

Once the American Dream. Inner-Ring Suburbs of the Metropolitan United States. Bernadette Hanlon. Temple-University Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2010. 203 pp. \$54.50

Cities and Suburbs. New Metropolitan Realities in the U.S. Bernadette Hanlon, John Rennie Short, and Thomas J. Vicino. Routledge, London, UK and New York, New York, 2010. 285 pp. \$44.95

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“The American Dream manifests itself most acutely in the American suburb,” Bernadette Hanlon notes in the introductory chapter of *Once the American Dream. Inner-Ring Suburbs of the Metropolitan United States* (p. 1). The book summarizes her research on inner-ring suburbs in the 100 largest metropolitan areas of the United States. As the core subject of the book is suburban decline, it is a study of how the American Dream may come to an end both presently and in the future. Because recent developments in real estate markets have most severely affected sub- and ex-urban areas in the Southwestern states (such as Arizona, Nevada, and California), some have even argued that suburbs may vanish completely—that they may represent the next slum. Contrary to such speculations, Hanlon’s study is theoretically informed, empirically rich, and carefully assesses its findings. In fact, the book may set a new standard in research on contemporary suburban developments in North America.

The book is organized into 10 chapters. The first provides an overview of the subject, the main research questions of the study, and the structure of the book. Chapter 2, “Decline Is a New Suburban Reality,” reviews the large body of literature on North American suburbs and seeks to identify early indications of decline, given the wealth, growth, and expansion that was predominant in the majority of suburban developments. Not surprisingly, some signs of decline already had been noted in classical studies by authors such as Kenneth Jackson, Robert Fishman, and Mark Baldassare. Chapter 3 presents a carefully drawn definition of the subject and the methodology for investigation. According to Hanlon, inner-ring suburbs comprise suburban places that are situated adjacent to central cities and that are governed by autonomous political bodies. Census place-based data assessment and GIS application assist Hanlon in identifying a detailed selection of suburban places, comprising a total of 1,765 suburbs in 1980 and 1,944 in 2000. The core findings of her study are presented in the following five chapters (4–8), emphasizing different dimensions and key factors of suburban decline. The most important factors driving suburban decline are housing markets, new suburban demographics (e.g., with respect to immigration, but also pointing toward racial and ethnic discrimination), and postindustrial labor market restructuring. Last but not least, metropolitan fragmentation and associated impacts come into play, such as fiscal discrimination or exclusionary zoning.

A typology of suburban places, in which some of the results are bound together, unfolds in different types of declining inner-ring suburbs—namely *élite*, *middle-class*, *vulnerable*, and *ethnic* inner-ring suburbs. The diverse middle-class type and the declining vulnerable (often old-industrial, working-class) type of inner-ring suburbs represent the two most important cases, comprising 35 and 47 percent of the sample, respectively.

Overall, 13 percent of the inner-ring suburbs investigated by Hanlon are characterized as being “in crisis”; levels of poverty have significantly increased in these areas between 1980 and 2000, and affluence has been shifting from inner to outer suburbs. Against this background, Chapter 9 explores key opportunities for “fixing inner-ring suburbs,” and considers a selection of measures that could be undertaken at the national, state, and regional levels in order to stabilize declining suburbs and to improve local conditions (affordable housing, growth management, and so on). However, the author notes that one can hardly assume that specific policies have been developed for assisting inner-ring

suburbs as of yet. Chapter 10, which concludes the book, summarizes the major findings and raises some issues for future research as well. The author calls for doing more differentiated research on suburbs, rather than extending the large body of suburban stereotypes and clichés. She also points to new functions of the U.S. suburbs, such as gateways for metropolitan immigration. An appendix on methodological issues is also added.

Once the American Dream is an extremely welcome addition to the existing stock of literature on the suburbs. Moreover, it offers a new understanding of the contemporary role and status of U.S. suburbs (namely of those older, pre- and post-war suburbs that are experiencing decline), which has scarcely been addressed before. The volume has quite an extensive empirical basis and is very well written. In just under 200 pages, it concisely presents dense and carefully developed content. In the context of suburban decline, it may become as classical a contribution to the literature as some of previous works that had emphasized the rise of the suburbs.

The study of suburbs—declining, in stagnation, still rising—is also part of *Cities and Suburbs*, co-authored by Bernadette Hanlon, John Rennie Short, and Thomas Vicino, which addresses the broader issues of metropolitan change in the United States. The book examines the current demographic and socio-economic processes in central cities and their suburban areas, and the related extent of decline and renewal at different places within metropolitan space. It thus nicely adds to the focus of Hanlon's volume on inner-ring suburbs and puts suburbanization within the context of larger metropolitan transformation processes. This context is characterized by several elements that underline the authors' argument about new metropolitan realities in North America: (1) the fragmented patterns of local jurisdictions and associated politics of separation and fragmented land use; (2) the postindustrial economies based on services and information technologies, emerging in downtowns as well as in edge and edgeless cities; (3) the heterogeneous and segregated urban, suburban, and exurban communities; and (4) the new (sub)urban forms, particularly those characterized by inequality, with affluent enclaves and boomburbs on the one hand, and declining suburbs and suburban poverty on the other.

A short introduction familiarizes the reader with the authors' basic propositions, pointing out ongoing processes of urban transformation and the evolving new metropolitan landscapes. The main body of the book comprises 12 chapters and is organized into four parts. Part I—"The Rise of the Metropolis"—offers a brief history of urban and suburban development, certainly repeating issues that can be found in many other volumes and textbooks on the topic. The second and third chapters, however, appear quite instructive in terms of historicizing the subject (suburbs, newer metro areas), and thus better relate suburban and metropolitan developments to their origins in the transformation of the industrial city. Part II includes Chapters 5–7, which lay out the properties of the metro region in more detail, making particular reference to spatial patterns, diversity, and immigration. According to the authors, the period between the 1940s and the 1980s can be considered the time of suburban shift. Metropolitan patterns have evolved since then, being characterized by a much higher degree of diversification, gentrification, and immigration, as well as by serious policy struggles. Growth and decline tend to be situated in close proximity. Three major cycles of investment (downtown, selected inner-city areas, favored suburbs) and also disinvestment (older, inner-ring suburbs) are driving the processes of *metropolitanization*. The new metropolitan model is sketched out by making reference to statistical definitions and to key settlement forms. This section also unfolds another typology for analyzing suburban areas, distinguishing *poor*, *manufacturing*, *Black*, and *immigrant* suburbs.

Part III, which includes Chapters 8 and 9, assesses suburban developments by introducing the term "suburban gothic," which exemplifies suburban decline. Gothic refers to the shady side of the suburbs, the grotesque or desolate, as for example portrayed in such movies as David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* or the television series *Desperate Housewives*. Crisis can be detected in terms of externalities of sprawl and also with respect to specific vulnerabilities of the suburbs (housing devaluation or poverty concentration, for example).

Part IV comprises two chapters that address policy challenges and the potential for developing a metropolitan strategy for growth management and environmental sustainability, taking stock of the very particular properties of suburban areas examined in the previous chapters. A short section on “projects and trajectories” concludes the book, mainly pointing at generic policy options to be undertaken at different levels; it also gives a brief overview of the new urban policies pursued by the Obama Administration.

Cities and Suburbs provides quite welcome, up-to-date insights into the state of American suburbs in metropolitan contexts, based on current literature and most recent research findings. The format of the book is highly accessible. Each chapter is accompanied by a list of references for further reading and an illustrative case study. This makes it quite useful for teaching purposes as well.¹ However, a few more words on economic structural changes and on the locational preferences (and significance) of certain services and industries would have been useful—particularly because the suburban economy extends far beyond the office and retail sectors. Blue-collar activities are still under way in such areas, both in the remaining manufacturing suburbs as well as in today’s commercial areas (which are packed with extensive land uses such as wholesale, warehousing and logistics, and light manufacturing). Also the book appears somewhat undecided in terms of whether it covers the metropolitan space as a whole or is focusing on the particular role of the suburbs within this context. Judging from its content, *Suburbs in Cities* might have been an even more precise title for the volume. However, these are only minor caveats that do not call into question the overall value of this contribution, which is highly recommended.

¹Readers who are interested in these issues in more detail may find additional information in several recent journal papers published by the authors.