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JANE'S URBAN ETHICS:

Jane Jacobs on Racism, Capital, Power, and the Plantation Mentality

Peter L. Laurence

The 2016 centennial of Jane Jacobs's birth was an opportunity for scholars and pundits to reflect on the legacy of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and the author's other works and activism. Such reflections naturally considered Jacobs's enduring readership, but also sought to find shortcomings in her thinking and works. Among the critics, and even some otherwise admiring biographers, was a theme that Jacobs was keen to observe the importance of "eyes on the street" and other street-scaled phenomena but was weak on such overarching structural concerns as racism, power, and capital. From such charges arose claims that Jacobs was race-blind and a neoliberal, accusations made more dramatic in the context of the polarizing rhetoric of the 2016 US presidential election, Brexit, and other ideological divisions. By examining Jacobs's ideas about the freedom of the city; segregation and discrimination; public space and social capital; neighborhood organization and self-government; and her rejection of the "Plantation mentality," this paper challenges those claims and shows Jacobs as an important theorist of ethics in the city, which she described as an "ecosystem" of "physical-economic-ethical processes" ideally characterized by "mutual support."

Keywords:

Jane Jacobs; Ethics; Just City; Urban Design; Urban Renewal; Urban Redevelopment; Urban Economics; Urban Policy; Urban Planning; Neighborhood Organization; Urban Politics; Urban Governance; Public Space; Segregation; Redlining; Desegregation; Racism; Gentrification; Public-Private Partnerships; Social Capital

Introduction: Ecosystems, Cities, and Ethics

In the 1993 edition of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs emphasized the study of "the ecology of cities" as the overarching ambition of her canonical 1961 book. Explaining what she meant by this, Jacobs observed that natural ecologies and city ecologies have "fundamental principles in common." Among their similarities, both natural and human urban ecologies require great diversity to sustain themselves. The greater number of "niches for diversity of life and livelihoods in either kind of ecosystem," Jacobs explained, "the greater its carrying capacity for life" (Jacobs, 1993, xvi). In other words, in natural ecosystems, the diversity of gene pools enables and enriches life, while in city ecosystems, the diversity of people, with a diversity of interests, tastes, and desires to pursue diverse kinds of work, enriches urban economies. These ideas, present in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (hereafter *Death and Life*), led to her subsequent books on city economies, the roots of which can be found in her earliest essays on cities and "city naturalism" from the late 1930s and early 1940s (Laurence, 2016, 50).

However, Jacobs recognized that natural ecosystems and city ecosystems are not the same. In her view, their key difference was this: While natural ecosystems are composed of "physical-chemical-biological processes," city ecosystems are composed of "physical-economic-ethical

processes” (Jacobs, 1993, xvi). For Jacobs, ethics are as an important a part of city systems as their physical and economic composition.

This description of cities as systems defined by physical-economic-ethical processes is perhaps as condensed a summary of Jacobs’s interests in *Death and Life*—and her larger oeuvre—as we might find. *Death and Life* was concerned, in Jacobs’s fluid and synthetic approach, with the physicality, economics, and ethical dimensions of cities. By the time she had written the foreword to the 1993 edition, she had followed *Death and Life* with two books on city economics—*The Economy of Cities* (1969) and *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (1984)—and had just completed *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics* (1992), a book on the ethics of public service and private economic life inspired by Plato’s *Republic*. Thus, by 1993, Jacobs had examined the component parts of the physical-economic-ethical dimensions of city ecosystems in separate books.

As Jacobs wrote the new foreword to her most famous book some thirty years after it was first published, she was likely reflecting on the overarching interests and ambitions of her work. Appropriately, her next book was *Systems of Survival*’s sequel, *The Nature of Economies* (2000), a book that explored the similarities of natural and economic systems in detail, extending themes, among them systems thinking and complexity, first explored in *Death and Life*. And by the time *The Nature of Economies* was finished, she may well have had in mind her final book, which was tentatively titled *A Short Biography of the Human Race*.

Unfortunately, by the time Jacobs was in her late 80s, *A Short Biography of the Human Race* was too ambitious a project. Nevertheless, some of its themes can be found in her rather hastily written last book, *Dark Age Ahead* (2004), and in a lecture presented in New York just after *Dark Age Ahead* was published. In this lecture, titled “The End of the Plantation Age,” Jacobs explained that early civilizations, built on the abundance of natural resources and “cheap and disposable” human life, had fundamentally operated as plantations. Guided by a “Plantation mentality,” these civilizations eventually perished because, as monocultures, plantations could never endure because plantations systematically reject the vitality, adaptability, and resiliency of ecosystems (Jacobs, 2004b, 432). Nevertheless, the “dead and unburied, putrefying Plantation Age” lingered in such potent forms as wars, colonization, factory farms, racism, and even gated suburban communities.

These ideas, Jacobs said in her lecture, were “a partial preview of a future book I hope to write, under the optimistic assumption that we have not reached a point of no return in loss and corruption of our culture” (Jacobs, 2004b, 458–59). For the human race to survive, Jacobs argued, the Plantation Age must be eclipsed by an Age of Human Capital, with cities and an ecological mindset at its heart. Echoing ideas developed in earlier works, Jacobs remarked that, “In their modes of connecting, their deep organizational principles, ecosystems are much like cities, and not at all like plantations.” It was only cities and economies developed in emulation of ecosystems that could contain, as Jacobs wrote in the final lines of *Death and Life*, “the seeds of their own regeneration” (Jacobs, 1961, 448).

Because of Jacobs’s scientifically oriented mindset, and her inclination to turn to scientific rationales and forms of proof, it can be difficult to extract the moral aspects from the physical-economic-ethical gestalt that comprises her understanding of the city. For example, although ethics was a critical theme in *Systems of Survival*, that book is not especially concerned with cities per se, and, moreover, a detailed study of Jacobs’s ethics and conceptions of the just city

across her oeuvre of seven major books is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, what is undertaken here is an in-depth study, informed by her larger work, of these ideas primarily in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, her most read work and the one most directly and explicitly concerned with cities in a holistic fashion. And while *Death and Life* is widely read, as seen in essays and books published around the time of her centennial in 2016—some of which claim that Jacobs was race-blind, a flag-bearer for gentrification, and a neoliberal—it is still prone to misinterpretation more than a half century after its publication, indicating that a better understanding of Jacobs’s ethics at that critical point in her thinking is worthwhile and necessary.¹

Thus, in examining *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in detail, with the help of some of her other writings, this paper challenges claims that Jacobs’s was a casual racist, an apologist for gentrification, and a libertarian and, to the contrary, finds in Jacobs’s view of the city’s ethical infrastructure a vision of an open, just, and democratic city. In the pages that follow, this is taken up in four sections. The first, “*Stadtluft macht frei*,” examines Jacobs’s thinking about the freedoms of the city. Second, “Our Country’s Most Serious Social Problem” investigates her attitudes toward race. Third, “A City’s Wealth of Public Life” interrogates her attitudes toward capital and the public good. And fourth, “On Self-Government,” the concluding section, summarizes her attitudes toward social organization, power, and democracy.

Cities and Freedom: “*Stadtluft macht frei*”

Jacobs likely first read Henri Pirenne’s *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* (1925) during her brief career as a college student at Columbia University, where she studied economic geography among other subjects between 1938 and 1940 (Laurence, 2007). But whatever the date, *Medieval Cities* became one of the most influential books on Jacobs’s thinking; she referenced or alluded to it in all of her major books, beginning with *Death and Life* (Laurence, 2016, 53).

In a thesis that Jacobs found especially compelling, Pirenne argued that Medieval European cities had liberated European people from servitude, subsistence economies, and caste. He wrote,

“‘The air of the city makes free,’ says the German proverb (*Die Stadtluft macht frei*), and this truth held good in every clime. Freedom, of old, used to be the monopoly of a privileged class. By means of the cities it again took its place in society as a natural attribute of the citizen. Hereafter it was enough to reside on city soil to acquire it. Every serf who had lived for a year and a day within the city limits had it by definite right: the statute of limitations abolished all rights which his lord exercised over his person and chattels. Birth meant little. Whatever might be the mark with which it had stigmatized the infant in his cradle, it vanished in the atmosphere of the city” (Pirenne, 1925, 193).

Medieval cities were, in this sense, the cradle of Western civilization, economies, and liberalism. They created, and were conceived by, a merchant class that evolved into a middle class that had incrementally carved out civil rights and freedoms from the authority of the landed gentry, nobility, and church, and established municipal institutions, ultimately offering serfs opportunities for freedom and upward mobility. “Little by little,” Pirenne wrote, “the middle class stood out as a distinct and privileged group in the midst of the population of the country. From a simple social group given over to the carrying on of commerce and industry, it was

transformed into a legal group, recognized as such by the princely power. And out of that legal status itself was come, necessarily, the granting of an independent legal organization” (Pirenne, 1925, 122).

“Democracy in the Middle Ages, as in modern times,” Pirenne concluded, “got its start under the guidance of a select few who foisted their program upon the confused aspirations of the people” (Pirenne, 1925, 112).

This rather romantic story of the revival of democracy after the collapse of the Roman Empire, by way of cities and trade, greatly appealed to Jacobs. As a story of the death and rebirth of Western cities, *Medieval Cities* was a point of reference as she first started thinking about writing the book that became *Death and Life*, which even echoed Pirenne’s thesis in its title. In discussing her idea for the book in the summer of 1958, Jacobs observed that *Medieval Cities* had “much to say on how life is organized in contemporary cities” (Laurence, 2016, 54). Although she didn’t cite the book directly (as she did in later books), her reference to *Stadtluft macht frei* in *Death and Life* was another allusion to it. In a remarkable passage in *Death and Life*’s conclusion—much later echoed again in “The End of the Plantation Age”—Jacobs wrote,

“In real life, barbarians (and peasants) are the least free of men—bound by tradition, ridden by caste, fettered by superstitions, riddled by suspicion and foreboding of whatever is strange. ‘City air makes free’ was the medieval saying, when city air literally did make free the runaway serf. City air still makes free the runaways from company towns, from plantations, from factory-farms, from subsistence farms, from migrant picker routes, from mining villages, from one-class suburbs” (Jacobs, 1961, 444).

In the context of *Death and Life*’s final chapter, with this passage Jacobs rejected historical and contemporary ideas about the unnaturalness and malignancy of cities, and the alleged naturalness, purity, and freedom of rural settlements. She observed that it was the perverse success of the European city that gave rise to the fantasy of the Noble Savage, and, in the American milieu, Jefferson’s rejection of cities for the “pathetic dream,” as Jacobs described it, of gentleman farmers whose plantations were worked by slaves (Jacobs, 1961, 444). As it was for medieval serfs, the countryside was where people had long found themselves bound to farms, plantations, and mines; later, to company towns; and, in the age of suburbs, to gated communities. In a subtle biographical allusion, Jacobs herself had left, at the first chance, a mining town, her hometown of Scranton, Pennsylvania, for whatever opportunities the great city of New York would afford her. Twenty-five years later, Jacobs was full of disdain for those leaving cities for newly minted suburban communities. Throughout *Death and Life* are found searing critiques of the middle-class decision to self-segregate in exurban “colonies,” and of the reactionary idea that destructive urban renewal projects were necessary to bribe them to stay. “City officials today prate about ‘bringing back the middle class,’” Jacobs remarked, “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” (Jacobs, 1961, 282).

As these passages suggest, Jacobs was no more idealistic about the middle class than suburbia. She regarded the “wandering” middle class, particularly the suburban middle class, as willful bores. *Vapid, bland, insipid, standardized, superficial, and sentimental* were some of the terms she used to describe suburbs in *Death and Life*. And, to her frustration, little might be expected of the middle class, as a group, politically. As Pirenne had observed, the middle class “merely wished to obtain, because it was necessary to their existence, not an overthrow of the existing

order but simple concessions... limited to their own needs. They were completely uninterested in those of the rural population from which they had sprung. In short, they only asked of society to make for them a place compatible with the sort of life they were leading” (Pirenne, 1925, 110–11). Thus, in various ways, the idea of being a housewife in an isolated, homogeneously white, socially uniform, and functionally separated community was, for Jacobs, not an “American dream,” but a nightmare.

Nevertheless, Jacobs believed that the middle class had a historically important role in cities and thus was particularly concerned about 1950s suburbanization and “white flight.” In an article about Cleveland in 1955, she wrote that, “No big city can afford to allow its heart to become a ghetto for the underprivileged, surrounded by prosperous suburbs” (Laurence, 2016, 170–71). Apart from the inherent racism, self-segregation, and urban disinvestment, and her prescient concerns about sprawl, loss of farmland, and pollution, she feared that civil society would wither in an environment of social polarization.

Pirenne had written that the rule of law, and peace itself, was historically tied to both the city and to the middle class: “In questions of marriage, succession, liens, debts, mortgages, and particularly in questions of business law, a whole new body of legislation came into being in the cities, and the jurisprudence of their tribunals created a civil practice, increasingly amplified and exact.” He continued to explain that, “More than community of interests and residence, it [“city peace”] contributed to make uniform the status of all the inhabitants located within the city walls and to create the middle class. The burghers were essentially a group of *homines pacis*—men of peace. The peace of the city (*pax villae*) was at the same time the law of the city (*lex villae*)” (Pirenne, 1925, 127–28). Without the urban middle class, it was therefore difficult to imagine either the city of peace or the city of laws; and without the middle class, not only would the urban economy contract, the wealthy and powerful would find it easier to prey on the poor and disadvantaged.

Apart from the stabilizing force that a middle class could provide, Jacobs believed that cities could offer people a greater range of opportunities than suburban and rural environments. She believed that “Cities grow the middle class” and 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” (Jacobs, 1961, 282, 288).

Although *Death and Life* was only a prelude to Jacobs’s books on the growth and nature of city economies, she was thinking about the connection between the prosperity of American cities and the migration of millions of poor Irish, Italian, Jewish, Polish, and Chinese in the late nineteenth century, the Great Migration of six million African-Americans from the US South starting soon thereafter, and the contemporary migration from Appalachia and Puerto Rico. Of course, New York City, Jacobs’s primary point of reference, was a city of immigrants; she observed that Lower East Side neighborhoods, for example, were home to “individuals of more than forty differing ethnic origins” (Jacobs, 1961, 139). But beyond New York, she regarded immigration as a natural part of American history, and migration to the nation’s great cities—which she would describe in later books as the nation’s lifeblood—as essential to the nation’s and cities’ social and economic diversity, and thus to their success. Great American cities, like European counterparts before them, were built by “runaways from company towns, from plantations, from factory-farms, from subsistence farms, from migrant picker routes, from mining villages, from one-class suburbs.” These cities were ideally places of sanctuary and of opportunity.

Segregation and Racial Discrimination: “Our Country’s Most Serious Social Problem”

While Jacobs held strong convictions about the virtues of cities and rejected familiar nostalgic and romantic views of the countryside and suburbs, she was not blind to the problems of cities. Although she disdained reformer Ebenezer Howard’s “Garden Cities” as more paternalistic than realistic, she recognized that “Howard looked at the living conditions of the poor in late nineteenth-century London, and justifiably did not like what he smelled or saw or heard” (Jacobs, 1961, 17). And life at that time was no better in American cities. Thinking of Chicago, Jacobs observed that “When the great muckraker and crusader, Upton Sinclair, wanted to describe the dregs of city life and human exploitation in his book, *The Jungle* [1905], it was [Chicago’s] Back-of-the-Yards and its associated stockyards he chose to portray” (Jacobs, 1961, 297). (Jacobs would later write the introduction to a 2002 edition of Sinclair’s book, where she remarked that through his depiction of this Chicago neighborhood, Sinclair more broadly “traced seemingly separate strands of brutality, fraud, and corruption to show how they interlaced in concrete, understandable patterns” (Sinclair, 1905, xiii).

Fortunately, a half-century later, when Jacobs wrote *Death and Life*, US cities had changed and improved. Many of the most congested slums—in Chicago, New York, Boston, and elsewhere—had “uncrowded” and “unslummed,” in part due to mass transit systems, early suburban expansion, and the emergence of a generation of city-dwellers with the wherewithal to move away. As discussed later, neighborhoods like Back-of-the-Yards had also organized politically. Thus, Jacobs sought to show that the corrupt and paternalistic postwar slum clearance and urban renewal programs, which evicted tens of thousands and destroyed large parts of cities and their social networks, were not worth the costs. Rather than such cataclysmic destruction, Jacobs sought to show that neighborhoods could “spontaneously unslum” under the right conditions and with the right resources. The list of conditions was admittedly not short: safety; desegregation; the basic conditions for social and economic diversity (primary mixed uses, small blocks, aged building, and density); neighborhood political organization; accommodations for children and families; and public policy decisions including fair credit markets, housing subsidies, reconnecting disconnected city fabrics, performance zoning, strategically located public spaces and buildings, and a robust commons. Most importantly, people, regardless of income, must want to stay and invest in their neighborhoods.

As an example of unslumming, Jacobs wrote of Boston’s North End, “Twenty years ago, when I first happened to see the North End, its buildings—town houses of different kinds and sizes converted to flats, and four- or five-story tenements built to house the flood of immigrants first from Ireland, then from Eastern Europe and finally from Sicily—were badly overcrowded, and the general effect was of a district taking a terrible physical beating and certainly desperately poor.” But when she visited the North End again in 1959, Jacobs was amazed at the change: “Dozens and dozens of buildings had been rehabilitated” (Jacobs, 1961, 9). Later, as an example of residents’ powerful commitment to the neighborhood, she related the anecdote of a neighborhood butcher who explained that it “no longer ‘downgraded’ a person” to live in the North End. Pointing to a recently renovated building down the block from his shop, the butcher said, ““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.”” (Jacobs, 1961, 284).

While the North End may have been example of a city neighborhood that had uncrowded, unslummed, and had “grown the middle class,” Jacobs was well aware that not all neighborhoods—and not all people—were equal in their resources or opportunities. To be sure, she rejected the then-widespread concept of slums (and reformers’ and paternalists’ notions) that neighborhoods became slums because their residents were poor, ethnic minorities, or immigrants. In the first few pages of *Death and Life*, she observed that new housing projects often became “worse centers of delinquency, vandalism, and general hopelessness than the slums they were supposed to replace,” and when a Boston city planner insisted that, by all conventional measures, the North End, with its immigrants and ethnic demographic, was a slum, she sardonically replied, ““You should have more slums like this”” (Jacobs, 1961, 10). Indeed, in the book she asserted that, “Conventional planning approaches to slums and slum dwellers are thoroughly paternalistic. To overcome slums, we must regard slum dwellers as people capable of understanding and acting upon their own self-interests... This is far from trying to patronize people into a better life” (Jacobs, 1961, 271). For Jacobs, it clearly followed, “Nor can we conclude, either, that middle-class families or upper-class families build good neighborhoods, and poor families fail to” (Jacobs, 1961, 113). She rejected the white middle-class stereotype that poor people were criminals and their neighborhoods unsafe: “Nor is it illuminating to tag minority groups, or the poor, or the outcast with responsibility for city danger... Some of the safest sidewalks in New York City, for example, at any time of day or night, are those along which poor people or minority groups live” (Jacobs, 1961, 31).

On the contrary, Jacobs recognized that “Overcrowding, deterioration, crime, and other forms of blight are surface symptoms of prior and deeper economic and functional failure” (Jacobs, 1961, 98). And foremost among these were racism and segregation. Writing some six years before the US Civil Rights Act of 1964, Jacobs was very clear about “our country’s most serious social problem— segregation and racial discrimination” (Jacobs, 1961, 71). She described American society as having “tendencies toward master-race psychology” (Jacobs, 1961, 283). She understood that, in the Jim Crow era, racism was entrenched and systemic, even in Northern US cities. She observed that in Chicago perfectly good “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” (Jacobs, 1961, 274).

Jacobs knew that minority ethnic groups, especially African-Americans, and their neighborhoods, were subject to redlining—exclusion from credit and financial services and markets—a process she described as “the slow-death warrants of area credit-blacklisting by mortgage lenders” (Jacobs, 1961, 127). This, she observed, was broadly true for “blacklisted” areas that were considered slums: “Credit-blacklisting maps, like slum-clearance maps, are accurate prophecies because they are self-fulfilling prophecies” because, without fair credit, these neighborhoods were subject to the “exploitative money” and “shadow-world money” of loan sharks, the exploitations of slumlords, seizure through police powers, the power of corrupt real estate developers, and the destruction of urban renewal (Jacobs, 1961, 301). But African-Americans, excluded from neighborhoods and financial markets, were treated most unjustly by “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” (Jacobs, 1961, 274). As a result of these various abuses, people ended up in public housing. “Nowadays, relatively few people enter low-income projects by free choice,” Jacobs observed. “Rather, they have been thrown out of their previous neighborhoods to make

way for ‘urban renewal’ or highways and, especially if they are colored and therefore subject to housing discrimination, have had no other choice” (Jacobs, 1961, 403).

Jacobs knew of course that other ethnic groups had been subject to discrimination, and that many had overcome prejudice in time. But in comparison to experts on the subject, among them the sociologist Nathan Glazer, a friend who read a draft of *Death and Life*, Jacobs was actually more concerned, and skeptical, about the plight of African-Americans than others. For example, in *Beyond the Melting Pot*, published two years after *Death and Life* in 1963, Glazer had little to say about racism; he was overly optimistic that “Negroes” would be as easily assimilated into middle-class American life as Irish, Italians, and Jews had been. It wasn’t until 1970, with the second edition of *Beyond the Melting Pot*, that Glazer apprehended the depth of structural racism against African-Americans (Glazer, 1970, xiii).² By comparison, in addition to addressing “blacklisting,” Jacobs presciently questioned whether the US could overcome its wholly corrupting master-race psychology. As she wrote:

“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” (Jacobs, 1961, 284).

Indeed, as Jacobs explained in testimony to a US Senate subcommittee in October 1962, African-Americans were being denied the fundamental social and economic freedoms that would permit them to improve their lives and neighborhoods, thereby committing them to ghettos and victimization by slumlords. They inherited what she described as “perpetual slums”— neighborhoods “always going backward instead of forward, a circumstance that reinforces most of its other troubles,” and communities “in a perpetually embryonic stage” (Jacobs, 1961, 276). Ghettos, by definition, were undignified, overcrowded, purposefully neglected places that people wanted to leave. Therefore, as soon as someone could escape, they did. “I think inner cities will go on losing too much of the Negro middle class almost as fast as it forms,” Jacobs wrote, “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” (Jacobs, 1961, 283). Thus, even when poor, minority neighborhoods were not subject to urban renewal destruction— which, Jacobs pointed out, they frequently were— the very status of their residents’ citizenship was called into question.

In *The Economy of Cities*, Jacobs observed that “problems of discrimination [were] destroying the United States,” and wrote at length about the “discriminatory use of capital” (Jacobs, 1969, 220, 223). She noted the social and economic discrimination faced by women, immigrants, and various minority groups, but paid special attention to Black Americans, whom she noted “have been kept in economic subjection by discrimination in cities”—as they had been in rural America. She went on to state that,

“For if whites in the United States really were to ignore that blacks do, if they really were unaware of what goes on in black communities in American cities, blacks would, in fact, actually have a chance to develop work and add new work to old [i.e., economic

development]. But black people in their ghettos are regulated absolutely by whites” (Jacobs, 1969, 225).

Jacobs concluded that such discrimination would destroy both cities and the nation. “People who are prevented from solving their own problems cannot solve problems for their cities either,” she observed (Jacobs, 1969, 228). However, she was clear that discrimination and segregation were problems beyond the capacity of urban designers and city planners to solve. She did not fall for “the physical fallacy”—the idea that the design of buildings and cities could overcome the social and economic forces at the heart of structural racism.³ As she wrote in *Death and Life*:

“I do not mean to imply that a city’s planning and design, or its types of streets and street life, can automatically overcome segregation and discrimination. Too many other kinds of effort are also required to right these injustices” (Jacobs, 1961, 71).

However, Jacobs believed that the physical places and spaces of the city could *help* to overcome segregation and discrimination. What was important about these spaces and places was that they were safe and that they were public. It was only in these public urban spaces that people from different backgrounds and walks of life would encounter one another. For Jacobs, one of the basic definitions of a great city was that it was a place populated by many strangers (Jacobs, 1961, 30). But beyond this, Jacobs explained that, “Overcoming residential discrimination comes hard where people have no means of keeping a civilized public life on a basically dignified public footing, and their private lives on a private footing” (Jacobs, 1961, 72). She was concerned about the privatization, and effective privatization, of massive parts of the city through urban renewal policies and public-private real estate developments. Not only were public spaces—sidewalks, streets, and entire city blocks—being turned into massive “projects,” both public and private, people were being segregated by race and income, both by force and by choice. “Turf psychology,” as Jacobs described it, could be seen in functionalist planning concepts that separated residential, commercial, and institutional uses, as well as in city gangs, housing projects, gated communities, and other segregated and self-segregated entities. Jacobs presciently observed that, “The growth and hardening of Turf psychology because of real dangers—or the concentration together of appreciable numbers of people already beset with xenophobia, whichever it may be—is a serious problem for big cities” (Jacobs, 1961, 402). To counter racism and xenophobia, public spaces were absolutely essential. As she wrote:

“The tolerance, the room for great differences among neighbors—differences that often go far deeper than differences in color—which are possible and normal in intensely urban life, but which are so foreign to suburbs and pseudosuburbs, are possible and normal only when streets of great cities have built-in equipment allowing strangers to dwell in peace together on civilized but essentially dignified and reserved terms” (Jacobs, 1961, 72).

This “built-in equipment” for allowing strangers to dwell together in peace was the public realm of cities, which could be understood more broadly as cities themselves.

Social Capital and Public Space: “A City’s Wealth of Public Life”

Jacobs believed that civilization depended on a democratic and pluralistic public realm, where the civilized and dignified interactions of strangers from all strata of society (not just the white, wealthy, and male) could happen. She believed in an ideal American democracy, but, knowing that the nation was founded in slaveholding, she did not believe its ideals had yet been achieved.

Her first book, *Constitutional Chaff: Rejected Suggestions of the Constitutional Convention of 1787*, was grounded in her belief that the American experiment, like the Constitution itself, was a work in progress, and that open debate and argument were a necessary part of hashing out ideas (Jacobs, 1941; Laurence, 2016). Transparency and inclusivity in decision-making, and especially suffrage (an idea not shared by leading libertarians and other paternalists with limited views of democracy), naturally followed.⁴ She remarked that in public hearings at City Hall, “Very plain people, including the poor, including the discriminated against, including the uneducated, reveal themselves momentarily as people with grains of greatness in them” (Jacobs, 1961, 407). Meanwhile, she observed that on the street, “Lowly, unpurposeful, and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city’s wealth of public life may grow” (Jacobs, 1961, 72). Although she did not coin the term “social capital,” she helped to popularize it in her discussion of the “capital” that is built and the “income” that accrues when people build robust social networks in their communities (Jacobs, 1961, 138).

In various ways, social capital was a true form of wealth. As Jacobs observed, “The well-off have many ways of assuaging needs for which poorer people may depend much on sidewalk life” (Jacobs, 1961, 70). But more broadly, underlying this concept of social capital was Jacobs’s belief that public life was the essence of cities. Cities shrank and became poorer without it. “If interesting, useful, and significant contacts among the people of cities are confined to acquaintanceships suitable for private life, the city becomes stultified,” she stated (Jacobs, 1961, 55). For example, in Pittsburgh’s Chatham Village, a model middle-class “Garden City” suburb, there was “no public life, in any city sense.” There were only “differing degrees of extended private life” (Jacobs, 1961, 64). In another counter-example, Jacobs explained that in the suburbs, where a diversity of strangers was less common, “when mothers of different income or color or educational background bring their children to the street park, they and their children are rudely and pointedly ostracized. They fit awkwardly into the suburbanlike sharing of private lives that has grown in default of city sidewalk life” (Jacobs, 1961, 63). Public space alone, in other words, was insufficient for public life. Only the democratically shared public spaces of the city could truly generate public life. (At odds with prevailing sentiments of the day, cities were also better places to raise children and well-adjusted citizens than suburbs, in Jacobs’s estimation.)

In the context of postwar redevelopment, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* is an argument against the privatization of cities and the diminishment of the public realm. While Jacobs was critical of the social frameworks of the suburbs, and concerned about sprawl in general, cities were Jacobs’s primary concern and she wrote the book in large part to attack the socially and economically segregating developments built through public-private partnerships that characterized urban renewal, in which public land was given to private developers. Typically large-scale super-block developments, these projects ripped up public sidewalks, streets, and whole city blocks, physically reducing the scope of the public realm. Moreover, although urban renewal projects are stereotypically associated with public housing today, many postwar projects took public land and privately owned buildings from poor people, for minimal compensation, and gave the land to corporations and private developers to build middle-class housing. As James Baldwin observed in 1963, “urban renewal... means Negro removal” (Baldwin, 1963). They were removed for financial exploitation as much as racism. When the white middle class was moving to the suburbs, a major goal of urban renewal was to keep the middle class and their tax dollars in cities. In some cases, such as Boston’s West End, lower-income white/ethnic neighborhoods were destroyed and redeveloped for “high class,” upper-income residents. In this

sense, many urban renewal projects, among them those that Jacobs fought as an activist in Greenwich Village, were purposefully and explicitly planned as gentrifying projects (Jacobs, 1961, 272; Gans, 1962; Boston Globe, 2012; Laurence, 2016).⁵

When it came to housing and real estate development, Jacobs did not believe that government agencies should serve as developers, builders, and general contractors, but she did not believe in a laissez-faire free-market approach either. Rather, in the case of housing, she promoted government-provided rent subsidies. She explained that, “Our cities contain people too poor to pay for the quality of shelter that our public conscience (quite rightly, I think) tells us they should have. Furthermore, in many cities the sheer supply of dwellings is too small... Because of these reasons, we need subsidies for at least some portion of city dwellings” (Jacobs, 1961, 323). In other words, despite her strong criticisms of public housing projects, agencies, and administrations, she did not reject government programs to subsidize housing on principle, but because those particular programs and experiments had failed. In fact, she believed that “considerable public money will be needed for salvage” of urban renewal projects. Not shying away from the use of tax dollars, she stated that, “money will be needed for site replanning and designing itself... money will be needed for construction of streets and other public spaces; and probably money will be needed for subsidy to at least some of the new building construction” (Jacobs, 1961, 398). Only after public sidewalks and streets were returned to the public, and government agencies’ care, would land previously seized through eminent domain for urban renewal projects be re-parceled and re-sold to private developers. Jacobs did not believe that housing authorities themselves should be given “the responsibility of reweaving their old baronies back into the free city” (Jacobs, 1961, 397). As in her book *Systems of Survival*, Jacobs saw the importance of clear distinctions between public and private space, and public and private responsibilities.

When *Death and Life* was published, conservative readers such as William F. Buckley, who praised the book, read Jacobs’s criticisms of urban renewal as a generalized argument against government and its social programs (Laurence, 2016). To be sure, Jacobs hated urban renewal and its enabling agencies, and her attacks on public housing, as then conceived, were seen by liberals as well as conservatives as killing a liberal “sacred cows.” But this did not mean that Jacobs sided with private developers who took advantage of the system and went so far as to fraudulently fabricate public support for their development projects. Jacobs recognized such public-private projects as “monstrous moral hybrids,” as she described such corruption in *Systems of Survival* (Jacobs, 1992, 80). “Slum clearance,” she observed, was defended as follows: “‘Society has created the slums,’ they say, ‘and it is only right that society should pay what is needed to wipe them out.’ Putting it in these terms, however, evades the question of who is being paid by society, and where the money goes next” (Jacobs, 1961, 316). Through the use of eminent domain and the government’s police powers, “involuntary subsidies” were extracted from property owners. These property owners, Jacobs wrote, “are subsidizing these schemes, not with a fraction of their tax money, but with their livelihoods, with their children’s college money, with years of their past put into hopes for the future—with nearly everything they have” (Jacobs, 1961, 311). In the urban renewal “gravy train,” value extracted from property owners, taxpayers, and the public realm was turned into profits in the pockets of private and corporate developers.

Thus, despite her famous attacks on the urban renewal regime, Jacobs did not reject the idea that the public good might involve certain kinds of distributions from the private to the public. In a statement without the vitriol conservatives may have liked, she described eminent domain as a

“long familiar and useful... means of acquiring property needed for public use.” This was because she accepted the idea of “the public good.” Referring to *Berman v Parker*, she accepted that “The Supreme Court declared that society did have the right— through the medium of its legislatures— to make that kind of choice between private entrepreneurs and owners; it could take the property of the one to benefit the other, as a means of achieving objects which, in the legislature’s judgment, were for the public good” (Jacobs, 1961, 311).

In destroying social capital for the sake of private capital, the primary economic problem of postwar urban renewal was that the public, as a whole, was not paying its fair share of urban renewal. While urban renewal was sold to the public as a way of increasing tax revenues, Jacobs stated that, “Were the involuntary subsidies which make these schemes possible included as public costs, the enlarged public costs would bear no conceivable relationship to anticipated tax returns” (Jacobs, 1961, 312). She observed, “At present, society is protected from these facts of life because so high a proportion of the costs is visited upon involuntary victims and is not officially added in” (Jacobs, 1961, 312). This, obviously, was not just. Ultimately, urban renewal was not a government failure, it was a failure of the society as a whole.

In one of the most important, but overlooked, passages in *Death and Life*, Jacobs wrote, “Private investment shapes cities, but social ideas (and laws) shape private investment” (Jacobs, 1961, 312). It was a way of stating that the private depended on the public, and that the decisions made by the collective public could, and should, regulate strictly private actions.

Indeed, not only was Jacobs critical of corrupt public-private partnerships and involuntary subsidies, she was critical of the free market itself. In “The Self-Destruction of Diversity,” *Death and Life*’s thirteenth chapter, Jacobs described city real estate markets as potential “forces of decline” that “work for ill.” Unregulated real estate capital generated competition that ultimately destroyed itself. Such capital was “a force that creates has-been districts, and is responsible for much inner-city stagnation and decay” (Jacobs, 1961, 242). Giving the example of a popular “100 percent location” in Philadelphia that, after attracting a bank on one corner, was eventually colonized by banks on all four corners, Jacobs explained that “From that moment, it was no longer the 100 percent location” (Jacobs, 1961, 246). In this case, capital itself pushed out the diversity of uses and users that had once made that part of the city interesting and lively.

Thus, in contrast to the idea that from the competition of the free market would emerge the best outcome, Jacobs saw undesirable outcomes. In a critique of competitive real estate markets and gentrification, for example, she observed that,

“The winners in the competition for space will represent only a narrow segment of the many uses that together created success. Whichever one or few uses have emerged as the most profitable in the locality will be repeated and repeated, crowding out and overwhelming less profitable forms of use. If tremendous numbers of people, attracted by convenience and interest, or charmed by vigor and excitement, choose to live or work in the area, again the winners of the competition will form a narrow segment of population of users” (Jacobs, 1961, 243).

In other words, as compared to free market advocates, Jacobs did not believe that unregulated competition was productive. In such competition, she stated, “the triumph is hollow. A most intricate and successful organism of economic mutual support and social mutual support has been destroyed by the process” (Jacobs, 1961, 243).

This does not mean that Jacobs did not believe in the powers of self-organizing systems—biological, social, and economic. She was, in fact, a pioneer in understanding complexity theory and its relevance to cities and other complex systems (Laurence, 2006). As noted above, she believed that cities were like ecosystems, and in *The Nature of Economies* (2000), her second to last book, she drew parallels between ecosystems and economies. However, Jacobs did not see natural ecosystems as arenas of brutal, violent, Hobbsian competition or subscribe to a Tennysonian view of the state of nature, “red in tooth and claw.” Nor was she a social Darwinist. On the contrary, unlike libertarians, neoliberals, and other ideological conservatives who glorified the power of self-interest to produce the “best” outcomes, it was “mutual support”—both economic and social—that guided Jacobs’s beliefs.⁶ For her, stable and successful ecosystems required diversity for complexity, resiliency, and vitality, and were not characterized by an anthropomorphic hierarchy and competition for resources that ultimately destabilized and destroyed the system along with the “king of the jungle.” Ecosystems were characterized not by self-destruction but by symbiosis and mutualism. Complex human systems, cities in particular, required cooperation. “We need all kinds of diversity, intricately mingled in mutual support,” Jacobs wrote. “We need this so city life can work decently and constructively, and so the people of cities can sustain (and further develop) their society and civilization” (Jacobs, 1961, 241).

Thus, in contrast with individualistic neoliberal and libertarian philosophies, Jacobs believed that mutual support was at the heart of successful cities. As she explained in the introduction to *Death and Life*, the “ubiquitous principle is the need of cities for a most intricate and close-grained diversity of uses that give each other constant *mutual support*, both economically and socially.” Accordingly, her primary reason for writing the book was because “I think that unsuccessful city areas are areas which lack this kind of intricate *mutual support*, and that the science of city planning and the art of city design, in real life for real cities, must become the science and art of catalyzing and nourishing these *close-grained working relationships*” (Jacobs, 1961, 14). Jacobs summarized this idea in the end of the book by stating, “No single element in a city is, in truth, the kingpin or the key. The mixture itself is kingpin, and its *mutual support* is the order” (Jacobs, 1961, 376, italics added).

As a whole, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* is made up of ideas—preserving public space, sidewalks, and short blocks to generate interaction; promoting density and mixed uses; maintaining low-rent buildings; preventing social and economic segregation; and stopping highways and automobiles from eviscerating cities—that encourage mutual social and economic support. While many of these ideas were new and unpopular at the time, other strategies and tactics that Jacobs discussed were more familiar; these included public policy; tax policy; regulation, such as zoning for diversity; strategic public spending, such as careful location of public buildings and other investments; and “competitive diversion.”

The last of these, “competitive diversion,” was another of Jacobs’s explicit rejections of laissez-faire market forces. With it she recognized a need to manage the supply and demand of desirable city real estate. Although Jacobs wrote cursorily on this subject, she believed that, “At bottom, this problem of the self-destruction of outstanding success is the problem of getting the supply of vital, diversified city streets and districts into a saner relationship with demand” (Jacobs, 1961, 256).

Ideally, creating “a saner relationship” of supply and demand of desirable real estate by increasing the supply of livable neighborhoods would curb gentrification and self-destruction, while increasing tax revenues. Rather than building housing projects for the middle- and upper-

classes, Jacobs explained that, anchoring diversity meant supporting socioeconomic diversity. If cities could grow the middle class, and if city leaders truly wanted to grow the middle class, it was in poor people that assistance and dignity should be invested. Jacobs wrote, “to keep it [the middle class] 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” (Jacobs, 1961, 282). Mutual support, in other words, should be embodied in public and economic policy.

At the same time, Jacobs was well aware that “the market” was not always fair, nor did it always provide what morality or society collectively considered necessary. While she believed that private developers, not government, should build housing, she did not believe in the magic of the “Invisible Hand.” As she wrote in the chapter on “The Need for Aged Buildings,” new construction was costly, and therefore the market would not, and often could not, provide an adequate supply of low-income housing, especially in the face of urban renewal and gentrification. Moreover, blacklisting (aka redlining) was evidence that the market was a product of social constructions, among them laws and regulations corrupted by racism and poor planning ideas. As Jacobs observed, “No more than park designers or zoners do mortgage lenders operate in an ideological or legislative vacuum” (Jacobs, 1961, 295). It was thus Jacobs’s hope that *Death and Life* would prompt a shift in thinking about urban and economic policy as much as urban design. As she put it, “If and when we think that lively, diversified city [sic], capable of continual, close-grained improvement and change, is desirable, then we will adjust the financial machinery to get that” (Jacobs, 1961, 314). Later, in *Systems of Survival*, she observed, “Democratic access to business credit has been a long, slow time coming... If indeed its time has come—no matter where—it would be a momentous development of commercial life, perhaps one of the most momentous single developments ever” (Jacobs, 1992, 166).

What would better “financial machinery” look like? In *Death and Life*’s sixteenth chapter, “Gradual Money and Cataclysmic Money,” Jacobs explained that it was “not the mere availability of money, but how it is available, and for what, that is all important” (Jacobs, 1961, 292). Using her favored ecological and geographical metaphors, she explained that most money affecting cities produced “cataclysmic changes in cities.” These financial sources, which included private lenders, government taxes, and unregulated underworld, “behave not like irrigation systems, bringing life-giving streams to feed steady, continual growth. Instead, they behave like manifestations of malevolent climates beyond the control of man—affording either searing droughts or torrential, eroding floods” (Jacobs, 1961, 293).

But unlike the weather, this financial machinery was within the control of mankind. For example, the credit “droughts” caused by redlining, which left certain communities only with loan-sharks, were not inevitable. And not only were public policies that maintained fairness in the financial system necessary, Jacobs wanted to see orthodox financial mechanisms converted from forces of violence to “instruments of regeneration.” As she wrote:

“The forms in which money is used for city building— or withheld from use— are powerful instruments of city decline today. The forms in which money is used must be converted to instruments of regeneration— from instruments buying violent cataclysms to instruments buying continual, gradual, complex and gentler change” (Jacobs, 1961, 318).

This metaphor of the financial system working like a temperate ecosystem, or tended landscape, anticipated ideas in *The Nature of Economies*, where Jacobs, speaking through one of her characters, stated, “I think economic life is for teaching our species it has responsibilities to the planet and the rest of nature” (Jacobs, 2000, 147).

With this premise in mind, plantations, exploitive capital, and extraction-based economies—all part of the “Plantation mentality”—are not only unjust and destructive but doomed to self-extinction.

In Conclusion: On “Self-Government”

To resist paternalistic, authoritarian, and plantation-like city planning practices, the concept of “democratic self-government,” and urban design arrangements that enabled self-government, were especially important to Jacobs. Using the term “self-government” some twenty-seven times in *Death and Life*, she explained that the first five chapters of the book, which focused on public space and street-life, were concerned with “the self-government functions of city streets.” In Chapter Two, “The Uses of Sidewalks: Safety,” Jacobs famously discussed the concept of “eyes on the street,” which allowed a neighborhood to self-police itself—without the need of an overly large police force or a Big Brother social structure. As she observed, “No amount of police can enforce civilization where the normal, casual enforcement of it has broken down” (Jacobs, 1961, 31). The purposes and needs of the self-government of city streets were “to weave webs of public surveillance and thus to protect strangers as well as themselves; to grow networks of small-scale, everyday public life and thus of trust and social control; and to help assimilate children into reasonably responsible and tolerant city life” (Jacobs, 1961, 119). Building on this, Chapter Six, “The Uses of City Neighborhoods,” where Jacobs discussed self-government in detail, was concerned with the relationship between city form and sociopolitical organization. City neighborhoods, Jacobs believed, are the “mundane organs of self-government” (Jacobs, 1961, 114). In their healthy state, such neighborhoods promoted the conditions for mutual support across the city.

Jacobs regarded three scales of sociopolitical organization as critical: the local street neighborhood, the district, and the city as a whole. Local neighborhoods, in her analysis, are the building blocks of political organization. Local neighborhoods, she explained, were “indispensable, but inherently politically powerless... Nothing is more helpless than a city street alone, when its problems exceed its powers... Nothing much ever happens when one helpless little street fights alone some of the most serious problems of a great city.” But local neighborhoods needed political organization precisely so that they were able “to get help when too big a problem comes along” (Jacobs, 1961, 122).

As one might expect, mutual support—help in solving local problems, sometimes shared and sometimes not—had to come from the other neighborhoods that made up the surrounding district. Giving the example of a local West Village fight against a Streets Department road-widening/sidewalk-narrowing plan, Jacobs explained that it was political pressure and influence at the scale of Greenwich Village that was required to defeat it: “People on our delegation who swung the most weight were from other streets than our entirely; some from the other side of the district.” In short, “A district has to be big and powerful enough to fight city hall. Nothing less is to any purpose” (Jacobs, 1961, 122).

When Jacobs wrote these words, her efforts to organize Lower Manhattan communities to fight the Lower Manhattan Expressway were a year or two away, as was the campaign to save her own West Village neighborhood from urban renewal redevelopment. However, she had learned a great deal about organizational strategies from the battle to save Greenwich Village's Washington Square Park from Robert Moses's plan to bisect the part with the extension of Fifth Avenue.⁷ As she explained in *Death and Life*, organization at the district and city scale required strategies to consolidate reasons and feelings for mutual support. In the case of the bisection of Washington Square, Jacobs recalled that, "majority opinion was overwhelmingly against the highway. But not unanimous opinion; among those for the highway were numerous people of prominence, with leadership positions in smaller sections of the district. Naturally they tried to keep the battle on a level of sectional organization, and so did the city government" (Jacobs, 1961, 127). In the face of divide-and-conquer tactics, "Majority opinion would have frittered itself away in these tactics" had not district-wide political organization held firm and ultimately prevailed. Jacobs was clear that "seduction or subversion of the elected is easiest when the electorate is fragmented into ineffectual units of power" (Jacobs, 1961, 131).

In this sense, the organization of street and district neighborhoods was about creating and maintaining local and democratically distributed power. The reasons for this, naturally, were local self-determination and bottom-up input into otherwise top-down decisions. It could be said of Jacobs, as has been said of political philosopher Hannah Arendt, that she "did not conceive of politics as a means for the satisfaction of individual preferences, nor as a way to integrate individuals around a shared conception of the good. Her conception of politics is based on the idea of active citizenship, that is, on the value and importance of civic engagement and collective deliberation about all matters affecting the political community" (d'Entreves, 2016). The city, or *polis*, was a place for the "sharing of words and deeds" (Arendt, 1958, 176). Being denied the ability to publicly and effectively speak, act, or share ideas, and thereby deny agency to affect locally relevant circumstances, was a basic definition of oppression, and a destruction of the purpose of the city.

While there would thus seem to be universal dimensions to Jacobs's political philosophy, *Death and Life* was of course written within the context of American, if not more broadly Western, democracy. And within that context, Jacobs observed that, at the end of the day, "There are only two ultimate public powers in shaping and running American cities: votes and control of the money" (Jacobs, 1961, 131).

More specifically, anticipating her study of corruption in *Systems of Survival*, Jacobs made this remark in reference to Robert Moses, whom, through control of the funds of New York's Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority and other city planning and construction agencies for decades, operated outside of electoral politics. With money, Moses was able to seduce, subvert, or ignore the electorate. As she wrote:

"Robert Moses, whose genius at getting things done largely consists in understanding this, has made an art of using control of public money to get his way with those whom the voters elect and depend on to represent their frequently opposing interests. This is, of course, in other guises, an old, sad story of democratic government. The art of negating the power of votes with the power of money can be practiced just as effectively by honest public administrators as by dishonest representatives of purely private interests" (Jacobs, 1961, 131).

In other words, while Jacobs is often remembered in superficial ways for her battles with Moses in Washington Square and against the Lower Manhattan Expressway, for her Moses represented what we might now describe as the emergence of a neoliberal order. Dating back to the 1930s, Moses was a pioneer among municipal administrators in creating public-private partnerships that substantially benefitted private developers; in the wake of the financial crisis of the Great Depression, he learned how to leverage government funds for the benefit of private development, which typically took the form of gentrifying, middle-class housing projects (Laurence, 2016, 40). Thus, Moses was more than an exceptional “power broker” (Kidder, 2008). Even if he did not profit directly, he represented the power of money to shape government and public policy and undermine democracy. Jacobs went on to write that, “Any forms of zoning, any forms of public building policy, any forms of tax assessment policy, no matter how enlightened, give eventually under sufficiently powerful economic pressure” (Jacobs, 1961, 255).

Although Moses himself may not have been such an ideologue (at least early in his life), it followed that, during the Reagan/Thatcher era, Jacobs described the ideas of Reagan’s economic policy advisor Milton Friedman as a “fool’s paradise,” and stated that, “Margaret Thatcher’s government *appalls* me,” explicitly rejecting the neoliberal or libertarian philosophy of social and economic hyper-individualism, which can be traced directly back to Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek (Jacobs, 1984, 20; Lawrence, 1989, 18; Harvey, 2005, 19; Laurence, 2016, 294).⁸

In recent years, historians including David Harvey, Naomi Klein, and Nancy MacLean have documented the rise of neoliberalism and systematic attacks on the public realm since the 1950s (Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2011; MacLean, 2017). In *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Klein wrote of a “world of suburban Green Zones,” privately protected, gated communities for the wealthy, which she named after the compounds of occupying soldiers in war zones (Klein, 2011, 531). “Green zone” urbanism is not new, however. Jacobs wrote about the contemporary origins of this phenomenon in 1950s urban renewal:

“Middle- and upper-income housing occupying many acres of the city, many former [public and lower-income] blocks, with their own grounds and their own streets to serve these ‘islands within the city,’ ‘cities within the city,’ and ‘new concepts in city living,’ as the advertisements for them say... designate [their] Turf... At first the fences were never visible. Patrolling guards were sufficient to enforce the line. But in the past few years the fences have become literal” (Jacobs, 1961, 47).

To drive her point about “turf” urbanism home, Jacobs related an anecdote of pretending to be a prospective tenant of the new Park West Village, a fancy Upper West Side housing complex. Billed as “Your Own World in the Heart of New York,” the rental agent boasted of gates and fences that would soon be built. “Cyclone fences?” Jacobs asked. “That is correct, madam. And eventually’—waving his hand at the city surrounding his domain—‘all that will go. Those people will go. We are the pioneers here.’” To her readers, Jacobs remarked, “I suppose it is rather like pioneer life in a stockade village, except that the pioneers were working toward greater security for their civilization, not less” (Jacobs, 1961, 47).

Stockaded villages, Green Zones, and gated communities are the opposites of the city that Jacobs had in mind, where social and economic diversity and mutual support prevailed. She accordingly attacked the racism, destruction of public space, cataclysmic money, and social and economic segregation of postwar urban renewal. It is time to put to rest mistaken beliefs that Jacobs was a

neoliberal or a libertarian, and blind to issues of race, power, or capital. When we look at the sociopolitical divisions between cities and suburbs, electoral maps starkly colored red and blue, a declining middle class, and growing disparities between the wealthy and the poor, we can understand why Jacobs believed that it was so important to break down “turf” and “plantation” mentalities; to resist the “price-tagging” of populations; to preserve and grow urban social capital; and to and preserve and create urban forms that promote self-government.

More than a half-century ago, Jacobs wrote:

“To plan deliberately, and physically, on the premise that separated city neighborhoods of less than district size are a worthy ideal, is to subvert self-government; that the motives are sentimental or paternalistic is no help. When the physical isolation of too small neighborhoods is abetted by blatant social distinctions, as in projects whose populations are price-tagged, the policy is savagely destructive to effective self-government and self-management in cities” (Jacobs, 1961, 128).

Unfortunately, Jacobs words ring even truer today, and the problems transcend suburbanism and poor physical planning theory. “Divide and conquer”—by race, income, and geography—remains the strategy of those whose interests are threatened by diverse, united, and open cities. As they have in the past, politicians and ideologues foment fears of minorities and immigrants, crime and urban density, promoting “turf” mentality and making it difficult to distinguish between free choice and public manipulation. While Jacobs was a pioneering theorist of cities as complex and self-organizing systems, she also knew that people may willingly self-organize into segregated communities, and that they may be manipulated into doing so. She observed, for example, that, “The immense new suburban sprawls of American cities have not come about by accident—and still less by the myth of free choice between cities and suburbs” (Jacobs, 1961, 307).⁹ She understood that structural forces—racist and financial in this case—manifest themselves in cities and the built environment.

But as Jacobs’s life as a writer and activist shows, she believed cities, as diverse and dense communities of people and social capital, had the power to resist oppressive forces and solve social problems. She believed in cities’ cosmopolitanism, and, as she wrote in *Systems of Survival*, her treatise on ethics, she associated them with tolerance, trust, cooperation, and invention (Jacobs, 1992, 35). And, as shown here, she believed that cities, in their physical form, could promote democratic life. Thus, at a time when political events in the US indicate that anti-democratic forces seek to undermine the political power of cities, Jacobs’s work seems more relevant than ever (Fulton, 2016; Mock, 2017; Wilkinson, 2017; Yeoman, 2018). But for Jacobs, democratic self-government requires work. Alluding to her own activism, she wrote, “I am convinced we need continual but informal democratic explorations on the part of people who must thread their ways through governmental, business, or volunteer and grass-roots policies,” adding, “Where democracy means more than having the vote, many citizens engage part-time in public affairs” (Jacobs, 1992, 2, 165, 205). “Democratizations don’t happen by themselves.”

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¹ Example of Jacobs being described as racist or race-blind include biographer Alice Sparberg Alexiou’s *Jane Jacobs, Urban Visionary* (2006), who stated that Jacobs “hadn’t acknowledged the importance of race in her analysis” (135). As discussed here, *Death and Life* and other evidence shows that Jacobs was not race-blind or a racist. Apparently referring to Alexiou’s book, in “Jane Jacobs’s Tunnel Vision,” Lev Bratishenko stated, “Her inattention to racism, whether in the form of American housing markets or in official policies like redlining, is well known—at least within the academy, and it was noticed before *Death and Life* was published.” Again, Bratishenko’s first point is revealed as erroneous by reading *Death and Life*. His second point refers directly to Robert Kanigel’s book *Eyes on the Street* and Kanigel’s story of Nathan Glazer and “the Negro question,” discussed below. Another example is Adam Gopnik’s condescending essay “Jane Jacobs’s Street Smarts,” in which Gopnik stated that he would “pay her the compliment of taking her seriously.” Among other notable errors dispelled by reading *Death and Life*, Gopnik states that Jacobs’s “unslumming” is what we would today call gentrification, when in fact for Jacobs it was the opposite. Gopnik was also misled by Kanigel’s book on the race question. Gopnik snarkily asked, “Are there black folks on Hudson Street?” In fact, there were, and Jacobs joined her neighbors in 1964 in protesting a plan to segregate the public school her children attended. An example of Jacobs being described as a neoliberal is Brian Tochterman’s “Theorizing Neoliberal Urban Development: A Genealogy from Richard Florida to Jane Jacobs” (2012). Tochterman ultimately blames Jacobs for “lack of progressive vision and lack of a sustainable, replicable model for urban economic

development,” claims at odds with her vision for diverse cities in the Jim Crow era, at the dawn of mass suburbanization and a historic urban decline, and her various books on economics, among them *The Nature of Economies*. As the title suggests, he also blames Jacobs for having inspired Richard Florida. Another example of Jacobs being portrayed as a neoliberal, also connected to Florida, is the 2014 comment by the editors of *Jacobin* magazine that “Jane Jacobs-style urbanism has become all too adaptable to liberal appropriation. Her celebration of mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods has been used in the service of gentrifying, high-income developments” (“The People’s Playground, Oct. 3, 2014). The writers admit their preferred models are “socialist cities,” but ultimately their critiques of Jacobs—a pioneering theorist of gentrification and street activist against gentrification—are ironic and uninformed.

² In *Eyes on the Street: The Life of Jane Jacobs* (2016), Robert Kanigel wrote that, “Jane, in short, didn’t see what she didn’t see. And what she didn’t see, at least not with the same urgency others did, was the troubling impact on cities of race, class, and ethnicity.” This claim of Jacobs’s race- and class-blindness is proven inaccurate by reading *Death and Life*. Kanigel’s story of Nathan Glazer warning her not to neglect “the Negro question” is flawed. Not only did she address the plight of African-Americans, she understood “the question” with more prescience than Glazer did in his 1963 book.

³ In *Eyes on the Street*, cited earlier, where Jacobs was charged with being race-blind, she was also charged with falling for “the physical fallacy,” where Robert Kanigel dedicates an entire chapter (Ch. 14, “The Physical Fallacy”) to this criticism of Jacobs’s thinking. Nevertheless, it was a line of reasoning that Jacobs explicitly rejected.

⁴ For example, neoliberal pioneer Friedrich Hayek questioned whether women, or “all adults,” should have the right to vote, noting that at the time he was writing, in Switzerland, “the oldest and most successful” European democracy, women did not have this right (Hayek, 1960, 169).

⁵ As documented by Herbert Gans in *The Urban Villagers*, and discussed by Jacobs, an iconic case of urban renewal gentrification was Charles River Park, designed by Victor Gruen Associates, for Boston’s West End. So egregious (albeit not unusual) was the razing of the neighborhood that, in 2015, the Boston Redevelopment Authority officially apologized for destroying it (“BRA director offers formal apology for West End’s demolition,” *Boston Globe*, Sept. 28, 2015).

⁶ David Harvey has described neoliberalism as a political theory where the role of the state is to promote strong property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey, 2005). George Monbiot offers that it is an ideology that “sees competition as the defining characteristic of human relations” (2016). Klein and MacLean offer similar definitions, and further document neoliberal corporatism, racism, and anti-democratic activities (e.g., disenfranchising black voters).

⁷ Jacobs had also learned about neighborhood organizing from her friend Saul Alinsky, author of *Reveille for Radicals* (1946).

⁸ In *Becoming Jacobs Jacobs*, I compare Jacobs's thinking to Friedrich Hayek's, and while observing similar interests in self-organizing systems, show that she did not share Hayek's social Darwinism or libertarianism. I also discuss her unionization efforts in the 1940s; her support for the communist-influenced American Labor Party; her friendship with Saul Alinsky; and her extensive investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation during the McCarthy era for "communist sympathies."

⁹ Jacobs explained that suburban development was "made practical (and for many families was made actually mandatory) through the creation of something the United States lacked until the mid-1930s: a national mortgage market specifically calculated to encourage suburban home building" (Jacobs, 1961, 307-8).