

Suburbocentrics leave behind concern for city

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The column written by Jean Slaughter Doty for this page, "Love Suburbia or leave it alone," recently was beautiful.

Mrs. Doty, author, housewife and mother in a Connecticut suburb, aptly described the problem of growth, both planned but more commonly unplanned, that has taken place in American suburbs and which has too often destroyed the advantages that these places initially offered.

She speaks about the increased taxes for necessarily increased services of water, sewers, and school; the bored children and housewives; the general decline of natural life, including geese and ducks. Mrs. Doty's concluding statements nicely summarized her views, views held by many others in the suburbs, that suburbia has changed "... and it is you (the recently arrived, former city dwellers) who changed it. And now will you please roll up your fancy roads, go away, and leave us alone."

The points made by Mrs. Doty make her sound like an arrogant, selfish, self-seeking, snobbish individual who has erected a wall, either visible or invisible, around her turf, and because of good fortune or inheritance, does not want anyone to disturb her tranquil life and surroundings. I am sure that she is not that kind of person, but she certainly reflects the ideas of many of her compatriots who "escaped" the problems of the city only to find that suburbia isn't the utopia they thought it would be.

I sympathize with Mrs. Doty because I live in the city, and we have our problems, but rather than take the negative view that she expresses, I would like to suggest a possible answer that would make life better for the both of us, whether we choose to live in the suburbs or the city.

My experience with suburbocentrics is that by leaving our urban centers, they also leave behind any interest in the city and any hope for its future. But more importantly, these city escapers also leave behind any kind of financial commitment for the improvement of the city. Even though many derive their livelihoods from these centers, use its streets and police protection, take advantage of its free museums, concerts, parks and other activities, they have little, if any, sense of

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obligation to the city. Yet former President Johnson wisely referred to the city as the heart of our society, a society which will be great only if its cities are great.

My answer for Mrs. Doty and the numerous other suburbanites who hold similar views is to work for the betterment of our cities. If they would take an interest in the improvement of our cities, work for it, invest their time and energy in it, and convince their legislators to appropriate money for this improvement then, perhaps, in conjunction with those of us who live in them, we could improve our urban centers.

*We in the city
are trying to cope
with racial diversity**

Then our cities could be beautiful and attractive places to visit, could be clean, could have less crime and better schools, and could facilitate the flow of traffic by placing greater reliance on mass transit, rather than having suburbanites come in and congest our streets with their couldn't-exist-without-them, energy wasting monsters.

The point I am making is that too many Americans have taken the easy way out, by literally moving out of our central cities. Most recent census data for the past four years again indicate that our major cities are still losing population to the suburbs.

The 1970 census revealed, for the first time, that more Americans live in the suburbs than in our central cities. But it is this very type of movement which has generated the problems of which Mrs. Doty speaks and which has left behind deserted any dying cities.

As one who has experienced the joy of European city living, I can tell you that cities are our hope for the future. They tell us who we are. Right now the future of the American city is very much in doubt. Lacking funds, partly because of too little governmental help but primarily because higher income groups have left, the city is increasingly becoming the depository of the poor, the old, and the minorities.

Incidentally, Mrs. Doty, you did not mention our black population which you suburbanites have generally managed to exclude from your tranquil world. At least we in the city are trying to cope with racial diversity and learning from the experience. I am appalled at the number of suburban students who come to our urban colleges and universities and, through no fault of their own, have never spoken to blacks and do not understand the richness of that culture, nor that of the other urban ethnic groups which make our American society so rich.

Let us end on a positive note Mrs. Doty, rather than the one you expressed. Let people such as yourself in the suburbs and myself in the city work for the betterment of our cities. With this improvement, those of us in the city will then not want to leave for the suburbs. We will be happy with what the city has to offer, perhaps even attract people from the suburbs to live here, and again make cities the vital part of the economic and cultural fabric of our society. And you Mrs. Doty, can have your ducks, bees, fresh air, trees, and clear streams.

Working together, we of the city and you of the suburbs can have the best of both possible worlds. You can come to visit and enjoy the life of the city and we, in turn, can visit and relish the peace and solitude of the countryside, rather than the tacky, box-like structures which sprawl, engulf, and destroy our beautiful rural lands.