

Toward New Suburbs:

How Superblocks Became the Paradigm for Unsustainable and Exclusionary Development and How to Retrofit Them

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Preface

The best place to view the ruins of San Diego's alternative future is on the chain-linked pedestrian overpass that spans across Interstate 5 at Balboa Stadium. Underfoot are tens of thousands of motorists inching northbound toward the city's new downtown: University City and Sorrento Valley, the once-exurban neighborhoods that straddle Interstate 805 at its juncture with the San Diego Freeway.

The 5, crawling with bumper-to-bumper traffic, is the site of the Olmsted Brothers' trampled dreams. Commissioned by the city government in 1910 to design the Panama-California exposition, the famed landscape architects — builders of the park systems in Cleveland, Portland, and Seattle — were out of the job in less than a year, fired by the exposition's executive committee for proposing a location in Balboa Park that didn't serve its moneyed interests.

The Olmsted Brothers had planned to place the exposition on the future path of Interstate 5, right where it makes an S-turn around downtown. The location would have utilized the park's existing topography and left much of the park untouched. Instead, the executive committee moved the site to a massive plot in the center of the park, a decision that would set the the tone for the 20th century San Diego to come: white-collar speculation — even on prized municipal park land — and the white flight suburbanization that often comes along with it.

City boosters didn't invent the model for speculatively desecrating natural space and then preserving the remaining land that was spared from development. They were merely keeping with the Progressive Era trend, a trend deceptively called the Garden City movement. It had a number of prominent devotees, but none were as impactful as Clarence S. Stein.

As a city planner, architect, and developer, Stein believed the calamities of urban living in the early 20th century urban environment — overcrowding, disease, vehicular congestion — could be ameliorated by building self-contained communities surrounded by greenbelts. It was a modern vision for idyllic and sustainable living. His first professional assignment was drafting plans for the Panama-California Exposition at the new Balboa Park site; this appointment seeded his interest in city planning and building, but his later Garden City designs put in practice never came close to proving the theory.

Stein's most consequential design was at Radburn in Fairlawn, New Jersey, 15 miles east of New York City. Unshackled from the urban gridiron, he developed an entirely new town on farmland, designing his own streets, housing, and infrastructure. He thus established the paradigm for the 20th century suburban development. That paradigm is known as the superblock and its impacts are still being felt today through dual, intertwined catastrophes: climate change and social exclusion.

The superblock has no formal definition, but it generally characterized as a larger version of the traditional block, the foundational urban form recognizable to all. Integral to the superblock design is a hierarchal street use. Access roads within the superblock feed into bounding arterial roads, which then lead to highways and so on. Regular city blocks, on the other hands, typically fit within the existing and often uniform street grid.

Stein's superblock accommodated the automobile in every way imaginable. There simply was no other way to enter or leave

the suburban superblock. And he created the superblock at the same time that the government, as part of New Deal economic relief, started subsidizing suburbanization in a discriminatory manner. The Radburn model was duplicated innumerable times throughout the United States. The damage Stein's example has wrought is incalculable.

Despite being conceived nearly 100 years ago, the superblock is unfortunately still inflicting damage. We know manmade climate change is the greatest issue of our time, and yet policymakers still allow sprawling, exclusionary development. We also know spatial segregation and economic discrimination is one of American society's greatest scourges, and yet we do little to reverse course. I offer a proposal to address both afflictions.

Part One charts the history of the Garden City ideology, from its Progressive Era roots to Stein's professional rise. Part Two examines Stein's superblock and its pernicious social effects that are still felt today. Here I also summarize international examples of superblocks, especially the reimagined model in Barcelona. In Part Three I provide a five-step toolkit that cities can use to "undo" their superblocks. Densifying urban areas and expanding public transit are key to mitigating climate change, but if we are to make a serious dent in the amount of greenhouse gas emissions we expel, we must retrofit the suburban superblock.

Finally, in Part Four, I apply the toolkit to the Fairmount Park neighborhood in San Diego to exemplify my contention: the suburban superblock that Stein pioneered is untenable in a world in which we know the source and effects of climate change and spatial and socioeconomic exclusion.

Had San Diego allowed the Olmsted Brothers to proceed with their exposition plans, Stein's architectural firm would not have been hired and perhaps Stein never would have conceived of the American superblock. But then it would have been some other inventor. The Garden City movement was an indomitable

ideology, and someone else would have picked up the mantle. What is known for certain is that Stein and San Diego are inextricably linked. It is not just because he drafted plans for the iconic California Tower, and that the central plaza in Balboa Park sparked his initial interest in town building. It is also because the suburbs sprawling north of Mission Valley and east of Interstate 15 owe their existence to him. To reverse the effects of climate change and social exclusion that these suburbs encapsulate, the superblocks that forms their geographic imprint must be wholly reimagined and reengineered.

Introduction

As if laughing at the rest of the country, postbellum San Francisco flourished in a time of great human strife. Disconnected politically from the ravages of the Civil War and economically from the pains of Reconstruction, the city emerged in the years following the discovery of gold in 1848 as an anomalous, modern powerhouse. Through its gold and silver rushes, extensive railroad development, and bustling port, the city firmly established itself as the de facto capital of the West.

Southern California, on the other hand, could not have been more unlike the Bay Area. As late as 1880, the southern (or “Cow”) counties — those south of the Tehachapis — possessed just 7.5 percent of California’s population.¹ The terrain was mostly inaccessible desert and coastal grasslands. The economy was singular: the rancho-based livestock industry dominated with eight million acres of Southern Californian land owned by just 800 grantees.² The oil and citrus industries, the fuel that ignited modern development of the Los Angeles basin, were both still fledgling enterprises still working out the kinks.

Moreover, Southern California, like the eastern United States, was embroiled in disaster. The worst drought of the 19th century scorched the grasslands and killed cattle by the millions between 1862 and 1864. The fabled rancho economy, on which

1. Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Reprint, Layton: Gibbs Smith, 2010), 20.

2. McWilliams, *Southern California*, 61.

many of the region's idyllic, sun-drenched myths are based, was gutted. Unfamiliar with the Americans' imported system of land taxation, and staring modern bankruptcy in the face, the Spanish dons were forced to sell off their legendary land holdings.³

As the Southland smoldered, San Francisco continued to thrive. Most notably, Leland Stanford, namesake of the prestigious university, was building the great Central Pacific Railroad with his "Big Four" associates⁴ — when not busy serving his own interests as governor and U.S. senator.

Amassing fortunes was not exclusive to robber barons and mine operators. As social commentator and writer Carey McWilliams put it, "the gold produced was not valuable ... But gold production is the incomparable stimulant to trade and business and industry. It is the very best economic pump-primer."⁵ Many forgettable businessmen, from manufacturers to farmers, accrued substantial wealth (although the revered miner hardly prospered from his labor).

Many newly wealthy San Franciscans saw opportunity amid the economic ruin in the Southern California. James Irvine, a small-time grocer drawn to San Francisco by the original gold rush, parlayed his produce profits in real estate to become a wealthy investor. When drought-stricken rancheros in the south had to sell off their holdings, Irvine purchased over 100,000 acres — about a third of present-day Orange County.⁶ You can honor his legacy today by buying a multi-million McMansion in the master-planned community that bears his name.

Alonzo Horton was yet another middling merchant who, if not for a famous real estate transaction, would be unknown to posterity. The eponym of the failed shopping center and park-

3. McWilliams, *Southern California*, 62.

4. The "Big Four" included Stanford, Collis Huntington, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins.

5. Carey McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949), 34-35.

6. "About Irvine," The James Irvine Foundation, accessed January 27, 2019, <https://www.irvine.org/about/history>.

cum-oasis for the homeless, Horton bought “New Town” San Diego, or what is known today as Downtown, in 1867 with the profits from his furniture business.

Old Town, on a bluff five miles north of “Horton’s Addition,” was long the economic and social center of San Diego. For generations, the indigenous Kumeyaay people called it home, wisely avoiding the fickle floodplain near the harbor. Usurped by Junipero Serra in the 18th century, Old Town is where the marauding priest established the first of his famous missions along the El Camino Real.

Whether the native people or the Spanish Franciscans, the inhabitants of Old Town knew what the colonizing white man refused to accept: that the natural harbor — today the deepwater San Diego Bay — was treacherously shallow, with shoals shifting seasonally and unpredictably. To allow reliable passage and support modern economic trade, the bay would need to be tamed and dredged, a grand endeavor only possible through federal investment and only economically feasible with a supporting railway that connected to points north and east.⁷

New Town first flopped in the late 1850s, when federal and corporate investments failed to materialize in the face of the burgeoning Civil War. Despite the failure, Horton was as bullish on New Town San Diego as William Heath Davis, its original Anglo investor. In fact, Horton was the only bidder for Davis’s holdings, securing a land deal for 26 cents an acre.⁸

Soon after, Horton began speculatively reselling his subdivided New Town holdings based on yet another scheme to bring a major rail connection to San Diego — this despite repeated laments from engineers that San Diego was an inaccessible *cul-de-sac* due to its rugged backcountry. Inevitably, the bubble

7. Mike Davis, Kelly Mayhew, and Jim Miller, *Under the Perfect Sun: The San Diego Tourists Never See* (New York: The New Press, 2003), 22-25.

8. Davis, Mayhew and Miller, *Under the Perfect Sun*, 25. It was a better deal than the infamous transfer of Manhattan in 1626 from the native Lenape people to Dutch colonists.

created by Horton burst, leading him in 1881 to foreclose on some of his most valuable properties. By the end of the century Horton, poor and out of power, sold his last holding to the nascent city government.⁹

Rail-and-land booms and busts, fueled mostly by speculators selling to speculators, persisted for nearly 50 years following Horton's New Town acquisition. In 1880, San Diego's population stood at just 2,637. 40,000 people came to the city seven years later amid one of its booms. In the succeeding bust, 24,000 residents fled.¹⁰ Such was the cycle for decades. Its population in 1910 was smaller than it was in 1887.

Two concurrent developments — one economic, one cultural — led San Diego to finally becoming an economically viable city in its own right. First, Congressman William Kettner, namesake of one of Little Italy's commercial corridors, led an expansive marketing campaign throughout the 1910s to attract the military, the city's first sustainable industry. Initially rebuffed by Admiral George Dewey, hero of the Spanish-American War and by then a leading naval strategist, the city's ruling class focused on feting other key senior officials and impressionable military officers. Colonel Joseph Pendleton was welcomed into the local elite while he was stationed at the rudimentary North Island military base. Franklin D. Roosevelt, then the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, visited the city as part of an official delegation. Even military wives were accepted into the most exclusive social clubs.

Further, the city offered some of its prime real estate to the U.S. government in exchange for federal investment. Land that today houses the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Liberty Station, Naval Medical Center San Diego, and Naval Base San Diego were all eventually ceded to the federal government in exchange for developing the bay

9. Davis, Mayhew, and Miller, *Under the Perfect Sun*, 28.

10. Davis, Mayhew, and Miller, *Under the Perfect Sun*, 27.

for modern use and guaranteeing future federal spending in the region.

The efforts worked. Kettner wore down Dewey and, with the admiral's support, pried open the federal purse strings. In 1919, San Diego was awarded a Pacific fleet, with all the federal expenditure and consumer purchasing power it entailed. The city's real estate interests finally had a stabilizing market (much to the dismay of enlisted sailors, who much preferred the welcoming and dynamic San Francisco over the conservative and stolid San Diego).¹¹

The second — and to the superblock, more important — event to San Diego's stability was the Panama-California Exposition. Opened on New Year's Day 1915 to coincide with the opening of the Panama Canal, it was the city's official coming out party to the rest of the country.

George Marston, once an employee of Alonzo Horton's and a city leader through his dry goods business, noticed that San Diego had in spades what rapidly-developing Los Angeles was squandering: relatively untouched natural beauty. Within the city government's real estate portfolio was, among other public treasures, 1,400 acres of land earmarked for a municipal park. City fathers sought to capitalize on their environmental riches. Marston, in effect, became the West's most consequential follower of the City Beautiful movement.¹²

Jane Jacobs, a famous critic of the City Beautiful, characterized the ideology as the City Monumental, where great cultural attractions were segregated from the everyday life (and needs) of the locals citizenry.¹³ The City Beautiful was also interwoven into the conception of the Garden City, an ideology built on self-contained communities insulated by greenbelts.

11. Davis, Mayhew, and Miller, *Under the Perfect Sun*, 43-48.

12. Davis, Mayhew, and Miller, *Under the Perfect Sun*, 31.

13. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 67, iPad.

Both ideologies, however, possessed a fetishization and an implicit commodification of the natural landscape within the built environment.

The early 20th century Progressive movement that swept across the country ushered in the idea that a decentralization of the urban environment — which at the time was predominately poor, immigrant, and diseased — benefited the middle-class quasi-utopian suburb. San Diego, by showing off its aesthetic wonder through the Panama-California Exposition, encapsulated this sentiment.

To lead the exposition effort, the city's Chamber of Commerce appointed Marston, who searched for famous designers to plan and construct the exposition in the 1,400-acre municipal crown jewel, recently renamed Balboa Park to honor the European who “discovered” San Diego. Marston first asked Daniel Burnham, the preeminent City Beautiful advocate from Chicago, but he declined the job, too busy for a commission from a little-known city of 39,000.

Marston instead hired the Olmsted Brothers, the next-most famous adherents to the City Beautiful. Sons of the man who built New York's Central Park, the Olmsteds started work on the Panama-California Exposition in late 1910.

In competition with San Francisco, which was planning its own “World Exposition” for the opening of the Panama Canal and developed up to that point almost entirely with Bay Area capital, San Diego wanted desperately to break the shackles of its in-state rival and differentiate its own exposition. It decided, then, to theme its Panama-California Exposition in the emergent Spanish Mission style, a romanticized nod to “the Franciscan padre praying at sundown in the Mission garden, lovely Ramona and brave Alessandro fleeing through the foothills of Mt.

San Jacinto, and the Old Spanish Don sunning himself in the courtyard of his rancho.”¹⁴

The Olmsted Brothers, exclusively landscape architects, brought on the appropriate expertise by hiring New York architect Bertram G. Goodhue, who specialized in the Spanish Colonial styles that were growing in popularity at the time. Together, the Olmsteds and Goodhue proposed an exposition plan that would have utilized the existing topography of the southeast corner of the park, just north of San Diego High School, which is today paved over by the 10 bustling lanes of Interstate 5.

The committee governing the exposition, controlled by business and real estate interests — most notably John D. Spreckels, the San Franciscan who financed much of the development in early 20th century San Diego — did not agree with the site proposal and conspired to undermine it. Spreckels and his associates controlled the limited electric street car system in the city and the undeveloped land near it. If the exposition was moved to a larger, more central location in the park, then there would be a clear (and preconceived) need to expand the street car network. Expanding the streetcar would then lead to development of the real estate holdings north and east of the park (in what is now the Mid-City area). Falsely claiming that there was a greater demand for exhibition space than anticipated, committee members started making the case for an exposition sited in the central mesa of Balboa Park.

The Olmsteds vociferously defended their proposal. Not just progeny but also disciples of their father, they steadfastly followed his belief that parks must be urban respites left in a rural state to achieve their primary and greatest purpose. Despite their protests, the exposition committee voted to move the site to the center of Balboa Park, thereby expanding the exposition’s footprint by five times and necessitating substantial

14. McWilliams, *Southern California*, 21.

development of untouched park land. The Olmsteds swiftly resigned their commission.

Marston, the Olmsteds' original patron, also resigned from the exposition committee after submitting one of the few votes against moving the site. The City Beautiful idea that seeded the exposition in the first place, and that brought these characters together, was indeed paying dividends, but not in cultural enrichment. Instead, the natural state of San Diego was being used to line the pockets of the ruling class. As a popular saying at the time went, "we sold them the climate and threw the land in."¹⁵

For his part, Goodhue, a daydreaming urban planner in his free time, stayed on and relished the opportunity to leave a greater imprint on the San Diego landscape than originally planned. He now possessed near total free rein to put into practice many of his town-building theories and Mission Revival visions. Ultimately, he designed most of the central plaza in Balboa Park that exists to this day, including the iconic California Tower. Helping him develop these plans was a young, impressionable architect named Clarence S. Stein.

15. McWilliams, *Southern California*, 101.

Part One: Progressivism & the Garden City

The Great Recession of the late 2000s has nothing on America's first Great Depression, a twenty-three-year economic morass lasting from 1873 to 1896. But like the Tea Party during President Obama's tenure, a rural populism bubbled up and took hold in the late 1800s. Dispirited with the excesses and inequalities of the Gilded Age, the populist movement eventually excited urbanites as an avenue for addressing many of society's ills. By the turn of the 20th century, the Progressive movement exploded into the popular consciousness.

Based on a reformist ethic that sought to claw society back from the iron grips of industrial capitalism, as well as banish systemic cronyism from the bureaucratic ranks, the Progressive movement brought about some of the country's most fabled social, economic, and political achievements.

Women won their place in the franchise, Teddy Roosevelt became the Trust Buster, universal public education proliferated, and labor unions ensconced themselves into the economic fabric of the country. These enduring accomplishments can be attributed in large part to the urban middle class that, perhaps feeling the walls closing in on its place in society, rejected en masse the feeding hand of the ruling class. (Much to the chagrin of Marx, who believed lasting social revolution must be carried out by the truly aggrieved — the proletariat — and not by the benevolent bourgeois.)

More than a political or electoral movement, Progressivism was an all-encompassing ideology that influenced every aspect of American life. Just as consequential as other reforms, although much less newsworthy, a scientific mindset toward solving society's and democracy's problems was rabidly adopted. Breakthroughs in technology, medicine, engineering, and a range of other fields all contributed to the magnetism of objective problem solving. As business leaders harnessed these developments to build ever more wealth — Ford's assembly line was brought to life at the height of Progressivism's popularity — reformists attempted to bring about Good Government.

Nowhere was this truer than in New York City, whose Tammany Hall machine typified the crony control of government that Progressives railed against.¹⁶ One group of reform-minded public employees, founders of the city's Bureau of Municipal Research, developed the first line-item budget system utilized by any government in the United States. This was designed to end the lump-sum payments, beloved by Tammany Hall, that were awarded to various municipal departments. The previous corrupted system allowed public employees to disburse the funds to political patrons, friends, and pet projects with impunity.¹⁷

The same group that founded the Bureau of Municipal Research also founded the Training School for Public Service, the first educational institution dedicated to training people for moral and ethical governmental service. Among its first enrollees was a recent Oxford graduate who just completed a thesis on reforming the American civil service toward transparency, accountability, and merit. It did not take long for Robert Moses, who went on to become the infamous and omnipresent architect of modern New York City, to find his footing within government employment.

16. Headed in its heyday by the corrupt "Boss" Tweed, Tammany Hall, initially a fraternal organization, was the New York Democratic Party's mechanism for maintaining political power from the 1850s until roughly World War II.

17. Robert Caro, *The Power Broker* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 59-62.

The Power Broker

Moses' attraction toward a Progressive ideology is instructive of both the movement itself and the 20th century American city. Concerning the former, Moses was born in 1888 to a well-to-do family. His father was a successful department store owner and real estate investor in New Haven, Connecticut. After moving the family to New York City in 1897, the senior Moses lived the rest of his days in retirement. In today's social structure, the Moses clan would be the epitome of the Democratic coastal elite.

In spite of, and in part due to, their wealth, the Moseses were the prime demographic for sympathizing with the Progressive movement: rich, white, and urban. Moses' mother, Bella, was a leader in New York's settlement movement, a philanthropic effort financed by uptowners to house and support the poor immigrants pouring into the city at the height of the Progressive Era. By 1915, there were 1.5 million Eastern European Jews in New York. Bella's involvement was no doubt inspired by her own German-Jewish ancestry. Unlike her peers, however, who thought their generous monetary donations were enough to satisfy their societal duty, Bella was engaged in day-to-day operations at settlement houses for decades.

Bob Moses inherited his mother's desire to do right by the public. After his undergraduate years at Yale, Moses started studies at Oxford in 1909. He fit in perfectly at the prestigious university, where for centuries "rich young men were sent ... as a preliminary to public life and who, from positions in Parliament or the civil service or the learned professions, actually did ... govern Britain and its vast territories overseas."¹⁸ His doctoral thesis on reforming civil service focused in part on abolishing the spoils system in the American federal government.

18. Caro, *The Power Broker*, 49.

Moses went on to radically alter New York's physical form through often undemocratic, sometimes illegal, and always opaque methods, but his upbringing and early intellectual bias encapsulated the well-off urbanites' attraction to Progressivism. Good governance, civil rights, and an end to suffering could be brought on by transparency, sacrifice, and academic rigor.

Of course, the Progressive movement pushed an agenda rooted in the working class's demands. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911 led to a rise in women's unionism and in reforms to workplace conditions and building standards. But as in 2016, the upper classes during the Progressive Era reasserted their rule by disingenuously adopting the populist ideology of the day. New York's urban elite felt they knew better. Bella Moses's beloved settlement houses often featured programs to "Americanize" the European immigrants, to "clean them up [and] dust them off."¹⁹ The language is softer than the rhetoric spewed today about Latin American immigrants, but the sentiment is the same.

As such, settlement houses were not serendipitous creations or practical housing solutions for the millions of impoverished new Americans. Instead, they were mechanisms of control, both socially and spatially. Their proliferation as proto-public housing influenced the designers — Bella's son included — of the sprawling 20th century cities to come.

The American City

Along with good governance, a newfound infatuation with science coursed through the Progressive ideology. Discoveries and technological advancements in a range of fields led many at the time to turn to science to solve many of society's ills. Under the banner of the Efficiency Movement, or Taylorism, Progressives believed scientific management and technocratic

19. Caro, *The Power Broker*, 31.

interventions could eliminate waste and improve performance in both social and physical systems. The line-item budget was a product of this ideology.

But perhaps nowhere was this thinking more pervasive, and more necessary, than in medicine, biology, and chemistry. For centuries, city dwellers fended off and suffered many deadly ailments endemic to urban environments: smallpox, typhoid, malaria, yellow fever, and tuberculosis. Cholera may have been most feared due to the painful death that inevitably came to the infected.²⁰ Many of New York's new inhabitants either suffered these diseases upon arrival or were susceptible to them in the squalid tenements they squeezed into in lower Manhattan.

Marx illuminates these urban physical struggles. His letters to contemporaries in 1857-8 were littered with references to his "liver disease" that made it difficult to sit comfortably, let alone write, from his destitute home in London. In his time, nearly all discomfort in the torso was sourced to the liver.²¹ There was nothing more accurate, especially for the impoverished, than general, amateur self-diagnoses.

The life sciences in the United States were no better. Southern California, due to its constant sunshine and moderate climate, quickly became a magnet for the indigent and invalid upon Anglo colonization in the 1860s. In 1869, Los Angeles claimed it did not have the resources to care for its scores of "climate tourists," and by the 1880s the San Gabriel foothills were ground zero for the medically hopeless. The "moist, warm, enervating climate of Southern California, instead of making real sanitariums," noted one Denver newspaperman in 1885, "makes simply soothing death-beds for those who are beyond recovery."²²

20. Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), XXXVIII.

21. Sven-Eric Liedman, *A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx* (London: Verso, 2018), 342.

22. McWilliams, *Southern California*, 99-100.

Encouraged by advances in the late 19th century, like Louis Pasteur's research into thermal processing in the 1880s, which exactly preceded the rise of the Progressive movement, Progressives and their influential contemporaries believed urban diseases could be managed and vanquished with efficient and scientific methods. Notably, the Carnegie Foundation was founded in 1906 and soon began donating to university-associated medical schools. In the 1910s, the Mayo Clinic modernized and grew to power.

To be sure, there was a discriminatory underside to the scientific revolution taking place. Most grotesquely, eugenics seeped its way into the popular discourse. The Nazis used their extreme interpretation of the field to justify their genocidal practices, but eugenics also held sway over some of America's most revered thought leaders. W.E.B DuBois advocated for a subset of eugenic beliefs and was a proponent of Margaret Sanger's Negro Project, a birth control initiative to cleanse African-Americans of the qualities that were perceived to consign them to a life of poverty.²³

With exploding populations — the Great Migration of southern African-Americans paralleled by the influx of European immigrants — cities throughout the Progressive Era struggled, or failed to even try, to build commensurate civic and physical infrastructure. Philanthropists like Bella Moses funded and staffed settlement houses in New York to compensate for the public and private lack of investment in adequate housing and social services. Urban destitution only intensified with the onset of the modern Great Depression in 1929.

But the lack of public investment was not a bug of the era; indeed, it was a feature of the system. Progressives espousing Good Governance and a focus on welfare tried to achieve those

23. "Birth Control or Race Control? Sanger and the Negro Project," *The Margaret Sanger Papers Project*, Newsletter #28 (Fall 2001), https://www.nyu.edu/projects/sanger/articles/bc_or_race_control.php.

goals through efficiency and economy, and not through public investment.²⁴ Later, President Hoover — tellingly, an engineer by trade — convinced himself during the 20th century’s Great Depression that good spirits and hard work would pull the country out of economic catastrophe.²⁵

It is no coincidence, then, that Robert Moses started dreaming of his parkways and suburban enclaves while New York sagged from its swelling Black and European populations. An obsession with urban disease, a growing reliance on automobiles, the emergent City Beautiful and Garden City movements, and an unwillingness to invest public resources in non-white neighborhoods all converged during the Progressive Era to lead place-makers to fantasize about the deconstruction of the city.

Fittingly, the discovery of penicillin in 1929 occurred at the same time as the “tower in the park” became the urban paradigm. “The introduction of sun, space, and green,” architecture historian Richard Plunz notes, “was to foil the incubation of both moral and physiological germs.”²⁶

Moses’s designs epitomized that doctrine, but he should not bear the brunt alone for laying the groundwork for the sprawling 20th century American city. Many urban planners and designers were working at the time, albeit more subtly, to implement these Progressive beliefs. As Moses was preparing for his appointment to the Long Island State Parks Commission, his entree into formal power, one architect in particular was getting started on his first major project in newly-suburbanizing Queens, a project not nearly as recognizable as any of Moses’s most famous examples, but certainly as insidious.

Clarence S. Stein

24. Caro, *The Power Broker*, 327.

25. Nick Taylor *American Made: The Enduring Legacy of the WPA: When FDR Put the Nation to Work* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2008), 8-9.

26. Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City*, XXXVIII.

Clarence S. (“C.S.”) Stein’s similarity to Moses’s is striking. Both were born in the 1880’s into upwardly-mobile Jewish families that moved to New York City prior to the turn of the century. Both leaned into the Progressive movement during their formative years (in fact, Stein worked at settlement houses just as Moses’s mother had), and both studied at prestigious universities that groomed the era’s intellectual leaders — Yale and Oxford for Moses, Columbia and the École des Beaux Arts for Stein.

But whereas Moses lusted for power, Stein undertook finer, more intellectual pursuits. At a young age he admired the Arts and Crafts movement, which sought to move away from the cold industrialism forced onto the unwitting urban masses. As its name implies, the Arts and Craft movement idealized the craftsman’s handiwork and connection with pastoral lands. Initially derided, the architectural style lives on in single-family neighborhoods across Southern California, the last redoubts against modern West Coast urbanism.²⁷

Stein coupled his architectural curiosity with observant walks through the Lower East Side’s tenements. All at once he was enlivened by its urbanity, dejected by its poverty, and encouraged by the few community amenities, like Hamilton Fish Park, available to the European immigrants. He was studying the built environment, as well digesting the inhabitants’ relationship to it. While Stein was among the proletariat, he was not of them: his family could afford to finance his six-year sojourn in Paris to study at the École.

Stein honed his design sensibilities at the famed design and architecture school by critiquing Paris’s housing stock. A smug intellect-in-training, he was unimpressed by the seemingly monotonous rows of buildings placed flush with the roadways. On the other hand, he looked upon the city’s egalitarian parks

27. Kristin E. Larsen, *Community Architect: The Life and Vision of Clarence S. Stein* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 34-35.

with an approving gaze. Likewise, Stein praised the City Beautiful (or, to Jacobs, the City Monumental) movement underway across the pond. Grand cultural landmarks, like Paris’s parks, were breaking ground in many of America’s great cities²⁸. Stein found his greatest inspiration, however, in Bournville, England, a company town just south of industrial Birmingham.

A master-planned village for workingmen, Bournville was one of the first bedroom communities, this despite the automobile not yet claiming its dominance — a light-rail system connected workers to the Cadbury plants in Birmingham. Keeping with Progressive ideals, Stein was most excited by the town’s land use. Bournville housed almost 3,000 people in multifamily apartments, yet most homes had a front yard garden and the streets were broad and tree-lined. To Stein, “Bournville is like a park” where people lived close to the land, keeping with his early Arts and Crafts inclinations.²⁹

With dreams of park-like, “model” towns, Stein graduated from the École in 1911 — the same year as the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory tragedy (which compelled Stein to join the Progressives ranks advocating for better building and housing standards) — and returned to the United States at the age of 29. He then fatefully took employment at the architecture firm of Cram, Goodhue, & Ferguson.

Bertram Goodhue

Bertram Goodhue was considered a master at combining the traditional with the modern in his designs, especially when taking on projects incorporating regional elements. The Spanish Colonial Revival style, increasingly in vogue as Anglo colonization of the American Southwest became entrenched, emerged as

28. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 39-40.

29. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 44.

Goodhue's forte; this expertise provided the impetus for his selection by the San Diego's Panama-California Exposition Board of Commissioners as lead architect for the exposition.

Stein started his work for Goodhue just as the latter was given nearly free rein over the exposition's designs following the Olmsted Brothers' resignation. Goodhue cared little for the classical tradition in which Stein studied at the *École*. The symmetry, decoration, and hierarchy of use that characterized the *Beaux Arts* bored and confined him. Further, San Francisco's competing exposition to commemorate the opening of the Panama Canal was to be designed in the *Beaux Arts* (marked by the grandly-named Tower of Jewels and the Palace of Fine Arts).³⁰ San Diego sought to differentiate itself by adopting the Spanish Revival style.

Still, Stein's experience sketching buildings in Churriguere, a Spanish style that incorporated similar baroque and rococo characteristics as *Beaux Arts*, was useful to Goodhue. By 1913, Stein was lead draftsman for the design of the California Tower, the centerpiece of the exposition and what is today San Diego's defining architectural landmark.

Stein's visions for city planning (and the eventual "superblock" design) can be sourced to his to his work for the exposition. In Paris, he adored the streetscape; in San Diego, he was able to articulate that sentiment. In an essay reflecting on the firm's designs, Stein opined that the famous plazas of Venice and Rome were imitated too often without proper context. Goodhue's innovative approach to constructing buildings in relation to one another to create a more welcoming atmosphere — an early example of human-centered design — stood in contrast to the grandiosity and maximalism of the classical styles. "We need ... the more intimate side of city planning," Stein wrote, "the

30. Gregory Montes, "Balboa Park, 1909-1911: The Rise and Fall of the Olmsted Plan," *San Diego Historical Society Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1982). <https://sandieghistory.org/journal/1982/january/balboapark/>.

byways with their little shops, the occasional drinking fountain at a street corner, the glimpse of some secluded garden through a half-open gate.”³¹

If San Diego inspired the vision, then Goodhue’s contract with Tyrone, New Mexico, a tiny mining town, provided Stein the technical expertise to implement his later designs.

Following the opening of the San Diego Exposition, Goodhue put Stein in charge of creating the model town the Phelps-Dodge Corporation needed to house its miners in Tyrone. Following the trend toward modernism that pervaded at the time, Stein dispensed with whatever classical influence remained. Indeed, Goodhue was repulsed by the California Tower’s ostentation by the time work began in earnest in New Mexico.

To Stein, Tyrone was a dusty Bournville, a company town completely and perfectly constructed from scratch. In the desert, as in England, wide welcoming boulevards connected community amenities and points of interest, and multifamily housing of various scale was clustered on narrower side streets. The only thing Stein resented about Tyrone — ironically for someone who was quickly becoming infatuated with centralized town planning — was the paternalistic control the company wielded.³²

Managing his firm’s work in New Mexico exposed Stein to many facets essential to centralized town planning: land use, construction materials, labor costs and considerations, and financing. Crucially, it was at Tyrone where Stein learned how to build quality workforce housing at a price that still provided its investors a profit. It is doubtless that without this experience there would be no American superblook.

31. C. S. Stein, “A Triumph of the Spanish-Colonial Style” in *The Architecture and the Gardens*, ed. Winslow, 10–18.

32. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 52-54.

The Garden City

Stein's evolution through his life and career is clear. An early curiosity in the built environment and people's relationship with it led him to study architecture in the classical style at the École des Beaux Arts. This formal training influenced his early designs, but he gradually shifted toward the modern. (The Bauhaus, emerging as an intellectual force not long after work at San Diego and Tyrone completed, was no doubt an influence on all practitioners at the time.) Undergirding his work were the Progressive Era ideals of efficiency, economy, and equality. But a full understanding of Stein's philosophy is absent without considering the Garden City.

Conceived by the British stenographer Ebenezer Howard, the Garden City became a massively influential urban planning ideology in America during the Progressive Era. There were many different interpretations of the Garden City — Stein fine-tuned his own as his career progressed, eventually morphing the idea into the 'Regional City' — but the central tenet was constant: self-contained, healthful communities buffered by greenbelts, beyond which other self-contained communities existed in similar repose. Any community amenity and service — housing, shopping, and educational and recreational facilities, among others — were all supposed to be accessible, affordable, and connected to the residents who participated in civil self-governance.³³

If it sounds utopian, that's because Howard believed Garden Cities should have been.³⁴ Like Progressives across the Atlantic, Howard was disgusted by the industrial cities of the late-1800s. Indeed, as a Brit Howard saw firsthand Manchester's devolution into the world's first industrial city (famously documented by

33. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 18.

34. Sarah Laskow, "These Utopian City Maps Have Influenced Urban Planners for Over a Century," *Slate*, December 12, 2016, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2016/12/ebenezer-howard-s-utopian-city-maps-have-been-influencing-urban-planners-for-over-a-century.html>.

Friedrich Engels, Marx's closest associate, in *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*). Considering the human suffering and exploitation endemic to such urban environments, it is little wonder how offering fresh air and green space, accompanied by cooperative socioeconomics, attracted Progressive Era urban planners and architects.

For his part, Stein was a wholehearted and lifelong advocate of the Garden City. Even as governments shifted toward urban renewal and redevelopment post-World War II — a time characterized by publicly subsidized slum clearance and white-flight suburbanization — Stein remained faithful to the waning movement and called for “complete communities” rebranded as the Regional City.

Like Manchester, though, the Garden City was no match for capitalism. As early as 1909 — just 10 years after Howard initially wrote about the concept, and well before it gained popularity in the United States — the Garden City movement was bastardized as political and economic realities set in. First to go were Howard's bias toward communistic elements. Namely, cooperative land control proved untenable in an economy in which land is commodified. Raymond Unwin, an ardent Garden City booster, acknowledged this conundrum, believing adherents should focus more narrowly on low-density, efficient housing to maintain affordability.³⁵

The ideology faltered in the United States, as well. Forest Hills Gardens in Queens, one of the first Garden City-like developments in America, quickly rebrand itself after completion as a “high-class suburban residential community” — hardly an affordable utopia for the working-class masses. Further, Garden City advocacy organizations folded and town

35. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 20.

plans, some of which Stein was tangentially involved in, never left the drawing board.³⁶

The core fallacy of the Garden City is the very idea on which it is based: the deconstruction of the urban environment. Disease, poverty, and overcrowding compelled Howard to imagine a more healthy, just, and sustainable community model, which should be commended; but two things become inevitable when implementing the Garden City concept.

First, capitalism is unfortunately inescapable. Among other “radical” economic elements, Howard believed land in the Garden City should be controlled by a collectively-owned trust, but this model (which has many proponents in the affordable housing sector today) is, again, fundamentally at odds with a marketplace in which land and real estate is commoditized. A prospective Garden City in Howard’s conception would have to compete for land, either developed or vacant, on price. It hardly needs to be discussed why this complicates a pure Garden City model. This reality bedeviled those in the Garden City movement, which is why supporters like Unwin and those in America, including Stein, pivoted to more viable economic frameworks.

One innovation that Stein relentlessly advocated to sidestep the economic barriers was public-private partnerships. To realize the Garden City dream, governments could provide financing and regulatory flexibility, while private organizations contributed their efficient and economical building practices, as well as their urban design visions. This model is one of the Garden City movement’s lasting contributions to American society. With the federal government eliminating almost all of its direct investment in public housing in the 1980s, the public-private partnership is today the predominant model for constructing subsidized affordable housing.

36. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 21.

Stein was also a pioneer in the “limited dividend housing” model, in which investors financed home construction, usually for the working- and middle-classes, and were guaranteed a small dividend in return, typically in the high-single digits. This struck a balance between purely philanthropic housing, such as that with settlement houses, and market rate housing, which can return 10-20 percent on investment. The viability of the model is based on economical building practices and effective property management. Stein used the limited dividend model to finance his superblocks, discussed later.

Intertwined with capitalism’s influence, the second inevitability is the relentless march toward suburbanization that the Garden City movement help bring about. The Garden City is itself a suburb, and boosters acknowledged that, but this was hardly viewed as a drawback. By isolating towns behind greenbelts, Howard and his acolytes believed they were magnifying the positive aspects of urban life — proximity and vibrancy — and mitigating the negative — disease and poverty. Blinded by their vision of a network of towns connected by rail, however, they failed to see the age of the automobile on the horizon.

For better or worse, the gasoline-powered automobile is the defining technology of the 20th century.³⁷ Simply put, it impacted and still impacts every aspect of life, with the Garden City no exception. Indeed, its boosters made a Faustian pact with the automobile. In exchange for access to middle- and working-class consumers and cheap land, Garden City planners accommodated the automobile in their designs. Howard’s cheap railways to the workplace and sister cities were abandoned. In their place came parkways and garages. The environmental calamity wrought by this development pattern cannot be understated. However, this was only a minor hiccup to Garden City proponents and, again,

37. Sadly, the battery-powered motor lost out to the gasoline-powered engine early in the 20th century. We’re still trying to make up for it.

they sought ways to overcome a barrier, in this case runaway suburbanization.

In the absence of communitarian land control, and to prevent new suburbs from leapfrogging each other, Stein believed American government should adopt comprehensive planning to guide the development of a network of Garden or Regional Cities. This approach was “needed to guide efficient decentralization of the largest metropolitan populations into a healthful arrangement of Regional Cities.”³⁸ Today’s political conservatives would have a conniption over that sentiment, but to Stein it was the only way to put into practice the Garden City ideology beyond just one-off experiments.

In Stein’s perfect world, the state would build and improve roads, distribute requisite utilities, and locate and disperse (after survey and assessment) Regional Cities to serve as self-contained communities. This was naive but not entirely misguided. After all, the New Deal stood up a Greenbelt Town program, which developed the namesake town of Greenbelt, Maryland, today a fully-functioning, self-governing suburb of Washington, D.C. The federal and state governments also, in a fractionalized manner, subsidized the suburbanization of America. Roads and mortgages were guaranteed by the government. Much to the dismay of Stein, government action stopped short of dictating land use, at least in the cooperative planning sense.

Conceptually, the Garden City was the epitome of Progressivism. It represented spatially what the ideology represented politically and socially. Open space promised to alleviate the medical suffering of the masses. Good design offered affordable homes. And connectivity, both geographically and economically, ensured financial security.

Practically, the Garden City has become a scourge. It established the development paradigm of the 20th century American city,

38. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 24.

consecrating environmentally unsustainable suburbanism in the popular psyche. It also enabled the spatial and socioeconomic segregation that plagues many of America's political and civic systems. Parkways dreamed up in the Progressive Era funneled people out of the city, sure, but it also entrenched racism and sequestered wealth in the nodes that were to serve as nominal Garden City.

Clarence Stein and his contemporaries, wittingly or not, helped unleash the twin catastrophes — economic inequality and climate change — that today's younger generations must act expeditiously to reverse. This can be done by reengineering the superblock, Stein's most lasting and consequential design, in the same way that he reengineered the American city.

Part Two: The Superblock

Clarence Stein's designs are easy to vilify in the climate change era, but his politics and intent were nearly unimpeachable. He accurately predicted an extreme housing shortage following the end of World War I, when hundreds of thousands of American troops would be pouring back into cities, so he consistently advocated for policy changes commensurate with the impending demand. Focused on housing condition, availability, and affordability, some of his many proposed reforms included rent controls, coordinated state planning, increased public subsidies and financing, and improved building codes. He also pushed the usual Progressive belief in efficient and economical building processes and techniques.³⁹

Stein's views on socioeconomics and urban life following World War I would be well-received in 21st-century California. His comprehensive approach to providing the masses with quality and plentiful affordable housing is reflective of the approach adopted by the country's most populous state. Just as there should be tenant protections, there should be incentives for developers. Just as government should ensure the most vulnerable are provided housing opportunities, developers should be allowed to efficiently build housing to meet the demands of the marketplace.

39. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 61-71.

Unfortunately, Stein faced the same impediments to implementing such a vision that are present today. Fiscal conservatives fought tooth-and-nail to prevent government largesse, libertarians believed government should stay out of land use decisions, and people across the ideological spectrum were concerned with the racial composition of future towns and housing projects. It is easy to see, the, why Stein compromised on his purest Garden City vision.

Stein knew that left unchecked the Garden City would devolve into a bastardized marketing gimmick, at best, and a socio-spatial calamity, at worst. His vision for his limited dividend company, founded in 1923 as the City Housing Corporation (CHC), adhered to “large-scale development techniques, street design based on intensity of adjacent land uses, recapture of increasing land values to benefit the entire community, cooperative ownership and/or management, and the establishment of a greenbelt to restrict sprawling growth.”⁴⁰

Stein was both retrospective and prescient in worrying about suburban sprawl. In *New Towns For America*, his classic treatise on his life’s work, Stein pointed out that early attempts at providing quality affordable housing “had been tempted, by planners’ delight in spacious elaboration, into becoming middle-class suburbs.”⁴¹ No doubt he had Forest Hills Gardens in Queens in mind.

But Stein’s belief that his ideology would win the day was naive. His vision of comprehensive, tightly-controlled town building relied on nuanced and technical policies that were mostly politically impractical. His advocacy was herculean yet also Sisyphean. Posterity remembers Stein, but people today live in the uncoordinated, unsustainable sprawl built by thousands of forgotten speculators.

40. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 73.

41. Clarence S. Stein, “Toward New Towns for America,” *The Town Planning Review* 20, no. 3 (October 1949): 206.

Stein himself eventually had to face the music. In two of his most notable designs — Sunnyside Gardens and especially Radburn — he succumbed to economic and political realities. When writing about the latter, he flatly notes, “[it] had to accept the role of the suburb.”⁴² It was also at Radburn where the superblock found its first American expression.

Sunnyside Gardens

In response to the post-war influx of GIs, New York City’s municipal government offered tax exemptions to developers as an incentive to build much-needed housing. In the absence of a coordinated city planning initiative, speculators bought up huge amount of land in the outer boroughs and littered what was once grasslands with, in Stein’s view, shoddy row homes.⁴³

Sunnyside Gardens, CHC’s first development, was to be the antithesis of such development. Sited on 77 acres of land in Queens, it was to prove the Garden City model, as well as garner Stein the experience to develop the Garden City of his dreams at a more appropriate site at a later time. Sunnyside represented the “possibility of preserving open space for natural green, for recreation, for healthful living, and for more spacious and beautiful living; without additional cost.”⁴⁴

This was achieved not by purchasing additional land to serve as a buffer, but rather through optimizing construction around the perimeter of the city block, thus maintaining open space in the block center. Eventually replicated on seven contiguous city blocks, Sunnyside would have been the first superblock if not for two significant hurdles, both of which were beyond Stein’s control.

42. Stein, “Toward New Towns for America,” 222.

43. Stein, “Toward New Towns for America,” 205.

44. Stein, “Toward New Towns for America,” 206.

First, escalating construction costs forced CHC to start development immediately upon purchasing the site. This frustrated Stein's inclination to observe and assess prior to designing, let alone building, but he had no choice. Construction costs almost double in the ten years between 1914 and 1924, and developers were racing against time to avoid even higher future costs.⁴⁵ They were also racing each other to buy up increasingly expensive undeveloped land. CHC closed on its property in February 1924. Construction started in April. Stein simply did not have time to conceive a proper Garden City.

Second, the city's Engineer's Office refused to let CHC consolidate the street grid by closing off existing and underutilized roads. A railway forming the property's northern edge resulted in a series of useless dead ends, which offended both Stein's Garden City philosophy and his Progressive ideology. The typical street grid was economically inefficient, CHC argued to no avail. Better land use and better living were possible if only the narrow, public streets were converted into private park land.⁴⁶

CHC forged ahead, despite Stein realizing Sunnyside would be no true Garden City, turning the property into a test case, an experiment. On the seven blocks which CHC had at its disposal, it built four different configurations. But the prevalent design, and the core of Stein's Garden City vision, was dense housing, utilizing an efficient footprint and lining the block perimeter, that was turned inward toward a semiprivate courtyard. If the Sunnyside development could not be buffered by a greenbelt, then at least one could be installed in people's front yards.

To Stein and his acolytes, this created a most harmonious living arrangement. Lewis Mumford, a giant in the urban planning literature and famous proponent of the Garden City,

45. Stein, "Toward New Towns for America," 205.

46. Stein, "Toward New Towns for America," 208.

lived at Sunnyside for 11 years. The human scale of the design was as enjoyable as the greenery maintained by the residents.⁴⁷

Sunnyside was not just an urban oasis. It was a gold mine. As soon as they completed houses, CHC was able to fill them with buyers and renters. There was an insatiable demand for naturally affordable housing and efficient practices and Stein's designs allowed the company to bring that to market.

CHC was also lucky. The demand for housing naturally created demand for developable land. From the time the company purchased the property in 1924 to the time it finished construction in 1928, the value of the land on which Sunnyside sat more than tripled in value. CHC had no problem providing its investors the limited dividend inherent to its business model.

For all its charm and prosperity, Sunnyside was the prototype for the 20th-century revanchist suburb. Facing the homes toward a tranquil center was an innovation, but was that not also turning away from the public? Replacing redundant roads with parks would have in fact been a better land use, but would that not also be usurping the public right of way?

Stein attributed Sunnyside's success to seven factors: cheap land, proximity to public transit, continuous large-scale building, rapid development, standardized units, appropriate housing type grouping, and a limited interest rate. This sounds like a modern YIMBY's dream, but isn't this also the menu for establishing exclusionary suburbs?⁴⁸

Indeed, Stein, like most Progressives, extended equality only to those of the same white skin color. At a conference in 1927 put on for Garden City practitioners to discuss a range of issues relevant to their shared ideology, Stein refused to commit to racial integration at Sunnyside Gardens. On the right side of history, one camp believed African-Americans should be allowed

47. Stein, "Toward New Towns for America," 212

48. YIMBY, short for 'yes in my backyard,' is the antithesis to NIMBY, or 'not in my backyard.' YIMBYs advocate for pro-growth and inclusive housing policies.

residence at CHC's development. Others disagreed, citing financial uncertainty if blacks were granted residency. Stein, unfortunately, took no hard position, stating one way or the other it was up to CHC — not the community organization supposed to be governing each Garden City — to establish the policy, before construction began, that worked best for the development.⁴⁹ At Sunnyside, where CHC apparently forgot to consider black ownership and tenancy during the abbreviated planning stage, that meant no people of color.

Along with his elusiveness on discrimination, Stein was an unforgiving capitalist as a business owner with his livelihood at stake. The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 blighted Sunnyside, in Stein's view, and financially gutted his company. When Sunnyside homeowners organized and went on a mortgage strike, Stein offered resigned condescension. "Their attack was aimed at [CHC]. In this they were wrong," Stein wrote, "no matter how just might be their resentment."⁵⁰

CHC merely administered the mortgages as an agent for the lending institution, Stein tried to explain, but the swine filling his perfect housing could not possibly understand. The conflict, he believed, "ended the most constructive development of community life. Sunnyside has never regained its sense of unity as a neighborhood."⁵¹

As disappointed as Stein was, at both its limited Garden City nature and its residents, certain aspects of Sunnyside should be commended. Namely, Stein minimized the role of the automobile. By siting Sunnyside near transit and wanting to eliminate unnecessary roads, he foresaw the development necessary in the 21st-century to combat climate change and optimize land use on expensive real property.

49. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 86.

50. Stein, "Toward New Towns for America," 217.

51. Stein, "Toward New Towns for America," 217.

But the development as a whole was merely prelude to Stein's massively consequential design at Radburn. There, he dismissed his concerns for the automobile's predominance. More than accommodated, the car became central to the "Radburn Idea". It was done so to perfect the superblock.

The Radburn Idea

Radburn, unlike Sunnyside Gardens, was intended to be a true Garden City in the vein of Ebenezer Howard's conception. Despite past Garden City failures and limitations, Stein still faithfully subscribed to "greenbelts, and towns of limited size planned for work as well as living."⁵² The prospective grand development was sited on two square miles in Fairlawn, New Jersey, 16 miles west of New York City.

In December 1927, as Sunnyside Gardens hurried toward completion, CHC general manager Herbert Emmerich sketched a "highly theoretical" residential neighborhood design that was free from vehicular traffic and congestion. Stein, enthused about the concept, excitedly remarked it will "doubtless be built some day when we tire of auto noises and risks!"

CHC officers must have had rousing conversations through the holidays because in January 1928, just a month after Emmerich's first draft, they proved Stein's premonition correct: the superblock was established as the design basis for Radburn.⁵³

The superblock has no formal definition, but it generally characterized as a larger version of the traditional block, the foundational urban form recognizable to all. Integral to the superblock design is a hierarchal street use. Access roads within the superblock feed into bounding arterial roads, which then lead

52. Stein, "Toward New Towns for America," 221.

53. Stein, "Toward New Towns for America," 221.

to highways and so on. Regular city blocks, on the other hands, typically fit within the existing and often uniform street grid.

This is what Stein hated about Sunnyside's layout. The city blocks existed because that is how the streets were gridded, regardless of their practicality or nearby limitations (the railway, in Sunnyside's case). He regarded this design as "obsolete as a fortified town wall".⁵⁴ If the city permitted it, superblocks that uprooted the street grid would have allowed Stein to place housing irrespective of existing topologies. He could have built interior access roads to meet the needs of the residents. Put another way, superblocks allowed the developer to build streets in context to housing, to make the street subservient to the design.

The impact of this design innovation is as material as it is philosophical. Radburn became both a place and an idea — the "Radburn Idea". At its core was the superblock, which is also realized both physically and mentally, and what became the paradigm for environmentally unsustainable and socially exclusionary suburban development. Radburn's superblocks are Stein's lasting contribution to society.

Of course, Stein believed it was the exact opposite. Radburn and the superblock would be the highest form of urban planning, liberating the masses from myriad urban afflictions. But for all his altruism and idealism, he was wrong. As I will presently discuss, the superblock has been an environmental and social catastrophe for three primary reasons.

Faux environmentalism

First and foremost, the environmental nature of Stein's superblock was a fiction. No less than Lewis Mumford acknowledged this before construction even began. CHC has "found an excellent site," he wrote about Radburn, "but the irony of it is, the site

54. Stein, "Toward New Towns for America," 223.

is excellent trucking land ... producing early spinach and other garden produce ... which should remain exactly in the state it now is!”⁵⁵

Mumford addressed a salient sticking point about the Garden City. How can it adhere to responsible land use and ecology when it must develop untouched or agricultural land? The devotion to greenbelts is a charade in a capitalist economy. Speculators and developers simply leapfrog each other, sprawling further away from vital urban centers, toward cheap land and the topographical and political paths of least resistance.

Stein lobbied throughout his career for governments to exert the power of the state on land use. He knew he needed government to coordinate the development of towns and the pattern of that development to realize the full Garden City vision. This was a political delusion, however, and at Radburn he once again folded on his greenbelt fantasies.

He blamed others for his not being able to achieve a true greenbelt. This “essential” element was sacrificed for other objectives, he rationalized, and what buffer he did incorporate was being encroached by undisciplined speculators building “badly conceived products”. In other words, there would have been a greenbelt if only developers didn’t do exactly what he did — buy up cheap land to build housing to make money. He consoled himself by finding comfort in the residents’ ability to at least enjoy the peaceful green at the center of the superblocks.⁵⁶

Moreover, Stein had to forgo building the industrial infrastructure he planned to support Radburn economically and to make it a self-sustaining community. Fairlawn’s railway connected to no useful points and the age of the automobile had fully arrived: the George Washington Bridge, connecting suburban New Jersey to New York City, was under construction

55. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 89.

56. Stein, “Toward New Towns for America,” 222.

and highways were being graded throughout the region. Again, Stein compromised on his Garden City visions. With the elimination of both the greenbelt and industry, Radburn was plainly a commuter suburb, a bedroom community.

His ideological aim was correct. Place middle-class jobs near decent, affordable housing and incorporate and surround it with greenery. That is exactly the goal of the contemporary YIMBY movement. Today's lack of affordable housing in urban job centers has pushed the middle- and working-classes further into suburbia. Unlike in 1928, however, there is no longer plentiful, cheap land. The suburbs for both Los Angeles and San Diego reach deep into fire-prone grasslands, as well into what was once barren desert. To the north, Sacramento, 75 miles northeast of San Francisco, is slowly becoming a commuter town for the Bay Area.

The ecological destruction, and the human toll wrought by wildfires and mega-commutes, is grotesque. Sadly, Stein modeled this development pattern, putting Garden City lipstick on an unsustainable pig. Further, his steadfast belief in greenbelts is entrenched in “slow growth” fanatics who fight more inclusive housing development patterns today.

At 6th and Olive Streets, just across the street from Balboa Park, San Diego's “crown jewel”, the relevant community planning group vociferously opposed a 20-story apartment building. Apparently, the “excessive” height would impose deleterious shadows on the park.⁵⁷ It is this kind of specious NIMBYism that led Newland Communities to propose a 2,100-home master planned community in the heart of San Diego County's so-called back country.⁵⁸ A Stein clone wittingly or not, the developer claims 62 percent of the tract will be preserved as open space and a majority of the homes will be affordable to the

57. Andrew Bowen, “St. Paul's Cathedral Puts Its Faith In A High Rise,” *KPBS*, January 25, 2019, <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2019/jan/25/st-pauls-cathedral-bankers-hill-6th-olive/>.

58. It ultimately received approval after a years-long legal quagmire.

local workforce.⁵⁹ (Never mind the hellish vehicular commutes to the Sorrento Valley or University City that the residents must endure to afford such homes.)

These are just two of 2018's notable development battles in San Diego, and there are countless others occurring throughout the country's major cities. Perhaps most asinine was San Francisco's Sierra Club chapter fighting to save an "historic" garage from housing development.⁶⁰ What the ossified Sierra Club (and Stein) do not understand is greenery and preservation, while providing tranquility to the privileged, do not prevent ecological calamity for the masses. On the contrary, Stein's fateful decision to turn the Garden City into a glorified suburb continues to undermine today's efforts to combat climate change.

Urban theorist Mike Davis underscores this sentiment. "The cornerstone of the low-carbon city, far more than any particular green design or technology," he writes in *Old Gods, New Enigmas*, "is the priority given to public affluence over private wealth." Stein's city is the polar opposite, and in fact we would need "several additional Earths ... to allow all of humanity to live in a suburban house with two cars and a lawn."⁶¹

If there is hope in combatting climate change, it rests on investing in the urban masses. It rests on "participating in the struggle for democratic control over urban space, capital flows, resource-sheds, and large-scale means of production."⁶² And it rests on reversing Stein's faux-environmentalism and ceasing replication of Radburn.

59. "Newland Sierra," <https://supportnewlandsierra.com>.

60. Andy Lynch, "The Sierra Club Fights To Save... A Parking Garage?" *Bay City Beacon*, April 25, 2017, https://www.thebaycitybeacon.com/politics/the-sierra-club-fights-to-save-a-parking-garage/article_93ff9084-3be7-11e7-a3a8-17f11f24db6e.html.

61. Mike Davis, *Old Gods, New Enigmas* (London: Verso, 2018), 217-218.

62. Mike Davis, *Old Gods, New Enigmas*, 219.

Impermeability

Stein lusted over control to build roads, which is why he loved superblocks. Placing Radburn on farmland allowed him to develop street patterns that accommodated his precious housing designs. He also argued eliminating the gridiron street grid is a safety measure, which is a credible claim.

In just 33 years, vehicle registration in the United States went from five cars in 1895 to over 21 million in 1928. The roadway, once the main thoroughfare for pedestrians and the main play area for children, was horribly clogged with vehicular traffic. Just as today, more people in 1928 were killed or injured in automobile accidents than in war. “Porches faced bedlams of motor thoroughways with blocked traffic, honking horns, [and] noxious gases,” Stein lamented, “Parked cars, hard grey roads, and garages replaced gardens.”⁶³

In the 1910s, when Stein took his first professional assignments, automobiles usurped the roadways that were once all-purpose public spaces. Progressives, at the height of their political influence, fought back against the encroaching automobile and demanded a slew of interventions including an installation of devices that automatically moderated speed.⁶⁴ In response, car manufacturers conducted an assault on the pedestrian way of life, eventually shaping and defining the modern flow of traffic: people using narrow sidewalks and crossing streets only at intersections. To codify this, manufacturers pushed jaywalking laws that still penalize people today.⁶⁵

63. Stein, “Toward New Towns for America,” 224.

64. A hundred years later, that technology is apparently feasible for alternative mobility solutions, like electric scooters — cities across the country are requiring them to automatically regulate speed in certain areas by employing geofencing — but not for personally-owned vehicles.

65. Joseph Stromberg, “The forgotten history of how automakers invented the crime of ‘jaywalking,’” last modified November 4, 2015, <https://www.vox.com/2015/1/15/7551873/jaywalking-history>.

Stein's own response, fully realized at Radburn, was two-pronged. First, he segregated land use between pedestrians and vehicles. Whereas people and cars shared the roads in the typical gridiron, they did not interact in Stein's designs. Residents' front yards were the semi-private gardens at the center of superblocks, which funneled people to walking paths that led to more traditional parks and other community amenities. He utilized underpasses and overpasses to ensure spatial separation persisted throughout Radburn, a design he modeled off of Central Park's separate thoroughfares for "carriages, horsemen, footmen, and transients."⁶⁶

Second, and more consequentially, Stein built roads for one use — driving — instead of roads to be used by all, as they were in older cities with standard gridirons. The encapsulation of this idea is the cul-de-sac. He did not invent the unique roadway — it was in use in Europe since the 18th century — but he certainly popularized it in America by incorporating it at Radburn, and since then it has been the design paradigm for suburban tract development.

The cul-de-sac may seem like a harmless design. After all, it "served in England for peacefulness and economy of roads and utilities" and its use at Radburn allowed Stein, by affording direct yet relaxed vehicular access, to have the "houses turned around".⁶⁷ It also serves a practical purpose to the developer. Cul-de-sacs are cheaper to build than street gridirons and because they do not allow through-traffic they often have lower standards for street width, curbs, and sidewalks.⁶⁸

But in fact, the cul-de-sac is the root of the superblock's social and spatial exclusion, or as urban design scholar Eric Charmes

66. Stein, "Toward New Towns for America," 227.

67. Stein, "Toward New Towns for America," 226.

68. Eran Ben-Joseph and Michael Southworth, *Streets and the Shaping of Towns and Cities* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2003), 30.

puts it, the “residential territorialization in the suburbs”.⁶⁹ Stein hated the gridiron not only for its constant vehicular traffic, but also for its streets acting like walls. Ironically, however, it is his cul-de-sacs and superblocks that are the paragon of what I call socio-spatial impermeability.

Research shows communities built in the environmental area model — or rather, the Garden City model — possess physical similarities to gated communities. Namely, they each make it impossible for people to pass through. Indeed, there is a marked decline in unplanned encounters, a key data points for social cohesion and cultural vibrancy, in “inward-focused enclaves” that have become the “the dominant planning and design model for residential suburbs”.⁷⁰

In this conception, cul-de-sacs, despite usually being public rights-of-way, are absorbed within an exclusive ownership model, becoming semi-private entities like the parking lots, staircases, and entranceways in a condominium.⁷¹ Again, this is based in their impermeability. People who do not live within the cul-de-sac have no reason to navigate it, let alone have any way to pass through it. Over time, this isolation is institutionalized, in a sense, in residential territorialization.

The social effected is compounded by the general inaccessibility of suburban superblocks. Stein cited Central Park as inspiration, but dense housing and public transit grew around the park, making it an egalitarian urban oasis. Radburn, on the other hand, offered no access to the masses besides via the automobile, and even then it was not welcoming. A visitor who wanted to “enter” Radburn needed to navigate from adjacent arterial roads to inner access lanes and then finally to cul-de-sacs. There was simply no

69. Eric Charmes, “Cul-de-sacs, Superblocks and Environmental Areas as Supports of Residential Territorialization,” *Journal of Urban Design* 15, no. 3: 357.

70. Charmes, “Cul-de-sacs, Superblocks and Environmental Areas as Supports of Residential Territorialization,” 357-358.

71. Charmes, “Cul-de-sacs, Superblocks and Environmental Areas as Supports of Residential Territorialization,” 359-360.

passing through Radburn. “Whereas in the traditional urban landscape the principal rooms [houses] open on to roads that are open to all,” Charmes points out, “in the superblock these rooms turn their backs on the roads that service their habitation.”

This configuration implicitly identifies who is supposed to be, or who is allowed, “in” the superblock, despite its Progressive origins, and established the spatially-based psychological exclusion that undergirded the 20th-century American suburb. This ideology naturally led to explicit forms of institutionalizing suburban segregation. In this regard, Radburn once again was a pioneer.

Social exclusion

Radburn is widely considered the incubator for the United States’ first government of “common interest development”. In other words, Stein invented the modern homeowners association (HOA) and its creation was not unreasonable. More than rounding out the semi-utopian aura of the superblock, homeowner associations maintained order and established centers of authority, both critical functions for what were intended to be self-contained communities. Suburban municipal governments in the 1920s either did not exist or were under-resourced fledglings.

Stein’s views on the associations, touched on earlier, cut both ways. At their best, they enlivened the community and sustained his developments’ appeal. At their worst, such as when the community group at Sunnyside Gardens organized a mortgage strike, they were misinformed annoyances that detracted from the goal of idyllic, modern living. But their contemporary impact pales in the comparison to the discriminatory legacy they left nearly a century years ago.

Quite simply, HOAs, along with federally-insured mortgages and development loans inaccessible to people of color, are one

of the original sins of spatial and socioeconomic segregation in modern America. But their racist history was neither secret nor accidental. In *The Color of Law*, a powerful survey of the government's history of systematic discrimination of non-Whites through housing, legal scholar Richard Rothstein charts the HOA's insidious past.

As far back as the 1800's, individuals houses were often deed-restricted to maintain white homeownership, but it was difficult for neighbors to enforce the deed once, say, a White family sold to a Black family. This is because the injured party, if there was one, was the original homeowner. The consent of a sale to a racial minority obviously invalidated this claim.

To maneuver around this legal sticking point, developers started deed-restricting entire developments at construction. To gain access as a homeowner, a prospective buyer had to pay into a community association, and that association's bylaws usually included a Whites-only clause. Thus, if a homeowner sold to a non-white, others in the association could credibly sue as an injured party.⁷² This practice existed in spite of the Supreme Court's 1917 decision in the *Buchanan v. Warley* case that outlawed racially-based zoning.

In 1948, the Supreme Court finally weighed in explicitly on the practices of HOAs and ruled that racially restrictive housing covenants are a violation of the post-Civil War 14th Amendment and cannot be legally enforced — but private interests devised ways around such barriers regardless. The most common, and one that still is employed today, is levying exorbitant HOA fees to exclude the less well-off, which are more likely to be people of color.

Urban theorist Mike Davis rails against HOAs in his seminal *City of Quartz*, a Marxist critique of Los Angeles. He traces the

72. Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: The Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017), 79

HOA's history from its establishing spatial segregation in early-20th century Southern California to its lead role in the 1970's tax revolt that gestated Proposition 13, the lightning rod of contemporary state politics. In an essay titled "The White Wall," Davis quotes a 1940s HOA leader: "If we can't enforce restrictive covenants in this area then pretty soon the whole Westside will be gone and be worth nothing for people of our class."⁷³ Of course, the Westside of Los Angeles has never been more exclusionary as it is today, and its property owners have never amassed such massive real estate fortunes.

It is true Stein himself was a Progressive — his designs always started with the goal of housing the working class, at least until financial realities emerged — but he was regrettably indecisive on racial exclusion. He ignored the issue at Sunnyside Gardens and at Radburn he let money talk.

"Realtors hired by CHC discouraged Jews — as well as blacks [sic] — from moving into Radburn," the community's first manager said, "a policy which met with approval or indifference from the town's financiers, administrators, and residents alike." He continued: "Shared values and experience, not economic and ethnic diversity, were considered important attributes for a smoothly functioning, attractive community."⁷⁴ A survey in 1934 of the town's residents revealed most were WASPs commuting to New York for middle-class, white-collar jobs.⁷⁵

This social exclusion was institutionalized in Radburn's homeowner association, which were able to establish the parameters for acceptance of new residents. Eric Charmes asks why such a development did not become more popular earlier, especially when Europe had co-ownership housing models as early as 1804.

73. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (London: Verso, 2006), 153-160.

74. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 86.

75. Larsen, *Community Architect*, 87.

One of his hypotheses, which I think is correct, is the unique semi-autonomous nature of the superblock, in which residents not only owned their home but also presided over shared communal space, necessitated a need for regulating the community.⁷⁶ Unlike with deed restrictions, the association had to protect both common and private property. Such a jurisdiction was obviously more easily governed when the community shared a common ideology, but that ideology came at the expense of others, of the public.

After assessing Radburn, I ask my own question: is it fair to blame Stein for today's spatial segregation and the environmentally unsustainable suburban living associated with it? After all, he meant to achieve the opposite. At the same time, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Superblocks today

Since Stein's landmark Radburn development, the superblock has proven to be a remarkably adaptable urban form. There seems to be as many interpretations of it as there are cities that have them. Sometimes the expression of the superblock is explicit. At others, it is happenstance or an unwitting derivative. New York City contains a multitude of both cases.

New York University's campus in Greenwich Village is not usually thought of as a superblock. A high school senior on a tour might simply believe the school ingeniously weaved its way into the existing street gridiron. But over the decades NYU has strategically subsumed contiguous real estate to eventually become what it is today: a comprehensively planned campus that offers private residence (dorms) along with semi-public communal space (classrooms, libraries, etc.). Is that not the very definition of Stein's superblock?

76. Charmes, "Cul-de-sacs, Superblocks and Environmental Areas," 368-369.

Just a few (normal) blocks away in the Lower East Side is the monolithic Stuyvesant Town, which more obviously connotes Stein's designs. Dense multifamily housing is placed like numbers on a clock. At the center and in the interstitial space are pedestrian paths, lawns, and recreational facilities. If anything, this is the superblock of Stein's dreams, what with its proximity to transit and jobs and a garden-like core (although it does lack a greenbelt).

While having a smaller footprint — just three city blocks — yet another superblock, Rockefeller Plaza, was built in midtown. Swap in office towers for residences and conceptually it would not be very different from others in New York.⁷⁷

The United States does not have a monopoly on superblocks. There are countless international examples that riff on Stein's superblock, particularly in countries with or that once had planned economies. Maoist China conceived the danwei, or work unit, model. By constructing both industrial centers and dense housing in a single development, the Chinese aligned almost perfectly with Stein's ideology. As did Stein, they thought it was an economic and efficient way of meeting people's, and the country's, needs.⁷⁸ Stein would be jealous of the state's control of town planning and building.

The danwei model, however, was built in scales that Stein never fathomed. One development that began construction in the 1950s contained 32,000 dwelling units to house 107,200 residents. Today, Beijing, a city of 21 million, is ground zero for superblock experimentation. New designs, configurations, and land uses are being tested to move away from the monotonous and much-derided "tower in the park" model.⁷⁹

77. Peter G. Rowe and Har Ye Kan, *Urban Intensities* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2014), 58-59.

78. Rowe and Kan, *Urban Intensities*, 59.

79. Rowe and Kan, *Urban Intensities*, 59, 78.

Barcelona, far from East Asia, is the city getting the most attention for its superblocks — or superilles — but curiously it does not have any, at least in Stein’s spatial conception. Instead, the Spanish city is carving superblocks out of the existing urban street grid that adhere to his purest Garden City ideology: returning streets back to the pedestrian by restricting vehicular access, creating egalitarian communal space, greening the streetscape, and more.⁸⁰ The result is dense, urban, and sustainable neighborhoods within the large metropolitan fabric.

A study of Barcelona’s central superblock revealed that by “taking the street back from cars” there was a significant reduction in noise pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and particle pollution.⁸¹ At another area in the city, fears about gentrification and displacement were mitigated by forming a superblock near affordable housing developments.

This innovative approach to deemphasizing the role of the vehicle and enriching the lives of urbanites is exactly what Stein had in mind at Sunnyside Gardens in Queens. It also provides a template for cities considering similar interventions within their jurisdictions.

Unfortunately, these kind of superblocks in the United States are Disneyfied simulacra that have almost no physical or cultural connection with the daily life of its full-time residents. Beale Street in Memphis is a kitschy recreation of what it once was. Times Square in New York, with its badgering hucksters and crushing crowds, might as well be the Vegas Strip or Bourbon Street.

The commonality among these and other urban superblock corruptions is the separation of land uses. Stein implemented this idea at Radburn, but the tourist superblocks take it to extremes. There is no housing at any of them, and a visitor must drive (or

80. David Roberts, “Superblocks: how Barcelona is taking city streets back from cars,” *Vox*, last modified April 22, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/2016/8/4/12342806/barcelona-superblocks>.

81. David Roberts, “Superblocks: how Barcelona is taking city streets back from cars.”

otherwise travel) to the periphery to then walk to their glitzy centers that are lined with commercial businesses that possess little appeal to full-time residents. They are not sustainable models of urban living. They are tourist traps.

Should American cities more faithfully follow Barcelona's lead? Clearly, they should be. The existing street gridiron can be converted relatively easily with enough political will. As Barcelona has shown, doing so does not need to include costly changes to existing infrastructure. Simply closing a street off, as San Diego is eventually doing with its proposed 14th Street greenway, can by itself introduce a modicum of sustainability and community into a neighborhood.

But for all the good that can come from converting the existing gridiron into a superblocks, Stein's influence is too widespread to concentrate solely on more urban areas. San Diego's eastern and northern sprawl is characterized almost entirely by the design elements at Radburn. The classical subdivisions dotting, say, University City are obvious descendants of Stein, but even older, less comprehensively planned communities have his fingerprints on them.

"Suburbs" like Linda Vista and Clairemont feature hierarchal street configurations that, at the neighborhood block level, are used almost exclusively by the residents of that block. Just as with Radburn, there is no passing through Linda Vista, unless it's on the arterial Linda Vista Road funneling people in and out of their Radburn-like neighborhoods.

Revamping these communities toward a more sustainable and socioeconomically integrated future is substantially more difficult, both in political will and geographic practicality, but it is absolutely essential. We must unwind the segregation entrenched in suburban communities at the same time as we move them toward more sustainable lifestyles.

In the next part, I offer several tools that municipal governments can utilize to achieve this vision. In Part Four, I hypothetically apply these tools in San Diego, ever an unlikely test case in densifying America, and its Fairmount Park neighborhood.

Part Three: Toolkit

Stein's Garden City ideology was altruistic and even "good" design. There isn't an urban planner today who doesn't believe that housing should be placed near jobs and transit and that urban greenery provides many benefits. But Stein's implementation fell short of his vision. He established the design paradigm for the 20th-century American city: suburban, pseudo-environmental sprawl.

The following five-step toolkit contains policies and technologies that can reverse the insidious effects of Stein's template. While the tools can be implemented anywhere — such as in the urban gridiron, as Barcelona has modeled — I am focusing on what can be done to transform the typical subdivision or hierarchal street-fed enclave. There is a movement to make the urban environment more pedestrian- and transit-friendly, but we won't reach the progressive goals of reversing segregation and seriously combatting climate change without addressing the suburban superblock.

I included policies in each category based on three intersecting criteria: desirability, feasibility, and viability. Desirability is a simple concept: people must want to use or support the solution. Feasibility addresses the practical nature of a solution and questions if something is possible. Viability touches on if a solution is economically or socially sustainable.

The California High-Speed Rail (CHSR) illuminates this criteria. It is clearly desirable because in 2008 the voters approved issuing a bond to fund it. The project is also feasible. Many foreign countries have demonstrated that high-speed rail is not a far-off technology but is rather a practical solution. The CSHR as planned fails in terms of viability. There is no funding beyond that for the first phase of the project, it remains a political football, and land use concerns persist to this day.

On the other hand, the solutions I propose here for creating more integrated communities and achieving sustainability fall in the “innovation sweet spot” where desirability, feasibility, and viability meet. But there can be several “goldilocks” solutions within each category. For brevity and practicality, I included those that are seemingly the most politically expedient solutions. After all, we live in a polarized democracy, much to the chagrin of Stein.

Step 1: Restrict vehicle access

Stein was smart to minimize the impact of the automobile on people’s living conditions, but his inclination to abolish through-streets was misguided. Rather than accommodate the automobile by building then segregating access roads, he should have discouraged their use entirely. He had an opportunity to do so at Sunnyside Gardens, what with its proximity to public transit, but he entirely dismissed the notion at Radburn. “Future transportation, or tomorrow’s highways, do not market houses to workers now,” he mused.⁸² He needed to make profit, so he flung the Garden City door open to automobile commuters.

Stein’s ultimate mistake was allowing the privately-owned vehicle to dictate land use. The obvious, and very realistic solution is physically restricting vehicular access within the superblock.

82. Stein, “Toward New Towns for America,” 223.

Many cities are doing this to liberate the streetscape from the automobile. Oslo is the latest visionary city to implement this idea. The Norwegian capital now severely restricts vehicular access to the city's core. It did so by designating many roads as pedestrian-only and abolishing street parking. Madrid, London, and Paris are other major European cities implementing car-free zones within their urban cores.⁸³

The United States has its own examples, although car-free or car-restricted zones exist mostly in gentrified tourist areas. Both Beale Street in Memphis and Bourbon Street in New Orleans allow the (probably drunk) pedestrian to reign. These car-free zones must proliferate, especially within suburban superblocks and doubly so in areas where people actually live.

It may seem counterintuitive to close off a suburban enclave to vehicles — how then would people get to work? — but restricting vehicular access is not zero-sum and the benefits are many. Street safety improves, which was a goal of Stein's all along; privatized access roads like cul-de-sacs can be given back to the public; and it is not a particularly costly intervention. Stanchions or signage are cost-effective ways to restrict vehicular access. Even traffic cones can, at least temporarily, accomplish the goal.

A corollary to broadly restricting vehicular access is discouraging automobile use and decreasing its infrastructure. Oslo provides a model by its ridding the streets of parking spaces. San Diego also offered an encouraging policy by eliminating the requirement for developers to build parking in multifamily housing developments near transit. These kinds of efforts must be expanded for any hope in breaking the United States' vehicular habits.

83. Jonathan Wolfe, "Oslo Puts Up a Stop Sign," *New York Times*, December 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/19/travel/oslo-restricts-cars-in-city-center.html>.

Step 2: Expand active and public transportation networks

Public transit in the United States usually consists of some combination of buses and trains. Active transportation refers to getting around by moving the human body. Most common active transit options are walking and biking. Both networks must be expanded and made more accessible, especially if reimagined suburban superblocks restrict vehicular access. People have to get around somehow and cities must ensure that that is done in a more environmentally friendly fashion.

Policy makers and the public often believe expanding public transit options and network requires a massive financial investment. It is true that building fixed rail lines, whether as an urban subway, a commuter line, or otherwise, usually costs billions of dollars, but there many cost-efficient methods for improving and expanding public transit without an influx of additional resources. These include creating bus-only lanes in existing rights-of-way, modifying bus lanes to improve efficiency and capacity, and increasing frequency of current bus routes and train lines.

Active transportation networks can be improved with similar low-cost upgrades like creating protected bike lines, widening sidewalks, and “quieting” vehicular traffic by lowering speed limits, narrowing roadways, and decreasing number of automobile lanes. None of these require a massive investment in new infrastructure.

Step 1 of this toolkit — restricting vehicular traffic — also contributes to this step. Limiting automobiles on the existing streetscape inherently provides greater space and opportunities to return the street to its rightful owners: the public and the pedestrian.

Step 3: Legalize apartment buildings and increase investment in affordable housing

Stein's superblocks were supposed to be affordable havens for the working class. Instead, they became exclusionary islands for the middle- and upper-classes. Reimagining and implementing a suburban superblock should entail an investment in publicly-subsidized housing to ensure lasting affordability. The difference from Stein is he had to create profit for his investors. The government obviously has no profit motive.

Stein's housing was not completely misguided. He focused on and developed efficiently constructed, relatively dense multifamily apartments. Future iterations of suburban superblocks corrupted this aspect, with McMansions and cookie-cutter single-family homes eventually sprawling across America. Today's reimagined suburban superblock should return to Stein's tenets. Dense, multifamily housing is simply more environmentally friendly.

At the same time, there must be land to build more affordable housing. Existing suburban superblocks are built out, in a sense. As many homes were built as what was allowed by zoning regulations, and suburban zoning historically permitted only single-family residences. Increasing funds for affordable housing development in these areas will then result in few new multifamily buildings. If there is going to be a densification of the suburban superblock, facilitated by an influx of affordable housing development, then the underlying land use regulations must then be amended. In other words, apartment buildings must be legalized.

This can be done primarily through rezoning suburban development to permit higher densities and multifamily residences. This process, while impactful in terms of both housing affordability and sustainability, can be politically vicious. NIMBYism, even in communities perceived as progressive or

liberal, is a powerful ideology that usually triumphs over rezoning efforts. There is hope, however.

In 2018, Minneapolis became a beacon of progressive and sustainable land use by abolishing single-family zoning. Now, almost every single property designated for residential use allows for no less than a triplex.⁸⁴ Oregon is considering a similar move at the state level; cities would be required to allow no less than fourplexes on properties designated for residential use.⁸⁵ These and other upzoning efforts around the country are enthusiastically backed by an emergent progressive YIMBYism, which advocates economically inclusive pro-housing policies.⁸⁶

These reforms need to be applied to where people actually live. This should go without saying, but areas in America that restrict vehicular access — like Beale Street in Memphis and Bourbon Street in New Orleans — are often located in areas with little, if any, housing and are therefore used predominately by visitors. The success of reimagined superblocks and car-free zones in Europe is due mostly to their being sited where residents live, work, commute, and recreate. It is this strategic siting that discourages car use and compels people, not cars, to use the streetscape. Suburban superblocks have a built-in advantage in this regard. It is usually only housing that comprises the built environment. In a sense, it is a captive audience and cities should leverage this advantage.

84. Patrick Sisson, “Can Minneapolis’s radical rezoning be a national model?” *Curbed*, November 27, 2018, <https://www.curbed.com/2018/11/27/18113208/minneapolis-real-estate-rent-development-2040-zoning>

85. James Brasuell, “Local Governments Weigh-in on Oregon’s Statewide Upzoning Proposal,” *Planetizen*, February 14, 2019, <https://www.planetizen.com/news/2019/02/102905-local-governments-weigh-oregons-statewide-upzoning-proposal>

86. Patrick Sisson, “How a San Diego YIMBY club changed city politics,” *Curbed*, March 20, 2019, <https://www.curbed.com/2019/3/20/18274497/development-san-diego-real-estate-yimby-nimby>

Step 4: Retrofit existing infrastructure to combat and mitigate rising temperatures

Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s Green New Deal proposal audaciously calls for every building in the United States to be retrofitted for “maximum energy efficiency, water efficiency, safety, affordability, comfort, and durability, including through electrification.”⁸⁷ This goal may seem outlandish, but there is clear evidence that shows retrofitting buildings with green technologies demonstrably lowers air temperatures in the surrounding built environment and helps combat further climate change.

One study found adopting city-wide “cool roof” technologies can decrease daytime temperatures by almost two degrees Fahrenheit and can partially offset some negative effects of manmade climate change⁸⁸. Another found that a combination of tree-shade and “cool pavement” makes for a markedly cooler environment at the street-level.⁸⁹ An investment in these kind of retrofitting technologies can both improve pedestrian comfort and help combat further climate change.

The former benefit clearly complements Step 2 of the toolkit. Cities must encourage active transportation by expanding active transit networks and making them more accessible, but people will be hesitant to participate in active transportation in extreme temperatures. Paving new bike lanes with “cool pavement” material and shading them with trees can lower this barrier.

87. U.S. Congress, House, *Recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal*, H Res. 109, 116th Cong., 1st sess., introduced in House February 7, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/109/text>.

88. Mohammad Telaghani *et al*, “Micrometeorological simulations to predict the impacts of heat mitigation strategies on pedestrian thermal comfort in a Los Angeles neighborhood,” *Environmental Research Letters* 11 (2016).

89. Telaghani *et al*, “Micrometeorological simulations to predict the impacts of heat mitigation strategies on pedestrian thermal comfort in a Los Angeles neighborhood.” The defining characteristic of a cool pavement is its improved capability over traditional pavements to reflect, rather than absorb, energy from the sun.

Step 5: Offer new and improved public amenities

If cities are going to retrofit the suburban superblock, then they must make them appealing to use. It is not enough to return the streets back to the pedestrian. The streets must be fun, communal, and safe. Barcelona leads the way in this regard. Within its reimagined urban superblocks, the city installed playgrounds, benches, and even a running track. This all improves the appeal of the “product”, including by increasing the number of eyes on the street, one of Jane Jacobs favored methods for increasing vibrancy and security.⁹⁰

Other, less considered amenities, like wifi connectivity and public restrooms, should be provided to encourage sustained use of the suburban superblock. It is wholly important for cities to make recreating in the superblock as comfortable and easy as possible.

90. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 85

Part Four: San Diego Superblocks

Using a suburban superblock in San Diego to hypothetically apply the toolkit may seem like an odd choice. San Diego, like many western metro areas, is almost entirely reliant on personally-owned automobiles. Just four percent of commuters use public transit in San Diego.⁹¹ This is a far cry from New York, where over 50 percent of commuters use public transit.⁹² San Diego's lower transit ridership is due in part to its sprawling nature.

There are neighborhoods in the urban core, like South Park and Normal Heights, that are suburban-like. Both feature wide roadways lined mostly with single-family residences and offer little in the way of public and active transportation beside lacking bus service and unprotected bike lanes with fading paints. Even the neighborhoods that are usually considered the "inner city" — Barrio Logan and City Heights, to name two — are suburbs by many measures.

These features, though, are also what provide incredible opportunity in making strides in environmentally sustainability and social inclusion. The newer suburbs north of Mission Valley and east of Interstate 15 bear remarkable resemblance to Clarence Stein's Radburn superblock. What's more, they are tinged with

91. Andrew Bowen, "San Diego's Public Transit Growth Hits Speed Bump," *KPBS*, January 9, 2017, <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2017/jan/09/public-transit-ridership-falls-san-diego-seeks-sol/>.

92. Richard Florida, "The Great Divide in How Americans Commute to Work," *City Lab*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.citylab.com/transportation/2019/01/commuting-to-work-data-car-public-transit-bike/580507/>.

a social and racial exclusion that still haunt San Diego. In the following sections I provide context to San Diego's development history to make the case that it is a perfect laboratory for unwinding the effects of the suburban superblock.

“America’s Finest City”

First coined in 1972, San Diego's nickname — America's Finest City — has become as integral to the city's image as the beaches, parks, and cliffside mansions it implies. It's a slogan, an ideal. All at once it says the city is not as unwieldy as Los Angeles, not as ambitious as San Francisco, and not as dirty as any city on the opposite side of the Continental Divide.

The slogan is so bulletproof and representational it largely escapes the popular ironic treatment other city nicknames endure. Philadelphians of the “City of Brotherly Love” once pelted Santa Claus with snowballs, and the “Mile High City” has taken on new meaning in Denver since Colorado legalized recreational marijuana use. “America's Finest City”, on the other hand, is no laughing matter.

BuzzFeed gave it the hagiographic listicle treatment,⁹³ Roadtrippers featured it in a clueless blog post,⁹⁴ and the America's Finest City Half Marathon is a vestige of the once-annual “America's Finest City Week”, a celebration established in 1972 by then-Mayor Pete Wilson.

The conception of that celebration — and the self-indulgent nickname — was not rooted in civic pride or an effort to promote tourism. It wasn't even grounded in the city's obvious surface level beauty. Claiming to be America's Finest City was a reaction

93. “26 Reasons Why San Diego Is America's Finest City,” *BuzzFeed*, August 11, 2014, https://www.buzzfeed.com/tatas/26-reasons-why-san-diego-is-americas-finest-city-7929?utm_term=.sx-GV3Zjam#.mtKeaMbZQ.

94. Chrissy Powers, “This is Why San Diego Calls Itself “America's Finest City,” *Road Trippers*, July 26, 2016, <https://maps.roadtrippers.com/trips/15344427>.

to San Diego being awarded the 1972 Republican National Convention and then ultimately losing it to Miami.

That story is embedded in Nixonian corruption, GOP incompetence, and bald political ambition, all of which led to a stinging public embarrassment for San Diego's elected officials. That story is actually how San Diego became, ironically, "America's Finest City".

In 1971, then-Mayor Frank Curran, a Democrat, rebuffed efforts from local officials in both parties to submit a bid to host either the Democratic or Republican National Convention the following year. He argued San Diego did not have large enough facilities to support the conventions and that local jurisdictions were often saddled with the cost and cleanup of hosting such events.

Those claims may seem dubious today. San Diego annually hosts the Comic-Con International convention, which broke records in 2017 with over 130,000 attendees; and the city boasts over 55,000 hotel rooms, a number further augmented by short-term vacation rental properties (much to the chagrin of the City Council).

It wouldn't be until 1987 that the city would start construction on a modern convention center, and the Sports Arena at the time was the only viable location for hosting an event as unique as a party convention. Mayor Curran reigned over a city in 1971 that was obsessed with remaining a blip on California's coast, which only reluctantly welcomed regular summer vacationers.

Still, in the face of Mayor Curran's protestations, and despite the deadline for host bids having passed, local officials and businessmen clamored for a convention and the national prestige and tourism dollars it would generate. They got their opportunity in May 1971 when Robert Finch, an aide to President Nixon, obliquely signaled to local congressman Bob Wilson (no relation

to Pete Wilson) that the White House would support San Diego making a late attempt at being awarded the GOP convention.

Wilson — like all Republicans, self-serving and oblivious — interpreted Finch’s prodding as a gesture from the president himself. But Nixon never publicly endorsed San Diego’s attempts, and Finch’s tip-off that the city would have a chance at hosting the GOP convention came with a major caveat: the city had to pledge \$800,000 to the RNC’s convention planning committee.

Wilson quickly garnered a \$400,000 pledge from Intentional Telephone and Telegraph (ITT). Backed by ITT’s financial support, Wilson reengaged Mayor Curran about hosting the GOP convention. Eventually, the city, county and state each fell in line, and pledged money and services to San Diego’s late host bid.

RNC officials were worried about many aspects of the city’s proposal, but none were more concerning than the deficient physical state of the Sports Arena and the hotel industry’s pledge to block off a mere 12,500 rooms. In typical Nixonian fashion, though, the RNC selection committee emerged from a closed-door session on July 23, 1971, with the news that San Diego had been awarded the GOP convention.

Almost immediately, the RNC’s initial fears were realized. Upon the announcement that San Diego had been awarded the convention, media members quickly booked many of the available hotel rooms. More importantly, convention planners proved utterly incapable in making necessary renovations to the Sports Arena.

First, local GOP officials dragged their feet in developing and promulgating design plans. By the time they got around to implementing their plans, they realized they were all but impossible to achieve by the next August’s convention.

Second, the operator of the Sports Arena was an irascible Canadian under no legal or contractual obligation to heed the GOP’s increasingly panicked and outsized demands to upgrade

his facilities. The straw that broke the camel's back, however, was a revelation regarding ITT's original \$400,000 contribution.

The Department of Justice settled an anti-trust lawsuit with ITT right around the time the \$400,000 pledge was made to the RNC. Syndicated newspaper columnist Jack Anderson put two and two together and accused the Nixon administration of an illicit quid pro quo.

Following Anderson's accusation, Life magazine published an article accusing President Nixon of obstruction of justice by covering up the illegal business dealings of his closest San Diego supporters, including C. Arnholdt Smith, then the city's most powerful civilian and a contributor to San Diego's bid for the convention.

Compelled by local planners' logistical bumbling and an increasing focus on the twin scandals surrounding San Diego's being awarded the convention, the RNC started negotiations with Miami to play host. In May 1972, just three months before the scheduled date of the convention, GOP officials announced the convention would be moved to Florida.

Nixon personally ordered that the convention be moved to Miami to avoid further scrutiny over the blossoming scandals (a detail revealed after his resignation in 1974). His cronies covered for him, claiming it was San Diego's civic and political incompetence that led to the RNC making its fateful decision.

San Diego conservatives were publicly embarrassed by losing the convention and felt betrayed by the national party's bait and switch. The convention was an opportunity to shine a national spotlight on themselves. Elected officials would earn political street cred and private businessmen could promote tourism to their city. Now, they looked like dawdling idiots, which is exactly what they were.

Not only selfish and oblivious, Republicans are also incapable of expressing, let alone feeling, contrition. New GOP mayor Pete

Wilson, the local official who felt most burned, was no different. Soon after losing the convention Wilson searched the wreckage for his own whipping boy (as the saying popular in the military goes, shit rolls downhill). He found one in Peter Graham, the insubordinate Sports Arena operator.

Wilson publicly blamed Graham for losing the GOP convention. It was Graham's greed alone that unraveled the deal. It was not local planners' incompetence, not elected officials' ambition, not the city's lack of sufficient supporting services, and certainly not the corrupt financial machinations behind San Diego being awarded the convention in the first place.

But the latter was exactly why San Diego lost the convention. It was a Republican party that was rotten to the core, at all levels of governance, that led to San Diego looking like a cuckold.

After throwing his hissy fit, Mayor Wilson endeavored to restore his public image and piece back together San Diego's tattered national reputation. He designated the week of August 21, 1972 — not coincidentally the same week of the Republican National Convention in Miami — as “America's Finest City Week”.

To most observers and citizens, San Diego's physical and manufactured beauty is explanation enough for why Wilson included ‘finest’ in the city's new nickname, but that justification doesn't hold up upon deeper inspection.

Ask a San Diegan — especially a resident that lives east of the 5 freeway— to make a list of superlatives to describe the city and ‘fine’ might not even come to mind. Providing much better explanation, then, for the use of ‘finest’ is San Diego's reaction to the threat of protests during the GOP convention and, by extension, Mayor Wilson's politics.

Just three years earlier in Chicago at the Democratic National Convention, roughly 10,000 protestors clashed for eight days with the city's police department. The infamous “riots” are far better remembered and resulted in much deeper social and political

impacts than the listless candidate the Democrats nominated for president that year.

All San Diego cared about in the run-up to the 1972 GOP convention was not looking like Chicago. Locals did not want who they described as leftists, anarchists, communists, freaks, hippies, and beatniks (in general, young people) to descend upon the city and cause havoc. Adding to the residents' anxiety were preposterous, even cataclysmic claims about the number of protestors that would swarm San Diego.

Jerry Rubin, who, as a leader of the 1968 protests, was one of the Chicago Seven charged by the federal government for inciting the riots, promised that one million protestors would march into San Diego. Other estimates ranged from 50,000 to 300,000 protestors. San Diego's police force predicted 100,000.

The threat of destructive and humiliating riots in sleepy San Diego was an understandable concern, but people's anxiety was actually seated in their disdain for others not like them. Their true fear was of sharing the city with the underclasses.

One San Diegan's sentiments — pulled from a letter to Congressman Bob Wilson and quoted in Vincent Ancona's recounting for the San Diego Historical Society Quarterly the ill-fated convention in San Diego (from which I pull many of the historical facts used here) — perfectly encapsulate the constituency's illogical fear. "Favorable national [television] coverage," the resident wrote in September of 1971, "will lure untold thousands of people to migrate to a city that already has many more people than its space and natural air and water resources can adequately support."

Similar rationale is used in many other realms — suburban exclusionism, bourgeois environmentalism, and American exceptionalism, to name three — to discriminate against those that are unwanted. This "logic" fails in the face of statistics.

In 1970, an astounding 89% of San Diegans were white. In Chicago, on the other hand, just 66% of the population was white. It is easy to assume how San Diego, and its conservative political class, interpreted the clashes at the 1968 Democratic National Convention: as a calamity inflicted upon a sacrosanct plank of the democratic process, perpetrated by leftists and thugs. But surely, it was the air resources residents were so worried about.

Moreover, nearly 700,000 people called San Diego home in 1970. The population has since doubled. Drought and air quality are persistent issues, but we all still live rather comfortably as compared to previous decades. If the writer of that letter is alive today, and truly believed in the scarcity of local resources to which he or she was entitled and others were not, then they better be hunkered down in a basement, surrounded by stockpiled water rations, tuned-in to an AM radio station awaiting emergency instructions.

I'm sure he or she is instead a "liberal" environmentalist based in La Jolla serving on multiple community planning boards.

Even further, in the 1968 presidential election almost two-thirds of San Diego county residents voted for either Richard Nixon and his coded racism, or George Wallace and his overt racism. If San Diegans resisted the incoming GOP convention because it would attract visitors and protestors —both potential permanent residents — then there is no other deduction than this: San Diego was afraid it would lose its identity as a "lily-white Navy-tourist town", as Jim Miller, labor studies professor at City College, calls it.

This undertow of social, if not ideological, conservatism is the source of Mayor Wilson's "America's Finest City" ploy. The Ivy League-educated political animal was at first labelled a reasonable centrist, and even a liberal Republican, but the hallmarks were always there of a classically intolerant, "free market" Republican

who invariably uses the government to discriminate against non-whites and the non-rich.

In 1971, Wilson was annoyed at the cost of building Chicano Park after the state ceded the land to the city (which occurred only after Barrio residents' protests succeeded in preventing a Highway Patrol headquarters being built there). And urban theorist Mike Davis points out that, as governor in the 1990s, Wilson would "polarize California with his shrill, nativist denunciations of immigrants".

To be clear, the 'finest' in America's Finest City is a dog whistle. Mayor Pete Wilson was telling the nation at a time of deep local embarrassment that it should instead be jealous of San Diego. We are whiter than you, he was implying. And, as a result, we are better than you.

Mike Eichler, a legendary local community organizer, claims in his book *Consensus Organizing* that the four-year period from 1968 to 1972 ranks among the most turbulent in United States history. That can be debated, especially in light of the Trump presidency, but what's indisputable is that San Diego during that time wanted no part of any of it — not civil rights, not protests, and definitely not a party convention that acts as a platform of debate for those two topics.

Pete Wilson conceived of a slogan to tell the nation of our disinterest. San Diego is an idyll, a seaside hamlet that happened to have hundreds of thousands of (preferably white) residents. Whether that 'Finest City' dream was actually realized was irrelevant. Local conservative elites believed they could will it into existence and thrust it upon the nation's consciousness. In a way, they have. BuzzFeed's "26 Reasons Why San Diego Is America's Finest City" fails to list, let alone mention, Chicano Park.

Today, San Diego is majority-minority. According to the last census, the city's population was only 45% white, and Chicano Park is a cultural landmark, despite gentrified ignorance of it.

If only that ignorance didn't extend as well to our insidious nickname would San Diego get a little closer to the fine city it claims to be.

Development history

I offer the story on the “America’s Finest City” nickname because it proves valuable context to the city’s development pattern over time. Long a conservative bastion, San Diego spread out along racial lines as soon as technology and modern finance allowed it, creating a spatial and socioeconomic dichotomy. People of color were abandoned in Mid-City and Southeast, while the municipal government subsidized white flight sprawl along what are now the Interstate 805 and 15 corridors.

For all intents and purposes, the Anglo history of San Diego starts with Alonzo Horton’s purchase of what is now downtown, but preeminent California historian Kevin Starr pushes the timeline up even further. “From a historian’s point of view,” he said in response to a question from a Union-Tribune columnist, “nothing much happened in San Diego before the Second World War.”⁹⁵ I’ll split the difference.

After a series of booms-and-busts at the hands of real estate speculators, the city finally started growing into itself once the Navy established a fleet at the harbor in the 1910’s. In that decade there was rapid subdivision of land holdings, the development of the now-extinct streetcar system, and some of the first modern land annexations to expand the city limits. It is when property around Balboa Park and east of downtown was first developed.⁹⁶ It is also perhaps the only time in the city’s history when working-and middle-class families could comfortably afford to live near the

⁹⁵ Davis, Mayhew, and Miller, *Under the Perfect Sun*, 6.

⁹⁶ “Southeast San Diego Historical Context Statement,” Page & Turnbill, February 14, 2014, 26.

urban core. What's more, they did so in single-family Craftsman homes that today garner seven-digit sales prices.⁹⁷

The end of World War I coincided with the Mexican Revolution, the Great Migration, and the rise of the automobile. The confluence of these events resulted in a severe housing shortage — the same one that compelled Clarence Stein to build Sunnyside Gardens 3,000 miles across the country — as well as in increasing racial animus.

Logan Heights was once home to San Diego elite — its late-19th-century robber barons built many of the neighborhood's stately Victorian homes that still stand today — but by the 1920's it was firmly a Mexican-American enclave. Southeast San Diego, including Mt. Hope, Valencia Park, and Encanto, became home to much of the city's African-American population. Whites, liberated from the urban core by the automobile and accommodated by the municipal government's voracious appetite for land, fled to rapidly developing suburbs.⁹⁸

This pattern was codified by the federal government in the 1930's when it began backing home loans — at least those for Whites — as part of its response to the Great Depression. Maps published by the Home Owner's Loan Corporation, the agency charged with refinancing mortgages, redlined the ethnic and racial enclaves, entrenching spatial segregation that is still perpetuated. The neighborhoods that were excluded from federal assistance then — Mid-City, Southeast — are the same areas that experience disproportionate poverty and discrimination today.⁹⁹

These communities, by virtue of systematic economic oppression, are also San Diego's most sustainable. There are major transit centers in both Mid-City and Southeast, and both

97. "Southeast San Diego Historical Context Statement," 31.

98. "Southeast San Diego Historical Context Statement," 56-57.

99. Maureen Cavanaugh, Michael Lipkin, and Tarryn Mento, "Redlining's Mark On San Diego Persists 50 Years After Housing Protections," *KPBS*, April 5, 2018, <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2018/apr/05/Redlinings-Mark-On-San-Diego-Persists/>.

areas are serviced extensively by MTS's transit network; and the best stewards of the environment are low-income populations. They own less cars, multiple generations often domicile under one roof, and, of course, they are more likely to take the public transit that's available to them.

What major sources of greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants exist in these neighborhoods were put there by their oppressors. Interstates 15 and 805 carve up Southeast. Interstate 5 bisects Logan Heights. The Coronado Bay Bridge stomps on Barrio Logan. The shipbuilding industry and the Navy ignore the pleas of residents to clean up their operations.

A saving grace, if there is one, is that the street gridiron and existing public transit infrastructure affords these communities the opportunity to benefit from superblock conversions like those in Barcelona. Mike Davis is correct. Along with sustained economic development and affordable housing development, investing in the urban proletariat is our last great hope to our planet from climatic catastrophe.

This does not let the richer suburban communities off the hook. Without interventions and integrated solutions their wasteful and revanchist ways would negate that positive outcomes brought on by urban superblocks. To demonstrate the possibility for the toolkit to unwind the suburban superblock, I apply them to Fairmount Park, a curious case in San Diego's suburban development.

Toward New Suburbs: Fairmount Park

Fairmount Park is a classical post-World War II Southern California suburb. Perched on a hill just three miles east of downtown San Diego, the community saw its first single-family homes erected in the 1950s and it quickly became a middle-class oasis. According the City Heights Town Council

website, it has a large percentage of homeowners as compared to surrounding neighborhoods, many of which are the original homeowners or their familial beneficiaries.¹⁰⁰ In the 1960s and 70s, it was further isolated with the construction of Interstates 15 and 805, which with the 94 freeway carved Fairmount Park out of the existing streetscape. It became triangular island of single-family suburbia incredibly close to the urban core, and it remains in this state today. I would know — I lived in the neighborhood for nine months and commuted to work in heavy vehicular traffic to downtown.

Despite its proximity to the city center, there simply is not sufficient public transit and it is near impossible to get anywhere without using one of the three freeways that form its boundaries. In this way, it is exactly like Radburn: a hierarchal, if accidental, road network leads residents in and out of the socially exclusionary superblock but only via automobile.

Home Avenue serves as Fairmount Park's arterial road and connects the community to the three bounding freeways. From Home Ave, residents can get into the superblock through one of only two access roads: Ash Street and Gateway Drive. From these roads branch the semi-private streets that ferry residents to and from their homes. There are even cul-de-sacs, furthering consecrating its status as a Radburn rip-off.

Following the steps of the toolkit, the roads of Fairmount Park must be reengineered for expanded pedestrian use by restricting vehicle access to the small neighborhood streets. This requires modest infrastructural investments, such as removable stanchions, at intersections where small streets meet Ash Street and Gateway Drive. It is also imperative to remove free street parking from curbsides.

100. "Neighborhoods," City Heights Town Council, <http://cityheightstowncouncil.org/neighborhoods/>.

Doing so feeds into expanded public and active transportation. Ridding the streets of on-street parking frees road shoulders to be repurposed as bike lanes or expanded sidewalks. This is especially important on Ash Street and Gateway Drive, which funnel out onto Home Ave (which needs its own active transportation investments).

Currently, the neighborhood is served by just one bus line, and it is merely an MTS shuttle that ferries transit riders to other stations where they can transfer to more intensive bus routes. The result is the community's residents have zero public transit options that connect directly to important destinations like downtown San Diego or the Euclid Avenue transit center, where riders can transfer to the trolley system.

In a reimagined Fairmount Park superblock, it is essential that MTS expand options for the residents, including a dedicated bus route that connects directly to downtown San Diego via the 94 freeway. The bus can travel down Gateway Drive and residents can access it by utilizing the newly pedestrian friendly and vehicle free roads.

This bus route will be economical when the neighborhood is rezoned to allow greater densities and multifamily housing. Right now, Fairmount Park is predominately a single-family neighborhood, but in the new environment there will be many more residents who, ideally, do not possess cars and must rely on new bus routes.

People will want to use the new streetscape, both for active commuting and recreating when green technologies allow for a more comfortable and attractive environment. Cool pavements and a tree canopy make the roadways comfortable to traverse at the same time as their ideal for child's play and other communal activities.

Lastly, the neighborhood, now almost entirely devoid of green and public spaces, will be enlivened by new public

amenities installed right outside people's front doors. Playgrounds encourage social interaction and healthy recreation, as would a track that allows residents to exercise in and around their neighborhood.

If this sounds like a utopian vision, that's because it is the true vision of the Garden City, the vision Clarence Stein imagined but never achieved.

Conclusion

Stein is not a boogeyman. He was a visionary with a complex and nuanced town building philosophy that he compromised by making small, seemingly insignificant decisions. The car could be tamed, he thought. Affordable housing for all was the ideal, he believed. For all his altruistic visions, he faced the realities of paying his investors dividends and making his own living. The resulting concoction, the suburban superblock, went on to be repeated and corrupted ad nauseam.

Do I believe the mass retrofitting of suburban superblocks is imminent? I do not. It is far more political expedient and technically practical to modify the urban gridiron to discourage automobile use, as Barcelona and many other cities are doing, than it is to wholly reimagine suburbanized neighborhoods. What I wanted to accomplish in this report is deconstruct the suburban ideology and rebuild it toward a more sustainable and inclusive future. I wanted to move the Overton window.¹⁰¹

It is necessary to do so. We are facing the effects of climate change now and socioeconomic exclusion is as pervasive as it has ever been. I agree wholeheartedly with Mike Davis. Our only societal hope for not ruining our planet for good is investing in public spaces and in the proletariat that Stein idealized but left behind in his designs. That investment must be made in the built environment, in the physical structures that spatially segregates

101. The Overton window is the range in which ideas are acceptable to the public. Ideas falling outside of this window are considered too extreme or politically infeasible.

classes and races and ethnicities and also contributes to obscene amount of greenhouse gas emissions. We must reimagine the suburbs.

