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Suburbia Linked to Societal Breakdown

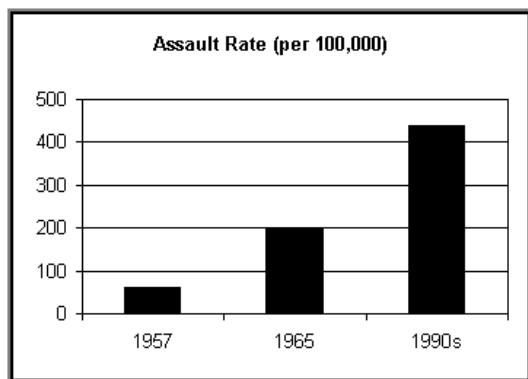
A ground-breaking exposé, *It's a Sprawl World After All: The Human Costs of Unplanned Growth – And Visions for A Better Future*, chronicles how sprawl has twisted the American dream into an on-going nightmare by transforming neighbors into strangers, and strangers into threats.

“We may think of ourselves as the land of the free,” explains author Douglas E. Morris “but how free are we really when parents are afraid to let their children play outside unsupervised for fear of them being snatched? How free are we when women are afraid of walking around at night, even in their own neighborhoods?”

An increasing number of Americans are starting to realize that suburban sprawl has eliminated the safety, sense of belonging, and quality of life that comes from living in genuine, small town communities. By building the fractured landscape of suburbia for the past 50 plus years, America has become an oppressively alienating place to live, filled with uncivil strangers; but more ominously, our rates of violence have increased dramatically as well, says the author.

America is now the most violent nation in the first-world. Statistics clearly show that the U.S. has the most murders, rapes, assaults, and serial killers than any first-world nation by a wide margin. The author points out that these rates of violence began to climb exponentially only after suburbia became our main form of habitat. Prior to sprawl, our nation was a safe and livable land of small towns and vibrant city neighborhoods. After sprawl, our society fell apart.

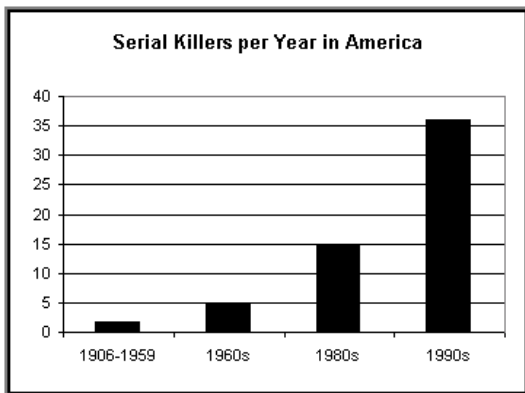
Sprawl emerged in 1945 and was firmly in place by the 1960s. Not so coincidentally, side by side with the emergence of sprawl, violence in all its forms increased. The aggravated-assault rate skyrocketed from 60 per 100,000 in 1957 to 200 per 100,000 in 1965, then erupted to over 440 per 100,000 by the middle of 1990s. This is an increase of over 700 percent. As sprawl emerged, violence increased ... dramatically.



Even more chilling is that America is home to seventy-six (76) percent of all the world's serial killers. These homicidal maniacs impact every person in America disproportionately to the number of people killed, simply because we are all well aware that we could be their next victim.

Just as with murders, assaults, and rapes, the statistics associated with serial killings can be clearly connected to the rise of sprawl. Between 1906 and 1959, there was a steady rate of only 1.7 new cases of serial killers every year in America. When there was no sprawl, there was no breakdown in society, therefore no increase in serial killers.

Then, by the 1960s, when sprawl was firmly established as America's main form of habitat, new serial killers emerged at a rate of five (5) per year. By 1980, the number of new serial killers per year had risen to fifteen (15); and by the 1990s there were thirty-six (36) new serial killers identified per year, an average of three (3) a month.



This represents a rise of nearly a thousand percent in only three decades. Because of this increase in serial predation, the FBI has estimated that serial murders could claim an average of eleven (11) lives a **day** in the United States in the twenty-first century.

Despite all the impressive advances in forensics technology, as well as the introduction of many more police officers and federal law enforcement agents with sophisticated training and resources, serial killings continue to increase.

Some may speculate that it is detection alone that is contributing to the increase in the statistical number of serial killers. If so, as law enforcement methods all over the world have improved, every other Western nation should also have commensurate increases in the detected number of serial killers. However, they have not! Violence and serial killing have increased dramatically in America, and America alone.

What is it about America that makes it a breeding ground for violent sociopaths? Other first-world nations have everything we do in the way of consumer toys, industrial development, and technological advancements. They have violent movies, television shows, and video games. They have pornography, drug users, prostitution, poverty, and racial disharmony. If you go down a checklist and compare the reasons “experts” have given for the breakdown in U.S. society and the increase in violence, you will find that the same issues exist in other developed nations. However, those societies have not fallen apart as ours has.

What is missing in America is that which suburban sprawl has eliminated: genuine communities. Experts from a variety of fields are noticing this need for community, and how its lack is having an impact on violent behavior. Criminologists and psychologists—including **John Douglas**, the FBI’s serial killer expert; **Rolf Loeber**, professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh; **Felton Earls**, professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School; and **Shawn Johnston**, a forensic psychologist in Sacramento—assert that without a network of responsible adult role models available for those pre-disposed to violence, many will begin to act on their hostile tendencies.

However, in the isolation of sprawl, where are such “bad seeds” going to find the community they need to teach them how to be responsible members of society? If spending time with significant adult role models is what is necessary to stop the development of serial and violent offenders, how is that going to happen in sprawl? With small town communities extremely rare because of sprawl, where are children going to find the role models they require to become healthy adults?

Regrettably, suburban sprawl has eliminated the places where children can spend time with responsible, caring adults. Without the adult supervision that was so common when we lived in genuine small town communities, many American children today are left to their own devices, allowing those who are predisposed toward violent behavior to fall through the cracks in society, offering an opportunity for their “bad seed” to germinate and grow. Without strong communities to connect children to supportive adult role models, some of those individuals inclined towards violent behavior descend into the darkness of their genetic makeup and become violent offenders.

Before sprawl existed, children and adults could depend on the whole community to be there for support, guidance, and direction. In sprawl, such support is virtually non-existent.

“Suburban sprawl has severed the ties that bind us together,” says Mr. Morris, “setting those pre-disposed to violence adrift without the tempering influence of community. A situation that has become increasing deadly for every American.”

Certainly there are other factors involved. Nothing occurs in a vacuum. However, all things considered, the breakdown in American society and the commensurate rise in violence are too closely connected to the

emergence of sprawl not to bear intense scrutiny. As the first study of its kind to finger suburban sprawl as the root cause of America's societal breakdown, ***It's a Sprawl World After All*** is also a challenge to the nation's criminologists, sociologists, psychologists, and urban planners to work together to combat the negative impact that suburban sprawl is having on every Americans' quality of life.

Along with illuminating the root cause of our societal breakdown, ***It's a Sprawl World After All*** also offers proven remedies for individuals to help them create a sense of community and safety in the emptiness of suburban life. In conjunction, the book presents achievable steps we can take as a nation to restore the security and sense of community that sprawl eliminated.

"Let's not subject another generation of Americans to the fear, alienation and isolation perpetrated by suburban sprawl," says Morris. "Not only do Americans deserve better places to live than what exists in sprawl, but their lives depend on it as well."

Brief Bio

International entrepreneur, magazine columnist, and published author of five books, Douglas E. Morris most recently is the author of *Its a Sprawl World After All* (www.ItsaSprawlWorld.com), the first study to link the breakdown in the US with the uniquely American development pattern of suburban sprawl.