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Jane Jacobs and Dark Age America

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"Amerikas mörka tid," *Samhällsbyggandet som mysterium: Jane Jacobs idéer om människor, städer och ekonomier*, Jesper Meijling & Tigran Haas, eds. (Nordic Academic Press, Lund 2018), 193-211.

In 1972, a reporter from *The Village Voice* went to Toronto to visit Jane Jacobs, who had left New York with her family four years earlier. Echoing a feeling shared by other New Yorkers, as well as other Americans, about the absence of one of Greenwich Village's most famous residents, he titled his piece "Won't you come home, Jane Jacobs?"[1]

Jacobs's unequivocal answer was "no." She would not be returning to New York.

When asked if she had any feelings of guilt about leaving, she replied,

> "None at all. I did the best I could for 20 years. I fought as long as I could, but I've had enough. There's no virtue in fighting battles and losing. In Toronto you have a chance of winning. No, I have no regrets about leaving. One of my great-great uncles left Bavaria in 1828 because he saw the coming Prussianization of Germany. And you know, I'm glad he did."[2]

Had the reporter asked Jacobs if she felt any regret or sadness, perhaps she would have had a different answer. However, by 1972, her feelings about leaving New York were offset by the weariness of nearly two decades of non-stop fighting against "improvement" schemes that would only make New York, and, by extension, other American cities, less livable. She fought to save her West Village neighborhood first from a street-widening/sidewalk-narrowing plan, and later wholesale reconstruction in an urban renewal scheme to build middle-income apartment blocks. She had fought the Urban Renewal Administration to improve project housing in East Harlem—unsuccessfully—and then fought for ten years to build an alternative housing model in the West Village, facing financial and bureaucratic obstacles at every turn—only to find the highly compromised design of the West Village Houses to be physical evidence of the difficulties of overcoming the income-segregated, developer-driven, tower-model of housing construction. She fought the plan to bisect Greenwich Village's Washington Square Park with an extension of

[1] Clark Whelton, "Won't you come home, Jane Jacobs?" *The Village Voice* (Jul. 6, 1972), 28.
[2] Ibid. It should be noted that Jacobs's move to Canada was less difficult than for many emigrants. She and her family had the resources; her husband, an architect, had employment opportunities; and Toronto was not far from the familiar territory of her hometown of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Fifth Avenue, and a few years later, helped lead the fight to stop the Lower Manhattan Expressway, which would have cut a wide swath of destruction through the Lower East Side, Chinatown, Little Italy, Soho, and other neighborhoods. That fight lasted some six years, with two campaigns leading to false victories where Jacobs and her fellow activists saw the project revived with new bureaucratic tactics. The third and final campaign was successful, but it culminated in her arrest for inciting a riot and the obstruction of public administration.

By the late 1960s, Jacobs was fed up. She told an interviewer in 1969,

> "I resent, to tell you the truth the time I've had to spend on these civic battles. The new book [The Economy of Cities] was begun two years later than it should have been because of that expressway and the urban renewal fight in New York's West Village. It's a terrible imposition when the city threatens its citizens in such a way that they can't finish their work. Why, I know artists who aren't getting their pictures painted because of an expressway, poets who aren't getting their poems done."[3]

To *The Village Voice* reporter, she put it this way: "It's absurd to make your life absurd in response to absurd governments."[4]

By this time, moreover, Jacobs was disgusted by the war in Vietnam and resented being forced to help fund it with her tax dollars, let alone assist it with her sons' lives. In 1967, she was arrested twice for civil disobedience, first at the October "March on the Pentagon," and then at a December action at a New York City military induction center. In 1968, when her sons decided that they would chose jail over conscription, the family moved to Canada. This was not a fight that Jacobs otherwise knew how to win. And, in the previous two decades, having been extensively investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for communist sympathies; having lost her State Department job due to McCarthyism; and having battled, in writing and on the street, the Urban Renewal regime and its corrupting influences, which sought to take her own home, Jacobs increasingly saw the United States losing sight of its democratic ideals—and becoming increasingly imperialistic. Being threatened by soldiers in gas masks at the Pentagon had a profound impact on her: "They looked like some big horrible insect, the whole bunch of them together, not human beings at all. And I was also not only appalled at how they looked, but I was outraged that they should be marching on me, on me, an American!"[5] The empire, it seemed, had occupied its own cities and turned on its own citizens. Going into exile did not bring a feeling of loss—quite the opposite.

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[3] Susan Brownmiller, "Jane Jacobs" (*Vogue*, May 1969), *Ideas That Matter: The Worlds of Jane Jacobs* (Ginger Press, 1997), 22.
[4] Whelton, 24.
[5] Mark Feeney, "City Sage" (*The Boston Globe*, Nov. 14, 1993), *Ideas That Matter*, 11.

In Toronto, Jacobs and her family found a city like the New York of earlier decades. "It's as if we've found the city we used to love," she remarked. And as she wrote in a 1969 editorial against the proposed Spadina Expressway soon after arriving, "Here is the most hopeful and healthy city in North America, still unmangled, still with options." In particular, Toronto was a city where immigrants were welcomed. "The city government, and many other city institutions," she noted later, "continually celebrate the ethnic differences among the citizens, and tirelessly emphasize that this diversity is a source of social and economic richness."[6] Moreover, community battles, such as stopping the construction of the Spadina, were more easily fought—and more likely won. Jacobs described the municipal board hearings as "orderly, dignified, honest, no displays of ego, no phonies, just a real exchange of information. Nothing like New York at all. Even the politicians here are different. In fact there is only one Toronto politician who scares me and that's because he's just like a New York politician: sneaky, devious, dangerous."[7]

Asked whether Toronto, with all of its high-rise construction, was turning into another New York, she responded with hope that Torontonians, and other Canadians, would look to the US as an object lesson of what not to do. She observed,

> "The builders and highway people are tearing it [Toronto] down as fast as they can, but they're being fought before things get as bad as they are in New York. We're lucky here, you know. The States serves as a sort of early warning system for Canada. We can look down and see what's going wrong in New York and Cleveland and then try to avoid the same thing happening here. But it's not easy, because the same destructive forces are at work in Canada."[8]

In Canada, Jacobs also found a less militaristic and imperial nation. As she stated soon immigrating, "I hate spending money for taxes that go to war goods, expressways, and secret police"—referring to the United States.[9] In 1974, she gave up her US citizenship to become a Canadian. Of the naturalization process, she recalled that, "in a paper we had been given, upon applying, about the duties of Canadian citizens, I was very pleased to see that one of our duties is 'to get along well with our neighbors.' This really is a remarkably nice, sane country."[10] Moreover, having already settled into her new community and soon become involved in local affairs—the activities of "self-government"—she wanted the right to vote, especially in the local elections, which she considered the most important.

However, as much as Jacobs admired Canada as a nation, she was not keen on the trappings of nationalism, whether economic or bureaucratic, or remote and

[6] Jane Jacobs, "The Responsibility of Cities" (1984),
[7] Whelton, 24.
[8] Whelton, 28.
[9] "Jane Jacobs, Critic of Cities" (*Toronto Star*, Oct. 24, 1970), *Ideas That Matter*, 129.
[10] Jane Jacobs, letter to her mother (Sept. 21, 1974), *Ideas That Matter*, 143.

bureaucratic control over local matters. By 1969, having finished *The Economy of Cities* and already contemplating *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (1984)—in which she questioned the aggrandizing concept of gross domestic product and the large nation-state—she observed,

> "I think it is also questionable that large nations are really viable governmental units any longer. They may be obsolete—like dinosaurs. The viable nations of the future may be on the scale of Sweden or Holland, rather than on the scale of the United States, China, or the Soviet Union."[11]

This sentiment was not new for Jacobs. Early in her career, in the 1940s, she rejected President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's federalism, not to mention his unprecedented third and fourth terms in office, fearing the eclipse of local self-determination. Decades later, she similarly rejected Canadian federalism. In *The Question of Separatism: Quebec and the Struggle over Sovereignty* (1980), she made the case for Quebec's independence. In *Toronto: Considering Self-Government* (2000, with Mary W. Rowe), she made the argument for greater independence for Toronto from its provincial and national governments.

Perhaps a surprising sentiment for an advocate of "great cities," Jacobs even believed that some cities could be too large—at least from the point of view of their governance. In 1969, echoing arguments she made in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* for the decentralization, or re-localization, of city government, she observed, "Take New York. Back before the turn of the century, it was five cities. It was probably a mistake to consolidate them into one. Five autonomous city governments are probably not enough for New York now. Just because a city is a huge economic unit, it does not follow that it must be a huge governmental unit."[12]

The great difficulty was how to organize local self-government—a topic of particular concern in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*—while simultaneously arranging a system that could handle problems of large scales and indeterminate geographies, such as transit and pollution. As Jacobs observed in 1957, in an essay titled "Metropolitan Government," the United States' 174 metropolitan areas were a "weird melange of 16,210 separate units of government." This frequently irrational and sometimes hostile patchwork of overlapping jurisdictions made municipal and regional planning and governing challenging, if not impossible. For example, Cleveland's "jigsaw government," with its 60 or more municipalities, "cannot plan its waterfront rationally, nor can it distribute the rest of its services fairly." By contrast, Jacobs observed that Toronto was "the only metropolitan federation in operation thus far in North America" with its federation of the city and twelve suburban

[11] Leticia Kent, "Jane Jacobs: Against Urban Renewal, For Urban Life" (*New York Times Magazine*, May 25, 1969), *Ideas That Matter*, 22.
[12] Ibid.

satellites, all of which were located in a single county.[13] This structure allowed for comprehensive planning and avoided the rivalries and hostilities between cities and the counties in which they were located. Politically, the result was something closer to a city-state. Economically, Jacobs would later go so far as to entertain the idea of replacing national currencies with individual city currencies.[14]

As Jacobs settled into life in Toronto, she continued fighting large-scale developments that were destroying the diverse fabric of the city. In 1973, she protested a plan to wreck and replace twenty old houses with six identical apartment buildings. To stop the demolition, she, her sons, and other protestors tore down the fences surrounding the houses, temporarily halting the wrecking machinery. The action prompted the Toronto's mayor to negotiate with the provincial authorities the idea of renovating the homes and building the remaining (affordable) housing in the backyards and spaces between the old homes. As opposed to the original scheme, the variety of resulting buildings suited the various needs of the residents—singles, families, elderly couples, and widowers—and municipal support for the infill concept took hold. Although high-rise construction came to dominate parts of the city, in 1981, Jacobs observed that "Some of the infill building has been tall; most of it is low; but high or low these little plans have all been used to knit together again pieces of the city fabric that had become frayed or unraveled."[15]

Meanwhile, Jacobs returned to writing. *The Question of Separatism*, written in the late 1970s, was immediately concerned with the relatively local question of Quebec's sovereignty, but continued her overarching inquiry into the balance of cities' self-governance and nations' federal powers. When it came to federal powers, Jacobs worried about growing imperialism, as manifested both domestically and internationally. Having read Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* years earlier, the nature of empire was not a new line of inquiry for her; already in *The Economy of Cities*, she observed, for example, that, "The great capitals of modern Europe did not become great cities because they were the capitals. Cause and effect ran the other way." Of the Roman Empire specifically, she noted that once Roman "cities were no longer centers of economic opportunity (as they once had been) in the western empire… their inhabitants had become so oppressed by the official taskmasters that they had to be prohibited from fleeing into the country." And these were "*free* inhabitants, not slaves."[16] Drawing the point home, she opined that the economy of the United States—in part because of the "economic conflicts" created by "racists and paternalists"—was in the process of

[13] Peter L. Laurence, *Becoming Jane Jacobs* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), Jane Jacobs, "Metropolitan Government," *Architectural Forum* v. 107 (Aug. 1957), 124, 204.
[14] Jane Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 158.
[15] Jane Jacobs, "Big Plans and Little Plans," *Ideas That Matter*, 124–25.
[16] Jane Jacobs, *The Economy of Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 177. Jacobs quotes the British economic historian George Unwin's *Studies in Economic History* (1927) in this passage.

stagnating, and that if the situation "proves to be profound and unremitting, it could be comparable to that of the later Roman Empire."[17]

In *The Question of Separatism*, Jacobs reiterated her association of empire with oppression and inevitable decline. She observed that with centralized control oppression increased, stating,

> "The biggest and most thoroughly centralized governments have always, finally, required the special environment of oppression to continue to maintain themselves. And some could never have attained their great size at all had they not grown in that environment."[18]

And she observed that, throughout history, empires and very large nations—in part through oppression, sheer scale, complications, and the aggrandizements of bureaucracies and the powerful—"invariably reached a point when they behaved like decaying and disintegrating organisms, from ancient Persia to modern Britain."[19]

So, was decline inevitable? Jacobs pondered the question. "Must the people of large sovereignties always be doomed to helplessness in the face of intractable problems, and to the eventual certainty of irreversible decline with all its hardships, waste and loss?" she asked.

Her answer, which was fully consistent with her arguments for self-government in *Death and Life*, was to pursue local self-determination, the decentralization of power, and even to accept political separation, succession, or independence. She offered the independence of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Iceland, and Norway as some examples of peaceful secessions from an empire, while also noting a long list of secessions or secession attempts that emerged from foreign or civil wars and sometimes bloody separatist movements. The separation of Norway from Sweden, to which she devoted a chapter, was of particular interest to her as one where a split was achieved without terrorism or warfare, an outcome she felt "did honor not only to both [countries] but also to civilization." Of Sweden, the more powerful nation, Jacobs remarked that, "In striking contrast to so many nations of nineteenth-century Europe, Sweden did not embark upon seizures of empire abroad; quite as strikingly, its government did not behave imperialistically at home. The behavior was all of a piece, both at home and abroad, as nations' behavior so frequently is."[20]

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[17] Ibid., 236, 247.
[18] Jane Jacobs, *The Question of Separatism: Quebec and the Struggle over Sovereignty* (New York: Random House, 1980), 77.
[19] Ibid., 69.
[20] Ibid., 30, 48. Today, Norway and Sweden are respectively ranked 1 and 3 in the world "Democracy Index," a fact that likely correlates with their amicable relationship. See *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, "Democracy Index 2016," *The Economist*, http://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index.

In *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, an argument for the key role of urban economies and city-based innovations, Jacobs's thinking about the fall of empires—the United States in particular—continued. Writing in 1984, she observed that, "Today the Soviet Union and the United States each predicts and anticipates the economic decline of the other. Neither will be disappointed." She believed that these countries' prolonged militarism, and the other costs necessary to maintain their empires, would be their ultimate downfall. She argued that "imperial decline is built right into imperial success" because "the very policies and transactions that are necessary to win, hold, and exploit an empire are destructive to an imperial power's own cities and cannot help lead to their stagnation and decay."[21]

As Jacobs had long maintained, without vital cities, a nation, or empire lacked its economic and cultural engines. Looking at the history of empires including Persia, Rome, Byzantium, Turkey, Spain, Portugal, France, Britain, and others, she noted that, "The longer an empire holds together, the poorer and more economically backward it tends to become."[22] For its part, the United States, Jacobs observed, "has been milking its cities and city regions even more prodigiously [than the Soviet Union], a feat possible because, being more numerous, more highly developed, and richer, American cities have had more to yield than Soviet cities." The result of the arms race and its economic emphasis on military production was that city economies were subsidizing "transplant regions" through "transactions of decline," undermining "the contexts in which Americans can expand" and causing "economic life" to constrict.[23]

Jacobs wrote *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* early in the Reagan and Thatcher regimes, as the postwar Keynesian economic paradigm gave way to "neoconservatism" and "neoliberalism" in the US and UK respectively. Indeed, her book was in part prompted by the failure of Keynesian and Chicago School monetarist economic theories to account for, or relieve, "stagflation"—the combination of rising prices and unemployment—in those and other advanced countries. Jacobs's economic analysis was relatively simple: The condition of high prices and too little work was a "normal and ordinary condition to be found in poor and backward economies the world over." Moreover, it was commonplace in poor and backward parts of the US and other countries. What was new about "stagflation" was that the twin afflictions had begun to victimize the country as a whole. Ultimately, the problem was emotional as much as economic: It was hard to admit that these countries were "sliding into profound economic decline."[24]

Since the 1950s, the reaction of neoconservatives and neoliberals has been to promote military spending, privatization, and deregulation to support corporations, and to cut public spending and social programs. But as Jacobs indicated, reactions to

[21] Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, 182, 200.
[22] Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, 182, 200.
[23] Ibid., 200.
[24] Ibid., 25–27.

economic problems were, and are, emotional—and ideological. Historian Nancy MacLean has documented the rise and spread of Hayekian neoliberalism and Chicago School economic ideology in *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (2017). While focused on the emblematic career of the economist James McGill Buchanan, "a zealous advocate of the market order," MacLean reveals the sweeping, often racist, social agenda of a growing cadre of neoliberal/libertarian economists and their wealthy and super-wealthy backers. With a fear of "socialism" bordering on psychosis, these pioneering conservatives became fervently hostile not only to the state, but to government, the public sphere, and ultimately democracy itself. Like their contemporary followers, these libertarians believed that the individual good of the wealthy and powerful was more noble and important than the good, and even the humanity, of those lacking wealth and power. Capitalism trumped democracy. In an effort to sell this idea, in 1962, Buchanan argued that democracy, as majority rule, violated "the liberty" of the elite. Such ideas drew directly on those of John C. Calhoun, whose support for slavery and hostility to the federal government, and the democratic processes that might abolish slavery, led to the Civil War. In the contemporary context, this philosophy was, and is, used not only to rationalize and promote racist segregation and discrimination, and general hostility to government and the public realm, but closure of public schools; regressive tax reform; deregulation of industry; anti-city policies; ideas of personhood for corporations and "running government like a business"; gerrymandering; and voter suppression. In the Trump era, partisans will go so far as to make excuses for executive corruption and even collusion with anti-democratic enemies of the state.

In *Becoming Jane Jacobs*, I addressed claims that Jacobs herself was a libertarian and that her ideas were aligned with, and even influenced by, pioneering neoliberal economist Friedrich Hayek. I explained that Jacobs explicitly rejected libertarian ideology when she stated that in 1985 that, "Margaret Thatcher's government *appalls* me," adding, "as for not wanting to help the poor or saying 'let everyone stand on their own feet,' no, I don't believe that at all."[25] Although both Jacobs and Hayek were interested in complex systems and the phenomena of self-organization, she did not share Hayek's belief in the market, self-interest, and the price mechanism as the best tools for organizing a society. Unlike Hayek, who abhorred the concept of "social justice," she was not a social Darwinist. Quite the opposite, Jacobs regarded cooperation and mutual support as the most important forces in shaping civilized human societies, and, of course, cities.

Ignoring Jacobs's radical politics of neighborhood organization, among other aspects of her thinking, conservatives and libertarians have long confused her communitarianism and localism for atomistic individualism and the anti-government positions of neoliberals. They have assumed that someone who does not subscribe wholesale to the left politics of the day must be right wing. Meanwhile,

[25] Thatcher's and Reagan's social and economic policies were significantly influenced by Hayek. See https://www.margaretthatcher.org/archive/Hayek.asp.

self-described libertarians ignore the use of police or military force on protestors; indeed, many welcome it, as Naomi Klein has observed, as part of a domestic "shock doctrine" aspiring to criminalize political opposition.[26] Yet it was such use of force against the Vietnam protests, and in imperialistic wars, that led Jacobs to her most outspoken criticisms of the government.

In *Systems of Survival*, Jacobs, speaking through one of her characters, observed,

> "I used to think of government—meaning good government—as the major force at work in the civilizing process. Now I'm inclined to think of government as being essentially barbaric—barbaric in its origins and forever susceptible to barbaric actions and aims. But don't get me wrong. We need it."[27]

Nevertheless, as Jacobs explained in *Systems*, a countervailing force was needed to keep the "guardian" role of government in check, and vice versa. "Some other civilizing agent must therefore be necessary," she wrote, calling this the "commercial moral system," which included voluntary trading and exchange of all kinds, cultural and economic. Together, the cooperative dynamic of the two moral systems, not one of them independently, was the basis of flourishing civilizations:

> "This, I now think, is the guardian-commercial symbiosis that combats force, fraud, and unconscionable greed in commercial life—and simultaneously impels guardians to respect private plans, private property, and personal rights. Mutual support of morally contradictory trading and taking; it tames both activities and their derivatives. So perhaps we have a useful definition of civilization: reasonably workable guardian-commercial symbiosis."[28]

Like *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, it is no coincidence that Jacobs wrote *Systems of Survival* in the wake of the Reagan/Thatcher era. As an analysis of the "moral foundations of commerce and politics," *Systems* rejected the idea that government should be run like a business. Inspired by Plato's *Republic*, Jacobs sought to show that commerce and governance required two completely different moral systems and that the idea of applying the moral system appropriate to business to government was, at best, deeply misguided. At worst, it was an invitation to the systemic corruption that resulted from the inappropriate mixing of moral systems' values and activities in inappropriate contexts. For example, while trading and

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[26] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 163–64. While I am not aware of Hayek himself advocating violence against political opponents, his rhetoric about the alleged evils of socialism (as "serfdom") certainly led to this, for example, in Chile.

[27] Jane Jacobs, *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics* (New York: Random House, 1992), 214.

[28] Jacobs, *Systems of Survival*, 214. While "trading" referred naturally to the commercial moral system, "taking" referred to government, which is acknowledged to have the authority, even moral authority, to take property through taxation, police powers, etc.

selling are appropriate in the marketplace, government officials are expected not to sell votes, collude with corporate interests and serve private donors, or profit from office or the markets that they are charged with regulating. For these reasons, "officials are forbidden to take a job in a business they have regulated, or a job lobbying former guardian colleagues, until a year or two has elapsed after they have left government service."[29]

Similarly, the Thatcher/Reagan era calls for deregulation and privatization typically benefitted corporate interests. Jacobs agreed that, "where governments have unadvisedly taken on commercial functions, privatization of those enterprises makes sense morally and financially." However, this did not alter the fact that "Government agencies are entangled in commerce, the more complex a society, the more so. It's simpleminded to suppose privatization can eliminate that."[30]

When it came to the corruption of commercial culture, Jacobs said that, "The eighties [1980s] were very educational."[31] The ideology of these years was not subtle. Looking, for example, at the language used in the *Wall Street Journal* to report on the activities of investment bankers and their clients in the mid-1980s, she observed that their rhetoric was drawn from war reporting: "No guns and axes, to be sure. But to find words for the aggression, conquest, mayhem, and defenses being reported it was necessary to resort to war imagery. Commercial imagery can't supply them. The protagonists invented and named such weaponry as poison pills, white knights, and greenmail." As represented by the catchphrase "Greed is good"—popularized by the semi-fictional corporate raider protagonist of the film *Wall Street* (1987)—basic standards of commercial morality and business ethics were corrupted in these years.

Following her study of morality and corruption, Jacobs's sequel to *Systems*, *The Nature of Economies* (2000), was a hopeful book. Drawing, among other scientific and economic sources, on *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979/95) by James Lovelock, *The Next Economy* (1983) by Paul Hawken, *Biomimicry* (1997) by Janine Benyus, *Symbiotic Planet: A New View of Evolution* (1998) by Lynn Margulis, and the research that led to *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* (2008) by William McDonough, Jacobs sought to revive the harmonious classical relationship between ecology (oecology) and economics (*oikonomia*). As the "green revolution" and a growing public consciousness of environmentalism at a global scale seemed to be finally taking hold, she was hopeful that the time was ripe for a paradigmatic shift in thinking about natural resources, economic production, and material flows. Nevertheless, underlying the positive message of her second-to-last book was nothing less than the question of "the ability of the human race to rescue itself from collapse as a species."[32]

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[29] Ibid., 61.
[30] Ibid., 208.
[31] Ibid., 139.
[32] Jane Jacobs, *The Nature of Economies* (New York: Random House, 2000), 91.

Appearing approximately fifteen years later, *Dark Age Ahead* (2004), Jacobs's final book, was far less optimistic. The post-9/11 world was gripped by xenophobia, war, and imperialism. The moralities of both guardian and commercial institutions remained in doubt. Not one to be Pollyannaish, Jacobs returned to thinking about the collapse of the Roman Empire, and, greatly taken by evolutionary biologist and cultural anthropologist Jared Diamond's writing about the collapse of other civilizations, she speculated on systemic threats to "North American culture." The reasons she had left the US seemed to have caught up, at least in part, with Canada.

Dark Age Ahead focused on five essential cultural pillars that Jacobs saw as under threat of collapse: community and family; higher education; science and fact-based thinking; neoconservative (or neoliberal) ideology, particularly as related to public investments; and systemic corruption of the kind she warned against in *Systems of Survival*—corruptions that destroyed the foundational institutions and traditions built on trust. At the outset, Jacobs explained that she focused on these five areas as compared to another list of five critical failures—racism; profligate environmental destruction; crime; voters' mistrust of politicians and resulting lack of democratic participation; and the growing gulf between the rich and poor—because she felt that the latter five were often symptoms of the first.[33] Crime, for example, was related to breakdowns in community as well as neoliberal "austerity" economics. Environmental destruction was related to the decline of fact-based thinking. Private prisons were a product of both neoliberal ideas of "reinvented government" and an example of the "monstrous moral hybrids" she described in *Systems*.[34] Racism and sexism, meanwhile, were profligate.

To be sure, Jacobs covered many areas of concern with greater or lesser attention in her final book. Written in a hurry in her 80s shortly before her death in 2006, it was regarded by some critics as either poorly edited or too gloomy, or both. In retrospect, however, Jacobs accurately predicted the cultural decline represented by the Trump regime. Indeed, she could well have been speaking of 2017 when she wrote,

> Legions of hired liars labor to disconnect reality from all manner of images—images of personalities, of legislation, of corporations, of places, and of activities. Spin-doctors, virtuosos of deceptive image making and damage control, have become authoritative spokespersons in political campaigns and troubled institutions, able not only to disconnect reality but to construct new reality.[35]

Jacobs concluded *Dark Age Ahead* by observing that the United States "has often been equated with Rome by historians and social commentators seeking modern

[33] Jane Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead* (New York: Random House, 2004), 24–25.
[34] Ibid., 189.
[35] Ibid., 136.

lessons from Rome's mistakes."[36] But she was not hopeful that the nation would recover from its spiral of decline. She observed that, "History has repeatedly demonstrated that empires seldom seem to retain sufficient cultural self-awareness to prevent them from overreaching and overgrasping." Moreover, "They have neglected to recognize that the true power of successful culture resides in its example." Lastly, she observed that, "Any culture that jettisons the values that have given it competence, adaptability, and identity becomes weak and hollow. A Culture can avoid that hazard only by tenaciously retaining the underlying values responsible for the culture's nature and success."[37] It is only too easy now to pair events of the past year with Jacobs's observations. She ended *Dark Age Ahead* by quoting Lincoln's expression of "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" as among the most important "core values" of the nation. She would be very sad to see how tarnished that value, and the example to the world built on it, has become. She would be shocked by the extent to which American democracy has been undermined by career politicians and the corporate donors that fund them.

Jacobs could not predict the future. She did not know how things would turn out. While she read history and referred to complexity science and non-linear dynamics, she turned to metaphors of pendulums and spirals to describe the drama of civilization:

> "Some people think optimistically that if things get bad enough, they will get better because of the reaction of beneficent pendulums. When a culture is working wholesomely, beneficent pendulum swings—effective feedback—do occur. Corrective stabilization is one of the great services of democracy, with its feedback to rulers from the protesting and voting public… But powerful persons and groups that find it in their interest to prevent adaptive corrections have many ways of thwarting self-organizing stabilizers."[38]

Between the protesting, voting public and the powerful, she did not know who would win. But, no, she would not be coming home.

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[36] Ibid., 174.
[37] Ibid., 176.
[38] Ibid., 21.