



Bourgeois Nightmares: Suburbia, 1870-1930

Robert M. Fogelson

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The quintessential American suburbs, with their gracious single-family homes, large green lawns, and leaf-shaded streets, reflected not only residents' dreams but nightmares, not only hopes but fears: fear of others, of racial minorities and low-income groups, fear of themselves, fear of the market, and, above all, fear of change. These fears, and the restrictive covenants that embodied them, are the subject of Robert M. Fogelson's fascinating new book.

As Fogelson reveals, suburban subdividers attempted to cope with the deep-seated fears of unwanted change, especially the encroachment of "undesirable" people and activities, by imposing a wide range of restrictions on the lots. These restrictions ranged from mandating minimum costs and architectural styles for the houses to forbidding the owners to sell or lease their property to any member of a host of racial, ethnic, and religious groups. These restrictions, many of which are still commonly employed, tell us as much about the complexities of American society today as about its complexities a century ago.

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