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## Unslumming and slumming

Slums and their populations are the victims (and the perpetrators) of seemingly endless troubles that reinforce each other. Slums operate as vicious circles. In time, these vicious circles enmesh the whole operations of cities. Spreading slums require ever greater amounts of public money—and not simply more money for publicly financed improvement or to stay even, but more money to cope with ever widening retreat and regression. As needs grow greater, the wherewithal grows less. ✦

Our present urban renewal laws are an attempt to break this particular linkage in the vicious circles by forthrightly wiping away slums and their populations, and replacing them with projects intended to produce higher tax yields, or to lure back easier populations with less expensive public requirements. The method fails. At best, it merely shifts slums from here to there, adding its own tincture of extra hardship and disruption. At worst, it destroys neighborhoods where constructive and improving commu-

nities exist and where the situation calls for encouragement rather than destruction.

Like Fight Blight and Conservation campaigns in neighborhoods declining into slums, slum shifting fails because it tries to overcome causes of trouble by diddling with symptoms. Sometimes even the very symptoms that preoccupy the slum shifters are, in the main, vestiges of former troubles rather than significant indications of current or future ills.

Conventional planning approaches to slums and slum dwellers are thoroughly paternalistic. The trouble with paternalists is that they want to make impossibly profound changes, and they choose impossibly superficial means for doing so. To overcome slums, we must regard slum dwellers as people capable of understanding and acting upon their own self-interests, which they certainly are. We need to discern, respect and build upon the forces for regeneration that exist in slums themselves, and that demonstrably work in real cities. This is far from trying to patronize people into a better life, and it is far from what is done today.

Vicious circles, to be sure, are hard to follow. Cause and effect become confused precisely because they do link and relink with one another in such complicated ways.

Yet there is one particular link that is crucial. If it is broken (and to break it is no simple matter of supplying better housing), a slum spontaneously unslums.

The key link in a perpetual slum is that too many people move out of it too fast—and in the meantime dream of getting out. This is the link that has to be broken if any other efforts at overcoming slums or slum life are to be of the least avail. This is the link that actually was broken and has stayed broken in places like the North End, or the Back-of-the-Yards in Chicago, or North Beach in San Francisco, or the unslummed former slum in which I live. If only a handful of American city slums had ever managed to break this link, we might regard it skeptically as grounds for hope. These places might be freaks. More significant are the great number of slum neighborhoods in which unslumming starts, goes unrecognized, and too often is discouraged or destroyed. The portions of East Harlem in New York which had proceeded far along in unslumming were first discouraged by

unavailability of necessary money; then where this slowed the unslumming process but still did not bring regression to slum conditions, most of these neighborhoods were destroyed outright—to be replaced by projects which became almost pathological displays of slum troubles. Many areas in the Lower East Side which had started unslumming have been destroyed. My own neighborhood, as recently as the early 1950's, was saved from disastrous amputation only because its citizens were able to fight city hall—and even at that, only because the officials were confronted with embarrassing evidence that the area was drawing in newcomers with money, although this symptom of its unslummed status was possibly the least significant of the constructive changes that had occurred unnoticed.\*

Herbert Gans, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania, has given, in the February 1959 journal of the American Institute of Planners, a sober but poignant portrait of an unrecognized unslumming slum, the West End of Boston, on the eve of its destruction. The West End, he points out, although regarded officially as a "slum," would have been more accurately described as "a stable, low-rent area." If, writes Gans, a slum is defined as an area which "because of the nature of its social environment can be proved to create problems and pathologies," then the West End was not a slum. He speaks of the intense attachment of residents to the district, of its highly developed informal social control, of the fact that many residents had modernized or improved the interiors of their apartments—all typical characteristics of an unslumming slum.

Unslumming hinges, paradoxically, on the retention of a very considerable part of a slum population within a slum. It hinges on whether a considerable number of the residents and businessmen of a slum find it both desirable and practical to make and carry out their own plans right there, or whether they must virtually all move elsewhere.

I shall use the designation "perpetual slums" to describe slums which show no signs of social or economic improvement with

\* In 1961, the city is actually trying again for authority and federal funds to "renew" us into an inane pseudosuburb. Of course the neighborhood is fighting this bitterly.

time, or which regress after a little improvement. However, if the conditions for generating city diversity can be introduced into a neighborhood while it is a slum, and if any indications of unslumming are encouraged rather than thwarted, I believe there is no reason that any slum need be perpetual.

The inability of a perpetual slum to hold enough of its population for unslumming is a characteristic that starts before the slum itself starts. There is a fiction that slums, in forming, malignantly supplant healthy tissue. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The first sign of an incipient slum, long before visible blight can be seen, is stagnation and dullness. Dull neighborhoods are inevitably deserted by their more energetic, ambitious or affluent citizens, and also by their young people who can get away. They inevitably fail to draw newcomers by choice. Furthermore, aside from these selective desertions and the selective lack of vigorous new blood, such neighborhoods eventually are apt to undergo rather sudden wholesale desertions by their nonslum populations. The reasons why this is so have already been stated; there is no need to reiterate the sheer impracticality of the Great Blight of Dullness for city life.

Nowadays, the wholesale desertions by nonslum populations which give a slum its initial opportunity to form, are sometimes blamed on the proximity of another slum (especially if it is a Negro slum) or on the presence of a few Negro families, much as in the past slum formation was sometimes blamed on the presence or proximity of Italian or Jewish or Irish families. Sometimes the desertion is blamed on the age and obsolescence of dwellings, or on vague, general disadvantages such as lack of playgrounds or proximity of factories.

However, all such factors are immaterial. In Chicago, you can see neighborhoods only a block and two blocks in from the lake-front parkland, far from the settlements of minority groups, well endowed with greenery, quiet enough to make one's flesh creep, and composed of substantial, even pretentious, buildings. On these neighborhoods are the literal signs of desertion: "For Rent," "To Let," "Vacancy," "Rooms for Permanent and Transient Guests," "Guests Welcome," "Sleeping Rooms," "Furnished

Rooms," "Unfurnished Rooms," "Apartments Available." These buildings have trouble drawing occupants in a city where the colored citizens are cruelly overcrowded in their shelter and cruelly overcharged for it. The buildings are going begging because they are being rented or sold only to whites—and whites, who have so much more choice, do not care to live here. The beneficiaries of this particular impasse, at least for the moment, turn out to be the immigrating hillbillies, whose economic choice is small and whose familiarity with city life is still smaller. It is a dubious benefit they receive: inheritance of dull and dangerous neighborhoods whose unfitness for city life finally repelled residents more sophisticated and competent than they.

Sometimes, to be sure, a deliberate conspiracy to turn over the population of a neighborhood does exist—on the part of real estate operators who make a racket of buying houses cheaply from panicked white people and selling them at exorbitant prices to the chronically housing-starved and pushed-around colored population. But even this racket works only in already stagnated and low-vitality neighborhoods. (Sometimes the racket perversely improves a neighborhood's upkeep, when it brings in colored citizens more competent in general and more economically able than the whites they replaced; but the exploitative economics sometimes results instead in replacement of an uncrowded, apathetic neighborhood with an overcrowded neighborhood in considerable turmoil.)

If there were no slum dwellers or poor immigrants to inherit city failures, the problem of low-vitality neighborhoods abandoned by those with choice would still remain and perhaps would be even more troubling. This condition can be found in parts of Philadelphia where "decent, safe and sanitary" dwellings go empty in stagnated neighborhoods, while their former populations move outward into new neighborhoods which are little different, intrinsically, from the old except that they are not yet embedded by the city.

It is easy to see where new slums are spontaneously forming today, and how dull, dark and undiverse are the streets in which they typically form, because the process is happening now. What is harder to realize, because it lies in the past, is the fact that lack

of lively urbanity has usually been an original characteristic of slums. The classic reform literature about slums does not tell us this. Such literature—Lincoln Steffens' *Autobiography* is a good example—focused on slums that had already overcome their dull beginnings (but had acquired other troubles in the meantime). A teeming, bustling slum was pinpointed at a moment in time, with the deeply erroneous implication that as a slum is, so it was—and as it is, so it shall be, unless it is wiped away root and branch.

The unslummed former slum in which I live was just such a teeming place by the early decades of this century, and its gang, the Hudson Dusters, was notorious throughout the city, but its career as a slum did not begin in any such bustle. The history of the Episcopal chapel a few blocks down the street tells the tale of the slum's formation, almost a century ago in this case. The neighborhood had been a place of farms, village streets and summer homes which evolved into a semisuburb that became embedded in the rapidly growing city. Colored people and immigrants from Europe were surrounding it; neither physically nor socially was the neighborhood equipped to handle their presence—no more, apparently, than a semisuburb is so equipped today. Out of this quiet residential area—a charming place, from the evidence of old pictures—there were at first many random desertions by congregation families; those of the congregation who remained eventually panicked and departed en masse. The church building was abandoned to Trinity parish, which took it over as a mission chapel to minister to the influx of the poor who inherited the semisuburb. The former congregation re-established the church far uptown, and colonized in its neighborhood a new quiet residential area of unbelievable dullness; it is now a part of Harlem. The records do not tell where the next preslum was built by these wanderers.

The reasons for slum formation, and the processes by which it happens, have changed surprisingly little over the decades. What is new is that unfit neighborhoods can be deserted more swiftly, and slums can and do spread thinner and farther, than was the case in the days before automobiles and government-guaranteed mortgages for suburban developments, when it was

less practical for families with choice to flee neighborhoods that were displaying some of the normal and inevitable conditions that accompany city life (such as presence of strangers), but none of the natural means for converting these conditions into assets.

At the time a slum first forms, its population may rise spectacularly. This is not a sign of popularity, however. On the contrary, it means the dwellings are becoming overcrowded; this is happening because people with the least choice, forced by poverty or discrimination to overcrowd, are coming into an unpopular area.

The density of the dwelling units themselves may or may not increase. In old slums, they customarily did increase because of the construction of tenements. But the rise in dwelling density typically did not cut down the overcrowding. Total population increased greatly instead, with overcrowding superimposed on the high dwelling densities.

Once a slum has formed, the pattern of emigration that made it apt to continue. Just as in the case of the preslum emigration, two kinds of movement occur. Successful people, including those who achieve very modest gains indeed, keep moving out. But there are also apt to be periodic wholesale migrations, as a whole population begins to achieve modest gains. Both movements are destructive, the second apparently more so than the first.

Overcrowding, which is one symptom of the population instability, continues. It continues, not because the overcrowded people remain, but because they leave. Too many of those who overcome the economic necessity to overcrowd get out, instead of improving their lot within the neighborhood. They are quickly replaced by others who currently have little economic choice. The buildings, naturally, wear out with disproportionate swiftness under these conditions.

Residents of a perpetual slum constantly change in this fashion. Sometimes the change is considered noteworthy because the economic emigrations and immigrations entail an ethnic change. But the movement occurs in all perpetual slums, even those that remain ethnically constant. For instance, a Negro slum in a big

city, such as central Harlem in New York, may remain a Negro slum for a long period, but undergo huge, selective turnovers in population.

The constant departures leave, of course, more than housing vacancies to be filled. They leave a community in a perpetually embryonic stage, or perpetually regressing to helpless infancy. The age of buildings is no index to the age of a community, which is formed by a continuity of people.

In this sense, a perpetual slum is always going backward instead of forward, a circumstance that reinforces most of its other troubles. In some drastic cases of wholesale turnover, it seems that what is getting a start again is hardly a community but a jungle. This happens when the new people flooding in have little in common to begin with, and those who are most ruthless and bitter begin to set what tone there is. Anyone who does not like that jungle—which is evidently nearly everyone, for turnover is tremendous in such places—either gets out as fast as he can or dreams of getting out. Even in such seemingly irreparable milieus, however, if the population can be held, a slow improvement starts. I know one such street in New York where this is true, but it is terribly hard to get sufficient people anchored.

The perpetual slum's progress backward occurs in planned slums, just as it does in unplanned slums. The main difference is that perpetual overcrowding is not one of the symptoms in planned slums, because the number of occupants in dwellings is regulated. Harrison Salisbury, in his series of articles on delinquency in the *New York Times*, has described the crucial link of the vicious circle as it operates, in this case, in low-income projects:

. . . In only too many instances . . . the slums have been shut up within new brick and steel. The horror and deprivation has been immured behind those cold new walls. In a well-intended effort to solve one social ill, the community succeeded in intensifying other evils and in creating new ones. Admission to low-rent housing projects basically is controlled by income levels . . . Segregation is imposed not by religion or color but by the sharp knife of income or lack of income. What this does to the social fabric of the community must be witnessed to be appreciated. The able, rising families are constantly driven out . . . At the intake

end the economic and social levels tend to drop lower and lower. A human catch-pool is formed that breeds social ills and requires endless outside assistance.

It is the constant hope of the builders of these planned slums that they will surely improve as "a community has time to form." But time here, as in an unplanned perpetual slum, is an eternal disrupter instead of a builder. As might be expected, therefore, the worst examples of the immured slums, such as Salisbury was describing, are almost invariably the oldest low-income projects, where the perpetual sliding backward of the perpetual slum has had longest to operate.

However, an ominous modification in this pattern has started to appear. With the increase in planned slum shifting, and the rising proportions of "relocated" people in new projects, these new projects are sometimes starting off today with the sullenness and discouragement typical of old projects or of old perpetual unplanned slums—as if they had already, in their youth, been subjected to the vicissitudes of many disruptions and disintegrations. This is probably because so many of their residents have already lived with such experiences, and of course take them along as emotional baggage. Mrs. Ellen Lurie, of Union Settlement, describing conditions in a new project, comments:

One observation can easily be made as a result of all the visits with site tenants [families placed in public housing because their old homes were taken for city rebuilding]. As difficult a job as management has in running a large project, a bulk of initially unhappy people, angry at the Housing Authority for forcibly uprooting them, not fully understanding all the reasons for the move, lonely and insecure in a strange new environment—such families must make project management all the more overwhelming a task.

Neither slum shifting nor slum immuring breaks that key link in the perpetuation of slums—the tendency (or necessity) for too many people to leave too fast. Both these devices merely aggravate and intensify the processes of perpetual movement backward. Only unslumming overcomes American city slums,

or ever has overcome them. If unslumming did not exist, we would have to invent it. However, since it does exist, and does work, the point is to help it happen faster and in more places.

The foundation for unslumming is a slum lively enough to be able to enjoy city public life and sidewalk safety. The worst foundation is the dull kind of place that makes slums, instead of unmaking them.

Why slum dwellers should stay in a slum by choice, after it is no longer economically necessary, has to do with the most personal content of their lives, in realms which planners and city designers can never directly reach and manipulate—nor should want to manipulate. The choice has much to do with the slum dwellers' personal attachments to other people, with the regard in which they believe they are held in the neighborhood, and with their sense of values as to what is of greater and what is of lesser importance in their lives.

Indirectly, however, the wish to stay is obviously influenced by physical factors in the neighborhood. The treasured "security" of the home base is, in part, a literal security from physical fear. Slums where the streets are empty and frightening, and one is unsafe, simply do not spontaneously unslum. And beyond this, people who do stay in an unslumming slum, and improve their lot within the neighborhood, often profess an intense attachment to their street neighborhood. It is a big part of their life. They seem to think that their neighborhood is unique and irreplaceable in all the world, and remarkably valuable in spite of its shortcomings. In this they are correct, for the multitude of relationships and public characters that make up an animated city street neighborhood are always unique, intricate and have the value of the unreproducible original. Unslummed or unslumming neighborhoods are complex places, very different from the simpler, physically stereotyped places in which slums typically form.

I do not mean to imply, however, that every slum which gets itself enough diversity and a sufficiently interesting and convenient life automatically unslums. Some do not—or what is more usual, they do start to unslum for a time, the process proves impractical because there are too many obstacles (mostly financial)

in the way of the needed changes, and the place regresses, or is perhaps destroyed.

In any case, where attachment to a slum becomes strong enough to stimulate unslumming, that attachment begins before the unslumming. If people are going to stay by choice when they have choice, they must have become attached before that time. Later is too late.

One of the early symptoms that people are staying by choice is apt to be a drop in population, accompanied neither by an increase in dwelling vacancies nor by a decrease in dwelling densities. In short, a given number of dwellings is being occupied by fewer people. Paradoxically, this is a signal of popularity. It means that formerly overcrowded inhabitants who have become economically able to uncrowd are doing so in their old neighborhood instead of abandoning it to a new wave of the overcrowded.

To be sure, the population drop also represents people who have deserted, and this is important too, as we shall see. But the significant factor to note at this point is that the places of those leaving are, to a notable degree, being preempted by people who are staying by choice.

In the neighborhood where I live, which happens to have been an Irish slum, unslumming was obviously well started as early as 1920, when the population in our census tract was down to 5,000 from 6,500 in 1910 (the population peak). In the Depression, population rose a little as families recrowded, but by 1940 it was down to 2,500 and stayed at about that in 1950. During this period there were few demolitions in this census tract, but some rehabilitation; there were few apartment vacancies at any time; and in the main the population was composed of those who had been there in the old 1910 days, and of their children and grandchildren. The drop to less than half of the peak slum population was, in the main, a measure of the degree of uncrowding that occurred in a neighborhood with a high dwelling unit density on the residential land. Indirectly, it also represented an increase in income and choice characterizing the people who remained.

Similar population drops occurred in all the unslumming

neighborhoods of Greenwich Village. In the once unbelievably overpacked tenements of the South Village, which was an Italian slum, population dropped in an illustrative census tract from almost 19,000 in 1910 to about 12,000 in 1920, rose again to almost 15,000 in the Depression, and then with prosperity dropped and stayed at about 9,500. As in my neighborhood, this unslumming drop did not represent a replacement of the old slum population by a new and different middle-class population. It represented much of the old population moving into the middle class. In both these illustrative tracts, which I have chosen as examples of the degree of uncrowding because the number of dwelling units themselves remained very stable, child population dropped slightly less, proportionately, than total population; these were, in the main, families that were staying.\*

The uncrowding that has occurred in the North End of Boston is fully comparable to that which occurred in the unslumming of Greenwich Village.

To know whether uncrowding has occurred, or is occurring, and whether a drop in population is a sign of the popularity of the neighborhood with those who know it best, one must know whether or not the drop is accompanied by appreciable dwelling vacancies. For instance, in some parts of the Lower East Side (by no means all), population drops during the 1930's were only in part from uncrowding. They represented also large numbers of vacancies. When these vacancies filled up again, they filled with an overcrowded population, as might be expected. They had been abandoned by those with choice.

When sufficient people begin to stay in a slum by choice, several other important things also begin to happen.

The community itself gains competence and strength, partly from practice and growth of trust, and finally (this takes much

\* In those Greenwich Village census tracts which were always middle-class or high-income, never having become slums, populations did not drop during these same years, because there was no overcrowded figure for it to drop from. Typically, in these census tracts, population has risen, in some cases mightily, owing to increases in dwelling units themselves—mainly apartment houses. In these tracts, however, child population, *always low*, failed to rise proportionately.

longer) from becoming less provincial. These matters were gone into in Chapter Six, the discussion of neighborhoods.

At this point I would like to emphasize a third change that occurs—and that is implied in the eventual decrease of provincialism. This change is a gradual self-diversification within the population itself. The degree of financial and educational advancement among those who remain in an unslumming slum varies. The majority make modest gains, some make considerable gains, and some make virtually no gains at all. The different skills, interests, activities and acquaintanceships outside the neighborhood vary and diverge with time.

City officials today prate about “bringing back the middle class,” as if nobody were in the middle class until he had left the city and acquired a ranch house and a barbecue and thereby become precious. To be sure, cities are losing their middle class populations. However, cities need not “bring back” a middle class, and carefully protect it like an artificial growth. Cities grow the middle class. But to keep it as it grows, to keep it as a stabilizing force in the form of a self-diversified population, means considering the city’s people valuable and worth retaining, right where they are, before they become middle class.

Even those who remain poorest in an unslumming slum are gainers from the process of unslumming—and therefore they make the city a gainer too. In our neighborhood, these most unlucky or least ambitious of the original slum population, who might otherwise be permanent slum dwellers, have happily escaped that fate. Furthermore, although these people at the bottom are hardly successes by most standards, in their street neighborhoods most of them are successes. They make up a vital part of the web of casual public life. The amount of time they devote to street watching and street management makes some of the rest of us parasites upon them.

Into an unslumming or unslummed slum customarily come new increments of poor or ignorant immigrants from time to time. The Boston banker whom I quoted in the introduction to this book derided the North End because “it is still getting some immigrants.” So is our neighborhood. This too is one of the

great services of unslumming. People are accommodated and assimilated, not in undigestible floods, but as gradual additions, in neighborhoods capable of accepting and handling strangers in a civilized fashion. The immigrants—ours happen to be mostly Puerto Ricans and they are going to make a fine middle class which the city cannot afford to lose—do not escape most of the problems of being immigrants, but at least they do escape the ordeal and demoralization of the perpetual slum. They quickly assimilate into the public street life, and are lively and competent at holding up their end. These very same people could hardly act as they do within the community, nor would they be likely to stay put as long, were they part of a tumultuous replacement throng in a perpetual slum.

Other gainers from unslumming are newcomers who have choice. They can find in the city a place to live which is fit for city life.

Both kinds of newcomers add to the population diversification of an unslumming or unslummed neighborhood. But the indispensable foundation for this added population diversity is the self-diversification and stability of the former slum population itself.

At the beginning of the process of unslumming, few if any of the slum’s most outstandingly successful residents—or their most successful and ambitious children—are apt to stay. Unslumming begins with those who make modest gains, and with those to whom personal attachments overshadow their individual achievement. Later, with improvement, the threshold of success or ambition among those who stay may rise appreciably.

The losses of the most successful or most daring are, in a peculiar fashion, also necessary to the unslumming, I think. For some of those who leave are overcoming one of the terrible problems of most slum populations—the onus of discrimination.

The discrimination which operates most drastically today is, of course, discrimination against Negroes. But it is an injustice with which all our major slum populations have had to contend to some degree.

A ghetto, by the very fact that it is a ghetto, is a place in which most people of spirit, especially the young who have not

learned resignation, will not stay entirely willingly. This is true no matter how objectively good their physical accommodations and social surroundings may otherwise be. They may have to stay. They may diversify within the ghetto considerably. But this is far from the same as acceptance and glad attachment. It is fortunate, in my opinion, that so many of our ghetto dwellers do not feel resigned or defeatist; we would have far more to worry about as a society if we could easily get away with our tendencies toward master-race psychology. But be that as it may, the fact is that in our ghettos live people of spirit, and they don't like ghettos.

When discrimination is appreciably broken down outside a ghetto by its more successful progeny, then the old neighborhood has a great burden lifted from it. Then it is no longer, necessarily, a mark of inferiority to stay there. It can be a mark of genuine choice. In the North End, as an example of what I mean, a young butcher explained carefully to me that it no longer "downgraded" a person to live there. To illustrate his point, he took me to the door of his shop, pointed out a three-story row house down the block, told me that the family who lived there just spent \$20,000 modernizing it (out of saved earnings!), and added, "That man could live anywhere. Today, he could move into a high-class suburb if he wanted to. He wants to stay here. People who stay here don't have to, you know. They like it."

The effective breaking down of residential discrimination outside a slum, and the less dramatic self-diversification within an unslumming slum, proceed concurrently. If America has now, in the case of Negroes, reached an effective halt in this process and in general entered a stage of arrested development—a thought I find both highly improbable and quite intolerable—then it may be that Negro slums cannot effectively unslum in the fashion demonstrated by slums formed by other ethnic populations and population mixtures. In this case, the damage to our cities might be the least of our worries; unslumming is a by-product of other kinds of vigor and other forms of economic and social change.

When an area has unslummed, it is easy to forget how bad it once was and how helpless both the area and its population

were thought to be. This supposed utter worthlessness of the neighborhood was once the case of the area where I live. I see no reason to believe that Negro slums cannot unslum too, and more swiftly than the old slums at that, if the processes at work are understood and helped. As in the case of other slums, overcoming of discrimination outside the slum, and unslumming within the slum, must proceed concurrently. Neither can wait for the accomplishment of the other. Every relaxation of discrimination outside can help unslumming within. Progress in unslumming within helps outside. The two go together.

The inherent resources necessary for unslumming—advancement and self-diversification in a population—demonstrably exist among colored people, including the colored people who are in slums or who have passed through slums, as strikingly as these resources exist among white people. In a way the proved and obvious possession of these resources is more striking among the colored, because they emerge in spite of disproportionate obstacles against their emergence. Indeed, because of the very facts that colored populations advance, self-diversify and have too much spirit to like ghettos, our inner cities have already lost far more of the Negro middle class than they can afford to lose.

I think inner cities will go on losing too much of the Negro middle class almost as fast as it forms until, in actual fact, the choice of remaining there no longer means, for a colored person, an implied acceptance of ghetto citizenship and status. In short, unslumming is at the very least directly—as well as indirectly—inhibited by discrimination. Here I want to remind readers, without repeating it, of a point made near the beginning of this book, on pages 71 and 72, drawing a connection between an urban quality of street use and street life, and the feasibility of overcoming residential discrimination.

Although we Americans talk much about the rapidity with which we accept change, this does not apply to rapidity of intellectual change, I am afraid. Generation after generation, nonslum dwellers stick to the same foolish ideas about slums and slum dwellers. The pessimists always seem to feel that there is something inferior about the current crops of slum dwellers them-



selves, and can point out supposedly dire differences that distinguish them from previous immigrants. The optimists always seem to feel that there is nothing wrong with slums that could not be fixed by housing and land-use reform and enough social workers. It is hard to say which oversimplification is the sillier.

Self-diversification of a population is reflected in diversification of commercial and cultural enterprises. Diversification of income alone makes a difference in the range of possible commercial diversification, often in the humblest ways. Consider, as an illustrative example, the case of a New York cobbler who hung on while most of the adjoining neighborhood was cleared of its population and a new low-income project constructed. After his long and hopeful wait for his new customers, he is going out of business at this location. As he explains it, "I used to get good strong working boots to do, good shoes worth working on. But those new people, even the working men, are *all* so poor. Their shoes are so cheap and flimsy they fall to pieces. They bring them in—look. Shoes like this can't be repaired. What can I do to them—remake them? Even so, they can't pay for the work. There's no use for me here." The old neighborhood would have been characterized as predominately poor too, but it had people who had made modest gains. It was not a sorting of all the poorest.

In unslumming slums where great population drops have occurred with uncrowding, this event has been accompanied by a directly related increase in diversity of incomes—and sometimes by a considerable increase in visitors and cross-use from other neighborhoods and other districts. Under these conditions, tremendous drops in population (which of course occurred gradually rather than as a cataclysm) have not resulted in commercial decimation. On the contrary, the range and prosperity of enterprises typically increases in unslumming slums.

With the *uniformly* very poor, it takes very concentrated densities to produce a genuine exuberance and interesting range of diversity, as some of our old slums did by dint of fantastic overcrowding superimposed on top of very high dwelling densities—combined, of course, with the other three basic conditions for generating diversity.

Successful unslumming means that enough people must have an attachment to the slum that they wish to stay, and it also means that it must be practical for them to stay. Impracticality is the rock on which many an unslumming slum is wrecked. Impracticality has mostly to do with unavailability of money for improvements, for new buildings, and for commercial enterprises at a time when these needs become urgent and their discouragement crucial. Impracticality has to do with the difficulty of making, with time, many changes in detail in the unslumming slum. I shall deal with this problem in the course of the next two chapters.

Aside from these more subtle (but powerful) discouragements, unslumming today is frequently halted by the ultimate discouragement—destruction.

The very fact that a slum has uncrowded itself makes it an extremely tempting site for whole or partial urban "renewal" clearance. The relocation problem looks so simple in comparison with that of horrendously overcrowded perpetual slums. Also the area's comparative social health makes it tempting to clear for a higher-income population. It seems a feasible place for "bringing back the middle class." Unlike a perpetual slum, it is "ripe for redevelopment," as if some mysterious virtue of civilization resided in the very ground here and would be transferred. Describing the destruction of the lively, stable, low-rent West End in Boston, Gans made an observation which applies also to other big cities engaged in redevelopment: "Meanwhile, other areas which have older, more deteriorated and even harmful housing have a lower priority for renewal, because of the lack of interest among potential developers or other powerful interests."

Nothing in the training of planners, architects or government officials contradicts these temptations to destroy unslumming slums. On the contrary, everything that makes these men experts reinforces the temptation; for a slum which has been successfully unslumming displays—invariably—features of layout, use, ground coverage, mixture and activities that are diametrically opposed to the ideals of Radiant Garden City. Otherwise it would never have been able to unslum.

An unslumming slum is peculiarly vulnerable in still another

respect. Nobody is making a fortune out of it. The two great moneymakers in cities are, on the one hand, unsuccessful, perpetual slums and, on the other hand, high-rent or high-cost areas. An unslumming neighborhood is no longer paying off excessively, as it may once have paid, to exploiting slum landlords who do best with greenhorns, nor is it so lush or concentrated a field for policy, drug, vice or protection rackets as is a perpetual slum. On the other hand, neither is it rendering the premium land and building prices associated with the self-destruction of diversity. It is just providing a decent, animated place to live for people who are predominately of modest circumstances, and providing an unspectacular livelihood to the owners of many small enterprises.

Thus the only people who object to destruction of an unslumming neighborhood—especially if it has not yet begun drawing newcomers with choice—are those who have businesses there or who live there. If they try to explain to the uncomprehending experts that this is a good place and growing better, nobody pays attention. In every city, such protests are discounted as the howls of people of narrow vision standing in the way of progress and higher tax receipts.

The processes that occur in unslumming depend on the fact that a metropolitan economy, if it is working well, is constantly transforming many poor people into middle-class people, many illiterates into skilled (or even educated) people, many greenhorns into competent citizens.

In Boston, the improvement of the North End was explained to me by several people outside the district as a peculiar, a freakish thing, based on the circumstance that "North Enders are Sicilians." When I was a girl, people from Sicily and their descendants were slum dwellers, so it was believed, because they were Sicilians. The unslumming and self-diversification within the North End has nothing to do with Sicily. It has to do with the vigor of metropolitan economies, and with the choices and opportunities (some good, some bad) that these energetic economies produce.

This energy and its effects—so different from immemorial peasant life—are so obvious in great cities, and so much taken for

granted, that it is curious that our planning fails to incorporate them as a major and salient reality. It is curious that city planning neither respects spontaneous self-diversification among city populations nor contrives to provide for it. It is curious that city designers seem neither to recognize this force of self-diversification nor to be attracted by the esthetic problems of expressing it.

These odd intellectual omissions go back, I think, to the Garden City nonsense, as so many of the unspoken presuppositions of city planning and city design do. Ebenezer Howard's vision of the Garden City would seem almost feudal to us. He seems to have thought that members of the industrial working classes would stay neatly in their class, and even at the same job within their class; that agricultural workers would stay in agriculture; that businessmen (the enemy) would hardly exist as a significant force in his Utopia; and that planners could go about their good and lofty work, unhampered by rude nay-saying from the untrained.

It was the very fluidity of the new nineteenth-century industrial and metropolitan society, with its profound shiftings of power, people and money, that agitated Howard so deeply—and his more dedicated followers (like the American Decentrists and Regional Planners) after him. Howard wanted to freeze power, people, and the uses and increments of money into an easily manageable and static pattern. Indeed, he happened to want a pattern that was already obsolete. "How to stem the drift from the country is one of the main problems of the day," said he. "The laborer may perhaps be restored to the land, but how will the country industries be restored to rural England?"

Howard aimed at outfoxing the bewildering new city merchants and other entrepreneurs who seemed to spring up inexhaustibly from nowhere. How to leave them no scope in which to pursue their operations, except under the tight directives of a monopolistic corporate plan—this was one of Howard's chief preoccupations in devising his Garden Cities. Howard feared and rejected the energetic forces inherent in urbanization combined with industrialization. He permitted them no part in overcoming slum life.

The restoration of a static society, ruled—in everything that

mattered—by a new aristocracy of altruistic planning experts, may seem a vision remote from modern American slum clearing, slum shifting and slum immuring. But the planning derived from these semifeudal objectives has never been reassessed. It has been employed to deal with real, twentieth-century cities. And this is one reason why, when American city slums do unslum, they do so in spite of planning and counter to the ideals of city planning.

For the sake of its own internal consistency, conventional planning embodies a fantasy about the bewildering presence of people in “slums” whose incomes do not conform to slum dwellers’ incomes. Such people are characterized as victims of inertia, who need a push. (The comments of those who are unctuously given this information about themselves are unprintable.) Clearance, even though they protest it, does them a favor, according to this fantasy, by forcing them to better themselves. Bettering themselves means finding their squadron of price-tagged population and marching with it.

Unslumming and its accompanying self-diversification—possibly the greatest regenerative forces inherent in energetic American metropolitan economies—thus appear, in the murky light of conventional planning and rebuilding wisdom, to represent mere social untidiness and economic confusion, and they are so treated.