

Exclusive, Racist, Judgmental, and Dull: Cities are the New Suburbs

The taxes are too high. The people indulge in groupthink. There seems to be a system in place to prevent free thought, free action, and free movement. Everyone is more preoccupied with fitness than having a good time. Racism is a problem.

When did America's cities become like 1950s suburbs?

I recently moved out of Washington, D.C., to a suburb in Virginia. The move is supposed to be temporary; my lease is up, and the new apartment I want to move into isn't open for a couple of months. I'm staying in the renovated basement of a friend's house in the interim.

I wasn't ready for the culture shock. Decamping from D.C. to Virginia was like escaping from Cuba and arriving in Miami. Washington, like other American cities, has become oppressively orthodox and so strangled with bureaucracy, leftist monoculture, and bad municipal policy that it can barely function. When you live there you can become so numb to the problems—the potholed roads and parking tickets, the moldy decrepit apartments (starting at \$2000 for a one bedroom), the insufferable hipster pseudo-radicalism, the broken Metro—that it's easy to forget what real freedom and genuine diversity look like.

A 2012 [article in *The Atlantic*](#) observed that the divide in America is no longer between North and South, but between urban and country:

Today, that divide has vanished. The new political divide is a stark division between cities and what remains of the countryside. Not just some cities and some rural areas,

either—virtually every major city (100,000-plus population) in the United States of America has a different outlook from the less populous areas that are closest to it. The difference is no longer about where people live, it's about how people live: in spread-out, open, low-density privacy—or amid rough-and-tumble, in-your-face population density and diverse communities that enforce a lower-common denominator of tolerance among inhabitants.

“A lower-common denominator of tolerance” once meant that American cities were truly diverse and fun places. In 1960s New York City conservative William F. Buckley could be friends with liberal Norman Mailer. In his book [*Season of the Witch*](#), David Talbot recalls a 1950s San Francisco that had both beatniks and Catholic working class Irish. Even as late as the 1980s, one could find a mix of punk rockers, black radicals, and Reagan Republicans in D.C.

No more. A [recent MIT study](#) found that while modern cities that lean conservative express a kind of moderate conservatism, modern liberal cities are intensely, extremely liberal. In places like Washington, the second most liberal city in the country according to MIT (right behind San Francisco), this means the kind of lockstep conformity one used to get in 1950s Levittown, Pennsylvania. From the safe spaces at Georgetown University to the Black Panther and radical chic ethos of bookstores like Busboys and Poets and Politics & Prose; from the Stasi-style traffic ticket system that funds the city budget to the herd of independent minds who invaded to work for Obama, Washington has become one big collective Borg mind. Everyone is pro-choice. Nobody likes Ted Cruz. People still read, and believe, the *Washington Post*.

D.C.'s liberalism is not classical liberalism, with its emphasis on individuals over groups, enlightened thinking, and a sense of fun and a bit of innocent sex appeal. Rather, it's a mixture of modern punitive and puritanical health-nut

liberalism. A few years ago I wrote a piece denouncing Washington's ubiquitous speed-camera scam, and [the response](#) from one tired hipster D.C. paper was to primly remind me not to speed. As a kid in the 1970s and a college student in the 1980s, D.C. neighborhoods like Adams Morgan, Shaw, Brookland, and even Georgetown represented freedom, good food and drink, and a funky alternative to the Ward Cleaver Virginia and Maryland suburbs. Now the bars in D.C. have become yoga studios, Georgetown University students are calling for safe spaces, and Michelle Obama, in an echo of Mike Bloomberg's soda war in New York, is telling everyone what to eat. Maybe we should [elect Dolores Umbridge](#) mayor.

There are [no speed cameras in Virginia](#). There are, however, excellent multicultural restaurants, not to mention clean air, genuine diversity, and affordable housing that comes [without complaints](#) about your race. In short, it's what used to flourish in cities before the cities became stifled by heavy-handed liberalism: freedom.

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