From the Editor's Desk	Ernest A. Lynton

The editorial in the previous issue of *Metropolitan Universities* emphasized, once again, the important relationship between the urban core and the surrounding suburbs. That relationship is increasingly under attack by many who wish to abandon the inner city and who deny its vital role in this country's social fabric. The danger of this trend is strongly stated in three recently published items. *Harper's Magazine* for July 1992 carries an expanded version of Senator Bill Bradley's address on the Senate floor on March 26, 1922, one month before the Rodney King verdict, as well as a column entitled "City Lights" by the magazine's editor, Lewis Lapham. The July 1992 issue of *The Atlantic* contains a piece on "The Dawn of the Suburban Era in American Politics" by William Schneider. All three constitute important and deeply disturbing reading for anyone interested in the future of this country's metropolitan areas. All three describe the trend toward, as well as the disastrous consequences of, what Senator Bradley describes as two potential paths for the future of urban America.

One path is that of abandonment, which will occur if people believe that "the city has outlived its usefulness...the city will wither and disappear. Massive investment in urban America would be throwing money away, the argument would go, and trying to prevent the decline is futile."

What the Senator describes as the path of encirclement is, if possible, an even more frightening possibility. It would occur "if cities become enclaves of the rich surrounded by the poor. Racial and ethnic walls will rise higher. Class lines will be manned by ever-increasing security forces. Deeper divisions will divide community life...[urban America] will become a kind of "clockwork orange" society in which the rich will pay for their security; and the poor will be preyed upon at will or will join the army of violent predators. What will be lost by everyone will be freedom, civility, and the chance to build a common future."

For the readers of this journal it is not necessary to reiterate either the moral bankruptcy or the economic shortsightedness of turning our backs to the urban centers of our metropolitan areas. But it is, perhaps, worthwhile to draw attention to a further fundamental dimension of this critical issue mentioned, in different but consistent ways, in all three of the above mentioned articles. Bradley, Schneider, and Lapham all view suburbanization and the abandonment of the city as representing a loss of community and of civic life. That is implied in Bradley's statement about the loss "of a chance to build a common future." Schneider describes the growing privatization of suburban life:

"To move to the suburbs is to express a preference for the private over the public...[People] want a secure and controlled environment....Automobiles may not be efficient, but they give people a sense of security and control...in the comfort of [their] own private space....Even the streets of the suburb are not really public areas. Suburban houses have decks, which protrude into private back yards. In the great American suburb there are no front porches."

Schneider further quotes two architects who describe the suburb as

"...less a community than an agglomeration of houses, shops, and offices connected to one another by cars, not the fabric of human life....The structure of the suburb tends to confine people to their houses and cars; it discourages strolling, walking, mingling with neighbors. The suburb is the last word in privatization, perhaps even its lethal consummation, and it spells the end of authentic civic life."

Lapham shares this almost apocalyptic view. He associates the flight to the suburbs with "a fear of freedom" by people who "prefer the orderliness of the feudal countryside, where few strangers ever come to trouble the villagers with news of Trebizond and Cathay." He contrasts this with

"[t]he freedom of the city [which] is the freedom of expression and the freedom of the mind....Freedom implies change, which implies friction, which implies unhappiness, which disturbs the nervous complacency of the admissions committee at the country club."

"The energy of the city derives from its hope for the future and the infinite forms of its possibilities. The city offers its citizens a blank canvas on which to draw whatever portraits of themselves they have the wit and courage to imagine."

The common theme sounded by these three authors is that the future of the cities affects the very essence of our civic culture and of the intellectual life of our country, matters which are of central concern to metropolitan universities. We hear much these days of values, and of the responsibility of educational institutions to inculcate in their students a sensitivity to the ethical, cultural, and intellectual dimensions of the choices they face. Surely it is part of that responsibility to raise their awareness of the full implications of current trends, and to ask them to look beyond issues of security in deciding the kind of life they want for themselves and for their children.

Lapham's column begins with a quotation from De Tocqueville, which it is appropriate to repeat:

"Each person, withdrawn into himself, behaves as though he is a stranger to the destiny of all others. His children and good friends constitute for him the whole of the human species. As for his transactions with his fellow citizens, he may mix among them, but he sees them not; he touches them, but does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone. And if on these terms there remains a sense of family, there no longer remains a sense of society."