DIVERSITY IN RESTON AT 20:
Is the Glass Half-Empty or Half-Full?

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Many nations around the world have built or are building planned new cities. In the United Kingdom the first wave of New Towns built immediately after the second World War was designed to "decant" the population of London while also replenishing the housing stock destroyed in wartime air raids. The Brazilians built Brasilia as a new federal capital and to draw population and development to the vast interior of the Amazon. The Israelis constructed new towns on the periphery of their nation for defense and to absorb immigrants. In Japan, Tsukuba City, north of Tokyo, is nearing completion as the site of Tsukuba University and of laboratories and research facilities aimed at injecting more flexibility and creativity into Japanese higher education and, hopefully, to achieve scientific breakthroughs. India constructed Chandigarh in the early 1950s as the capital of the Punjab region, which had lost its former capital to Pakistan in the post-independence division of territory. Mexico hopes to build new cities throughout Mexico to encourage regional development and especially to relieve congestion in Mexico City. In the Soviet Union, Akademgorodok, south of Novosibirsk, was built as a science town. Saudi Arabia is building two completely new industrial cities - Jubail on the Gulf and Yanbu on the Red Sea.

The United States, too, has had its share of building planned new capitals - witness Washington, D.C. - and of cities platted out in the West to extend the frontier, as well as cities of science and technology such as Los Alamos, New Mexico and Oak Ridge, Tennessee. But in the United States, especially in the mid-twentieth century, the goals of building cities have more often been social. The most important goal
has been to build housing to build community, that is, to build housing which is not only attractive and affordable and considerate of the natural setting, but to build housing that will facilitate interaction and a sense of belonging. To build such a sense of community among peoples of diverse economic, ethnic, racial, and family backgrounds is a high ideal of American democracy. The Garden Cities movement, transplanted to the United States from England in the 1920s, the towns such as Radburn, New Jersey, constructed under the movement’s precepts; the Greenbelt towns built in the 1930s, and the federal New Communities legislation of the late 1960s and early 1970s all reflect the social benefits we hope for from housing, especially large-scale planned housing developments that include also the planning for jobs, services, and infrastructure.

My task today is to assess how well Reston has met one of its social goals - diversity - over a period of 20 years. Four of the eight goals that Robert F. Simon enunciated early on, goals that still guide Reston’s development today, resonate with the aim of being inclusive, with creating a community of diversity.

- to build a community where people may live, work, play and have the widest possible opportunity to realize their full potential,

- to build a community where barriers created by race, income, geography, education, and age are removed,

- to build the fullest possible range of housing types for the company janitor, the company president, the elderly widow, and the young bachelor,

- to make it possible for people to become rooted in their community, to identify and feel part of it by providing housing for different needs and incomes so that one may find the kind of housing he needs when he is 20, 40 or 65 without leaving his neighborhood.

How has Reston done? How diverse is the population? - and has the diversity been accompanied by interaction and a sense of community?
Before I deal with these questions - and they are separate questions - because diversity does not necessarily lead to interaction or a sense of community - I must ask one basic question. What are we comparing Reston to? What is the yardstick of diversity by which Reston measures up or falls short? Do we compare Reston to cities, or suburbs? Whether Reston is a city or a suburb was discussed by the previous speaker this morning and I did not preview his remarks. But I have formulated my own answer. Reston is a suburb, albeit a more diverse one than most suburbs in its metropolitan area, and probably in the United States.

Reston's diversity is best assessed in the context of the metropolitan area of which it is a part - the Washington, D. C. -Md. -Va. Metropolitan Statistical Area. As defined by the Office of Management and Budget in 1983, using 1980 census data, this metropolitan area contained three and a quarter million people, spread over five counties in Maryland, and five in Virginia, as well as the District of Columbia. (The 1983 definition added three counties - Calvert and Frederick in Maryland and Stafford in Virginia - to the earlier seven-county metropolitan definition). Most Americans - 70 percent in 1980 - live in metropolitan areas, that is, large core cities surrounded by suburban counties that are economically and socially interdependent with the core city. The lessons of what Reston has and has not accomplished in the way of diversity are certainly broadly relevant for the United States.

The following table compares Reston with Fairfax County and with the District of Columbia, the city that is the "engine" of the metropolis. Such three-way comparisons are virtually never made in either the Reston Times or in the profiles distributed by the Reston Land Corporation or Reston developers. The comparisons are only between Reston and Fairfax County; the references to Washington, D. C. deal almost exclusively with how easy
it is to get there.

Washington, D.C., like many other metropolitan core cities lost population between 1970 and 1980. Washington, D.C., lost over 15 percent of its population in the decade, while suburban Fairfax gained 31 percent and Reston a spectacular 536 percent. The population of Washington, D.C., is older, blacker, poorer, and less well-educated than either Fairfax or Reston. Such contrasts are typical for American core cities and suburbs. More than eleven percent of Washington’s people are over 65, but in recently-settled suburban Fairfax only four and a half percent, and in even more-recently settled Reston only three and a half percent. Seventy out of every 100 Washingtonians are black, but only about six of every 100 residents of Fairfax County, and ten of every 100 residents of Reston. Fifteen percent of Washington’s families have incomes below the poverty level, but only three percent of Fairfax families and five percent of Reston’s families. Roughly two-thirds of adult Washingtonians are high school graduates, but almost 90 percent of Fairfax adults and over 90 percent of Restonians. In sum, Reston, like Fairfax County, is an affluent suburb. But Reston is something more and that something is important. Reston has a greater proportion of blacks and of poor people than Fairfax. Both of these types of diversity have resulted from the deliberate policies of the past 20 years. They did not simply happen.

Reston was founded in the mid-1960s as part of the private sector response to what Ray Burby and Shirley Weiss have called the “suburban critique,” - the many-faceted criticism - aesthetic, ecological, governmental, and social - of the unplanned suburbs that mushroomed after the second World War. Before he founded Reston, Robert Simon’s dissatisfaction with conventional suburban living for himself and his family was a personal reflection of this critique. (quoted in Connection, 20th anniversary report, 1984). The New Communities legislation of the late 1960s
and early 1970s was the public sector response. Reston has been successful in showing how planning - and a social conscience - can produce beautiful, environmentally-sensitive suburbs that have some economic and social diversity. Reston illustrates that diversity is possible to a limited degree in affluent, upper-middle class suburbs. The question is what are the limits.

The limits of diversity result, in my view, from two sets of factors. First, the views of the American public about their cities. Second, the proper division of responsibility between public and private sectors in our governmental system.

The views of the American public about their cities indicate a love-hate relationship in which suburban living enables the middle-class to have its cake and eat it, too. The conventional wisdom in social science has been that Americans are anti-urban, but this simplifies a complex set of opinions. The people of the United States are ambivalent about their cities, especially their large cities. They value cities highly as commercial, recreational, and intellectual centers, but have a low regard for cities as places to live. This duality was evident in a survey of a national representative sample of American adults conducted in 1978 for HUD by the Louis Harris organization. Only 16 percent of the respondents said that the large city (250,000+) would be their first preference for a place to live. The city is associated with crime and other problems and was regarded as "the worst place to raise children" by 82 percent of the sample. On the other hand, big majorities viewed the large city as having the best employment opportunities, the best shopping, the best health care facilities, the best plays and cultural activities, the best restaurants, and the best selection of movies. There is support for saying that Americans believe cities are "nice places to visit - and work in - but not to live in," especially for family life and raising children.
For many Americans living in the suburban commuting range of large cities combines the best of both worlds - close to the attractions of large cities, but insulated from perceived urban problems. Restonians have taken this option - but have elected to include some urban economic and racial diversity. The mix is inherently limited, however, - the cost of private housing limits the number of low-income people - and since proportionately more blacks than whites are low-income, the number of blacks is also limited. Economic and social integration in Reston are not cosmetic - and they are to be applauded loudly - but they are indirectly controlled by the larger realities of American society.

The attitudes of Americans toward living in large cities - and a willingness to address the problems of the poor and the black who are disproportionately concentrated in cities - are likely to become more negative. My own recent research deals with the "suburban generation," the people born after the second World War who have lived all their lives in increasingly autonomous and self-sufficient suburbs, ("Young Suburban Migrants," in V. Boggs, G. Handel, and S. Fava, eds., The Apple Sliced: Sociological Studies of New York City, Bergin & Garvey, 1984). The suburban generation will loom ever-larger in the United States, since by 1980 44 percent of all Americans lived in suburbs, a larger percentage than in any other kind of place. My studies have suggested that the "suburban generation" - who are under 40 since they were born after World War II, are often afraid of the city, do not know how to handle themselves with strangers in dense urban public places, seldom visit the core cities of their metropolitan area, except for stellar attractions, and tend to regard the problems of the poor and of minorities as urban problems, that is, not their suburban concern. Most members of the suburban generation are not likely to want to create an echo of urban diversity in their suburbs by making provision for the poor and minorities. My guess is that it will be harder to recruit the next generation of
Restonians committed to the goal of an inclusive community.

My second limiting point: the responsibility of private as opposed to public sectors. Private developers cannot resolve income inequality in American society, nor should that be their task. Providing affordable housing for all groups is a national governmental responsibility, explicitly stated in the Housing Act of 1949: "The Congress hereby declares that the general welfare and security of the Nation and the health and living standards of its people require...the realization as soon as feasible of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American." Government implementation of housing affordability in terms of various forms of subsidies has waxed and waned over the years. When, as is the case currently, government leaves housing construction as much as possible in the private sector, the result is to squeeze poor and moderate income groups out of the housing market because developers cannot afford to build for them.

What is happening in Reston housing now is two-fold. On the one hand an influx of young, affluent professionals drawn by local high-tech industries is creating a market for higher-priced homes than the "old Reston." The 1990 census is likely to show higher median family income in Reston than in Fairfax County, in contrast to the 1980 results. According to the Reston-Times (Feb. 28, 1985) the "new Restonians," especially south of the Dulles Access Road, have a median household income of over $38,000 and live in homes with an average value of over $106,000; the "old Restonians" have a median household income of $31,400 and live in homes valued at $93,000, on average. Simultaneously, federal subsidies for apartment construction have been discontinued and local substitutes difficult to obtain. The result is a very low rental vacancy rate and higher rents at the very time that higher single-family prices have driven more Restonians into the rental market. The Reston-Times has been headlining the dire consequences of these trends: "The Two Restons" (Feb. 28, 1985); "You've Got to be Lucky to have an Apartment in Reston," "rents are Increasing Faster
than Rate of Inflation," "Area Lost Apartments though the Population
Scared," "Tax-Exempt Financing Critical to Apartments," (April 18, 1985);
"Apartment Shopping's Frightening Reality," (April 25, 1985); and they are
right. It will be harder and harder to maintain an economic mix in
Reston in the face of these trends and to meet the related goal of
being able to move within Reston as pm's financial situation changes.
Instead, Reston is on its way to becoming a high-income, high-tech
satellite town like Fairfield, Stamford, or Greenwich, Connecticut,
where the workers attracted by the jobs find they cannot afford to live
there. The Washington Post (June 17, 1984) reports that many workers
at clerical-level jobs paying $12,000-$16,000 a year in the new Reston
firms, are settling in the Sterling area because Reston does not have
enough moderately-priced housing for them.

Even if the mechanisms were available to build housing for low and
moderate income groups, the more profoundly disturbing question is whether
Restonians still have the will to implement them. After Gulf-Reston
took over the management of Reston in 1967 it had to be sued by the
Washington Metropolitan Housing Authority and the Housing Opportunities
Council before the corporation agreed to provide additional subsidized
housing units for workers at the U.S. geological Survey headquarters which
had relocated to Reston. The Housing Committee of the Reston Community
Association was active in these efforts. "Members of the Housing Committee
of the Reston Community Association also felt that they had had a tre-
memberous influence on Gulf-Reston, Inc. The tendency without their input
would have been to address the needs of upper-income residents only and
to ignore the needs of those priced out of the private housing market.
Simon had sold these early 'pioneers' on the idea of low and moderate
income housing." (Helen Smoekler, Economic Integration in New Communities,
Ballinger, 1976, pp. 91-93). In contrast, on June 17, 1984 the Washington
Post reported that the Artery organisation was encountering opposition
from prospective renters in the Waterside apartments, who objected to
the fact that 20 percent of the units had to be set aside for low and
moderate income households as a condition of the tax-exempt financing
provided by the Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority. This
is of particular interest since the cheapest apartment in Waterside will
rent for $400. (Reston-Times, April 18, 1985), p. A-12)

The Reston-Times has expressed concern in the past several months
over the possible slippage of interest in economic mix as a goal in
Reston, most explicitly in its lead story, "The Two Restons," on Feb. 28,
1985. The question is what action, if any, Restonians will take to insure
a housing and economic mix.

But what happens to moderate-income and especially low-income people
who do live in Reston? Reston's goal has been to build not just
housing but to build community. If the less affluent are not to be mere
tokens, how are they served by Reston's facilities and how are they
meshed into daily life? How do the poor become part of the community?
Reston is upper-middle class in its expensive recreation, trendy shops,
and time-consuming organization meetings. Does Reston provide jobs for un-
skilled workers? Is there frequent and reliable public transportation?
Are there stores that carry less-expensive cuts of meat, discount-priced
day-old bakery products, generic brand canned goods, and bulk-priced
staples? Is it easy to use food stamps? Are there inexpensive clothing
stores? How are the community recreational fees of low-income residents
financed? To what extent do low-income groups socialize within Reston?
To what extent has the concentration of low-income housing within par-
ticular areas of Reston been ameliorated? To what extent are the poor
of Reston also elderly - a strategy often used to achieve economic inte-
gration. All of these questions are variations on the question of whether
low-income groups are socially marginal in Reston or are part of the community.
I turn now to racial diversity in Reston, and will deal only with blacks, both because they are the most numerous minority and because they encounter the most resistance to economic advances and social acceptance. We have already indicated that in terms of the percentage of black residents Reston does better than suburban Fairfax county in which it is located. Blacks in Reston cover a range of income groups, as does the white population. Patricia Blackwell, head of the NAACP in Northern Virginia, and an eleven-year Reston resident, was quoted in the Washington Post (June 17, 1984) as saying of Reston that there is very little overt racism and that what exists "is very well masked." There is no racial steering in Reston and hence no racial residential segregation within Reston. Reston thus stands in marked contrast to the harassment, violence and houseburnings that still occur when blacks move into some suburbs, although racial steering is the more common reaction to blacks who seek suburban homes. The current (May 1985) issue of Black Enterprise has as its cover story "Off Limits! The Dilemma of Moving into Suburbia."

Reston is racially open but the message conveyed very indirectly, almost subliminally. In the developers materials and in the issues of the Reston Times I have perused for the past six months there are no statistics on blacks, only as occasional picture of a black resident, and, all-important, a few advertisements featuring black realtors. Word-of-mouth and knowledge of the Reston commitment to integration are probably the major methods of recruiting black home-buyers - and warning off whites who will not live in integrated areas. The important thing, studies have shown, is that the policy be known and adhered to.

The success of racial integration in Reston must be measured not only by numbers but also by the extent to which blacks have been able to build community in Reston - both within and across racial lines. Black residential preferences may be related to their desire to construct social communities. Thus, relatively few blacks - one to four percent in national surveys - want to live in "mostly white" areas. (See S. Fava, "Blacks in American
In the HUD survey I noted earlier that only 16 percent of Americans chose the large city as their first residential preference. However, 38 percent of the blacks have the city as their first choice, as contrasted to only 13 percent of the whites and 2 percent of the Hispanics. This may reflect a genuine preference for big city living among blacks, a recognition of the racial housing market, or a desire to live among larger numbers of blacks so that black institutions, such as churches, social clubs, and political power bases can be maintained.

The dynamics of racial integration and community building in Reston and in Columbia, Md., were studied in the middle 1970s by the sociologist, Peggy Wireman, and included in her recent book, (Urban Neighborhoods, Networks, and Families, Lexington Books, 1984). She concludes that

the dynamics of race and class in Reston seem to have been similar to those in Columbia: somewhat limited social interaction between races and an extensive system of all-black organizations. There are alumni branches of fraternities and sororities and a number of all-black couples' clubs, women's clubs, and men's clubs, as well as a local chapter of Jack and Jill. (P. 107)

Wireman notes that "Blacks in Reston were more vocal than in Columbia at any early point in the town's development about their desire to obtain community recognition of their black identity and to deal with racial issues." The organization, Black Focus, was formed and sponsors an annual Black Arts Festival and other events emphasizing black culture. Eighty percent of black families in Reston were estimated to belong to Black Focus, which Wireman holds was formed "to give black families black support - a kind of extended family." (P. 108).

Wireman's assessment is that integration in Reston represented a significant achievement for the community and its residents. It provided blacks with access to a
community in which they could move freely without fear of overt discrimination and with total access for themselves and their children to the cultural, educational, and other advantages of the community. Both blacks and whites had the opportunity to meet each other in a nonthreatening environment in which mutual respect generally was the accepted norm. Social relations could be formed according to the personal inclination of each individual, but the lack of widespread, close interracial friendships did not exclude blacks from enjoying other advantages of the community. (p. 108)

I would like at this point to add an aspect of diversity which has received attention only in the past decade - namely diversity in female gender roles. Low density suburbs of single-family homes segregated from non-residential activities provide a setting suitable only for the traditional housewife-mother role. However, women have been entering the paid labor force to the extent that in March 1984 six out of ten mothers with children under 18 were also working outside the home. The divorce rate has also increased and so has women's life expectancy, both trends leaving more women alone for many of their adult years.

Accessible work places, shopping, childcare, medical, recreational and other facilities are crucial for women because they reduce time pressures, enabling women to integrate their various roles. Higher densities and built environments combining residential and non-residential functions provide a greater availability of services and activities close to home. These characteristics had been found mainly in cities and therefore it had been thought that cities allowed women more role diversity because they could move readily from one activity to another. However, as suburbs have grown many have added non-residential functions and some suburbs have now reached the "critical mass" of density, jobs, shopping and support services that women need. Reston is probably in this category. If so, it means that many types of women can live happy, productive lives.

The critical dimensions for women are availability of jobs close to home and career ladders in the workplace; a variety of housing types and
price ranges; many services including child care and medical care in
the local neighborhood; easy availability of many people for compan-
ionship and emotional support, and transportation systems other than
the private automobile. All of these are part of the Reston dream.

In conclusion

Is the glass of diversity in Reston half-empty or half-full? The glass is
half-full in measuring Reston against the greater economic and racial
homogeneity of conventional suburbs. It is half-empty in measuring
Reston against the range of inequality in the United States, inequities
which depend on national policy changes. At the local level, Reston will
find it harder to sustain diversity so that the glass does not become
more than half-empty. It is time for Reston to renew its commitment.