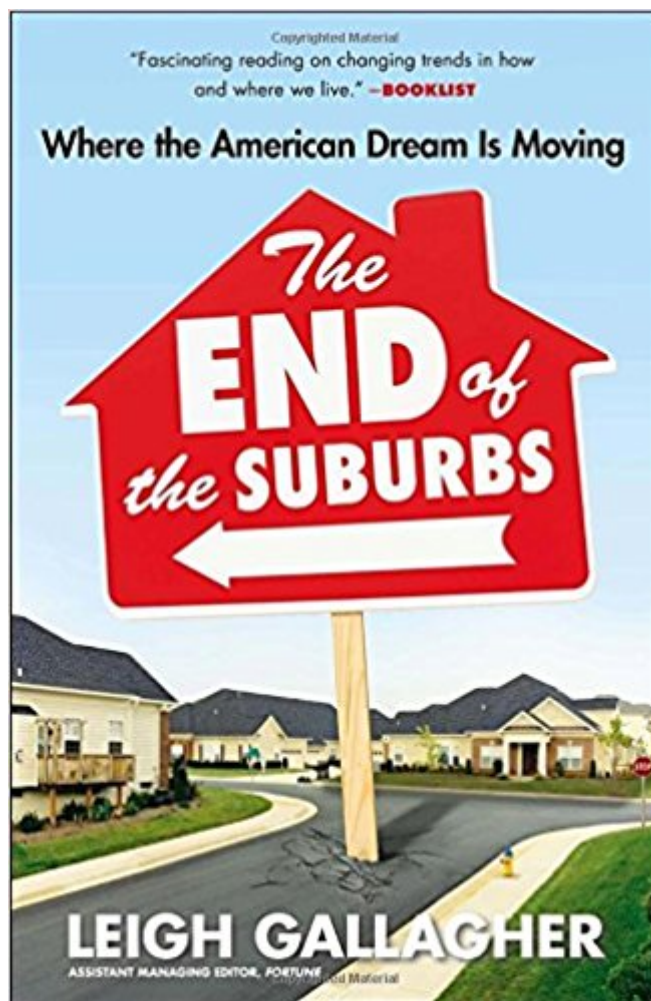


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The End Of The Suburbs: Where The American Dream Is Moving



Synopsis

“The government in the past created one American Dream at the expense of almost all others: the dream of a house, a lawn, a picket fence, two children, and a car. But there is no single American Dream anymore. For nearly 70 years, the suburbs were as American as apple pie. As the middle class ballooned and single-family homes and cars became more affordable, we flocked to pre-fabricated communities in the suburbs, a place where open air and solitude offered a retreat from our dense, polluted cities. Before long, success became synonymous with a private home in a bedroom community complete with a yard, a two-car garage and a commute to the office, and subdivisions quickly blanketed our landscape. But in recent years things have started to change. An epic housing crisis revealed existing problems with this unique pattern of development, while the steady pull of long-simmering economic, societal and demographic forces has culminated in a Perfect Storm that has led to a profound shift in the way we desire to live. In *The End of the Suburbs* journalist Leigh Gallagher traces the rise and fall of American suburbia from the stately railroad suburbs that sprung up outside American cities in the 19th and early 20th centuries to current-day sprawling exurbs where residents spend as much as four hours each day commuting. Along the way she shows why suburbia was unsustainable from the start and explores the hundreds of new, alternative communities that are springing up around the country and promise to reshape our way of life for the better. Not all suburbs are going to vanish, of course, but Gallagher’s research and reporting show the trends are undeniable. Consider some of the forces at work:

- The nuclear family is no more: Our marriage and birth rates are steadily declining, while the single-person households are on the rise. Thus, the good schools and family-friendly lifestyle the suburbs promised are increasingly unnecessary.
- We want out of our cars: As the price of oil continues to rise, the hours long commutes forced on us by sprawl have become unaffordable for many. Meanwhile, today’s younger generation has expressed a perplexing indifference toward cars and driving. Both shifts have fueled demand for denser, pedestrian-friendly communities.
- Cities are booming. Once abandoned by the wealthy, cities are experiencing a renaissance, especially among younger generations and families with young children. At the same time, suburbs across the country have had to confront never-before-seen rates of poverty and crime.

Blending powerful data with vivid on the ground reporting, Gallagher introduces us to a fascinating cast of characters, including the charismatic leader of the anti-sprawl movement; a mild-mannered Minnesotan who quit his job to convince the world that the suburbs are a financial Ponzi scheme; and the disaffected residents of suburbia, like

the teacher whose punishing commute entailed leaving home at 4 a.m. and sleeping under her desk in her classroom. Along the way, she explains why understanding the shifts taking place is imperative to any discussion about the future of our housing landscape and of our society itself—and why that future will bring us stronger, healthier, happier and more diverse communities for everyone.

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Customer Reviews

While the baby boomers helped fortify the notion of the suburban single-family house as the American dream, the millennials are headed in another direction, according to Fortune writer Gallagher. The recession, rising fuel prices, and demographic shifts that mean smaller families and fewer and later marriages are contributing to a decline in the appeal of the suburbs. Gallagher talked to homebuilders, developers, planners, transportation engineers, architects, psychologists, and home buyers and sellers in cities and suburbs to offer a fascinating portrait of housing and lifestyle trends. She examines how the American dream came to be tied to the suburbs even as they are lambasted in popular culture and by social scientists and, lately, planners and engineers. New Urbanists argue that the suburb is an unsustainable model because the low-density population doesn't generate enough tax base to support it, unless it sprawls. Gallagher points to research and analysis showing rising populations in urban areas and suburbs who adapt the ideals of green living and walkable communities. Fascinating reading on changing trends in how and where we live. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“This book is a steel fist in a velvet glove. Beneath Leigh Gallagher’s smooth, elegant prose there is a methodical smashing of the suburban paradigm. When all is done, a few shards remain—but only because she is scrupulously fair. This story of rise and ruin avoids the usual storm of statistics nor is it a tale told with apocalyptic glee. *The End of the Suburbs* is the most convincing book yet on the lifestyle changes coming to our immediate future.”

• Andres Duany, founding partner of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company and co-author of *Suburban Nation*

“The book is loaded with fascinating detail wrapped in a vivid story Gallagher creates from behind the scenes of America’s greatest promotion: the suburbs.”

• Meredith Whitney, author, *Fate of the States: The New Geography of American Prosperity* and founder, Meredith Whitney Advisory Group

“Leigh Gallagher asks all the right questions and comes up with surprising conclusions in this sweeping discussion of the future of the suburb. Spoiler alert - it’s a bleak future for the burbs, but don’t panic: Gallagher foretells a new world order where the conveniences of the urban lifestyle rewire our understanding of the American Dream. You’ll never look at a cul-de-sac the same way again after you enjoy this book, which is simultaneously entertaining and informative, breezy and analytical.”

• Spencer Rascoff, CEO, Zillow

“The End of the Suburbs is a compelling, insightful must-read on what author Leigh Gallagher calls the ‘slow-burning revolution’ re-mapping the shape of America and its future. Her masterfully-argued case springs to life with both impressive research and empathetic portraits of those seduced and often betrayed by suburbia’s promise of a more livable life. Now, where’s my moving truck? Oh, right. Stuck in commuter traffic.”

• Linda Keenan, author and resident of *Suburgatory*

“No one knows how American residential preferences will change in the 21st century. But Leigh Gallagher’s well-researched and provocative *The End of the Suburbs* makes a persuasive argument that is difficult to refute. Required reading for anyone interested in the future of the United States.”

• Kenneth T. Jackson, professor of history, Columbia University and author of the prize-winning *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*

“I couldn’t put this book down. My readers often ask me, ‘What will happen to suburbia once we’ve all right-sized our homes and communities?’ Leigh Gallagher provides the data that I’ve been looking for, and makes the powerful assertion that our suburbs are permanently changing, not because of the Great Recession, but because of new attitudes about where and how we want to live—which is great news, both for the near

term, and for generations to come." — Sarah Susanka, the author of *The Not So Big House* series, *The Not So Big Life: Making Room for What Really Matters*. "The end of Suburbia is timely and important. We should hope it is prophetic, because Leigh Gallagher shows suburbs as we know them are unsafe for our species." — Eric Klinenberg, Professor of Sociology at New York University and author of *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone* "Through compelling expert interviews, data and trends analysis, Leigh affirms the notion that we've hit 'peak burb.' This book presents a strong case for America's increasing preference for higher density lifestyles and the resulting trend to manage our lives via the information highway, not the paved kind!" — Scott W. Griffith, former chairman and CEO, Zipcar "Have you ever wondered whether the Great Recession will halt the process of gentrification in major American cities? Or what will happen to the empty suburban sprawl that is the result of the housing boom and bust? Or how most of us will live in a world where oil is expensive? Leigh Gallagher's crisp, entertaining, and fact-filled new book answers these questions and many more." — Bethany McLean, coauthor, *The Smartest Guys in the Room* and *All the Devils are Here: The Hidden History of the Financial Crisis*

A very interesting book. It prompts the reader to critically think about the different stories that are told--on many occasions I found myself pausing and thinking how the scenario suggested has played out, or may play out, in my own community. I thought a lot about what I, as an American, want from the house I just bought and whether or not Ms. Gallagher had correctly judged my generation's desires from my own perspective. That being said, Ms. Gallagher is a resident of the country's most urban environment and may not necessarily be well placed to pass judgement on the types of communities she has clearly personally rejected as "good." The most interesting parts were the discussion how we got here and some of the challenges presented for the future by the current housing stock. The introduction to New Urbanism was also very interesting, as I'm familiar with, but could never name these distinct communities. I think the discussion around future drivers of change in housing demand lacked much support, however. We get a massive amount of detail around the creation of suburban communities thanks to GM-inspired futurism, how they no longer encourage "neighborliness" because there are less children around, and how their street designs discourage human contact while encouraging traffic accidents etc etc. But besides these "negative" innate characteristics of suburban communities (which are likely considered positives when viewed differently by many of the residents of these homes), the author doesn't really suggest more than one reason why everyone will be abandoning them which she strongly suggests will happen. That

one reason? Gas prices. This seems like an massive over-simplification. There was no discussion of the major technological changes happening to automobiles at this very moment. Gas prices are likely to be much less important to consumers 20 years from now than they are today. Even more critically, the author does not mention the massive technological revolution that has changed how many, many people work. The requirement to actually go and sit in a physical office day in and day out is on the decline in most every industry. Cheap telephony and the rise of the internet enable people to stay in communication wherever they are and fewer and fewer people are making the trek into the office each day. Additionally, many of these offices are no longer in the urban core as companies move closer to where their employees live. This will expand, rather than contract, some people's choices on housing. I was really quite surprised at the omission. Sometimes key data or perspectives appear to be left out because they would conflict with the author's overall message and personal opinion. Finally, I was disappointed that there was no discussion on what's next for suburbs other than to suggest that farther flung ones will be abandoned and will turn into ghettos. This is not terribly helpful. If the author believes that the suburbs do not provide the housing stock people of the future will want, I'd love to hear ways people have for transforming the already built environment into something that WILL be what people want. There is limited amounts of land around metropolitan areas and most of it has been developed. And much of it is suburban housing stock. These homes cannot be just discarded if people want to avoid all this driving, as the author suggests they do. It is likewise not possible to simply bulldoze them and re-zone the land. Homes in these communities will remain desirable because of where they are located particularly in pricey coastal cities, even if the community's character is not people would design today. So what can we do to revitalize these places for the future Ms. Gallagher? I recommend this--it seems to have some missing pieces--but it made me think a lot before I would agree or disagree with each premise proffered. That is the sign of a good book.

Leigh Gallagher's *The End of the Suburbs* is a detailed account of the rise and fall of America's love and consumption of comfortable, car-dependent suburban living. Starting as far back as ancient Egypt, Gallagher tells us, rich high society types sought the quiet and comfort of the countryside. This, presumably, was the first suburb. The first half of the book is an interesting account of the rise of traditional American suburbs and its continuing factors. Mainly the post war population boom, mass produced building materials, and the beginning of America's obsession with the automobile. Then, predictably, the author takes us through the housing boom of the 90s and 2000s, setting us up for the fall we have all experienced: The perfect storm of rising gas prices, overproduction, and

questionable investment practices that created the housing crisis and largest recession since the great depression. It is from this point, that Gallagher begins detailing recent changes in the housing market (driven mainly by the changing tastes of millennials). People of this age are now renting, buying smaller homes, and placing a premium on a more walkable and social way of life. The term Urbanism or "New Urbanism" is used over and over again. I have had very little exposure to the term, but not being a novice to the principals of city planning it's not hard to understand the concept. Urbanism we are told, is a return to traditional methods of designing homes, cities, and neighborhoods. Where residents are live where they work and walk to and from both. It's a focus on a more communal way of life. It has home builders scared to death and young couples frothing at the mouth. I can't disagree too much with the author's account. My wife and I are in the process of selling a suburban property we purchased in 2005 and moving closer to downtown in a small, comfy home. When my realtor asked what I'm looking for in a new house, the top on my list were something more walkable and near friends. But this is my experience and after listening to the authors description of these new urbanists it's hard not to come to the conclusion that the migration back to city centers is really only for yuppies and the well-to-do. Indeed, it's hard not to roll your eyes when you hear the author describe one couple who moved from an affluent suburban neighborhood in Mass to a "fixer-upper" in Cambridge. The father is so excited that he can ride his bike to Google (where he works) and the wife can walk right around the street to Whole Foods. When the author speaks to her, she's in her car (which is likely not your dad's Pontiac) and is so embarrassed that she was caught driving. The book also details the tastes and clothes of other such "urbanists." Toward the end, it's a little hard to take. The larger issue to me, and one that wasn't addressed sufficiently, is if this new urban reset is going to leave the majority of America behind. It's not like the suburbs will be empty. The thing that made the suburban movement profound in the first place was that it was that the homes were accessible to nearly anyone. How can the new urban renewal be just as impactful if the only people who move there are the young and wealthy?

I thought I was pretty knowledgeable about this topic since I'm a real estate agent focused on urban properties and I see the movement of people from the suburbs into the city, but there was a lot of information in this book that I didn't know. It was very readable and well researched, it's like reading a New York Times feature article -- very enjoyable and interesting!

The writer makes market trends and demographics shifts entertaining to read. What more could you

ask for? I have lived in rural and urban areas, but I really thought I knew something about suburban life since it's so prominent in pop culture. Oh, boy, there's a lot I didn't understand about the suburban experience and how it's changing! I gulped this book down and am recommending it to everyone I know involved in policy. There's a counterintuitive epiphany on every page. Read it on the Kindle and might buy it in paperback to let people borrow it.

Really enjoyed this book. Helped that the author lived minutes from where I grew up so I was very familiar with her tome. Unfortunately I am now living in the exurbs as she describes but at least I know I'm not as alone in this as I thought I was. Hopefully she will write another book about how to escape this type of living that I feel trapped in. She was so right with so many statements that my husband has told me were in my mind. I'm leaving this type of life, with or without him. Exurbs of nothing lead to nothing and to me are pointless. Still wondering why I wasted a fortune going to a top university to marry and end up here. DH isn't from here. This happened by fluke.

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