

our democratic institutions, because people will lose faith in them and their ability to mitigate the economic distortions of a free-for-all market economy. We've already entered a period of cultural meltdown. I think that's reflected in the sadism and brutality of our pop culture. But I do foresee the possibility of a cultural transformation. Sooner or later, we're going to enter a more culturally rigorous phase of history in which our standards and expectations will be raised in everything from art to personal behavior. There are cycles of order and disorder in human events and sooner or later our age of disorder will come to an end and a new consensus will form out of the accelerating chaos of the present day.

And you see us becoming more compact and pedestrian-oriented like European towns and cities?

Urbanistically speaking, Europe is way ahead of us. They use up about half as much energy per person. European towns and cities offer a quality of life so superior to that found in the U.S. in some respects that it's like the difference between the way hogs live in a pigsty and the way humans live in a house.

(1997)

How Our Fear of Crime is Killing Us

BETWEEN PRISON AND THE GATED COMMUNITY

His dog started barking furiously. It was the middle of the night. He lived in Northbrook, a wealthy suburb outside Chicago. There was an intruder trying to get in the front door! He got his gun and started shooting. He shot the intruder to death. When he turned on the light, he discovered that the intruder he shot was not an intruder at all but his daughter Lesley returning home from college unexpectedly late on a Friday night.

This is not some urban legend but an actual tragedy that happened to my mother's cousin several years ago. It is a graphic illustration of a complex phenomenon in America today: our fear of crime is killing us. Our fear of crime is a fear of young black and Hispanic men, of strangers, of streets, of cities, of ghettos. It sucks us down into a spiral of fear—the engine behind the decline of our civic and community life. The end of Lesley Horberg's life.

The spiral goes like this: White and middle-class fear, white and middle-class flight, flight of jobs and capital, shrinking tax base, degradation of public services, accelerated suburban sprawl, destruction of countryside, race and wealth polarization, regional polarization, higher cost of government, declining public institutions; less contact between rich and poor, top-down poverty



programs rigged to fail, more hostility toward the poor; more industries that exploit fear, prison guard and construction unions that benefit from fear, more laws that exploit fear, more fear in the media; less opportunities for poor people, more desperation, more crime, more public fear, tighter security, less community life, less public life, less political participation, worse politicians, and less support for the common good.

The cancer of fear has taken over. We have government by fear. We have a fear economy. We have a landscape of fear. We have a mass media that sells it. Any effort to reverse the spiral of fear must begin with individuals taking initiative to examine their own fears, asking whether their emotions are being manipulated, and taking bold steps to test the validity of their fears. Then a grassroots movement can be built to transform the culture, government and economy.

The black community has been arguing for decades whether middle- and upper-class blacks should move out of the ghetto to more suburban and white neighborhoods. But I want to raise a question that I've never seen raised by anyone on the political spectrum, either black or white, rich or poor, Why isn't it good for middle- and upper-class whites to live in the ghetto?

Millions of ordinary, middle-class Americans still live in ghettos. Thousands of middle-class whites live in ghettos. I personally know at least 20 of them. No, they are not clowns. They don't even consider themselves brave. At least half are female. Occasionally they get beaten up or robbed, but not any more than middle-class whites who don't live in the ghetto. Not one of them has been shot, stabbed or raped because they lived in the ghetto (although a

few of them were raped in non-ghetto areas).

This is not because ghettos are good places. They are bad places which are created because race and class-based disinvestment and discrimination by white and middle-class people, who move away from neighborhoods and pull up the ladders of access to the networks of opportunity and economic self-advancement that middle- and upper-class people take for granted.

But there are good things about ghettos. They preserve the sense of neighborhood and community that were once typical of urban life—knowing your neighbors and shop owners, a sense of history and extended family, the fabric of casual encounters, street, stoop, and public transit life, charm and compactness of buildings, the opportunity for small business, and the pedestrian as opposed to automobile scale. All the things that used to make city neighborhoods feel like small towns—even as our urban planners, government and business elites have replaced them with high-rises, strip malls and parking lots.

Ghettos serve as a shield against the arrogance of the affluent world. Yes, there is still the landlord, the teacher, the cop, the pawn shop owner, the social worker—all the missionaries and pimps of poverty—but there's still a sense of belonging, a sense of familiarity and place and community, a cultural comfort zone. That's why gangs fight to protect neighborhoods they don't even own. That's one reason so many kids of color who go to white schools feel torn apart inside. That's why gentrification is a bad word.

Affluent people, especially affluent whites, don't know how to live in the city. They don't get to know their neighbors. They don't talk to strangers on the street. They drive everywhere. They don't shop in local stores. They don't get involved in grassroots community groups, or if they do, they try to take them over. They're uptight, defensive, patronizing and self-congratulatory about every little thing they do. They don't bother to really get to know people and let people really get to know them. They don't learn the hard and deep lessons people have to teach them. They don't become part of the village. They put up a fence instead of sitting on the stoop. They call the police on neighborhood kids. They get offended and scared. They *attract* panhandlers. They don't share. And they bring in more affluent people who drive up the rents and price the residents out.

In Chicago, the "inner-city" isn't the location of the ghetto anymore. Almost everything within 20 or 30 blocks of downtown has been gentrified or is about to be. The new location of the ghetto is the outer-city and the inner-suburbs. Many other cities are trying to follow a similar pattern. If they do, it will only succeed in moving our ghettos into the suburbs (the way they are in most third world countries), and destroying the soul of the city.

Any progress toward more livable communities must begin with our fear of crime. The good news is, if you're white and middle-class, most of your fears are not supported by facts. As Minnesota State Representative Myron Orfield

wrote, "Minnesota planning found in 1994 that residents of Hennepin and Ramsey Counties held expectations of victimization that were in some cases more than six times their true likelihood of victimization." In most instances, when we jump out of the Fear Box, we will be pleasantly surprised to find that crime isn't nearly as bad as we imagine. Americans are afraid of crime because we aren't cultivating community life and cross-cultural social skills, we watch too many scary TV shows, and we have no sense of statistics.

Here are a few statistics that begin to tell the story.

For all our fear of crime, the FBI reports that almost half of all Americans have never even been *punched*. Chicago, where I live, has less than 2.5 murders per day for a population of 2.7 million people. Most of that remains within the violent subculture of a relatively small group of people. Even if you live in the ghetto, as long as you stay out of the bullshit, the chance of being randomly murdered on any given day is less than one in a million. Most Americans take a greater risk everyday just by driving their cars.

When I think about how out of hand our fears have become, I wish I could go back in time fifty years before we became a suburban nation when the fear economy was still in its infancy. Back then, cities were in a better position to defend themselves. I try to look into the future and think which of the disasters of tomorrow are in their infancy today. The new growth industries are gated communities and prisons. These are the models for urban life in the 21st century. We will become a nation behind bars. For the time being, people not behind bars are still a majority in this country, but we're losing ground fast. If we don't build a movement soon to save and revitalize our public life, then the cities and the suburbs of today are going to be history.

For those of you who already live in gated communities, I hope there's some way to convince you to join society—while there's still one left to join. It seems our nation is spiraling gradually into fear and darkness. And when the **light** comes back on, we may be startled to learn the identities of the victims.