to accommodate its expanding group, but drawing on a different range of attitudes and behaviors, it did so by expanding the consumer economy. The group substituted for self-reliance.

Company insurance programs took over for personal savings, for example, but then required the company to sell more to support the new programs. The organization needed a consumerist society more than it needed an innovative society, a bigger and bigger pie to support the increasing numbers of people being trained, doing the training, and overseeing the training. Applying some of the human relations to consumption could increase sales, generating increasingly sophisticated market analyses.

By accepting the organization's needs as his own, the organization man became footloose, ready to go wherever he was sent. He was less rooted in a specific place and lived in a series of sprawling new "insta-places": fungible, electrically equipped, train-oriented, school-centered, male-dominated white middle-class bedroom suburbs.

Whyte's famous chapter titled "The New Suburbia: Organization Man at Home" was the last and longest part of the book (1956, 267–404). In this extended case study, he gently probed the social mores of Park Forest, Illinois, as an archetypal postwar corporate suburb. Park Forest opened in 1948 as a brand-new planned community built on the prairie, with its own commercial town center and six hundred buildings offering more than three thousand dwelling units. It pioneered the townhouse living: low-density, multifamily housing set around grassy courtyards. Park Forest offered clean, neat, predictable, and affordable housing for Chicago's many new managers' families. Fairlington in Arlington, Virginia, a similar development, served a comparable purpose for the many government employees at the same stage in their careers.

Developments like these helped the organization man and his family move comfortably wherever the company required. They offered quick community and similar people, one more way in which life after college resembled life during it. Whyte's investigations drew on his love of mapping and his extraordinary ability—later so evident in his urban work—to show how people use space and how space shapes their interactions. Location in the court had an effect on one's social role; those at the center of the block, rather than those at the outer edge, set the tone. Whyte also tracked length of residence and the frequency of moves of Park Forest residents. Even if they stayed in Chicago, they tended to change houses as they moved up the corporate ladder, finding more spacious place-equivalents as the suburban housing market expanded and segmented along with the rest of the American economy and organization.

Unlike many of his readers, Whyte never derided the organization man and his suburbs. He did not describe the people as conformist, nor did he see their homes as tacky-tacky, filled with people trying to keep up with their neighbors. He was wiser and more generous than that. He wrote: "There will be no strictures in this book against 'Mass Man'—a person the author has never met—nor will there be any strictures against ranch wagons, or television sets, or gray flannel suits . . . how

important, really, are these uniformities to the central issue of individualism? We must not let the outward forms deceive us” (1956, 10–11).

He questioned instead America’s turn to the social ethic, not that he idealized the Protestant one. He was concerned that the individual’s interest was not the same as the group’s and that the confusion of the two had harmful consequences. He knew that the organization needed less defense from the individual than the individual needed from the organization. Their interests could overlap on occasion—why would one work for a corporation with which one had no mutual interests?—but not always. In the merging of the two interests, the individual lost important elements of personhood and privacy.

Whyte ended *The Organization Man* with a reminder that organizational interests derive from individuals: “Whatever kind of future suburbia may foreshadow, it will show that at least we have the choices to make. The organization man is not in the grip of vast social forces about which it is impossible for him to do anything; the options are there, and with wisdom and foresight he can turn the future away from the dehumanized collective that so haunts our thoughts. He may not. But he can” (1956, 404).

Resisting a “dehumanizing collective” suffuses his subsequent work. Those “social forces” created beltways that broke up communities, developments that eliminated special secret places in the woods, and duller streets empty of people. He looked closely to understand what influenced people’s choices of public spaces, how they expressed their preferences, and what might give them more of what they wanted. He provided the form for early open space legislation. He observed how people use plazas and found they *like* to move the chairs, to be in the sun or not, to face a friend or to be alone. Why not develop plazas, then, in which people can shape place to *their* liking rather than being forced into some theoretically preferable mold?

Beyond the Organization Man?

By the 1970s and 1980s, the organization man seemed to have dated. The new generation of college students became so knowing that they could hardly say the term *organization man* without a smirk, followed up with a shriek to at least include women, too. The security the Depression-era children needed had no appeal to the university graduates of the 1970s, and for the generation after them the organization’s promise of security did not even register. Time between moves declined, and then length of tenure within the same organization fell. The median length of tenure for workers is four years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2004), and for most of the period since the organization man, that figure declined. The median tenure at Fortune 700 companies for the chief executive officer is five years,

two years less than in 1980 (Neff and Ogden 2001). Temporary workers increased in number; California’s doubled between 1991 and 1996 (Bara 2001).

The Death of the Organization Man by Amanda Bennett (1990) reported on the demoralizing managerial layoffs of the 1980s that revealed the flimsiness behind the organization man’s sense of belonging. David Brooks’s more recent *Bobos in Paradise* (2000) finds his educated, affluent group, the “bourgeois bohemians” (“bobos”) vaguely and superficially influenced by the organization man concept. They are aware of the term and generally adopt its antiorganizational sentiment, but are unlikely to have any deeper acquaintance with Whyte. Brooks himself finds Whyte’s critique a bit soft and ambivalent, seeing him as a *Fortune* writer more than a social critic (Brooks 2000, 118–20).

In their interesting follow-up study to Whyte’s book, sociologists Paul Leinberger and Bruce Tucker (1991) found that by the 1980s, the next generation’s social ethic had mutated into a “self ethic.” Loyalty to the organization by now had no base, a point that became painfully evident as corporate firings skyrocketed. Economic security and suburban life had created the “me generation.” The prototypical suburb was no longer clustered Park Forest but decentered Irvine, California. The world had changed from daddy commuting to the city and mommy home with the kids to a much more commodified world—from playgroup to day care. Even the organization fathers by the end of their careers had learned the truth of Whyte’s perception: that the organization and the individual are not symbiotic. The world changed and so did the organization, but Leinberger and Tucker thought Whyte’s management philosophy had persisted, and so did Whyte (Beder 1999).

The mutation of the social ethic over time is evident in various ways: less loyalty, more horizontal management, more team meetings. In addition, many of the organization men are now women. Today, though, we are all organization people because organizations dominate our world more extensively and intensively than ever. Whyte captured a moment when people seemed to live in *an* organization, but today we move seamlessly, effortlessly *between* organizations, from one to another. Sociologist Jeffrey Pfeffer wrote in 1997: “We live in an organization world. Virtually all of us are born in an organization—a hospital—with our existence ratified by a state agency that issues a certificate documenting our birth,” and it keeps on going from there. The shift from self-reliance Whyte found in *The Organization Man* resulted in corporations providing widely unrelated services, especially personal ones, preferably at a profit. As their domain expanded, the enterprise of understanding organizations became more the subject of business and management schools than sociologists (Pfeffer 1997, 3, 14), a change Whyte anticipated.

A 1999 *Fast Company* article on job satisfaction invoked Whyte to portray the difference between yesterday’s and today’s workers. Showing its dot.com boom moment, the article notes: “The organization man had to check his identity at the

office door. People today . . . are demanding the right to display their integrity and the opportunity for self-expression.” The article went on to say, however: “The new workplace also holds forth the promise of community—or some semblance thereof. Because we spend so much time at work, and because teamwork is a core organizational value, we expect to develop close bonds with our teammates. . . . The workplace provides a sort of home. Indeed, for better and for worse, work and life outside work blur into each other” (Fast Company 1999). Today’s organization people imagine themselves different, but note how critical the group remains as a source of belonging and creativity. Note further how quickly the community dissipated as the dot.com bubble burst in 2001.

Whyte saw postwar education as moving from the liberal arts and sciences to the technical, from the fundamental to the applied or vocational (Whyte 1956, 85). He thought this shift suited organization men for problem solving, but neglected to develop their ability to decide which problems needed solving, fiddling while giving people the false sense that they were fixing.

Whyte wrote about how one seeks common ground in the group, tending toward a common denominator. The current economy is much more intent on flexibility—finding niches instead of the standardization of group conformity—yet that flexibility requires even further-ranging design conformity in some ways. We gave up loyalty to one organization for loyalty to many organizations as the overarching structure for our society. Whyte’s organization man enlisted in organizations whose economic structures were about to reorganize. They had expanded to capture all the economies of scale, but the managerial change from the Protestant ethic to the social ethic paralleled the shift from economies of scale to economies of scope (Knox and Agnew 1998, 191–94). Economies of scale capture savings by streamlining ever-larger production of a clear and narrow range of goods. Economies of scope streamline by coordinating dispersed production and expanding range of offerings. The transition from the one to other created an organization world.

Whyte’s organization man moved smoothly between places—from college to work, from jobs in one city to another, from one residential suburb to another. We have increased the facility with which we do so even more, moving in and out of organizations, shifting roles as we go from worker to consumer to evaluator. As the organization man moved from place to place, around him place-specific characteristics generalized, jobs increasingly located in the suburbs, and the feeling of belonging the organization man sought at work became more elusive. Even more elusive is escape from organizations.

Daniel Pink’s book *Free Agent Nation* (2001) positions itself as anti-organization man. A former Gore vice presidential staffer, Pink left the White House to become self-employed and then urged everyone else to do the same. The advice has many problems, but for it to work at all requires that there be lots of interchange-

able spaces available, places with telephones, faxes, and computer outlets. Such space can be rented briefly, possibly by the hour or the month, shared with others, acquired, and divested. The rooms are minimally decorated, painted in neutral colors, hung with inoffensive art, and show few signs of individuality. The economy is flexible, on the move, so for whom do you build? Everyone. The hotel conference space works ideally as such a one-size-fits-all place, whether in town, near the airport, or at the intersection of several highways in Joel Garreau’s *Edge City* (1991). It is also an ideal place for the nonstop seminars on personal improvement that mix the social ethic with the self ethic.

Urbanism and the Organization Man

Among the problems Whyte wanted to fix were those observed in the landscape changes wrought by organization thinking (as codified in federal tax laws, local building and zoning codes, and investor preferences). The postwar remaking of the United States tore up the earth for new construction; highways, suburbs, roads, new commercial centers, and new office and factory buildings filled the countryside. It urbanized the region and sapped the city. The regional shopping centers served as the cores of the settlement, substantially altering the usual process of development. Gathering spaces became privately owned (Cohen 1996, 1053). The economy went through periods of boom and bust and reorganization, constantly reinventing itself.

The landscape is now dotted with interchangeable organizational spaces. The conference hotel is an iconic example. Others include the industrial park, the big-box store, the mall, and the gated community. Each is designed to be reliably predictable and controllable. Even elite shopping districts are predictable; Madison Avenue and Rodeo Drive vary less and less over time. Information and consumption are the growth portions of the economy, both with only mildly distinctive sectoral spaces, and center cities get remade as entertainment and tourism districts while other kinds of work shift to the outer edges (Hannigan 1998; Soja 2000). Organizations now are on campuses, and universities are more like businesses.

Universities are large organizations with major building programs where output is measured in pages produced and grants obtained. Many of us who thought we were avoiding or outsmarting the organization man by going into academic life have found ourselves working away in large technocracies. (At least job security for the tenured meets the organization man’s expectations, one of the few surviving places where it does.) Applied or professional fields such as business, education, and public health have continued to grow in line with what Whyte saw in the 1950s, whereas the humanities continue to lose ground. Whyte noted that science had become as collaborative as the corporate world, and as costly. He expected that funding requirements would discourage the asking of unpopular or awkward

questions. Over time, collaboration and funding have produced some extraordinary work, but some of Whyte's fears have been realized. For example, in the sciences, major biotechnology companies support much more work on genomes than on protecting ecosystems. Even as universities increasingly support specialized technical knowledge, they are increasingly interchangeable spaces, trying to attract everyone and anyone so that all parts of the plant are revenue streams. One strategy is to subcontract space to get rent, and thus many schools host Starbucks and Taco Bell. They contract vending machines exclusively to Coca-Cola or Pepsi, creating more organizational interpenetration.

Whyte saw leisure being eaten up by the organization: one was expected to work a lot. Yet consumption was essential to the growth of the economy. The Protestant ethic prized frugality, which helped profits by holding down costs, but was less aimed at increasing consumption. The social ethic needed to commodify leisure and thus add it to the corporate menu of sales. Increased consumer time pressures meant, however, that leisure had to become interchangeable, become easier to pick up and put down. The megaplex is everywhere and shows the same thing, sells the same snacks. We know the drill. Gyms are big, but from city to city they vary more by acceptable body images than by anything else. Many are national chains that define their income niches and then tailor a huge array of services appropriately (Epaminondas 2002).

Shopping malls, like schools, are major organizations. Their developers are certainly part of the management class about whom Whyte talked. Lizabeth Cohen writes that developers saw themselves as "participating in a rationalization of consumption and community no less significant than the way highways were improving transportation or tract developments were delivering mass housing" (Cohen 1996, 1055–56), the rationalizing of life and space that so worried Whyte. We shop as part of leisure and that shopping is smoother for its predictability. We know which way to turn when we walk into a new mall. Mall expansion actually peaked in 1978, when big-box stores emerged to provide another rationalized predictable shopping space, again each laid out in the same way, from city to city (Jackson 1996, 1120). George Ritzer (1993) echoes Whyte when he refers to the McDonaldization of society, the application of the bureaucratic approach to more and more segments of life, from fast food to hospitals, schools, and theme parks. Ritzer puts consumption at the center of his image. Others offer even darker visions. Experience eventually becomes so flat that even the human interaction and excitement of the mall pales. Eugene Halton describes the phenomenon as "brain suck," mass quantities of low-grade experience that eventually turn the individual inward. The only place to avoid a rationalized world is in time alone (Halton 2000).

The rationalizing, of course, segmented the market; it allowed the organization to creep into our lives by finding ways to derive profit from all aspects of our being. The elderly are increasingly housed, fed, and cared for by organizations. Assisted

living is a growth market with both large corporations and small. Vacant lots at the outskirts of cities acquire new, overscaled Victorian or Georgian buildings from which their aged residents rarely venture. We know the organizational world endures because its landscape has spread so effectively. Since 1960, acreages at urban, suburban, and exurban densities have each more than doubled (Theobald 2001, 553). How to resist?

Organizations seek predictability through regulation, and that trait lives on. The social ethic provides protection from the ruthlessness of the entrepreneur. Environmental agencies and zoning boards rationalize use of space (at least in theory). The League of Women Voters of Park Forest can ally with, among other groups, government scientists to make rules that protect the group. Suburban zoning ensures minimum lot size, plenty of square footage (for residents), and decent plumbing and wiring. Shopping centers must have enough parking spaces. Rules intended to ensure better environments help control abuses, but they also produce more generic places. The language of regulation becomes increasingly organizational. We are all stakeholders and must meet to agree on our best interests; the group will find consensus.

Urbanist Lessons for the Organization Landscape

Whyte’s resistance to the power of the organization was through modest methods: empirical observation, building from the ground up. In *The Organization Man*, Whyte was concerned about education’s move away from the fundamental orientation of the liberal arts to the applied or vocational approach. He was impressed and depressed that business had the most majors, to such a degree that it set the dominant tone of the campus (Whyte 1956, 85). As the quantitative revolution was surging in the social sciences, he was skeptical whether its proponents would know what questions to ask and how to match their methods to the questions.

His main method, he insisted, was social *study*, not social science. Social science assumed that it could produce “an exact science of man” (1956, 217–30). Whyte called that utopian, in fact dystopian (Whyte 1956, 22–32) in the way that it intruded on privacy and limited human options. He delineates the difference in *The Organization Man*’s portrayal of management objectives, but the same problems arise in urban design, particularly when planning efforts attempt to root out the problems of the city through large-scale reimaginings that rationalize city life; contrast the mega-ideas of Le Corbusier with Whyte’s more human-scaled ones. Whyte builds slowly and carefully, bit by bit, doing a form of market testing for public purposes. He advocates close observation of what works and of making what does not more like what does. In truth, utopian visions often seem to confer more reality on their imaginings, the future perfect, over the messy present (Donald 1999, 54). Whyte found more practical promise in the messy present. One could

learn from the street vendors and bag ladies. They knew what places were popular (Whyte 1988, 25–55).

Despite his dislike of scientism, Whyte was systematic. He made painstaking counts, spent hours in thoughtful interviews, and devoted decades to looking at and noting activity on the city street. He measured angles and seat heights of benches in plazas. His counsel is clear. Use science: understand how watersheds work, how to maximize sunshine, select trees that will survive city stresses. (See the essay by Mary V. Rickel Pelletier in this volume.) Science can thus further social ends, but be careful in applying scientific method to social behavior. For that, use the softer social studies, and observe and think. Ask the right questions.

According to Paul Goldberger, Whyte saw the street as society's best achievement (LaFarge 2000, xviii). It is, in fact, the antithesis of the organization. Whereas the organization orders, provides hierarchy and structure, and determines the individual's behavior, street activity is driven by individuals; their purposes, their paths, and duration of stay derive from separate choices. People differ, so the best streets—and, by extension, the best societies—let them find their own ways. They vote with their feet, eyes, noses, and rears, choosing to walk and sit where they find something interesting. Let them take their best vantage points for observing the passing scene; encourage people-watching. Like his early *Fortune* colleague Jane Jacobs, his solution for high-crime areas was to attract *more* people, not fewer. Don't overdesign the park and the plaza; don't make the world too orderly. The more people watching, the more people-watching, the less crime. So let the activity commence with all types of people joining in. Privacy is also important, so ensure that as well, from the organization and from the street.

Whyte relied on time-tested strategies but relished challenging conventional wisdom that did not achieve desired goals. In *The Last Landscape*, for example, he noted that people thought that they were getting privacy when they bought a single-family home with a private lot (1968, 225–52). He found this belief a delusion—the design need not provide privacy just because it was a house in the middle of a lawn—and it was wasteful of land. He advocated “cluster housing” that included small, private gardens with wall heights that shielded one from random eyes. Thus, one did not need to spread across space to get privacy from one's neighbor; one merely needed thoughtful design. The idea of compactness in urban design conflicted with the prevailing trend toward urban sprawl, as reinforced by tax devices like accelerated depreciation and the interstate highway system (Hanchett 1996, 1082). Similarly, he suggested using another long-standing device, conservation easements, to maintain and attain open space.

Whyte also knew that after observing and making adaptations, one must keep monitoring and evaluating results. In *City: Rediscovering the Center*, he noted how planners used incentive zoning to good effect, getting developers to add some new public space. The plazas, he found, only sometimes worked well, however, and,

even worse, newer ones were increasingly degraded through variances that neglected the original objectives. The device of incentive zoning was not sufficient; it had to be matched with consistent observation to see whether it continued to work as intended or needed adaptation yet again (Kayden 2000). (See the essay by Jerold S. Kayden in this volume.)

Land use and planning devices can preserve the sorts of landscapes and places that Whyte most valued: natural areas, the bucolic and productive countryside, and vibrant downtowns. Smart growth and New Urbanism owe some of their best insights to Whyte. Both aim to create walkable, mixed-use communities, heightening densities to generate liveliness while decreasing the environmental toll of more dispersed building patterns. They try to prevent fortress-style buildings and, where such structures arise, force an opening, a window, onto the street. Where corporate or commercial campuses get plopped down without a connection to neighbors, they try to build the connections. Perhaps their best hope is in the way in which they must work project by project. Smart growth and New Urbanism, for instance, derive from general principles that require that implementation include agonizing negotiations to make each project place-specific. Thus, new undertakings can be checked, altered, and improved, working from social study rather than social science.

The measure of all the urbanist devices, however, is the one Whyte hit on in 1956: the degree to which they support the individual. Organizational forces have enabled urban growth, turning cities into sprawling regions. Our days are bombarded by organizational obligations. Those trends may be unstoppable, but that should not stop us from trying to resist them. Whyte wrote: “It is wretched, dispiriting advice to hold before [the organization man] the dream that ideally there need be no conflict between him and society. There always is; there always will be. Ideology cannot wish it away; the peace of mind offered by the organization remains a surrender, and no less so for being offered in benevolence. That is the problem” (1956, 404). Our specific routes and routines should nurture us, however. If we keep in mind to make the kinds of spaces and places we enjoy, then we will always have some support for our own individual choices and protection from organizational imperatives.

Whyte’s critique still holds today. He began and ended *The Organization Man* with the plea to let the individual shape the group rather than the other way around. Whyte gives us the forces that work on us every day: the convenience of organizations, their homogenizing of our world, and then our resistance as we try to keep space for our own eccentricities. His ongoing thinking about this conflict led him to advance ideas that became some of the most vital innovations in recent urban and environmental planning, things small and large like vest-pocket parks, downtown plazas, and smart growth. These innovations ensure that whatever role the organization plays in our individual lives, we have alternative spaces for our own

particular enjoyment that can work as staging and supporting grounds for our own ideas and ideals.

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Sustainability Programs in the South Bronx

Thalya Parrilla

The South Bronx in New York City has the reputation of being a haven for drugs, prostitutes, and drag racing. Because of community intervention, however, its reputation is shifting. Today, a number of community programs are working to ameliorate social, economic, and environmental inequalities that are rampant in the South Bronx.

There are different definitions as to where the South Bronx begins. At the most southern part of the Bronx is Hunts Point. The neighborhood is generally broken into industrialized and residential areas. The industrialized area is concentrated around the waterfront, with most residential homes in the central area. High incidences of asthma, poverty, incarceration, and other social ills are found within this area. In response, a number of environmental justice organizations have sprouted from community members coming together over a cause or an injustice. Most of the organizations were formed in the mid-1990s and cover a wide range of issues and efforts. Many work in alliance with other organizations to remain strong and to gather support for their cause.

As the South Bronx continues to improve, there is concern that the neighborhood will be gentrified, thereby driving out the lower-income families and residents whose families are from the area. Gentrification is a reality in many neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs of New York City. The neighborhood improves, crime rates drop, and local residents no longer can afford the comforts of what they have been working to establish. The families that fought so hard to create a better quality of life are deprived of the fruits of their labor.

This essay concentrates mainly on Hunts Point, but includes organizations that also work within Port Morris and Mott Haven. Hunts Point, a peninsula that juts into the East River from the lower part of the Bronx, is squeezed between East Harlem, Port Morris, Rikers Island (a maximum-security prison), and industrial pollution. The population of Hunts Point is roughly ten thousand, mainly Latino and black; it has an unemployment rate of 24 percent.

The main truck access to the Hunts Point peninsula is a highway called the Bruckner/278. This highway, one of New York City's main arteries, funnels travelers and commercial traffic into the lower boroughs from southbound I-495. On a daily basis, some eleven thousand tractor-trailer trucks make their way to Hunts Point. The big rigs bring produce and meat to the markets at the tip of the peninsula surrounding the residential area. These markets are heralded as the largest in

the world, and in 2005 the fish market in Manhattan moved to Hunts Point peninsula as well, further increasing the volume of traffic, noise, and carbon monoxide. Owing to the location of the meat markets at the tip of the peninsula, some of the rigs go off their designated routes and drive through residential areas despite complaints from residents concerned for the safety of the children.

Industries along the Hunts Point waterfront include a sludge processing plant, car repair warehouses, dump truck garages, transfer stations, junkyards, and truck repair shops. The workers generally speak only Spanish, and the owners of the industries live elsewhere and rarely go to Hunts Point.

The industrial area of Hunts Point is where most of the money is made. The money generally does not make it into the residential community because the trucks merely deliver their loads and go on their way.

A number of different organizations work out of Hunts Point. The neighborhood has become increasingly politicized about environmental justice issues and their link to the residents' health and quality of life. Many of the organizations are interested in educating the public and bringing more people into the organizations. The educational outreach component of these organizations is bilingual owing to the high concentration of Latinos living in the area. Many groups cater to the local youth to make the movement toward a better quality of life a sustainable effort as well as to get them involved in positive activities to stop the cycle of violence and poverty in the area.

Sustainable South Bronx

Sustainable South Bronx (SSB) is a community organization dedicated to supporting and implementing sustainable development projects for the residents of the South Bronx. The definition of "sustainable development" that SSB upholds is, according to its statement of purpose, development "that meets the needs and promotes an agreeable quality of life for the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and quality of life standards." The projects are based on feedback and information that address the needs of the community and uphold the values of environmental justice.

Majora Carter, a lifelong resident of Hunts Point, started SSB in 2001. Since its creation, SSB has won acclaim and recognition from various municipal entities and foundations for its success in implementing projects and supporting the values intrinsic to environmental justice. In 2005, Carter won a MacArthur Award for her work. Within the doors of the organization is a variety of bilingual informational literature that explains the principles of environmental justice, care of street trees, and other initiatives or events that are scheduled.

The core of SSB's effort is to address environmental racism that is present in the South Bronx. Studies have shown that the South Bronx has the least amount of

accessible green open space in the city and in is in the top 10 percent for asthma in the United States. It is second to East Harlem in worst air quality in New York City. Some projects SSB has initiated are discussed below.

With a motto of “green the ghetto,” SSB is working hard to reclaim blighted areas and convert them into green spaces for recreational use. One success story is the *Concrete Plant Park-in-Progress*. SSB, along with Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, was integral in the renovation of ten acres of waterfront along the Bronx River, which now has been used for summer concerts and film screening. When completed, the Concrete Plant Park will be part of the vision of the South Bronx Greenway.

Not only does the lack of greenspace add to poor air quality, but the volume of traffic constantly exacerbates the problem. Because Hunts Point is a major hub for the fish, produce, and meat markets, it brings in approximately eleven thousand trucks daily. One effort to improve air quality in the neighborhood involved installing an *electronic truck bay*. This innovative technology allows a driver to plug the truck into an electronic console in the bay; heat, air conditioning, and other amenities are provided without the truck’s engine idling, thereby reducing the amount of carbon dioxide in the air.

The Sheridan Expressway is an outdated and underused section of highway. SSB is working as part of the Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance (which includes Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, Mothers on the Move, and the Bronx River Alliance) to *decommission the Sheridan Expressway* and convert the twenty-eight acres it uses into a green open space, affordable housing, and other community needs. The project is still in its formative phase; working with outside sources, the Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance is currently preparing a draft environmental impact statement.

Begun in the winter of 2003, the *Green the Ghetto Toxic Tour* takes participants to view twenty-three projects in progress and other sites that contribute to pollution in the area. The tour, with a guide to point out areas of interest, makes a number of stops, including at the Harlem River Rail Yards, the Waterfront (which harbors a number of industries), Concrete Plant Park, and the Hunts Point Riverside Park. Along the way are transfer stations, scrap yards, the prison barge, power turbines, a sludge pelletizing plant, factories, and a park.

SSB’s Bronx Environmental Stewardship Training program, begun in 2002, provides hands-on training to participants in riverine and estuarine restoration as well as job readiness and life skills. The program, which runs for three months, certifies the trainees in OSHA regulations and trains entry-level tree climbers and New York City tree pruners. Other classes include various types of restoration, brownfield remediation, green roofs installation, wildlife identification, and hazardous waste cleanup. Upon successful completion of the program, participants can be hired by a network of employers. The participants are recruited from the

community and work closely with a collection of organizations that are involved in the remediation and restoration of greenspaces in the Bronx and the other four boroughs. In the past, they have worked closely with youth groups and volunteers in the cleanup of the Bronx River. For instance, participants worked with Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice in one of their projects, Reclaiming Our Waterfront, or Project R.O.W.

A number of industries cut off access to the waterfront of Hunts Point, and some are derelict and have long since been out of business. Part of the plan for a greener Hunts Point is to revitalize the blighted areas in and around the peninsula. The *South Bronx Greenway* and *South Bronx Active Living Campaign* are two projects through which SSB is working to make that happen.

Across the Bronx River in Southview is a park with bike trails that has been built along the river. This area is important for restoration of natural habitat because the mouth of the river is home to a variety of wildlife. Hunts Point would like to replicate the effort and revitalize its side of the riverbank. The ultimate goal is to create a greenway that would allow people to use bicycles to get to Manhattan via Randalls Island (a recreational area that has swimming pools, baseball diamonds, and basketball courts). Currently, the only access to Randalls Island is through upper Manhattan by car or from the south by bicycle, thereby cutting off the Bronx, which is separated by six feet of water. The greenway would provide a space for recreation and contemplation in a parklike setting.

In coordination with SSB and the New York Economic Development Corporation, as well as a larger community visioning process, a private consultant and elected officials completed a master design, performed a feasibility study, and designed the greenway. There is strong interest in reclaiming the waterfront and making it accessible to families for recreation. Consistent with the trend in the rest of the United States, there is a high rate of obesity in the area. It has become a priority for urban areas to create recreational spaces for active exercise. (See the essay by Anne C. Lusk in this volume.)

The greenway project is part of a larger vision of developing an East Coast Greenway that runs from Florida to Maine. This concept is being gradually realized under the leadership of the East Coast Greenway Alliance.

SSB is working to creating green roofs in Hunts Point through the South Bronx *New Roof Demonstration Project*. In collaboration with Cool City Project at Columbia University, HM White Site Architects, and the Urban Planning Program, SSB is using the green roofs and public health research to create tangible results showing the economic and health benefits that stem from the use of green building technology.

The New York City Department of Sanitation, with funds provided by the New York City Council, coordinates free drop-off electronic recycling days in the five boroughs. The *electronic waste recycling project* was managed by INFORM, an

organization involved with projects citywide. In the spring of 2003, SSB was charged with coordinating electronic waste recycling days within each of borough. SSB coordinated with Per Scholas, a company in Hunts Point that has onsite computer recycling, and Supreme Recycling, a computer recycling company out of New Jersey. The project was an overwhelming success. Electronic waste, by the tons, was saved from going to the landfill. The project, however, was a one-time venture for SSB. To date, the city funding for the borough-based waste coordinators that made it possible was for ten months. Groups are working throughout the city as part of the Zero Waste Campaign to re-create the conception in a bigger, better, and more sustainable way.

Community Gardens

Other groups have banded together to reclaim underused or blighted sites. Vacant lots are being claimed by community members and converted into community gardens. A number of organizations have been integral to the development of these green oases.

Green Thumb, Inc., established in 1978, now assists more than six hundred urban gardens throughout New York City (www.greenthumbnyc.org). Its central purpose is to nurture community participation in projects that contribute to neighborhood revitalization. This process involves acquiring derelict lots and transforming them into community spaces where members can grow anything from edible foods to flowers. The members have a direct influence on the design and function of the garden. Many of these gardens offer educational workshops for all ages, block parties to build community and membership, and food pantries.

Green Thumb offers its members technical assistance and materials in the form of soil, tools, and wood. Individual gardeners can also apply for grants to tailor their own plan and obtain the material required.

Green Guerillas started in 1973 in a Lower East Side garden in Manhattan. From there it has become a resource for different garden groups throughout the city. It provides support to the garden groups by helping with organization, planning, and outreach and in saving community space from further development. This group is an integral part to making a community garden a success. Specifically in the Bronx, Green Guerillas are involved with Trees for Life and Unity Project with La Familia Verde Coalition. This project was established to plant forty trees as a living memorial to the victims of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Bronx Green-Up is an outreach program of the New York Botanical Garden that has similar functions to those of Green Thumb. Upon request, Bronx Green-Up provides informational workshops on a variety of technical training for members of community gardens. It also provides horticultural advice and hands-on assistance in garden maintenance. Bronx Green-Up has equipment and access to vehi-

cles that support gardens in hauling garden supplies. At the core of the program are the community gardens and a regional compost education program.

The organization's close proximity to the Bronx Zoo affords it access to "zoo doo" to fertilize community gardens. The group also provides transplants for the gardens and gardening tools. All the services are free of charge.

Formed in 2000 by a group of concerned residents to address the epidemic rates of asthma within the community, *Greening for Breathing* (GFB) is an organization committed to supporting and increasing green infrastructure in the Hunts Point community. GFB's goal is to use trees as a green buffer from the industrial zone. A large part of this group's work is in supporting the small and growing population of trees. According to a 2002 tree survey conducted by the Parks Department, GFB, and volunteers, 67 percent of the trees are less than six inches in diameter. Most of the trees alive today have been planted within the last ten years as local citizens have sought to combat the high incidence of asthma.

GFB has worked with New York City Parks and Recreation, Teens for Neighborhood Trees (a group based in lower Manhattan that teaches tree stewardship), and other local groups. The organization has planted hundreds of young trees—street trees of approved varieties that do not trigger asthma or allergies—around Hunts Point.

With educational outreach the heart of its program, GFB produces bilingual newsletters and informational pamphlets on tree identification, care, and maintenance. It conducts training programs for members of the community, helping them become better informed and linking them to resources so that residents can become certified as "citizen pruners."

This effort is done in collaboration with the nonprofit organization *Trees New York*. This group is involved with different organizations throughout the five-borough area and has also begun an Adopt-a-Tree program with the New York Tree Trust.

In 2003, GFB worked with New York City Parks and Recreation to map the young trees, heritage trees, and possible sites for tree pits. Hundreds of possible sites were identified, and a proposal for the trees has been submitted. Enthusiastic efforts to implement the planting, care, and community outreach goals are under way.

Cooperatives

Other efforts taking place in and around Hunts Point include workers' cooperatives and river restoration. A fusion of the environment and art also benefits the community.

Green Worker Cooperatives (GWC) is an organization dedicated to worker-owned and environmentally friendly manufacturing businesses in the South Bronx. Started in the summer 2003 as an offshoot of New York City's environmental

justice movement, GWC is involved in creating new alternatives to the working-class manufacturing jobs that have abandoned the South Bronx. With the flight of manufacturing companies has come a void that has been filled with high unemployment rates, low-paying service jobs, and polluting waste facilities. GWC is committed to addressing the economic and environmental issues. The organization looks for new ways to find gainful employment without harmful environmental side effects and exploitation of people. GWC conducts feasibility studies and business plans concerning advocacy, fund-raising, and recruiting. It seeks to convert bold ideas into a fully operating worker cooperative. After the inception of a cooperative, GWC provides training so that the workers can successfully realize their roles as the owners and their own advocates.

Solid waste management is a huge problem for all five boroughs of New York City. The waste issue has caused problems in many communities within the city, including the South Bronx. Creating industries to recover valuable materials in the South Bronx will serve to avert the need for more landfills and incinerators as well as preserve natural resources and reduce pollution.

According to the NYC Department of Design and Construction, the city generates thirteen thousand tons of “nonfill construction and demolition” waste per day, much of which is brought to the South Bronx. GWC’s first project is the Building Materials ReUse Center and DeConstruction Service. Its objective is to recover building materials from construction projects that can be resold to supply low-cost building materials to projects in the area. GWC works in conjunction with ICA Group, a consulting firm with many years of experience in supporting worker-owned businesses.

With the redevelopment of the Bronx, action groups and environmental justice coalitions have worked to restore the riverbank area so that residents can enjoy the river. The Bronx River Alliance, established in 2001, is a consortium of public and private agencies to promote cleanup and public access to the river. It stems from a restoration community-based organization that was begun in 1974. One of its goals is to create a greenway that provides recreational access to the river, including canoe launch points and hiking trails. In some neighborhoods, abandoned factory sites are being reclaimed as greenspaces and community gardens. The Bronx River runs twenty-three miles through the Bronx; it is the only free-flowing river in the five boroughs of New York City. North of the Bronx in Westchester County, the river is accessible to local residents for recreation. Upon entering the Bronx, the river winds through Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx Zoo, and New York Botanical Garden, where a surprising variety of wildlife and patches of old growth trees and natural land survive. After the New York Botanical Garden, the river is lined on either side by operating industries or by abandoned facilities. Its lowest segment before reaching the East River (an arm of Long Island Sound) is an estuary where fresh water from upstream mixes with tidal saltwater. Japanese knotweed, an exotic

invasive that has choked out native flora, has invaded the riverbank along this stretch. This plant is difficult to eradicate because of its pervasiveness, the strength of its root system, and its ability to grow in disturbed areas.

The river is crisscrossed by four major highways serving New York City, and there have been cases of illegal dumping along the river by various industries. One such industry, a cement plant, dumped cement directly into the river. At the mouth of the river is a large sewage treatment plant that, during periods of high precipitation, overflows into the Bronx River along Soundview Park.

The Bronx River Alliance has an ecology team that consists of scientists and representatives from federal, state, local and city governments. According to the alliance's website (www.bronxriver.org), the team's ecological principle is "to minimize erosion, buffer sensitive natural areas, capture water on site, use recycled materials to the extent possible, maximize open space, include bird shelters, and educational signage." The alliance collaborates with local colleges and with the Army Corp of Engineers. For instance, Lehman College and the State University of New York's Maritime Institute are conducting a fish study and a watershed-wide soil survey in cooperation with the organization. The Bronx Zoo was identified as a major source of excess nitrogen leading to eutrophication of the river. The zoo has promised to aid in the cleanup of the river and to minimize animal waste discharge.

The goal of the restoration projects is to provide safe areas where families can recreate and enjoy a natural setting. The proposed greenway should also promote exercise to help combat obesity. In addition, it will serve as an outdoor educational resource for neighboring schools and potential outdoor enthusiasts while supporting the wildlife along the river. The Bronx River Alliance also coordinates river activities awareness activities such as canoe trips down the river and bike rides on the greenway in the North Bronx.

The alliance works closely with New York City Parks and Recreation as well as local environmental organizations such as Sustainable South Bronx and Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice. There has been solid support from other community groups and individuals, such as the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance, Congressman Jose Serrano, and the Wildlife Conservation Society. With the collective political pressure and a focused constituency, approximately \$11 million has been secured to develop hiking and biking trails, to construct and restore wetlands, and to support projects to contain the overflow of sewage and stormwater. Since 2000, Bronx River improvement efforts have yielded forty acres of restored riverfront, 1.5 miles of greenway, three canoe launch sites, and removal of fifty derelict cars. Parties that are guilty of contaminating the Bronx River are being identified and held accountable for their actions.

It is intended that restoration projects will employ and train local community members to aid in the revitalization of the South Bronx by keeping the money

within the community. The people involved in the river restoration projects are passionate about their work. There is hope that the main objectives can be met and an environmentally equitable future can be attained for the low-income area of the South Bronx. It is also hoped that the Bronx River can become a safe and healthy place for local residents to fish, learn about nature, and hike.

Another way local residents are approaching and interacting with the Bronx River is through art. The *Bronx River Art Center* (BRAC), funded by the New York State Council on the Arts, is a nonprofit organization created when the Bronx River Restoration Project began in 1980. It provides an artistic space for classes, exhibitions, and presentations. The Bronx River and the nature around it are brought in to be teaching tools and inspiration for artists. BRAC provides environmental programming for the community, including a parent-child team learning class on environmental studies and urban planning through the arts. The center also offers afterschool art sessions for children and youths, and evening adult classes. All classes are free and are bilingual.

Youth Programs

Other programs in the South Bronx aim to get youth involved. Through offering practical skills to developing leadership, certain organizations aim to increase the participation of young people in the area.

For instance, *Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice* (YMPG) is a nonprofit organization devoted to environmental justice issues. It seeks to foster peace within the community by involving community members, especially youth. Begun in 1994 by Alexie Torres-Fleming, it is involved in a variety of community projects, including the Bronx River Restoration Project. YMPG works primarily in the Bronx River, Bruckner, and Soundview neighborhoods in collaboration with United Way and the Bronx River Alliance. Its programs include reflection and study of peace, justice, and human rights through dance, mural painting, music, drama, sports, wellness, literacy development, journalism, photography, and video. Other programs focus on environmental justice, employment, education, community policing, and housing.

Project R.O.W. (Reclaiming Our Waterfront) consists of youths thirteen to twenty-one years of age who conduct monthly water monitoring for local and state agencies and take environmental educational canoe trips on the Bronx River. The group has also removed a number of derelict cars from the river, in cooperation with the National Guard. In addition, it has assisted in revitalization projects at Starlight Park and the Edgewater Road cement plant (a brownfield site) with funding from the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration.

The Point Community Development Corporation has contributed to the cultural and economic revitalization of Hunts Point since 1994. This organization offers

youth development classes, including hip-hop, environmental justice, environmental education, break dancing, and photography. It also hosts a number of festivals and holds theater productions put on by the youth of Hunts Point.

In one of its projects, ten young people from the community receive a stipend to create and implement a variety of initiatives to enact social change in the Hunts Point area. Some of these initiatives include the following:

- The Odor Journal to help residents report pollution
- Outreach project to address prostitution in the Hunts Point area
- Research on youth and community topics for monthly cable television presentations on BronxNet
- Creation of a weekly teen news and entertainment show on BronxNet
- Participation in the National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit
- Research and dissemination of information to residents on proposals by businesses and city agencies that will affect Hunts Point.

Rocking the Boat engages youth in environmental education and in boat-building programs. Programs include such topics as traditional boat building, Bronx River habitat monitoring and restoration, community environmental education, forestry, what's next, and apprenticeships. These one-semester after-school programs for high school students target different subjects and aid students in realizing and pursuing goals after they graduate from the program. The apprenticeships are paid positions for students interested in continuing in the program.

All the programs work on creating practical skills that will help students in the future. The emphasis on the possibilities available in their urban and natural world provides a wider range of options for their future. The programs count toward high school credit. *Rocking the Boat* also holds several celebrations on the Bronx River to herald the launching of boats and canoeing for the community.

Recycling Initiatives

Among the different initiatives growing in the South Bronx is a new commitment to reduce the amount of waste that ends up in landfills. One program, *Per Scholas*, is a nonprofit organization that recycles computers and provides career opportunities by teaching computer technology classes. The recycling program began in earnest in 2000 when a state-of-the-art recycling facility was installed. *Per Scholas*'s fifteen-week training course teaches local residents marketable computer technician skills. The core of the training includes extensive hands-on training by assembling, installing, and repairing the computers that are brought to the facility. Once the computers are restored, they are sold at a very low cost to underserved communities and schools.

The bulk of the computers that Per Scholas receives come from businesses and banks throughout New York City. In 2004, they partnered with Sustainable South Bronx for drop-off dates in communities throughout the five boroughs.

Another program, *Materials for the Arts*, collects surplus materials from companies and distributes them to organizations that need them. This program is responsible for removing tons of materials from the waste stream and recycling them.

Despite the reality of asthma, poverty, and drugs, the South Bronx has a rich and vibrant, community-supported culture. The reputation of the South Bronx as a drug haven has obscured the ingenuity of its population. Hunts Point and the surrounding neighborhoods have cultivated a community awareness to enrich the lives of their citizens. The nonprofit organizations that have sprung up in the homes of concerned community members are now established and have formed a strong alliance. The organizations mentioned are a cross section of many different efforts.

Because of the efforts of these organizations, today there are better ways for urban youth to spend their time, and jobs have been created to assuage the unemployment rate. Youth now have opportunities to be in nature and learn about the environment in a concrete jungle, learn how to use their environment to make art, and express themselves within that context. The counterbalance to all the positive developments is the relocation of the fish market to Hunts Point, and the traffic of trailer trucks has not decreased. The toxic industries still line the waterfront, although there are plans to remediate this area. Although some of the projected completion dates of the projects are years away, most projects are well under way, new and exciting projects have sprouted from their roots, and most of the funding has been secured. There is a hope and a drive in the organizations that root for a South Bronx that they envision. Their energy spurs on the movement for a greener and better Boogie Down Bronx.