Does our housekeeping raise and inspire us, or does it cripple us?

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

# 1

# HOUSING AND AMERICAN LIFE

Mired in spring mud, striped with the treads of bulldozers, Vanport City, Oregon, is a new town under construction. Concrete trucks pour foundations and give way to flatbed trucks that deliver cedar siding from the forests of the Northwest. Carpenters, plumbers, and electricians try to stay out of each other's way as they work evenings, Saturdays, and Sundays. Architects from the firm of Wolff and Phillips confer on the site six, ten, a dozen times a day. "All my life I have wanted to build a new town," the project architect confides to a reporter, "but—*not this fast*. We hardly have time to print the working drawings before the buildings are out of the ground."

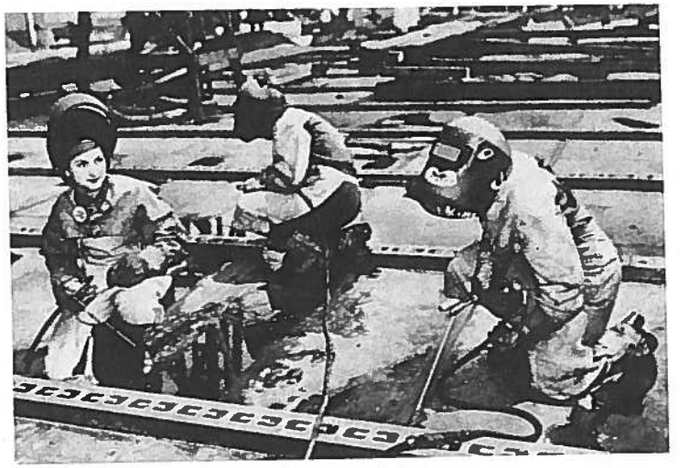
Near the town site, steel deliveries arrive at several shipyards on the Columbia River, where production is geared to an even more frenetic pace. Twenty-four hours a day the yards are open; cranes move against the sky, shifting materials. Tired workers pour out the gates at 8 A.M., 4 P.M., and midnight, each shift replaced by fresh arrivals—women and men in coveralls who carry protective goggles and headgear. The personnel office is recruiting as far away as New York and Los Angeles. They want welders, riveters, electricians. They offer on-the-job training, housing, child care, all fringe bene-

fits. They also advertise for maintenance workers, nursery school teachers, elementary school teachers, and nurses. In ten months the personnel office does enough hiring to populate a new town of forty thousand people, white, black, Asian, and Hispanic workers and their families. This is the first time that an integrated, publically subsidized new town of this type has ever been built in the United States.

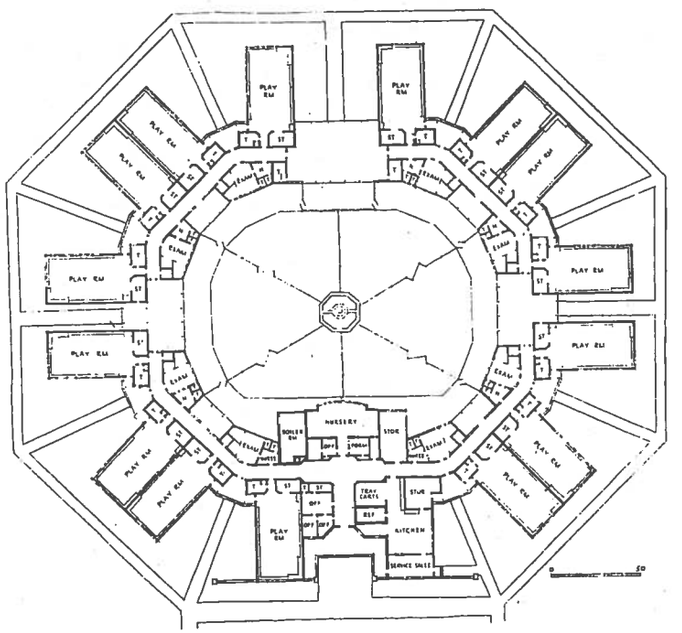
The chief engineer from the Federal Public Housing Authority is checking the last of the construction details as the residents' cars, pickup trucks, and moving vans start to arrive. It has been ten months from schematic designs to occupancy. The project architect is exhausted; never has he had a more demanding design program to meet, never a more impossible timetable. He has had to rethink many basic questions in very little time, especially every idea he has ever had about normal family life, about men, women, and children. The program specified that he design affordable housing for all types and sizes of households, including single people, single-parent families, and nonfamily groups. He also had to design for low maintenance costs, and for energy efficiency, to make the maximum use of very scarce natural resources. He was directed to emphasize public transportation by bus. His housing also had to be positioned in relation to several child care centers and job sites: "On a straight line," said James Hymes, the client in charge of child care,[1] because he didn't want parents to have to make long journeys to drop off or pick up their children.

"They certainly should become famous for that," the architect asserts, considering the large child care centers, open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (just like the shipyards), complete with infirmaries for sick children, child-sized bathtubs so that mothers don't need to bathe children at home, cooked food services so that mothers can pick up hot casseroles along with their children, and, most important of all, large windows with views of the river, so that children can watch the launchings at the yards. "There goes mommy's ship!" said one excited five-year-old. It all seems to work very well. And it costs seventy-five cents per day for each child.

It is March 1943. This new town, a product of World War II, is nicknamed Kaiserville after the industrialist who owns the shipyards. Everywhere, at home and abroad, Americans are singing a song at the top of the wartime hit parade:



1.1 Women working as riveters and welders, 1944.




1.2 Kaiser and Wolff, architects, plan of a day-care center at Vanport City, Oregon, 1944. This project represents the industrial strategy of building housing as a support for the female and male workers in the industrial labor force.

All the day long whether rain or shine,
She's a part of the assembly line . . .
She's making history, working for victory,
Rosie the Riveter!

This amazing American woman has been the client as much as Henry J. Kaiser, who has built this town for her: Rosie the Riveter.

Six years later, another new town for seventy-five thousand people is being built at the same frantic pace in Hicksville, Long Island. In Hicksville, nothing is on a straight line. Roads curve to lead the eye around the corner, but every road is lined with identical houses. There is no industry in Hicksville except the construction industry. Each new Cape Cod house is designed to be a self-contained world, with white picket fence, green lawn, living room with television set built into the wall, kitchen with Bendix washing machine built into the laundry alcove. Every family is expected to consist of male breadwinner, female housewife, and their children. Energy conservation is not a design issue, nor is low maintenance, nor is public transportation, nor is child care. A few parks and public swimming pools are planned to provide recreation.

In March 1949, the developer in Hicksville is ready to sell his houses. On a Wednesday the first prospective buyers appear to camp out in front of the sales office that will open the following Monday. It is the end of winter on Long Island: raw, wet, and cold. One of the women on the line of buyers camping out is pregnant; the developer's assistant rushes her to the hospital so she doesn't have her baby in the street. He returns and sets up a canteen for hot coffee and hot soup. News photographers come by and take pictures. On Monday night, in three and a half hours, the developer sells $11 million worth of identical houses. His company emerges as one of the great business successes of the postwar era. His Cape Cod house becomes the single most powerful symbol of the dream of upward mobility and homeownership for American families. Because of mortgage subsidies and tax deductions for homeowners, it is cheaper to buy a house in Hicksville than to rent an apartment in New York City.[2]

The creator of this new town, Bill Levitt, acknowledges that Levittown is not integrated, and he explains to a reporter that this is "not a matter of prejudice, but one of business. As a Jew I have no room in my mind or heart for racial prejudice. But, by various means, I have come to know that if we sell one house to a Negro family,

1.3 Dream house for a new homeowner, with wife and children, Levittown, New York, 1948. This housing represents the haven strategy of building homes as retreats for male workers and as workplaces for their wives. (Bernard Hoffman, LIFE Magazine, © 1950, Time, Inc.)

then 90 to 95 percent of our white customers will not buy into the community."[3] In fact, the Federal Housing Authority does not, at this time, approve mortgage funds for integrated communities, or mortgages for female-headed families.[4] The prospective customers do not get a chance to make this choice for themselves.

This second new town—Levittown—becomes known all over the world as a model of American know-how just as the first new town—Vanport City—is being dismantled, some of its housing taken apart piece by piece. Yet both of these ventures had great appeal as solutions to the housing needs of American families, and both made their developers a great deal of money. Vanport City met the needs of a wartime labor force, composed of women and men of many diverse racial and economic groups. The builders of Vanport City responded to the need for affordable housing, on-the-job training and economic development for workers. They recognized that single parents and two-earner families required extensive child care services in order to give their best energies to production. The site design and landscaping of Vanport City were good, the economic organization was good, and the social services were superb (down to maintenance crews who would fix leaky faucets or repair broken windows), but the housing lacked charm. It looked like a "housing

project,'' and the residents were renters not owners. Yet it was the most ambitious attempt ever made in the United States to shape space for employed women and their families. The U.S. government supplied $26 million to build the housing. Kaiser made only a $2 profit on it, but he made a fortune on the ships the war workers built for him.[5]

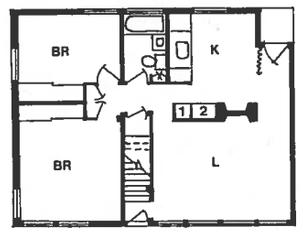
Levittown met rather different needs from the ones provided for by Vanport City. Levitt's client was the returning veteran, the beribboned male war hero who wanted his wife to stay home. Women in Levittown were expected to be too busy tending their children to care about a paying job. The Cape Cod houses recalled traditional American colonial housing (although they were very awkwardly proportioned). They emphasized privacy. Large-scale plans for public space and social services were sacrificed to private acreage. Although they were small, a husband could convert his attic and then build an addition quite easily, since the houses covered only 15 percent of the lots. Levitt liked to think of the husband as a weekend do-it-yourself builder and gardener: ''No man who owns his house and lot can be a Communist. He has too much to do,'' asserted Levitt in 1948.[6] His town was as ambitious as Vanport City, but Levitt aimed to shape private space for white working class males and their dependents. The pressures of war and the communal style of military barracks living made suburban privacy attractive to many veterans, especially those with new cars to go with their new houses. Levitt made his fortune on the potato farms that he subdivided with the help of both federal financing programs for FHA and VA mortgages and federal highway programs to get people to remote suburbs. And as the landscaping matured, Levittown began to look better than the acres of little boxes some visitors perceived at the start.

Ironically, although Kaiser's highly praised wartime town lost the public relations battle to Levitt's postwar suburb, Kaiser himself was not a loser in this contest. He understood changing federal subsidy programs for housing, and after receiving wartime Lanham Act funds for Vanport City, which enabled him to expand his shipyards with new workers, Kaiser entered the post–Warld War II housing arena with new housing developments suited to FHA and VA subsidies. On the West Coast, he built thousands of single-family houses in subdivisions much like Levitt's.[7] ''Vets! No down!'' read his signs. The losers were not the housing developers but the skilled white female and minority male and female workers, who lost their



wartime jobs to returning white male veterans and found there were no postwar housing subsidies designed to help them find new jobs, new homes, and mortgages with easy terms.

In the same era a third new town was launched—Baldwin Hills Village, in Los Angeles, California. It did not make anyone a fortune: neither an industrialist like Kaiser nor a developer like Levitt.




1.4 Plan of a Levitt house, 1952 model. (1) Bendix washing machine; (2) water heater.

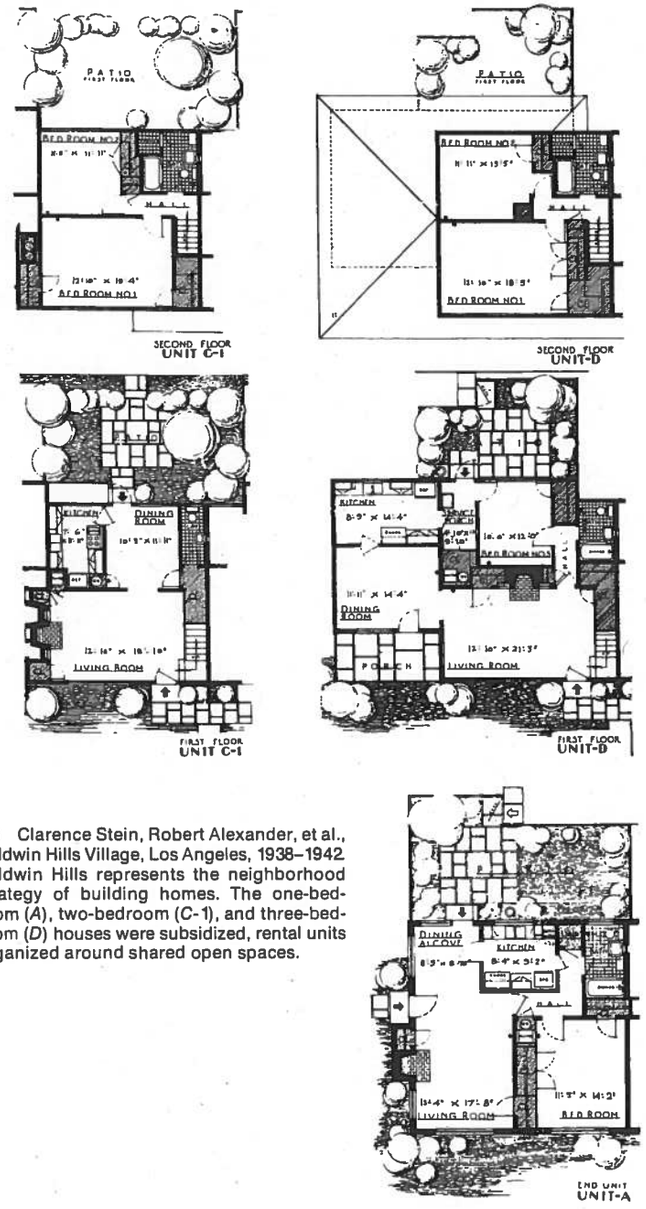
1.5 Levittown, 1955.

Funded by FHA and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, its designers had sophisticated professional ambitions: to reinterpret the tradition of common land at the heart of New England's Puritan communities in a way that could be copied throughout the United States; to adapt the best low-cost European public housing designs of the previous decades to American housing programs and life styles; and to keep the car in its proper place for the sake of air quality, children's safety, and open space design.

Unlike the other two projects, the construction of the Baldwin Hills Village dragged on in the early 1940s. City engineers made complaints about the designers' refusal to cut roads through the site; the building department didn't like the great variety of apartment and townhouse layouts, and the plans had to be redrawn no less than ten times. Budget cuts removed three child care centers and a shopping center; land acquisition problems canceled the second phase of the project; Clarence Stein, the overall designer, discovered that his proposal for community kitchens had not been funded.[8]

Yet when the project finally opened as subsidized rental housing, several of the collaborating local architects moved to Baldwin Hills Village. As a statement of support for their values about good housing, they left elegant private homes in other parts of Los Angeles to be part of the new experiment and to make sure it worked. They felt extremely pleased that they had created low-rise, medium density housing with generous floor plans, sunlight, and lush landscaping. The cost was almost as low as that of other local public housing "projects." The residents enjoyed a belt of three parks running through the center of the site, as well as smaller landscaped courtyards, tot lots, and private fenced-in outdoor space for each family. There were common laundries and drying yards, common garages, and a community center with a swimming pool.

Baldwin Hills Village was integrated at the start, but within ten years many white tenants left and were replaced by nonwhite and female-headed households who were considered "problem families" in comparison with the homeowners living on suburban quarter acre plots around them.[9] Eventually a group that was formed to rescue the buildings turned the Village into condominiums, prohibited children under eighteen, tore out the tot lots, and installed a miniature golf course on the central green. Today the children for whom the village was designed are gone, and many of the elderly residents are still too afraid of crime to use its three magnificent parks. Yet the Baldwin Hills Village is not as much of a ghost town




1.6 Clarence Stein, Robert Alexander, et al., Baldwin Hills Village, Los Angeles, 1938–1942. Baldwin Hills represents the neighborhood strategy of building homes. The one-bedroom (*A*), two-bedroom (*C*-1), and three-bedroom (*D*) houses were subsidized, rental units organized around shared open spaces.

as Vanport City. Part of Vanport City was dismantled after World War II. The rest was destroyed in a flood, and today the site of what was once the fifth-largest city in the Northwest is a park.[10]

Baldwin Hills Village and Vanport City whisper the stories of planned settlements based on complex visions of the American dream. Both sites raise the broadest issues in housing and urban design: the relationship of housing to jobs and social services, the need to design for diverse household types, the rights of female and minority workers to housing and jobs, the need for both spatial privacy and spatial community, the need for the regulation of automobiles, the problem of affordability, and the question of homeownership or tenancy as it concerns the stability of residential neighborhoods. Baldwin Hills Village and Vanport City are models of earlier struggles to come to terms with the social and economic programing of affordable housing. These projects, now largely forgotten, remind us that the need for affordable housing for all Americans is not a new problem, nor are the design problems and political questions that housing raises novel ones.

Very little of today's housing follows the Vanport City model of the home as a support for women in the industrial labor force; very little emulates the Baldwin Hills Village model of the home as a part of a well thought-out neighborhood. Most American housing is based on Levitt's model of the home as a haven for the male worker's family. Americans chose the Levittown model for housing in the late 1940s; we have mass-produced the home as haven and transformed our cities to fit this model and its particular social, economic, and environmental shortcomings. This choice is at the heart of the housing problem of the 1980s. Americans cannot solve their current housing problems without reexamining the ideal of the single-family house—that is, reexamining its history, and the ideals of family, gender, and society it embodies, as well as its design and financing.

Almost three-quarters of the total housing stock in the United States has been built since 1940. Out of 80.4 million occupied housing units counted in the 1980 census, nearly two-thirds, or 53.9 million housing units, are single-family detached homes. Owner-occupied units have been getting larger and larger in each decade since World War II: 84 percent consisted of five or more rooms in 1976. Yet households have been getting smaller, until nearly a quarter of all households in 1980 consisted of one person living alone, and close to a third consisted of two persons.[11]



During the last four decades bankers and builders have concentrated the bulk of capital resources for housing on the model of the single family detached house, despite the demographic shifts to new types of smaller households. As a result, many individuals and families are now experiencing serious difficulties in finding housing that meets their particular needs. The current American personal income tax structure favors homeowners (whose interest payments on mortgages are tax deductible) rather than renters, so no citizen who can help it wants to be a tenant for life.[12] Yet it appears that more and more households find homeownership beyond their reach, while many others cannot even locate affordable rental housing. Builders and would-be buyers speak of the end of the American dream of single-family homeownership.

The symptoms of this housing crisis begin with young couples, who even if they are both employed, often cannot qualify for a mortgage, since in 1982 the average price of existing single-family homes reached $87,600.[13] To lower their housing costs, they must commute long distances to remote suburbs where land is cheaper. At the same time, the elderly who live on fixed incomes alone or in couples—even those who own their houses outright—often find they cannot meet the property taxes, heating bills, and the demands for physical maintenance of single-family homes. The frail elderly often cannot drive, a necessity in most suburban locations.[14] Single-parent families often lack the support system of social services that such a family requires if the parent is holding a paid job. Infant care, day care, after school care, public transportation so that older children can move about independently, closeness to stores and health services, all are almost always lacking in neighborhoods where the housing was originally designed for households with a full-time housewife caring for husband and children.[15] Two-earner couples experience many of the same strains if the employed wife is also expected to carry the greater burden of family tasks.

Single people, male or female, old or young, straight or gay, often find that the housing options available to them lack flexibility, variety, and complexity. Coming home to an empty house or apartment every night can be dreary, but sharing traditional housing designed for the closeness of one family can be frustrating in its lack of privacy. More subtle options are hard to locate, and harder to finance.[16]

Couples undergoing divorce or separation experience additional frustration. If two incomes are needed to support one mortgage,

neither partner may be able to afford to buy the other's share of a jointly owned house. At the same time, it may not be feasible to relinquish one low interest mortgage in favor of two high rentals. Furthermore, couples with children will find that the majority of urban landlords simply will not rent to families with children.[17] As families struggle to cope with these dilemmas, rigid zoning laws and financing arrangements that make "granny flats" or "daughter-in-law apartments" illegal only compound the problem.[18] It becomes clear that very few neighborhoods or towns have planned for a variety of housing types at affordable prices so that single parent families, singles, and the elderly can live in close proximity to more traditional families.

Serious unemployment and a dramatic rate of mortgage foreclosures also signal trouble for traditional families who are now homeowners.[19] Racial segregation is another major problem for minority households. Despite recent legislation, segregation in neighborhoods of single family detached houses has never been dealt with adequately because of the informal discriminatory practices of realtors, homeowners, and banks.[20] In poor inner-city neighborhoods, banks may refuse to grant loans, despite bans on "redlining." And public housing may create racial segregation based on poverty. Gated communities for the rich and second homes for the affluent contrast with burnt-out abandoned ghetto tenements and vandalized public housing projects to form the extreme ends of the American housing spectrum. At the very lowest end of the economic scale, an estimated half million to two and a half million homeless sleep out every night—on the heating vents of New York skyscrapers, under the freeway overpasses in Los Angeles, in the subway tunnels, doorways, and parks of numerous other cities and towns.[21]

The United States has a housing crisis of disturbing complexity, a crisis that, in different ways, affects rich and poor, male and female, young and old, white and minority Americans. We have not merely a housing shortage, but a broader set of unmet needs caused by the efforts of the entire society to fit itself into a housing pattern that reflects the dreams of the mid-nineteenth century better than the realities of the late twentieth century. Single-family suburban homes have become inseparable from the American dream of economic success and upward mobility. Their presence pervades every aspect of economic life, social life, and political life in the United States, because the mass production of these homes, beginning in the late 1940s, was an economic activity of overwhelming importance that has transformed the American landscape.



The purpose of this book is to support the search for more satisfactory patterns of housing, work, and family life in the United States, as well as in other countries where the employment of women in the paid labor force has created similar strains concerning outworn patterns of private and public life. The first part of the book looks at the evolution of American housing since colonial times and explores the the challenges to the suburban dream house posed by environmental groups, women's groups, and civil rights groups, as well as the threat to dream houses created by changing economic conditions.

The second part, "Rethinking Private Life," seeks to identify the deepest needs and desires associated with the ideal of home. What are the most basic human attachments to a home, and how are they expressed in modern, urban, industrial societies? Humans need nurturing, aesthetic pleasure, and economic security. Homes can contribute to the satisfaction of these desires, or their frustration. Three models of how to organize housing in industrial societies emerged in the last third of the nineteenth century. Those models each carried strong implications for nurturing, for aesthetic expression in architecture, and for economic development. The strengths and weaknesses of these three models are examined in the perspective of American experience and that of other nations (such as China, Cuba, Denmark, Sweden, and the USSR), to assess the state of the art of creating housing in world terms.

The third part, "Rethinking Public Life," probes for solutions in the planning and design of better housing, social services, and public space. These chapters deal with rehabilitation of the existing American fabric of homes and neighborhoods, as well as with suggestions for new construction. These possible solutions are supported by many examples of projects—good and bad—undertaken by individuals, small groups, local governments, and national governments.

Finding an egalitarian approach to affordable housing must involve individuals, families, neighbors' groups, citizens' groups, local officials, national policymakers, and practitioners in the planning and design professions. Especially, it must involve employed women who are concerned about their own and their children's futures in a society that has chosen a housing model antithetical to their needs.

Employed women and the members of their families now constitute an absolute majority of American citizens, but a majority whose voices have not yet been heard in the national arena. For this new majority, and the numerous housewives who support them fully, the time for change will come, and that change will involve nothing less than redesigning the American dream.

It is useless to expect a conservative point of view in the workingman, if his home is but three or four rooms in some huge building in which dwell from twenty to thirty other families, and this home is his only from month to month.

*Lawrence Veiller*

Those immortal ballads, "Home Sweet Home," "My Old Kentucky Home," and "The Little Gray Home in the West," were not written about tenements or apartments. . . . They never sing songs about a pile of rent receipts.

*Herbert Hoover*

What was good for housing was good for the country.

*National Association of Home Builders*

# 2

# FROM IDEAL CITY TO DREAM HOUSE

Open the real estate section of a major Sunday newspaper in any American city and you will still find dream houses as well as dream apartments, dream lofts and dream condominiums by the hundreds. Developers often claim they are "planned with women in mind." They argue that women like elaborate stairways and formal entrances where they can greet their guests in style. They believe women favor romantic "master" bedrooms, where they can enjoy large closets, expansive dressing rooms, and extensive bathroom areas.[1] They advertise gourmet kitchens, where women can practice cooking as an art or as a science. Dream houses also have special marketing features for men, such as paneled dens, home workshops, and large garages. One can describe suburban housing as an architecture of gender, since houses provide settings for women and girls to be effective social status achievers, desirable sex objects, and skillful domestic servants, and for men and boys to be executive breadwinners, successful home handy men, and adept car mechanics.

Couples may accept or resist the real estate developers' definitions of their gender roles, but most of all, couples are likely to

justify the dream house as a place where they can give their children "all the things we didn't have." While "all the things we didn't have" may include a large back yard, a gas-fired barbecue, swings and slides, shiny bicycles, a big family room, and spacious individual bedrooms, this phrase usually means something more than material acquisitions. It may mean a chance to surmount one's class and ethnic background. In this sense, single-family suburban domestic architecture is an architecture of Americanization in a nation of immigrants, and it implies a complete social planning strategy. "The things we didn't have" is also a euphemism for a private life without urban problems such as unemployment, poverty, hunger, racial prejudice, pollution, and violent crime. As a solution to these problems, this housing type offers short-term incentives to a particular kind of economic consumption. It has encouraged Americans to turn their backs on their cities, and to pretend they don't exist.

The dream house is a uniquely American form, because for the first time in history, a civilization has created a utopian ideal based on the house rather than the city or the nation. For hundreds of years, when individuals thought about putting an end to social problems, they designed model towns to express these desires, not model homes. In fact the ideal of a good town was once as important to American life as the ideal of a good house. To analyze how and when Americans gave up the model town in favor of the individual dream house is to begin to understand the fears, hopes, and miscalculations that have generated the current housing crisis.

## The City on a Hill

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, farmers, laborers, shopkeepers, landowners, soldiers, and housewives all came to the North American continent seeking a better way of life. The Puritans believed they were creating a "city upon a hill," a model for the rest of the world. The Quakers called their settlement a "city of brotherly love." The public spaces they established, such as the town commons of the Puritan villages in New England or the ordered squares of William Penn's Philadelphia, gave form to their collective ideals. Despite a strict, hierarchical organization of society, which they took for granted, these settlers sought a balance between personal space and social space. Their plans expressed a desire for more personal autonomy in terms of land ownership than English



society had permitted, more lenient treatment of debtors and the poor, and more tolerance of religious dissidents. Their plans also expressed the settlers' mutual economic and social dependence.[2] While settlers usually tended separate fields at the edge of the settlements, they chose to live side by side. It would have been inconceivable to these first settlers to strive for the good life in America by building model houses rather than working for a model community.

The town commons or village greens created by the New England covenant communities remain some of the most beautiful, memorable, American public spaces. Originally town commons were used for cattle grazing. They formed a verdant heart for every settlement, bordered by the meeting house, the minister's house, and the houses of other settlers.[3] Because they represent American citizens' earliest covenants to provide and maintain public space, the village greens are an important part of our political heritage as well as our landscape heritage; they are our first and best planning tradition.

## Each Farmer on His Own Farm

By the end of the eighteenth century the New England pattern of town building was challenged by an alternate approach. Thomas Jefferson, the first mainstream American political theorist to attempt a schematic spatial representation of a national ideal of democracy, favored the model family farm over the model village. The Declaration of Independence and the National Survey that Jefferson produced are the crucial statements of the rights of all men to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in a landscape divided into small farms, where every man can own the means of agricultural production. As Jefferson's survey grid appeared on the American landscape west of the Alleghenies, in the late 1780s, this powerful theoretical statement of agrarian life became the framework for a national ideal of land ownership. However most of the early land sales resulted in the acquisition of large areas by speculators, not by small farmers.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the ideal of the model town was still debated, but the spatially and socially coherent settlements of the earliest settlers started to give way to distance between city and country, between capital and labor. Communitarian socialists—including the Owenites, Associationists,

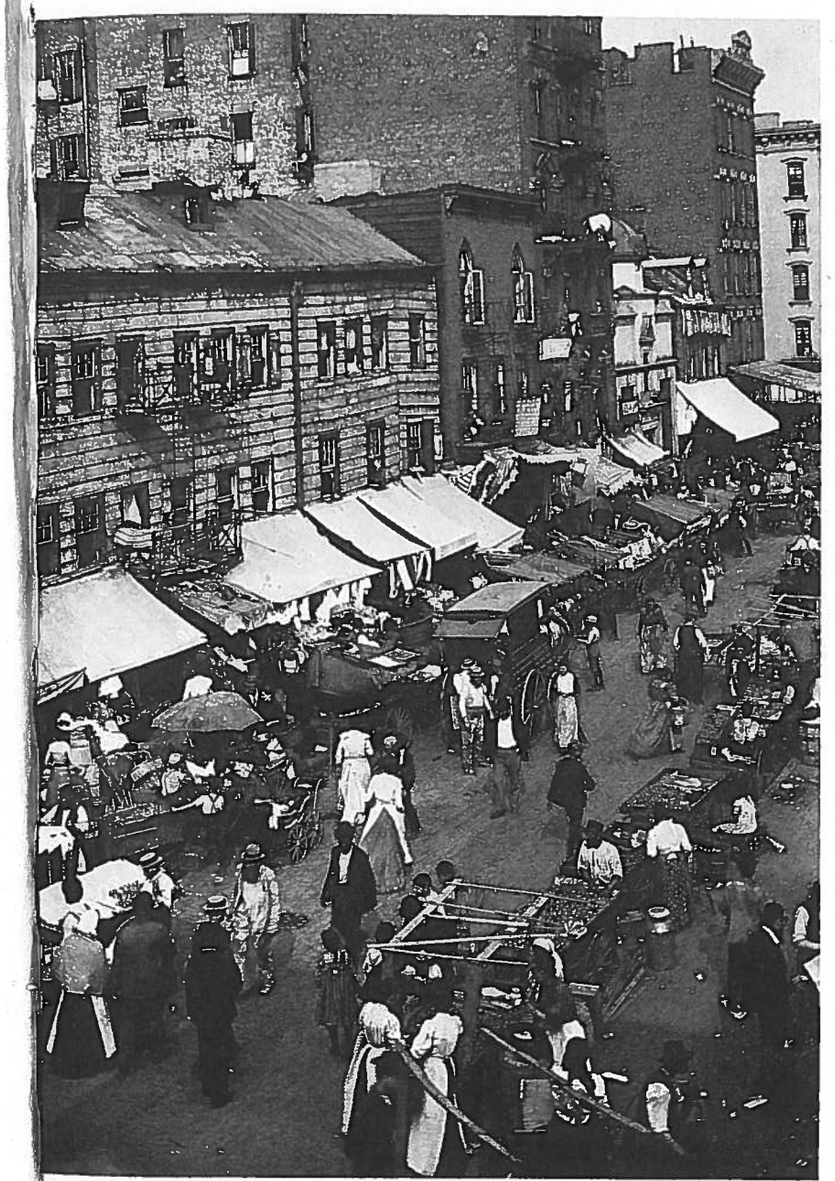
Shakers, and Amana Inspirationists—did continue to argue that the good life could only be achieved through collective economic effort and the shared spaces of cooperatively owned housing in model towns.[4] From Maine to California, they built hundreds of experimental socialist towns. Although tens of thousands of Americans joined their communities, more rural Americans lived on the Jeffersonian grid.

## The American Woman's Home

When the national economy shifted its emphasis from agriculture to industry, housing patterns changed. Between 1840 and 1920, the sprawling industrial city was on the rise. Millions of poor farmers and immigrants arrived in New York, Boston, Chicago, and other cities, eager to take any jobs they could find. They had few trade unions. Men, women, and children labored in factories under conditions that included unsafe machinery, foul air, corrosive wastes, and poor sanitation. When a man was crippled for life by a machine, or a woman's jaw rotted from phosphorous in a match factory, or a child lost several fingers in a press, the factory simply replaced the worker. There were no disability benefits, death benefits, or social security schemes—only charity or the workhouse. While these facts are often recounted, few historians convey the desperation and rage that such conditions generated.

The urban living conditions of this era were as bad as the working conditions. Tenement apartments often lacked windows, heating, running water, indoor plumbing, and proper sewers. In nineteenth-century cities, one urban family in five took in boarders, despite the crowding. The homeless slept in doorways or alleys. Food sold in slum neighborhoods was often adulterated or spoiled—water in the milk, powder in the flour, maggots in the meat. Tuberculosis, cholera, diphtheria, and influenza claimed as many lives as did industrial hazards. There were no public housing schemes or medical services, merely a few charitable associations struggling to cope with the needs of millions.

The dangers and discomforts of this urban setting eventually encouraged newly affluent urban businessmen to remove their families from urban centers. There were new forms of transportation, and businessmen began to commute by railroad and then by streetcar from the outskirts of the city to their downtown offices, stores, or factories. The earliest American suburban homes were designed



2.1 Street scene with market and tenements: a Jewish quarter of the lower East Side, New York City, 1900. (Library of Congress)

2.2 Tenement interior, Jersey Street, New York City, photographed by Jacob Riis about 1890. The mother holds her swaddled baby and looks resigned to her squalid home. (Library of Congress)

by Catharine Beecher and Andrew Jackson Downing, and promoted by small builders and the editors of women's magazines. Both Downing and Beecher started to popularize such suburban prototypes in the 1840s. These houses were designed to recall the values of the Puritan convenant community but to suit families whose lives centered around the profitable dealings of the new cities.

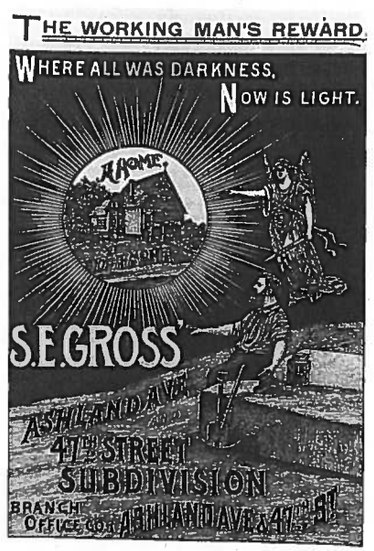
Downing's contribution was picturesque landscaping for the suburban retreat. Beecher named her 1869 prototype "The American Woman's Home," and her house was above all a space for woman's domestic labor in service of men and children. Essentially Beecher attempted to update Jefferson's ideal of equal male access to the means of agricultural production. Her ultimate objective was to give women control over the domestic space of the household to match male involvement in agricultural or industrial production. She ignored race and attempted to play off gender against class as a way of mitigating urban economic and spatial conflict, by stating that all women, rich or poor, could find a common identity in housework. She acknowledged conflict between men and women within the American family but was over-optimistic about her power to resolve



it. Her suburban house was designed to put the American woman, newly described as a "minister of home" and a "true professional," in charge of a well-organized private domestic workplace in a democratic society where public life was run by men.

According to Beecher, a woman, nurturing her spouse and children, could create a "model family commonwealth" in her suburban home.[5] Beecher believed that women's exclusion from the paid labor force would mute class conflict, and that women's consumption of commodities would stimulate the economy. She argued that in this home a woman could perfect her capacity for self-sacrifice and thus gain rewards in heaven for what she gave up on earth. Her calculations about the model home did not include the social costs to women or the economic costs to the city.

Whether or not heaven could provide an ideal city for some women at some future time, as Beecher claimed, her strategy required more patience than many women possessed, and more wages than most skilled workers earned. Beecher's model houses were built for a small proportion of affluent citizens. Millions of workers, concentrated in the vast slums, could only dream about the small, clean middle-class suburbs of houses surrounded by grass and trees and advertised by one builder as "the workingman's reward." At the




2.3 "The Workingman's Reward, a Home at $10 a Month," as pointed out by an angel with a sword of justice and built by S. E. Gross, Chicago, 1891.

end of the nineteenth century, two-thirds of American urban residents were still tenants, most of them in the tenements.

## "The City of the Faithfulest Friends"

Some of the greatest American writers, activists, and designers hoped for changes in the industrial city rather than an escape to model houses. Against the background of Jefferson's idealized family farm and Beecher's pious suburban house, several remarkable alternative visions of urban public space appeared. Between the late 1840s and the 1870s, the activists of the abolitionist movement and the woman's movement gathered the strength to make demands for political and spatial rights that were to inspire generations of reformers, and they saw the ideal city as the spatial expression of these rights, not the dream house.

One of the clearest statements of this urban vision came from Walt Whitman. Whitman, an editor, printer, and building contractor who became a great poet, defined the ideal American city in 1856 in his "Song of the Broad-Axe." The great city, for Whitman, was not "the place of the tallest and costliest buildings or shops selling goods from the rest of the earth." "A great city," he proclaimed, "is that which has the greatest men and women. . . ." A great city is "where the slave ceases and the master of slaves ceases." It is the city

> Where the citizen is always the head and ideal,
> . . .
> Where children are taught to be laws to themselves,
> and to depend upon themselves,
> Where women walk in public processions
> in the streets the same as the men,
> Where they enter the public assembly and
> take places the same as the men;
> Where the city of the faithfulest friends stands
> . . .
> There the great city stands.[6]

The "city of the faithfulest friends" was a city of equal political participation, without regard to gender, race, class, or sexual preference, a city offering all adults access to public space and to public office. It was an urban place diametrically opposed to the sentimental, gender-stereotyped private domestic spaces that Jefferson and Beecher promoted.



Whitman wanted the new American city to reflect "Shapes of Democracy total, result of centuries." He believed that in the great city, where "fierce men and women pour forth," the public domain, accessible to all, would inspire a new, uniquely American architecture. "The shapes arise!" he exulted.[7]

While Whitman always admired happily married couples and parents with their children, there were three other constituencies he was particularly eager to describe. He instructed his readers, in "Poem of Remembrance for a Girl or Boy of These States," to foresee the end of slavery, to "Anticipate when the thirty or fifty millions are to become the hundred or two hundred millions, of equal freeman and freewoman, amicably joined." With regard to female citizens he said: "Anticipate the best women; / I say an unnumbered new race of hardy and well-defined women are to spread through all These States; / I say a girl fit for These States must be free, capable, dauntless, just the same as a boy."[8] When "In the New Garden, in All the Parts," Whitman imagined himself walking through modern cities, he was most interested in finding this type: "with determined will, I seek—the woman of the future, / You, born years, centuries after me, I seek."[9] In addition, as a single man who was given to wandering the streets, seeking lovers both male and female, Whitman celebrated a public domain open to "the dear love of comrades":

> I dream'd in a dream I saw a city invincible to the attacks of the whole of
> the rest of the earth,
> I dream'd that was the new city of Friends,
> Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust love, it led the rest,
> It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city,
> And in all their looks and words.[10]

Although Whitman's aesthetic of urban space provided him with a "continued exaltation and absolute fulfillment,"[11] not every aspect of the American city could satisfy his critical sense of the dangers of bigotry, commercialism, and exploitation. At the very time that he was writing, many men were ridiculing women's desire for access to public space, racial segregation was practiced everywhere, and gay liberation was not even discussed, while the Jeffersonian family farm was still much romanticized.

2.4 Nostalgia for the patriarchal, rural household and the architecture of gender: Currier and Ives, "American Country Life: Summer's Evening," detail. This idyllic, romantic view was juxtaposed with harsh humor attacking advocates of change.


2.5 "The Age of Iron," by Currier and Ives, 1868, a satire about the impossibly extravagant demands of women's rights advocates, ridiculing women who forget their place. Women prepare to go out into urban space while men remain indoors sewing, washing, and minding the baby. Both class and gender are depicted: the coachwomen and the laundryman are working class, while the woman with the bustle and the man with the waistcoat seem to be their employers, and the main tension is in the glance he gives her departing back. This was not a response to female demands for male sharing of domestic work, but a joke about the silly things that would happen if women entered public life. (Library of Congress)



## Evolution of the Public Landscape

Whitman's zeal to create a democratic public life in the American city was matched by Frederick Law Olmsted, founder of the profession of landscape architecture. On February 25, 1870, Olmsted traveled to Boston to address the American Social Science Association on the subject of "Public Parks and the Improvement of Towns." Already well known for his work in creating Central Park, in New York City, Olmsted gave a bold lecture contending that the American city should be replanned to foster friendly associations among its citizens, rich and poor, female and male, young and old, whether socialites from the salons or immigrants from the steerage.[12] The impetus for this urban spatial ideal was not democracy as an abstraction but specific demands for the equality of women and the assimilation of immigrants, mid-nineteenth-century political events that challenged all earlier definitions of public and private life.

In his address Olmsted defined a backward society as a nonurban society where the "men counted their women with their horses." Olmsted argued that in a modern society, women would seek their liberation in the city: "We all recognize that the tastes and dispositions of women are more and more potent in shaping the course of civilized progress, and we may see that women are even more susceptible to . . . [the] townward drift than men." Like Whitman, he valued the traditional family but also recognized the independent needs of women and children. Olmsted confessed himself "impatient of the common cant which assumes that the strong tendency of women to town life, even though it involves great privations and dangers, is a purely senseless, giddy, vain, frivolous, and degrading one." Instead, he claimed that the city would attract single, employed women because of its social life and would attract married women because publicly owned urban infrastructure and socialized labor would relieve them from the isolation and drudgery of the private, patriarchal household. He speculated about the possibility of providing municipal hot-air heat to every home and suggested that public laundries, bakeries, and kitchens would promote "the economy which comes by systematizing and concentrating, by the application of a large apparatus, processes which are otherwise conducted in a desultory way, wasteful of human strength."[13]

It is extremely revealing that Olmsted made little distinction

between public sidewalks, public central heating for every home, and public kitchens. He and other social science idealists saw the era of industrial capitalism, when public space and urban infrastructure were created, as a time of urban evolution toward a more equal way of life. (He believed that model suburbs with common land, such as Riverside, Illinois, could be linked to the ciy and could also contribute to such goals, although he abhorred suburban sprawl.) Olmsted adopted his belief in evolution as a disciple of Charles Fourier, but many other socialists and feminists, including Edward Bellamy, August Bebel, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, substituted other theories of human evolution and came to similar conclusions. All these American and European theorists saw the industrial capitalist city as the product of an economic system that would give way to a completely industrialized, urban, socialist society utilizing modern technology and socialized labor to handle not only industrial production but also housework and social services.

In this light, it is important to see that Olmsted's view of the public landscape as an expression of human social evolution was linked to housing and social service programs. These programs were the cooperative residential neighborhoods advocated by Melusina Fay Peirce (beginning in 1869), the municipal housekeeping campaigns launched in the temperance movement by Frances Willard (beginning in the 1870s), and the Social Settlement houses developed by Jane Addams (in the late 1880s). Olmsted with his public parks, Peirce with her ideal of model neighborhoods, and Willard and Addams with their plans for model urban social services together envisaged an ideal American city where landscape architecture, housing, and urban physical and social planning were intertwined. These activists did not divide private life from public life, domestic programs from public programs, economic initiatives from social initiatives, factual knowledge from ethical stances about that knowledge. Their confident wholeness of purpose was their great strength, and the understanding that existed between environmental reformers, reformers in the women's movement, and social scientists contributed in no small way to the appeal this urban vision had for great numbers of American women and men alike.



## Domestic Evolution and the Homelike World

Peirce and her followers concerned themselves with developing a woman's perspective on the relationship between housing and household work.[14] For six decades these women, the material feminists, defined their movement with one powerful idea: that women must create new kinds of homes with socialized housework and child care before they could become truly equal members of society. They raised fundamental questions about what was called "woman's sphere" and "woman's work." They challenged two characteristics of industrial capitalism: the physical separation of household space from public space, and the economic separation of the domestic economy from the political economy. They experimented with new forms of neighborhood organizations, including housewives' cooperatives, as well as new building types, including the kitchenless house, the day care center, the public kitchen, and the community dining club. By redefining housework and the housing needs of women and their families, they pushed architects and urban planners to consider housing design as the spatial context for family life. The material feminists thought that domestic space in apartment hotels and new cooperative suburbs[15] promoted domestic evolution in the same way that Olmsted believed public space in parks and parkways promoted urban evolution.

2.6 Nursery and day-care center, The Children's Building, World's Columbian Exhibition, Chicago, 1893.

During this period, Frances Willard, Jane Addams, and other leaders of the temperance and settlement movements were demanding women's active presence in urban public space and developing a theory of municipal housekeeping as their contribution to the "city of the faithfulest friends." They believed thay were bringing domestic virtues to public life, and they justified women's urban activism as an extension of their work in the home. This activism began in the winter of 1873, a depression year, when temperance women of southern Ohio launched the passionate speeches and startling public marches that Willard later compared to a western prairie fire: ". . . like the fires we used to kindle on the Western prairies, a match and a wisp of grass were all that was needed, and behold the spectacle of a prairie on fire . . . no more to be captured than a hurricane."[16] The Crusades, or the Women's Whiskey Wars as popular journalism referred to them, eventually mobilized tens of thousands of American women to demonstrate in the streets of their towns and cities, to claim public space and political power in new ways, while closing down saloons. This militance flared among women who had never prayed aloud in public, never presided at public meetings, never demonstrated in the streets, and, of course, were not allowed to vote.[17] They were not merely prim, severe anti-booze eccentrics, but political women with a complex purpose and a logical spatial target who used the rhetoric of domesticity in new ways.

The year after the Crusades began, Frances Willard founded the Women's Christian Temperance Union, a national organization based on the crusading spirit of the Whiskey Wars.[18] With the WCTU, Willard attacked the separation of private life and public life on behalf of women. The WCTU ultimately became the most powerful women's organization in the United States, with two hundred thousand members here and two million affilliates world wide, dedicated to temperance, women's suffrage, and urban reform. Willard defined women's urban work as an essential extension of the "home protection" demanded in the earlier temperance crusades. Her slogan "municipal housekeeping" joined women's presence in urban space and women's traditional work in a metaphor of political cleanup. Willard's acid comment that "men have made a dead failure of municipal government, just as they would of housekeeping" led to her argument that good government was only good housekeeping on a large scale.[19] Her municipal housekeeping campaigns attacked



the corruption and filth of the American city in an era when many justified urban horrors as the "survival of the fittest." When WCTU women came out of their homes and into the city, they aimed at regulating industry, ending political corruption, improving housing, education and health, and organizing trade unions for women workers. "Make the whole world homelike," said Willard. "Do everything."[20]

In this nurturant, political effort settlement workers such as Jane Addams and members of trade unions, suffrage groups, and women's clubs joined WCTU women. Over several decades, the settlement workers built complex urban institutions to bring together individuals of different economic and ethnic backgrounds to reform the American economy and restore a sense of home and community to the American city. As a homelike public place in the heart of the slums, Jane Addams's Hull-House inspired over a hundred similar settlement house projects. Its activities spanned a broad range of interests but reformers stressed that they could extend the spirit of home to all new immigrants by "settling" in poor neighborhoods. At Hull-House groups of city gardners cultivated vacant lots; the residents built the first urban playground in Chicago; they created a child care center for children of employed mothers. They ran education classes on all kinds of subjects for children and adults, cultural to practical, from symphonies to shoemaking. *Hull-House Maps and Papers*, a survey of the physical and economic conditions of the slums of Chicago published in 1895, was a major American research effort on the need for urban physical planning and social services.[21] Various residents collaborated on this book and ultimately held many influential policymaking positions in city, state, and national government to implement its conclusions. Like Olmsted, the social settlement planners stressed equal access to public space as a healing and strengthening force in a democratic American society. The advocate approach to urban physical and social planning was certainly nourished right in the Hull-House dining room; when settlement residents such as Florence Kelley and Mary Simkovitch called the first national urban planning conference in 1909, their leadership had long been acknowledged.

The settlement workers and the temperance workers formed the coalitions that led to the reforms of the Progressive movement and changed the standards of American urban politics. Unfortunately as these women gained a popular audience, they and their organiza-

tions were pushed aside by ministers, politicians, planners, and social workers, men who began to take over leadership. Women had created a direct political challenge to their seclusion in the home by demanding a homelike city. Yet many men preferred to promote better government by *men* as defenders of women and children in the home rather than to accept direct female power. The Progressive Era thus was a time when women's activism and rage forced change but did not control the shape of change. The right to vote, won in 1920, implied that women would have the political power to make the "homelike world" a reality, but the same period unleashed the Red Scare, and red-baiting of politically active women.

## "Good Homes Make Contented Workers"

In the early twentieth century, many battles for parks, housing, and better planning were lost, and the distinctive parts of the urban spatial ideal developed by Whitman, Olmsted, Peirce, Willard, and Addams were fragmented and misunderstood. The dense urban centers of industrial capitalism were succeeded by the suburbanized cities of modern capitalism.[22]

This change occurred over several decades. Conservative Americans had called on the social Darwinist argument of the "survival of the fittest" to excuse the sordid living and working conditions of the nineteenth-century city slums, but social reformers in the 1880s and 1890s eventually began to express aspirations for a nation of healthy Americans. Workers' anger also hastened change. Between the 1880s and 1920s, reformers began to fear that the American city would be torn apart by angry, propertyless people. The Haymarket Riots of 1886, the Pullman Strike of 1893, the New York garment strike of 1909, the Paterson mill strike of 1911, and the Lawrence strike of 1912 publicized workers' grievances and employers' lack of concern. Then in 1919, at the conclusion of World War I, four million people were on strike and the future of the American city seemed very uncertain. Not only were workers angry, veterans were upset that Blacks and women had taken over the jobs of white males during the war.[23]

Between the 1890s and the 1920s the National Civic Federation had brought together manufacturers and some labor leaders to discuss industrial policies and long-term planning. By 1919, many



manufacturers began to concede that not only better wages but also better housing were essential underpinings for urban social order. Urban planners and housing reformers such as Lawrence Veiller and John Nolan had long been campaigning for better dwellings to help foster "a conservative point of view in the working man." In the post World War I era, many union leaders and corporate leaders finally agreed on this tactic. Trade unionists, who had concentrated their organizing on skilled male workers, wanted what they called a "family wage." This meant a wage for male workers high enough to assure that wives and children would not work in industry, a tactic that would, at the same time, lower the threat of wage competition by decreasing the available labor force. Industrialists, who had concentrated their money making around production rather than consumption, wanted to expand their domestic markets for manufactured goods. They saw the better-paid workers' families as potential consumers of items such as furniture, appliances, and automobiles. Both union leaders and manufacturers agreed that a more spacious, mass-produced form of housing was essential to enable workers and their families to consume. A growing number of employers decided that it would be a good idea to miniaturize and mass-produce the Victorian patriarchal, suburban businessman's dwelling for the majority of white, male, skilled workers.

As one corporate official described his attitude toward workers: "Get them to invest their savings in homes and own them. Then they won't leave and they won't strike. It ties them down so they have a stake in our prosperity." Or as a housing expert put it, "Happy workers invariably mean bigger profits, while unhappy workers are never a good investment." He advocated long home mortgages, because purchases of homes rather than rentals would promote steady employment: "Good homes make contented workers." Or as another sloganeer put it, showing the capitalist and the worker shaking hands: "After work, the happy home."[24] One political analyst has argued that the promotion of suburban home ownership of this kind effectively split the territorial base of the Socialist party, because it was aimed at native-born skilled workers, who moved out of the tenements, leaving the more recent immigrants in the inner-city.[25]

What did this strategy mean for the wives of working men? Garbed in rhetoric about a woman's place in the home, it reinforced the pressures on women to get out of the wartime labor force in 1919 in order to give their jobs to veterans. As men were to become home-

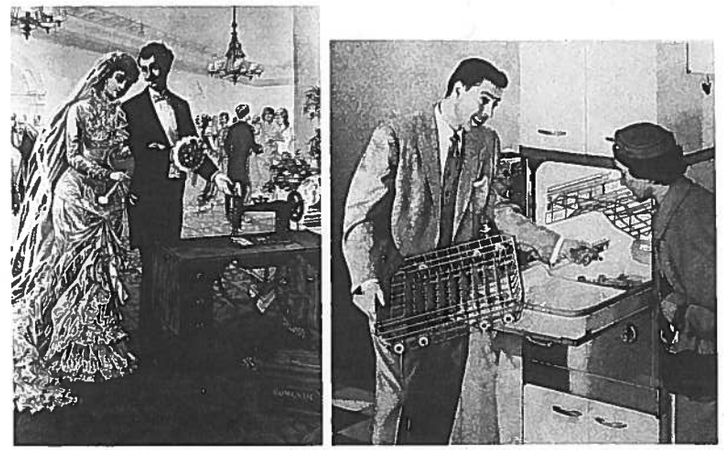
owners responsible for regular mortgage payments, their wives were to become home managers taking care of the spouse and children. The male worker would return from his day in the factory to a private domestic world. In his house, he would find a retreat from the tense world of work, and his physical and emotional maintenance would be the duty of his wife. Thus the private suburban house was a stage set for the effective gender division of labor. It made gender appear a more important self-definition than class, race, or ethnicity; it made consumption seem to be as crucial as production.

## Selling Mrs. Consumer

Corporations moving from World War I defense industries into peacetime production of domestic appliances and automobiles also found private homes and housewives' consumption of their products a key to success. Herbert Hoover, as Secretary of Commerce, served as president of Better Homes in America, an organization founded in 1922, designed to boost home ownership and consumption. There were several thousand local chapters composed of manufacturers, realtors, builders, and bankers. The rapid development of the advertising industry in the 1920s was also influential because advertisers promoted the private suburban dwelling as a setting for all other purchases.[26] The occupants of the suburban dwelling took on more than the house itself; they also had to have a car, a stove, a refrigerator, a vacuum cleaner, a washer, and carpets. Christine Frederick explained it all in 1929 in *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, a book dedicated to Hoover that promoted home ownership and easier consumer credit and advised advertising executives and marketing managers about manipulating American women. Frederick was particularly insistent that young married couples furnishing their first homes should be seen as prime consumers: "There is a direct and vital business interest in the subject of young love and marriage."[27]

By 1931 Hoover was President and his Commission on Home Building and Home Ownership established the private, single family home as a national goal to promote long term economic growth and recovery from the depression.[28] Eulogizing the rural ideal of "Home Sweet Home," Hoover noted that "Americans would never sing songs about a pile of rent receipts." Elementary schools taught students to make models of ideal houses. General Electric ran a design competition for a dream house for "Mr. and Mrs. Bliss" in 1935. In 1939 the personal income tax deduction for mortgage interest was introduced.[29] Still, this was brave talk with little action. Housing construction had peaked in the mid-1920s, and home ownership for the majority of urban workers remained a distant goal during the foreclosures of the Depression years and the housing shortages of the war years.





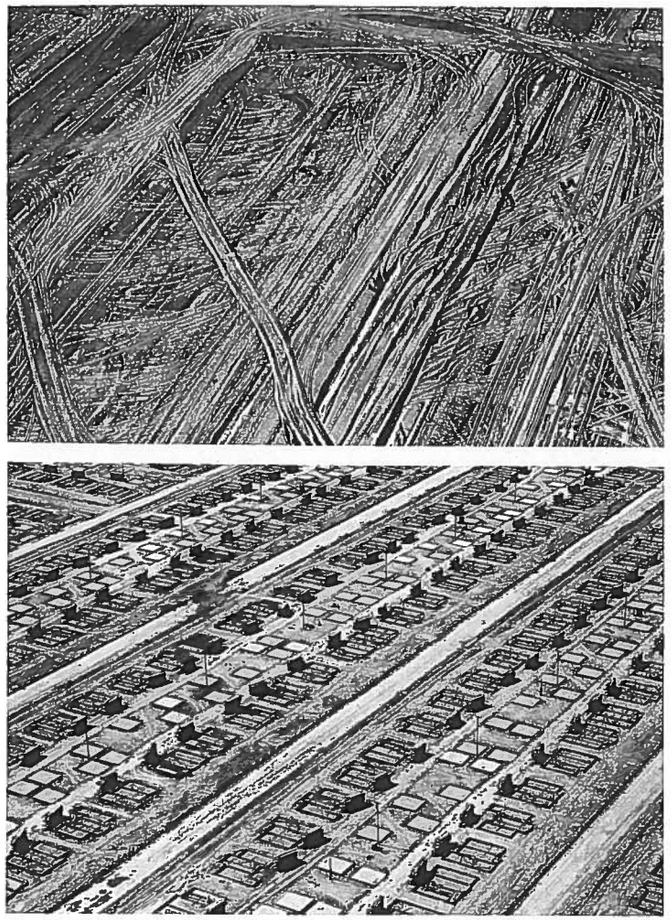
2.7 Selling Mrs. Consumer: the groom offers his bride the Domestic Sewing Machine, a ritual gesture equating consumption with love, 1882.

2.8 The realtor offers the housewife a Kitchen Aid dishwasher, *House and Home*, October 1956. This ritual gesture resembles the previous one, but the advertisement suggests that this brand of appliance helps builders sell more homes by persuading "Mrs. Consumer."

## I'll Buy That Dream

After World War II, the strategy of homeownership for white male workers articulated more than twenty years earlier became reality. As in the years following World War I, many defense corporations wanted to give women's jobs to veterans and convert some defense industries to production of consumer goods. And this time national mortgage insurance programs were in place, the American banking system was ready, highway systems were organized, and the speculative builders took over.

Veterans, with their World War II savings, were encouraged by a national policy promoting home ownership in suburban areas to



2.9 William Garnett, four views of a California tract under construction: after bulldozing; after house and garage foundations were poured; during framing; and as salable space. (Copyright, William Garnett, 1955)

participate in the transformation of the American city and the American economy. The central city was abandoned by many younger workers and their families in favor of the suburban ring. Young people left their parents and kin in the ethnic neighborhoods of the old central cities and, whistling the hit tune, "I'll Buy That Dream," bought new cars and went to live in new tract houses, with nothing down and low FHA monthly payments. Just as the native-born workers had left the more recent immigrants behind in the suburbanization of the 1920s, so the white workers left minority workers behind in the inner cities in the 1950s.[30] By the late 1970s, three-quarters of all AFL-CIO members were purchasing their homes on long mortgages.[31] Most of these families, headed by working men, identified themselves as "middle class."

The United States housing stock increased from 34.9 million

occupied units in 1940 to 80.4 million occupied units in 1980, as tracts of small houses, usually without day care centers or community facilities, spread over the countryside.[32] Housing starts by month and year became an important indicator of economic growth. In the forties, 9.8 million new units were constructed. In the fifties, this rose to 14.9 million. In the sixties, it climbed to 16.8 million. In the seventies, it totaled 22.4 million, despite a severe recession. Eventually only a quarter of the national housing stock consisted of pre–World War II structures.[33] Housing Americans was, as Hoover had predicted, a big, big business, and American banking, real estate, and transportation interests were intimately involved.

For both the huge merchant builders who emerged in the late 1940s and the small developers who built a few houses at a time, the heart of the housing business was the single-family detached house, accounting for 53.9 million units.[34] In the years between 1945 and 1980, suburban sprawl became a common phrase in Americans vocabularies; Malvina Reynolds sang "Little Boxes." Year by year, from 1950 to 1980, the dream houses got bigger and bigger until Americans enjoyed the largest amount of private housing space per person ever created in the history of urban civilization. Over 91 percent of U.S. households had one person per room or fewer in 1970; over 29.4 percent of U.S. households had seven or more rooms in their home in 1976.[35] The construction industry felt confident enough to announce that what was good for housing was good for the country.[36]

The dream house replaced the ideal city as the spatial representation of American hopes for the good life. It not only triumphed over the model town, the dream house also prevailed over two other models of housing, one based on an ideal of efficient collective consumption of scarce resources, the other based on an ideal of the model neighborhood. Yet the dream house had its critics, and by the late 1970s their accounting of its environmental, social, and economic costs could not be ignored.

What is the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?

*Henry David Thoreau*

She felt bought and paid for, and it was all of a piece; the house, the furniture, she, all were his, it said so on some piece of paper.

*Marilyn French*

# 3

# AWAKENING FROM THE DREAM

The personal happiness and economic potential of many Americans have been thwarted by the design of housing and public space, yet few of us employ the language of real estate development, architecture, or urban planning to trace the contours of loneliness, boredom, weariness, discrimination, or financial worry in our lives. It is much more common to complain about time or money than to fume about housing and urban space. In part this is because we think of our miseries as being caused by personal problems rather than social problems. Americans often say, "There aren't enough hours in the day," rather than "I'm frantic because the distance between my home and my work place is too great." Americans also say, "I can't afford the down payment to live in Newton," or in Marin County, or in Beverly Hills, rather than "I'm furious because only the affluent can live in a safe and pleasant neighborhood." Together, space, time, and money intersect to establish the physical settings where all the events of life will be staged. Whether they are harmonious or discordant, residential neighborhoods reverberate with meaning, and disappointments about them affect women and men of varied ages, income levels, ethnic groups, and racial groups.

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The house is an image of the body, of the household, and of the household's relation to society; it is a physical space designed to mediate between nature and culture, between the landscape and the larger urban built environment. In this sense the dwelling is the basis of both architectural design (as archetypal shelter) and physical planning (as the replicable unit used to form neighborhoods, cities, and regions). Because the form of housing carries so many aesthetic, social, and economic messages, a serious misfit between a society and its housing stock can create profound unrest and disorientation. As we have seen, the squalid tenements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflected class oppression that at times became a threat to the urban social order. Today the problems of a housing strategy based on suburban dream houses underscore the conflicts of class, gender, and race that characterize our society.

## Outgrowing Our Prescriptive Architecture

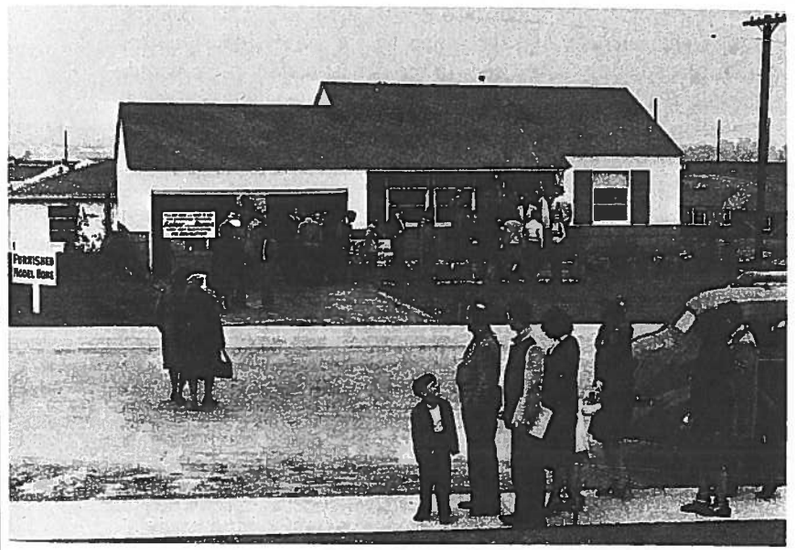
The United States is a society of diverse cultures and diverse household types, yet for the last four decades most American space has been shaped around a simplistic prescription for satisfaction. American cities and American housing have been designed to satisfy a nation of predominantly white, young, nuclear families, with father as breadwinner, mother as housewife, and children reared to emulate these same limited roles. While prescriptive literature in the form of sermons, housekeeping guides, and etiquette manuals has always been available to describe and define the ideal middle-class Christian family in our society, our post–World War II cities mark the triumph of a prescriptive architecture of gender on a national scale.

Today only a small percentage of American families include a male breadwinner, a nonemployed housewife, and two or more children under eighteen. The valiant World War II heroes and their blushing brides have now retired. Their children have grown up. The predominant family type is the two-earner family. The fastest growing family type is the single-parent family, and nine out of ten single parents are women. Almost a quarter of all households consist of one person living alone, be they young singles or the elderly. Yet Americans have not acknowledged that the cities and the housing built for the war heroes are no longer appropriate today.



Space is the problem rather than time or money. And this problem is inextricably tied to an architecture of home and neighborhood that celebrates a mid-nineteenth century ideal of separate spheres for women and men. This was an artificial environment that the most fanatical Victorian moralists only dreamed about, a utopia of male-female segregation they never expected the twentieth century to build. While maxims about true womanhood and manly dominance were the staple of Christian, bourgeois Victorian culture in the United States, England, and many other countries, only in the United States in the twentieth century were so many material resources committed to reinforcing these ideas by spatial design.

The veteran, his young wife, and their prospective children appeared as the model family of 1945. Millions of them confronted a serious housing shortage. In the aftermath of war, employing the veterans and removing women from the paid labor force was a national priority. So was building more housing, but the two ideals were conflated. Developers argued that a particular kind of house would help the veteran change from an aggressive air ace to a com-




3.1 Prospective buyers standing in line to view a furnished model home, by Kaiser, California, 1950s. Spending Sunday afternoons visiting model homes became a new family pastime.

muting salesman who loved to mow the lawn. He would also assist his wife to forget her skills as Rosie the Riveter and begin to enjoy furnishing her dream house in suburbia. As we have seen, Better Homes in America had tried to house the post–World War I family in segregated suburban residential communities, and this attempt, thwarted by the Great Depression, only intensified commitment to the same prescription for family bliss after World War II. The problem is that the spatial rules could have been written by Catharine Beecher in 1870; by 1920 they were anachronistic; by 1950, preposterous.

The outdated ideal of a particular kind of family life, however, had a function. Exaggerated, socially created male and female roles defined not only the labor market and housing design but also the parameters of urban planning. Postwar propaganda told women that their place was in the home, as nurturers; men were told that their place was in the public realm, as earners and decision makers. This ideal, gender-based division of labor described women's and men's economic, social, and political relationships to the private and public realms as distinctly different. Segregation of roles by gender was so pervasive and acceptable that it was used to justify housing schemes characterized by segregation by age, race, and class that couldn't be so easily advertised. In the richest nation in the world, economic deprivation, ethnic differences, age segregation, and racial segregation were hidden by a spatial prescription for married suburban bliss that emphasized gender as the most salient feature of every citizen's experience and aspirations.

## Creating the Critique

One could define the essence of any utopian design as the desire to create a society where no one counts costs, and no one even understands the concept of costs or the human inability to make everything perfect for everyone. A cartoon in the New York *Times* in 1977, showing a dream house devouring a family, expressed a growing panic about our national housing strategy as a utopian design on which the long deferred costs had finally come due. Dream houses got out of control economically, environmentally, and socially because they carried unacknowledged costs: they required large amounts of energy consumption; they demanded a great deal of unpaid female labor; they were often unavailable to minorities; and



eventually, they overwhelmed the institutions that had traditionally financed them. The *Times*' cartoonist forged two and a half decades of partial, tentative criticism from architects, planners, environmentalists, women, minorities, and economists into one powerful image of American life in decline.

The earliest critics of the dream house came from the professions of architecture and urban planning. They were angry because the basic building activity had bypassed both professions. Contractors received funding from federal housing agencies, bought farm land in a remote part of a metropolitan area—preferably a place without a planning board—and started "raising houses instead of potatoes" (as they said in Long Island). Many architects were appalled by the banal designs the builders threw up. William J. Levitt, for example, was considered one of the best developers of solidly constructed houses. He became a popular hero for the speed with which he built homes for veterans, but he simply built one design over and over in his first development.[1] Praised for his skill in reorganizing the logistics of traditional home construction, he responded to aesthetic critiques by developing three or four "models" that could be alternated on every street, a practice still followed by many builders today. Levitt's peace offering was to sponsor interior design contests for Levittown residents and invite well-known designers and architects to be the judges of the interior schemes created by the residents, whether modern, Early American, or country French.[2]

The predictable banality of it all was enforced by the federal agency responsible for funding: FHA design guidelines actually penalized any builder who hired a sophisticated architect by lowering the mortgagable values of houses that did not conform to their norms of design.[3] Flat roofs were particularly suspect at the FHA. (Curiously, Nazi policy had also decreed that only peaked-roof houses suited the Aryan race.)[4] But flat roofs had characterized many of the best multi-family housing designs in the twentieth century, including those of Irving Gill, Henry Wright, Clarence Stein, Rudolph Schindler, and other American and European architects who had worked on low cost housing but managed to make it harmonious and often elegant.

Architects gnashed their teeth, but their social and aesthetic critiques failed to address the basic gender division of labor. While they proposed the advantages of hiring skilled designers or of providing more community facilities and more shared spaces, they did not attack the Victorian programing at the heart of dream-house

culture. Some American architects working with the material feminists had led the world in the development of innovative, nonsexist[5] housing prototypes between 1870 and 1940, but the practitioners of the 1950s could only deal with suburbia by asking for a bigger share of the individual commissions. In truth, most architects loved to design large single-family houses, one at a time, and this predilection shaped the profession's acquiescence.[6]

Urban planners, like architects, were early critics of the dream-house strategy, but their concerns, while tied to larger issues of private and public space, still lacked a thorough social foundation. Planners perceived that hasty, uncontrolled suburban developments for veterans' families would produce houses without adequate schools, parks, or other community facilities. They saw that suburban residents would then be taxed to pay for these improvements. while the speculative developers used their profits to build yet another subdivision. They predicted that new suburbs would drain the social and economic activities of the center city, and that urban blight and suburban sprawl would work together to wear away the best pedestrian districts of inner-city areas.[7] Some of them recognized the racism of all-white tracts, and worried about the consequences of "white flight" from inner cities.

All of these events came to pass, and yet, while planners decried haste, shoddy building, and greed, while they deplored racial segregation and lack of public transportation, few spoke about the outworn gender stereotypes embodied in the basic definition of the household. Indeed, planners themselves relied on the Victorian template of patriarchal family life when they exhorted Americans to pay more attention to community facilities to strengthen that same idealized family. Even Lewis Mumford, the most trenchant of all urban critics, rhapsodized: ". . . who can doubt that Victorian domesticity, among the upper half of the middle classes, was encouraged by all the comforts and conveniences, the sense of internal space and peace, that brought the Victorian father back nightly to his snug household." He ardently supported providing "a young couple with a dwelling house and a garden" to continue this model, while adding that the city planner must also "invent public ways of performing economically what the old, three-generation bourgeois family once privately encompassed"[8]—care for the elderly.

Planners also used the same outworn family model to study residential choices and to measure needs for new services. The "head of household" and his "journey to work" framed their locational



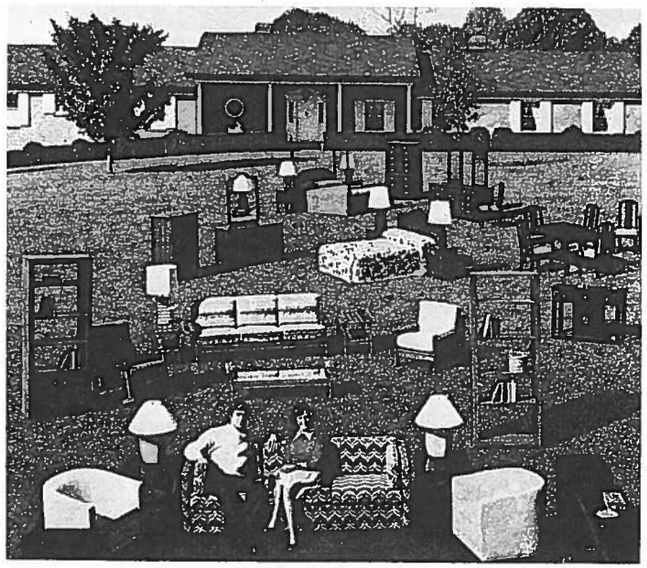
concerns, instead of detailed analysis of the different needs and different experiences of men, women, and children.[9] Even when caucuses of Marxist urban planners responded to the extreme urban fiscal crises of the late 1970s, they too based their statements about housing reform around an unexamined acceptance of the dream house and the gender division of labor underlying it.[10] They proposed a socialist banking policy to keep traditional housing afloat.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the activists of two major social movements generated enough anger about the single-family detached houses to spur broader cultural critiques. Ecologists and feminists took up where the designers and planners left off: the former stressing the dire consequences of environmental decline, the latter emphasizing the crippling effects of stereotyped roles for women and men. Both movements stressed that consciousness must be followed by active protest. They organized the disaffected to rally against some of the excesses of the post–World War II American life style. Both stressed democracy and emphasized that personal life represented political choices; neither put architecture in the foreground, but they generated enough debate to illuminate basic conceptual shortcomings of both architecture and urban design.

## Environmental Awareness

Environmentalists and energy planners pointed out that American dream houses and their dispersed settlement pattern used more nonrenewable resources than any society had ever consumed before, because builders had assumed that energy would always be cheaper than materials or labor. Thus Americans, as about six percent of the world's population, account for about a third of the world's nonrenewable resource consumption every year.[11] A white child born to a dream-house family in the United States will consume many times more resources than a Third World child over its lifetime.

These activists showed that the imbalance was partly the result of deliberate but uninformed choices in housing design. When builders of the 1950s constructed millions of dream houses lined up on suburban tracts, they broke with traditional regional responses to climate (typical of the adobes of the Southwest or the saltbox houses of New England) in favor of using standardized plans and materials. Huge picture windows created patterns of heat gain and heat loss that had to be compensated for by year round air-conditioning or



3.2 "Win a houseful of beautiful furniture!" Utopia on the model of single-family bliss and over-consumption, Pledge Furniture Sweepstakes.

intensive heating, depending on whether the standardized house was in Arizona or Massachusetts. Traditional siting also broke down. Builders' bulldozers leveled hills and trees that might have provided shade; the same house was built facing north, south, east, and west because the builders didn't care about the position of the sun so much as the profitability of the tract.

The dream houses, because of their isolation from community facilities and from each other, also required numerous private purchases of appliances such as stoves, clothes washers, and refrigerators. These appliances were often designed to increase rather than minimize the use of energy: in some cases the same manufacturers sold both consumer appliances and municipal generating equipment,[12] as a reinforcement of corporate interests. In addition to the wasteful use of energy, some appliances and all plumbing fixtures intensified the use of water. Toilets, garbage disposals, clothes washers, and dishwashers created an enormous volume of water usage in arid regions as well as in more temperate climates, by continuing the American practice of using water as a medium of carrying waste away, rather than reserving water for needed human use and recycling garbage and human waste as compost.



As the suburbs grew, the infrastructure of municipal water, gas, and power lines and roads expanded, and expanded again. Once on the path to lower densities, many cities found it hard to justify public transit expenditures. The journey to work for Americans averaged nine miles one way in 1976, when Americans owned 41 percent of the world's passenger cars to connect home and paid work. Indeed, they had more cars per household than children.[13] To get to distant houses, thousands of miles of roads and freeways were needed. But very few people wanted their dream house next to a busy freeway or shrouded in smog. To provide gas and electricity for these same houses, storage tanks and generating plants were needed, but no one wanted to be near them either.

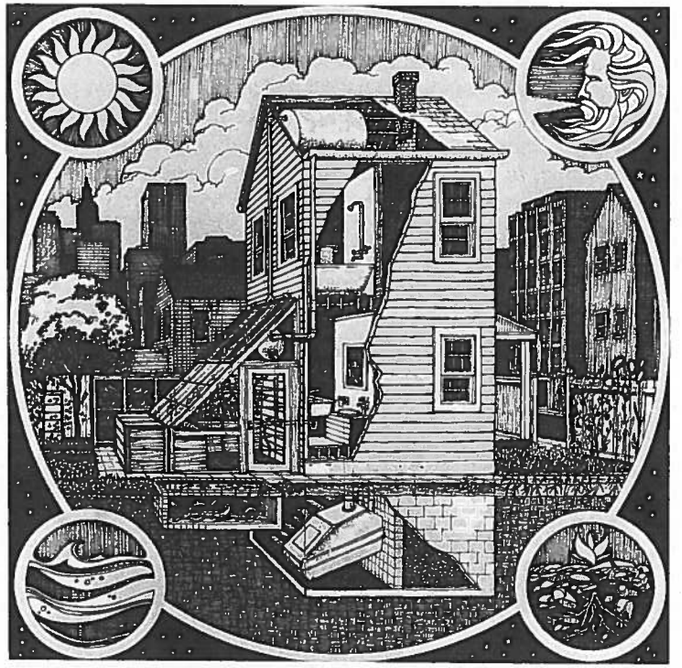
Ultimately American corporations had to resort to some desperate strategies to assure continued energy consumption. Oil leases in foreign countries brought the accompanying threat of foreign wars. Nuclear power plants and liquid natural gas (LNG) terminals at home were even riskier strategies because of their long-term vulnerability to accidents and because of the lack of safe disposal procedures for nuclear waste materials. In the late 1970s, *The Ladies' Home Journal* carried a pro-nuclear advertisement showing housewives holding up a variety of home appliances and thanking the utility for creating nuclear power to keep their appliances going. The phrase "dream house" began to acquire ironic overtones. Even those families who would have accepted nearby gas or electrical installations refused to be near a nuclear plant or an LNG terminal.

The political movement launched by environmentalists had one great success by 1982. Steady, sustained political pressure on both utilities and government regulatory agencies had made it clear that nuclear power plants were financially unprofitable to design, build, and operate. This citizen resistance to poor energy planning marked a significant achievement for Americans concerned about the safety of their neighborhoods and the social responsibility of major corporations. Victories were won in the face of massive expenditures by utilities for political contributions and extensive lobbying efforts by utility executives speaking to many different audiences. The environmentalists' common sense dominated the debates; revelations about nukes built on earthquake faults and nukes built from upside-down blueprints did the rest.

When it came to renewable energy sources, the environmentalists produced only partial reforms. Conservation education often stressed saving more than sharing. Retrofitting of existing buildings might

involve elaborate technical skills, but economic and social reprograming, essential to the better use of space, was often ignored. Thus ecologists Helga and William Olkowski criticized the ecological and economic parasitism of the suburban dwelling: "The typical home now largely wastes the solar income it daily receives and the mineral resources that pass through it. It takes from the forest for its structure, furnishings, reading materials, and fuel as well. The typical home also takes from the often fragile ecosystems of estuary, swamp, desert and prairie for its food and fiber. It also uses the waterways and mineral riches for its power and the products of the marketplace. The house shelters its occupants, but to the larger community it gives 'wastes.' These latter emerge unappreciated and consequently unsorted: the metals with the glass, organic, paper, and plastic all jumbled together; the toxic mixed with the benign. Because the home is such a total parasite, as are its neighboring urban habitats, it is not surprising that the occupants experience themselves as victims or, at best, ineffectual ciphers in a large, impersonal, centralized system." But the Olkowskis' powerful experiment, the Integral Urban House, a collective project established by six adults, did not stress rethinking family life so much as the introduction of urban agriculture and ecosystems analysis.[14] Other designers of solar homes who received wide publicity had far less to offer; some designs were based on new environmental gadgets for the old dream house but retained the model family in 2,500 square feet of space.

In the same way, discussion of new solar technologies, such as photovoltaic cells, often stopped at a certain level of technological innovation. Big corporations (utilities and defense contractors) received most of the government research and development money to study the profitable future production of these technologies. Neighborhood applications and small-town applications were seldom given the same level of support.[15] Here a mix of economic, social, and technical reforms could have resulted in more innovative programing. Using photovoltaic cells to cover the roof of every existing dream house would turn the United States into a nation of fifty-four million private power plants. Scale is still the most misunderstood environmental issue in the so-called appropriate technology movement. Between the giant corporations and the tiny houses, environmental alternatives require new social, economic, and architectural innovations as well as new, energy-saving inventions. While environmentalists are still developing a very effective accounting of the wasteful, destructive patterns of present resource



3.3 Sketch of "The Integral Urban House" established by environmental activists with composting toilet, greenhouse, fish pond, and solar energy, Berkeley, California. (From *The Integral Urban House: Self-Reliant Living in the City* by Helga Olkowski, Bill Olkowski, Tom Javits, and the Farallones Institute Staff. Copyright © 1979 by Sierra Club Books. Reprinted by permission.)

use, they have not yet come to terms with the reconceptualization of the private home as the key to the next set of public issues they must address.

## Feminist Unrest

The problems of domestic life documented by the women's movement also revolve around the hidden costs of building millions of homes on the Victorian model. The connections between home ownership, family structure, and women's status are complex. During the last three decades, while the majority of white male workers have achieved the dream houses in suburbia where their fantasies of proprietorship, authority, and consumption could be acted out, the majority of their spouses have entered the world of paid employ-

ment. Today, handicapped by the least suitable housing imaginable for employed wives and mothers, more than one out of two married women is in the paid labor force. (In 1890, the figure was one out of twenty.) Employed women often find themselves with two jobs: one at home, one at work. Pulled between unpaid work and paid work, women race from office or factory to home and back again. They know they have no time for themselves. They have to spend an inordinate amount of time simply struggling to get husbands or children to do a little more housework instead of leaving it all for Mom.[16]

While this pattern creates logistical problems for the employed housewife, those who stay home also have serious difficulties. Michele Rosaldo, a cultural anthropologist, argued that women's status is lowest in societies where women are most separated from public life.[17] And in the United States the suburban home is the single most important way of separating women, and thus lowering an individual woman's status. But as Bonnie Loyd, a geographer, points out, much of women's work in the household is status-producing work for the family, connected with the maintenance of the house.[18] So by glorifying her home through executing household tasks, a woman can guarantee her family's social status at the expense of her own. As Loyd notes, such activity often creates psychological conflict. This conflict increases when women who try to create interiors as a focus for entertaining come up against levels of consumption which are in fact new to them because of upward mobility. Terrified housewives who know little about designer furniture or antiques, cabinet work or colors, may consult women's magazines, home and life-style magazines, decorators, and department stores. Loyd quotes one psychiatrist who remarked in the 1950s of his female patients: "There is no time at which a woman is more apt to go to pieces than when she is engaged in decorating her home."[19]

Feminists of the 1960s, beginning with Betty Friedan, examined the relationships among women, advertisers, and mass-produced goods.[20] They saw the home as a box to be filled with commodities. Rugs and carpets need vacuuming, curtains need laundering, upholstered goods need shampooing—all fill up the domestic spaces to form colonial, Mediterranean, French Provincial, or some other ersatz decor. Women also criticized kitchens full of single-purpose appliances requiring frequent attention. These machines are lined up in one room, the kitchen, which is often designed to be isolated



from the rest of family life. As one appliance manufacturer put it in *Good Housekeeping* in 1965: "This kitchen has almost everything. Tappan built-in electric range and oven, Tappan dish-washer and Tappan disposal, Tappan refrigerator. Only one thing's really missing. *You.*"

3.4 Housewife posed with the products of a week's work, Rye, New York. Photograph by Nina Leen, LIFE Mazagine, © 1947 Time, Inc.)

One of the most effective explorations of housewives' frustrations was an exhibit created in 1971, "Womanhouse," which incorporated the combined talents of twenty-six artists to transform an abandoned Los Angeles mansion into a series of environments. At the top of the staircase a mannequin in a wedding dress posed, suggesting the young bride's fascination with the dream house. At the bottom of the stairs her muddy train and two disembodied feet vanished into the wall. In the linen closet, another mannequin was trapped among the sheets and towels. In the kitchen, everything was painted pink, that stereotypically feminine color: the sink, the

refrigerator, the potato peeler, the pots and pans, the walls. Inside the kitchen drawers newspaper linings revealed stories about women in public life. The bathtub contained colored sand, in the shape of a woman's body. As visitors to the exhibit touched the sand, the figure receded. After two weeks the woman disappeared. There were also rooms dedicated to a woman's enjoyment of her dream house as a place for privacy, fantasy, and playfulness. One room had huge toys, and in another, a crocheted spider web suggested a woman's place to spin out ideas.

The exhibition included some performances, and in one favorite theater piece, the artist simply walked to an ironing board and ironed sheets for thirty minutes. While the women decided it was hilarious, men were perplexed. "Womanhouse" addressed the ways that Americans have mystified the necessary work done in the house by isolating the housewife who cooks, cleans, and irons in a dream house. The artists illuminated some of women's positive feelings and attachments to domestic spaces as nurturing, controllable places, while criticizing the loneliness and isolation which many housewives encounter. Most effectively, they turned domestic space into public space temporarily by the appropriation of a residential structure for the exhibit, and thousands of visitors toured the house.

In the same way that the artists of "Womanhouse" protested the single-family home as an enclosure for women's lives, so the poets Adrienne Rich and Bernice Johnson Reagon cried out for change. Rich's "A Primary Ground," of 1974, told of the suffocation of traditional family life:

> Sensuality dessicates in words—
> risks of the portage, risks of the glacier
> never taken
> Protection is the genius of your house
> the pressure of the steam iron
> flattens the linen cloth again
> chestnuts puréed with care are dutifully eaten
> in every room the furniture reflects you
> larger than life, or dwindling

Most of all, Rich underlined the waste of female talent in this old pattern of domesticity:

> your wife's twin sister, speechless
> is dying in the house



> You and your wife take turns
> carrying up the trays,
> understanding her case, trying to make her understand.[21]

The image of "understanding her case" resonated through Rich's writings, as well as the demand for new forms of habitation.

In "The Fourth Month of the Landscape Architect," Rich fused images of pregnancy and a demand for the creation of a new kind of social space, as a female designer reviews the historical experience of women in her spatial imagination:

> I start to imagine
> plans for a house, a park
> . . .
> A city waits at the back of my skull
> eating its heart out to be born:
> how design the first
> city of the moon? how shall I see it
> for all of us who are done
> with enclosed spaces, purdah, the salon, the sweatshop loft,
> the ingenuity of the cloister?[22]

To read Rich's poems was to be exhorted to transcend the architecture of gender that diminished so many lives, yet it was only an exhortation and not a plan.

Writer, composer, and scholar, Bernice Johnson Reagon, in "My Black Mothers and Sisters," told feminists what the leaders of that struggle would need to be like:

> She could make space where there was none
> And she could organize the space she had
> My mama
> My grandmama
> Ms. Daniels
> dreamers who believed in being materialists—
> . . .
> We must apply energy to the development of our potential
> as parents
> as creative producers
> as the new way-makers.
> There must not be a woman's place for us
> We must be everywhere our people are
> or might be . . .[23]

To seize and hold more space, to redesign space, to deliver the goods of survival was an adequate definition of the task in its material and cultural dimensions, but still an exhortation.

While these women developed a critique of the suburban house and created a new consciousness that inspired some housewives to leave the seclusion of their homes, the critique did not go far enough. Gender was the culprit; material culture was satirized and criticized, but the architecture of gender was not reworked. The material feminists' idea that the gender division of labor was reinforced by spatial design was a lost intellectual tradition for most feminist activists of the 1970s, just as it was for architects and planners.

Indeed, feminists often agitated for something very like the single-family house even as they proposed to put it under women's control. Articles and manifestos on the housing needs of single-parent mothers stressed their desire not to be stigmatized by special housing "projects," their quite natural desire for their children to feel that their homes were "just like everyone else's."[24] Emergency shelters for battered women and their children—which involved integrated housing, child care, and social service arrangements—were usually seen as temporary solutions to women's housing needs, and the stated goal of such groups was to return the woman and her children to "normal" housing as soon as possible. Not surprisingly, this "normal" housing created great stress when women left the community of the shelter to return to the dream-house world.[25] In the 1970s, campaigns on behalf of employed women that stressed gaining economic justice through increased access to home ownership also accepted the dream-house design. At HUD, Donna Shalala's "Women and Mortgage Credit" program promoted female ownership with the slogan, "If a woman's place is in the home, it might as well be her own."[26] While this pragmatic program met with quick success, HUD's sponsorship of in-depth research by architects and urban planners revealed that long-term problems about the nature of housing design would demand far more complex policy initiatives. Neither a single-family house filled with solar gadgets nor home ownership for single mothers addresses the largest political and spatial issues inherent in the dream-house culture. The need to unite architects, planners, environmentalists, and feminists is urgent. As material conditions change, the shock reverberates. The economic problems of this housing form are finally provoking the intensive public policy review that no previous protest movement was ever able to generate.



## Race, Gender, and the Economic Crisis

When Americans discuss the good life, they still speak about their hopes or their fears in terms of buying houses. Home ownership has not only symbolized a family's social status, but also guaranteed its economic security. The homeowner has been an owner-speculator, an identity acknowledged by one Florida developer who advertises his homes with the slogan, "To her, it's a nest; to him, a nest egg."[27] The "nest egg" explains why Americans struggle to "climb the ladder of life from renter to owner."[28] After years of mortgage payments to the bank (and substantial income tax deductions), some older homeowners have needed a speculative profit from the sale of the house to provide adequate retirement income. "For years your house has made you happy. Now it's going to make you rich," claims Jon Douglas, a California real estate agent seeking couples to list their homes for sale with him.[29]

Because home ownership has been closely associated with an individual's tax position and retirement income, it has created a sense of progress through life for the two-thirds of American families who have managed to attain it. The process of entering the market has been a rite of passage for thirty-year-olds equipped with the savings, marriage, and children that make this choice seem logical. Ownership and intense participation in the culture of home have characterized the middle years of life. For the retirees who sell their houses, detachment from gender roles has come with age and the speculative bonus of leaving suburbia.

Of course, one-third of American families have never had a chance to participate in these rituals. The roots of this problem lie in the five groups of Americans that were excluded from home ownership in the late 1940s. First, white women of all classes were expected to gain access to housing through their husbands. Second, the white elderly working class and lower middle class, who were no longer wage earners in the prime of life, were left behind in the old inner-city neighborhoods. Third, minority men of all classes were excluded from suburban home ownership when suburban tracts specifically excluded minority families; the FHA actually had agents whose job it was to keep minorities out, and they pressured any builder or lender who didn't agree.[30] Minority men were expected to become tenants in old slums in the central cities or owners in other segregated neighborhoods vacated by the "white flight" to the suburbs.

The majority of housing units in these segregated areas were difficult to finance since banks usually refused to give home mortgages in "redlined" ghetto areas. Fourth, minority women of all classes were not to be homeowners. So minority women often became the domestic servants in other women's suburban houses to earn the money to keep their own families together. Fifth, the minority elderly of all classes were left in the central cities. Close to their offspring, they often remained in three-generation households, sometimes caring for their grandchildren while their daughters worked outside the home.

Home ownership did develop among approximately 40 percent of minority male workers and their families in the late 1960s and 1970s, encouraged by the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The Act outlawed segregation and made blockbusting less possible. Redlining of ghetto areas continued, however, and kept many minority families from buying. Eventually the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1973 also made home ownership possible for a small number of women by forbidding discrimination by mortgage lenders on the basis of sex. This meant that mortgage bankers could not apply the so-called rule of thumb (perhaps better described as the rule of uterus) to discount the income of any women of child-bearing age by at least 50 percent when determining mortgage eligibility.[31] Still, very few employed women of any age had the income to qualify as sole owners, so this law helped two earner couples more than female heads of households. In this latter group, a home ownership rate of about 40 percent is similar to the minority rate.

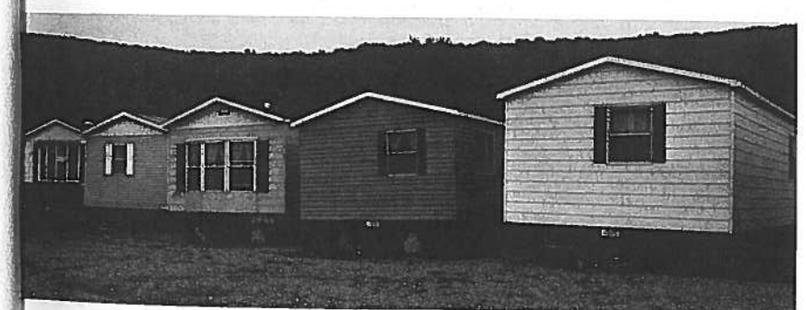
As these groups moved into potential home ownership in the 1970s, they encountered increasingly inflated prices. Between 1970 and 1982, average housing prices across the nation jumped from $28,700 to $87,600.[32] The inflation was exacerbated as thirty million baby-boom children of the post–World War II era came of home-buying age in the 1970s; an equivalent or greater number will reach their thirties in the 1980s.[33] As the price of houses turned into a steadily rising line on real estage agents' graphs, millions of these young Americans, most of them the product of the veterans' suburban tracts, found that they couldn't afford to buy homes. They heard economists predict that they would be tenants most of their lives unless they could inherit their parents' houses. They added their frustrations to those of people long excluded from home ownership, including minorities and women for whom the economic obstacles remained although the legal and institutional barriers to



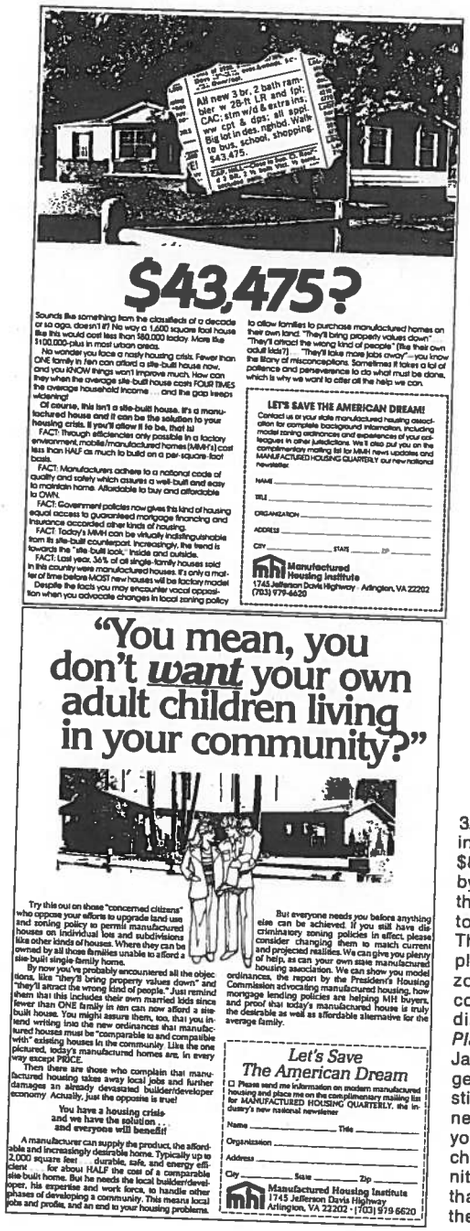
home ownership were decreasing. A frantic scramble ensued as all three groups struggled to get into the housing market with "starter" homes.

As a result of the scramble, a rising percentage of household income was spent on housing. Americans' indebtedness for residential mortgages mushroomed from $661 billion in 1976 to $1,172 billion in 1982.[34] Finally the housing market was declared problematic by all but the most optimistic builders. Some introduced tiny "studio houses" and 300-sq.-ft. condominiums at exorbitant prices, and then attempted to distract attention from the size of these units with minimal furniture.[35] Others introduced "mingles" designs or "double master bedroom" plans to help new kinds of households squeeze themselves into outmoded land use and financing patterns, essentially proposing that two households could share one dream house or one condo, since each one could only afford half the asking price. Makers of mobile homes saw their chance. Changing the name of their product to "manufactured housing," they argued that they, and only they, could make houses cheaply enough to "save the American dream."

Bankers tried to patch up the economic crisis in the housing market with new balloon mortgage plans which deferred some interest payments for certain highly educated young professionals (charging them large sums at age thirty-five rather than at age thirty), with variable rate mortgages, and "growing equity" mortgages. These "creative financing" devices didn't do much for the mass market; they helped affluent people become overextended. Bankers also demanded new government subsidies for home buyers, and federal



3.5 Mobile homes on a sales lot in Connecticut, 1982.




3.6 When average house prices in the United States reached the $80,000 range, mobile-home lobbyists began arguing that only their product was cheap enough to "save the American dream." These two ads, aimed at urban planners to make them change zoning so that mobile homes could be legal in districts forbidding their use, were published in *Planning*, December 1982 and January 1983. "$43,475?" suggests that an "all new, 3BR" is still available, provided that planners "allow it to be." "You mean you don't *want* your own adult children living in your community?" tries to persuade readers that only mobile homes can save the three-generation family.



bailouts for failing savings and loan institutions. Real estate agents who were suffering too (from lack of commissions) began to take full-page advertisements in metropolitan papers, criticizing defense appropriations and deficit spending as harmful to the economy. One advertisement showed a little house with a peaked roof sagging under the weight of a sack of dollars for the Pentagon.

By 1983, two things were clear: certain groups were unable to enter the housing market, and many Americans who had already bought houses discovered that they couldn't afford to move. Others found that they couldn't even afford to stay where they were. Unemployment was high, and some people, caught with mortgage payments they couldn't meet, lost their homes to foreclosures. Neither the anxious owners nor the foreclosing banks could sell out because of the sluggish market. Some pessimistic economists began predicting a housing crash similar to the stock market crash of 1929, which started the Great Depression. They predicted that as high rates caused demand to fall, the building construction industry would slump and even fail. At the same time, rising unemployment in all sectors of the economy would contribute to increasing mortgage defaults, weakening the banking system (housing represents half of all its transactions) and further undermining the real estate market and the construction industry. Just as these economic interdependencies had promoted paper profits and growth, so they could contribute to a downward spiral of decline and even collapse.

Although the crisis did not become a crash, now is the moment of opportunity. The inadequacies of dream-house architecture can no longer be ignored. To renew democratic, self-sufficient traditions and survive as an urbanized, modern society, Americans must search for an adequate way to organize and pay for the spaces we live in, a way more compatible with the human life cycle. As a rich nation, we need to examine these issues in world perspective, if we care at all about world peace or about our international influence as a democracy. As a nation that has pioneered self-awareness and personal growth, we must also examine these housing issues from the perspective of our most intimate psychological and sexual desires as women and men. It is not enough to face the loss of the dream house with nostalgia about the end of an era, or with despair that America's resources stretched just so far and no farther. We need to reconstruct the social, economic, and spatial bases of our beliefs about individual happiness, solid family life, and decent neighborhoods.

There is no private life which is not determined by a wider public life.

*George Eliot*

# part II

# Rethinking Private Life