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equality of outcomes are distinctive features of recent American experience. Perhaps the crowning achievement of this perspective is the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990—which forces many businesses to accommodate a wide variety of mental and physical conditions—for it puts the stamp of approval of a Republican president (George Bush) on the idea of using government to enforce a multiculturalist ideal. But the war is hardly over. After all, who won the crucial battles Bernstein himself describes?

**H**is fascinating account of a writing requirement at the University of Texas that would substitute rank political indoctrination for English composition is the story of how that proposal *lost*. What made efforts to dumb down the public school curriculum in Brookline, Massachusetts (in order to de-emphasize European history) so noteworthy, as Bernstein notes, is the fact that so many parents fought back and *won*. New York City had to drop the idea of teaching first graders about sex, and the superintendent was

forced to resign. If Bernstein really believed the war was over, his book would not be as highly spirited as it is—nor would there be so many other similar books.

*Dictatorship of Virtue* is certainly the best of the anti-p.c. critiques. However, it may be precisely this type of overheated counterattack that is getting in the way right now. Bernstein says he doesn't want to be "melodramatic," but he is. He knows that "we are not in danger of the guillotine," yet he can't resist the analogy. Concluding, he writes: "The time has come for liberals to recapture the high ground from the demagogues of diversity, to declare their diversity fake, fraudulent, superstitious, cranky, sanctimonious, monotonous." Actually, that time has passed. The time now is for a sober discussion. If education remains the best path to a life of reason, intelligence, and faith in merit—the story of Gizella Braun—then a less hyperbolic, more nuanced debate ought to be the next step.

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## OTHER TITLES

### *Contemporary Affairs*

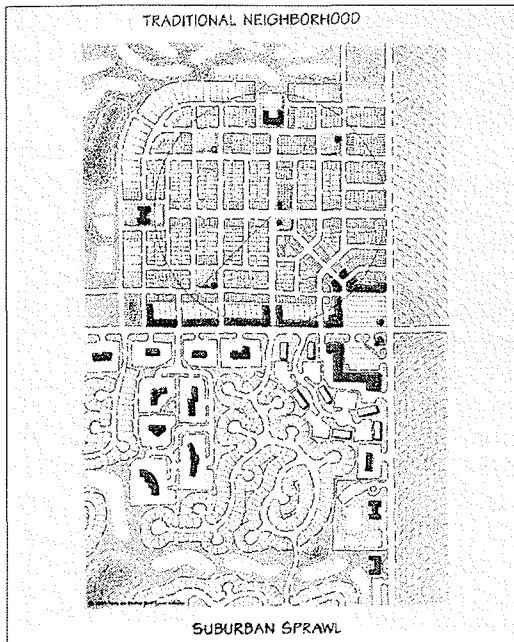
**A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE:** Reshaping the American Suburb. By Philip Langdon. Univ. of Mass. 288 pp. \$29.95

**THE NEW URBANISM:** Toward an Architecture of Community. By Peter Katz. McGraw-Hill. 245 pp. \$49.95

What may be most astonishing about the vast suburban landscape created in America during the past 50 years is not its scandalous ugliness or its protean vigor, but the fact that it was built virtually without benefit of town planning. America's town-planning tradition, older than the nation itself, perished when its

practitioners retired or died during the long post-1929 construction standstill of depression and war. The postwar generation of designers and architects, steeped in European modernism, regarded the old town planning as quaint and viewed the American desire to live in a single-family house surrounded by a green lawn with disdainful incredulity. So by and large they decided—with the happy concurrence of developers and many public authorities—to have nothing to do with suburbia. Instead, they chose to mastermind urban renewal and other disastrous schemes in the cities.

Today, the New Urbanist planners and architects, led by the Miami-based husband-wife team of Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-



Zyberk, are struggling to revive the American town-planning tradition. The essence of the New Urbanist idea is conveyed by Katz's subtitle: *Toward an Architecture of Community*. The New Urbanists argue that most of the postwar suburb's key features, from its broad roads to its generous setback requirements, work against the constant chance contacts between strangers needed to create a public realm. The remedy, say the New Urbanists, is in the plan: Build houses close to the street and closer together. Lay the streets out in a grid so that people can walk from one place to another. Narrow roads to slow down the cars. Mix housing types so that the mechanic can rent an apartment over the doctor's detached garage and the empty nesters can leave their five-bedroom house for a smaller place without departing for a distant retirement community. Most of these ideas are presented with textbook clarity by Langdon, a journalist who writes frequently about architecture.

So far, the signal New Urbanist accomplishment has been Duany and Plater-Zyberk's acclaimed community of Seaside, Florida, where construction began in 1981. Peter Calthorpe's Laguna West is being built on 1,000 acres outside Sacramento, California, and on the draw-

ing boards is Playa Vista, a planned community in Los Angeles designed by Elizabeth Moule and Stefanos Polyzoides. These and nearly two dozen other stunning New Urbanist communities—many still only in the planning stages—can be seen in Katz's lavishly illustrated book, which also includes brief essays by several New Urbanist leaders.

Yale University's Vincent Scully, the movement's *eminence grise*, concedes in the Katz volume that "New Suburbanism" might be a more accurate name for the movement. It is not that the group neglects cities but that "the *new* theme that links these projects is the redesign of that vast area in which most Americans now live." The critics who complain that the New Urbanists do not offer solutions to the problems of the inner cities are themselves heirs to a modernist tradition that, as Scully notes, helped destroy the city and that now has practically nothing to offer either cities or suburbs. (Both the New Urbanists and their critics, one might add, seem to be naive about the capacity of good design to overcome deeply rooted social problems.) There are other challenges to the New Urbanists' ideas: Do Americans really *want* to live together in towns? How do the planners propose to repair the thousands of square miles of suburban sprawl already in existence? Perhaps, however, it is too much to ask them to make up overnight for 50 years of lost time. Americans are continuing to surge into suburbia, and the New Urbanists have the only fresh ideas about how to shape the world they will make there.

**RACE AND CULTURE: A World View.** By Thomas Sowell. Basic. 331 pp. \$25

When European and Lebanese businessmen competed with each other in the cities and towns of 18th-century colonial West Africa, the Lebanese won hands down. In Malaysia during the 19th century, Chinese workers sapped trees on rubber plantations at twice the rate of the natives. Soldiers of German ancestry have commanded armies under Russian czars and American presidents. Most of today's mainstream social scientists can explain none of this, says Sowell, an