

# POPULATION TRANSFER, AMERICAN STYLE

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## **The Slaughter of Cities: Urban Renewal as Ethnic Cleansing**

E. Michael Jones

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*Reviewed by David Wilson*

The names Dennis Clark, Louis Wirth, and George Edwards do not come to mind as towering influences on mid-twentieth century America, but drive through the bombed-out urban shells of cities like Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit, and you will see their legacy. From the outset of U.S. entry into World War II and continuing until about the 1970s, America's Protestant Establishment sought to break up the Catholic neighborhoods of northern industrial cities by moving in black migrants from the south.

The devices employed ranged from pulling strings on funds for housing to government infiltration of the local parish. More often than not, the goal was accomplished by municipal housing authorities and their decisions about who would live where. The efforts often led to violence, such as the Detroit race riots, one of which left thirty-five dead in 1943. The campaign was designed to ensure, among other goals, U.S. victory in World War II. The Protestants had both a sympathy for England's wartime aims and a deep distrust of the Irish, Polish, and other white ethnic newcomers, who were overwhelmingly Catholic.

As these more recent European immigrants teemed in places like North Philadelphia, they could communicate effectively with each other while screening out the influence of mass media and the broader culture. Their lives were defined by the parish, and as their numbers grew, so did their political clout. With their proximity to one another, a closeness enabled by the row houses in which they lived, it was difficult for the war makers in Washington to keep tabs on them. The possibility that they would either be neutral about American involvement in World War II or, worse, sympathetic to the Axis powers, was deemed a significant domestic threat.

Meanwhile, girding for the war effort meant ramping up industrial production, which accelerated the migration of waves of blacks from the

south (between 1930 and 1970, six and half million made the trek). But rather than house them away from the already occupied urban centers, deliberate efforts were made to inject them into the heart of Catholic neighborhoods, which inevitably drove out the whites. The resulting racial disruption helped to secure cheap black labor for industry, the undercutting of a potential fifth column during the war, and the eventual suburbanization (or Americanization) of white ethnic Catholics. Animating this entire operation was the Anglo-Saxon elite's desire to maintain its dissolving hegemony.

### CREATING THE MODERN GHETTO: URBAN POLICY AND WHITE FLIGHT

So goes the thesis of E. Michael Jones, a thoughtful if at times obsessive Catholic writer, in his massive dissertation on the true motivations behind "urban renewal." Jones, editor of *Culture Wars* magazine and proprietor of a website bearing the same name (culturewars.com), offers a brand of cultural criticism that depicts social trends typically deemed "progressive" as not merely ill-advised, but designed to cultivate a morally confused – and thus pliant – populace.

He brings this perspective to bear in *Slaughter of Cities*, making the point that while "urban renewal" and racial integration were endlessly touted as helping to clear the cities of "blight" and the backwardness of racial segregation, they were in fact little more than a game of human chess played by the American elite. The Catholics had to go. And if they couldn't be sent back to Europe, they could be uprooted from their parishes and scattered to the suburban winds, where Rome's grip on their minds would be loosened – and Washington's grip tightened. That these Catholics drew sustenance and comfort from living in their own communities was never considered by the neighborhood demolition engineers. They were instead caricatured as ignorant white racists, pig-headedly opposed to the joys of living with blacks.

Jones opens with an introduction to the brothers Paul and Brand Blanshard, members of the Protestant intelligentsia, whose time in Philadelphia beginning in 1918 convinced them that the Catholics were a looming threat. Like the rest of the characters to follow in Jones's book, they are entirely forgettable people. But the writing and thinking of men like the Blanshard brothers was to shape municipal housing policy for decades to come.

Brother Brand, reflecting on the Catholic parochial schools of Philadelphia's Bridesburg area, observed in 1920 that "It is a world...which is simply not our world, a world in which independent criticism and disinterested science is and must remain unknown, a world which still abounds with the primitive concepts and fancies of the middle ages." Brother Paul agreed, writing in his best-selling book *American Freedom and Catholic Power* in 1949 that "Often the parochial and public schools are on opposite sides

of the same street, dividing the children into competing and even hostile groups, conscious of their own differences and suspicious of each other's way of life."

Of particular concern was Catholic fertility, which, because of sharp differences in church teaching on birth control, was bound to overwhelm Protestant numbers. In big cities, this had obvious consequences for voting power. For the Protestant establishment – in what might be observed as a larger pattern for ethnic and racial conflict – the possibility of specific policy disputes or conflicting interests was subsumed by a more visceral reaction to the "other" (which may only be a more efficient manifestation of the former). For Jones, this reaction is understandable for white Catholics threatened with black criminality, but deplorable for white Protestants threatened with Catholic voting strength. This is not to register a complaint about Jones's explicit advocacy for Catholics, but only to note it, and the way in which it informs his perspective. For Jones, the victims were the Catholics, and the perpetrators were anyone – even if they happened to be Catholic themselves – who participated in the effort to drive them from their homes.

Much of what Jones describes, however, can provide useful insights for those concerned about the loss of power and demographic displacement of white Americans today. Why do so many individual whites work against the interests of whites as a group? Some insight might be gleaned from the story of Dennis Clark, one of Jones's more prominent participants in the anti-Catholic design of urban housing policy. Clark, himself an Irish Catholic from Philadelphia, found that by internalizing the aspirations of Philadelphia's "WASP" elite he rose in stature at such institutions as the Quaker-dominated Philadelphia Housing Authority, the Catholic Interracial Council, and later, the largely Jewish Fels Foundation. Clark never acknowledged to himself that much of his life's work was dedicated to forcing his own kind from the communities that nurtured them. He avoided this reality, Jones says, by taking the cue to view issues in political, rather than ethnic, terms. If Catholics could be divided into "progressives" and "racists," then he needn't have worried himself about operating as an agent against his own people – just those who weren't going along with the program. So convinced of the rightness of racial integration was Clark that he was willing to turn his back on the church over the matter.

Jones summarizes:

Dennis Clark provides us with the classic paradigm of the Catholic intellectual of the time, agitating for social change which he perceived as a moral imperative, and then abandoning the Church when she didn't conform to his paradigm of social justice, without once giving some indication that the program he supported might have been of political benefit to the opponents of Catholic ethnics, even when he sat on the councils of the organizations that plotted the destruction of their neighborhoods.

As all of this was happening, it was plain to see that blacks and whites were not integrating. Rather, once a critical mass of blacks in a given area was achieved, the remaining whites picked up and left. This critical mass need not have been big—sometimes, the move-in of a single black family (the “blockbuster”) was enough to signal to the neighborhood that it was done for. This pattern was so clear and so pervasive that it serves as solid evidence for Jones’s case that “integration” of the urban neighborhoods was not the true goal—displacement was.

A Quaker group called Friends Suburban Housing, for instance, would buy homes in white areas like Levittown, near Philadelphia, with the assistance of special access to the Veterans Administration foreclosure list, and then offer them exclusively to black families. The Quakers themselves, however, did not want racial integration for their own neighborhoods. Jones recounts how one man who planned to sell his Swarthmore home to blacks was presented with a petition signed by thirty-nine members of the Swarthmore Friends Meeting urging him to “consider the neighbors and friends in the community where you have lived for several years.”

In Chicago, similar events were taking place with the help of people like Louis Wirth. An assimilation-minded Jew, Wirth leapt head first into the WASP criticism of Catholics from his power-perch as a sociologist at the University of Chicago, described by Jones as a headquarters for “psychological warfare” in that effort. Wirth once wrote that “the totalitarian nations of Europe have substantial representation of their subjects” in America. Behind this observation was the assumption, in Jones’s words, that “Catholics had a congenital weakness for fascism.”

Ironically, Wirth, himself a member of B’nai B’rith and once elected to the executive board of the Anti-Defamation League, observed that “the relative internal unity...of the Catholic groups in the urban centers increases their capacity to act collectively and to develop an appropriate group consciousness.” Wirth brought his adopted anti-Catholic animus to places like the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council of Chicago at a time when projects like the Frances Cabrini Homes—originally meant for poor Italians, as the name suggests—instead went to black defense workers, touching off a riot in April of 1943.

### WASP ELITE, FEDERAL HOUSING AUTHORITY, AND BLACK CRIME

While characters like Clark and Wirth busied themselves as agents of the WASP elite, Detroit’s George Edwards was a WASP principal, primed to carry out the ruling elite’s plan at the local level. Edwards, the son of a Dallas lawyer and a graduate of Harvard, found himself appointed to head the Detroit Housing Commission in 1939. It was this commission that, in accordance with the wishes of Washington, passed over the uncontroversial and undeveloped areas of Detroit for the building of housing

for black defense workers. Instead, places like St. Louis the King parish were targeted. Jones writes that the Federal Housing Authority furthered the attack by refusing to insure mortgages in the area near the proposed projects, "indicating it was destined to become an all-black ghetto."

Edwards brought his establishment liberal views and strong support among blacks to his appointment as chief of police, declaring in a 1960 article in *The New Republic* that "no child is born predestined to be a criminal." As if on cue, crime shot skyward. Blacks were 29 percent of Detroit's population but accounted for 65 percent of the arrests, Jones writes. Meanwhile, morale among white police officers was plummeting. On the night of the funeral of a white officer killed by a black man, Edwards also attended an American Jewish Committee award ceremony in which he was lauded for fostering racial harmony. In 1963, while Edwards was on a trip to England with Supreme Court Justice William Brennan, a white officer attempting to arrest a hulking black prostitute was slashed in the hand. The officer shot and killed the prostitute.

Such spiraling multiracial anarchy was too much for the whites of Detroit to bear. Between 1964 and 1966, 22,000 whites left the city each year, and following a race riot in 1967, 47,000 more left, which spiked to 80,000 in 1968. When Edwards died in 1995, Jones notes, Detroit was the most racially homogeneous big city in America.

Throughout these battles in the cities of the north, Jones observes, Catholics had nobody to articulate their position on a national level. The Catholic leadership was busy issuing proclamations on the evils of "racism" and the oneness of humanity while their parishes were being decimated. How Catholics might have articulated their position, however, is unclear, because Jones is keen to stress that the conflict was ethnic (white Protestants versus white Catholics) and not racial (whites versus blacks). Would Catholics have fared better by arguing that the evil force at work was not criminally inclined blacks, but manipulative and controlling Protestants? Or by pointing to the organic virtues of homogeneous white Catholic community?

At the very least, perhaps, understanding the Protestant dynamic might have been helpful, even if Catholics could not have expected to get much traction by publicly criticizing the WASP elite. Jones gives the impression that most Catholics, like most whites today, were either unaware of what was happening to them or misdiagnosed the source of the problem. They were aware that *something* was happening – they just couldn't quite figure out who or what was behind it. "Communists," they suspected, were the ones moving blacks into the neighborhood and supporting Martin Luther King, Jr.

This point, like others in the book, is a good one, but getting to such points can prove a laborious task. *The Slaughter of Cities* is entirely too

long, and oddly organized. Jones jumps from city to city and back again, dropping in names by the dozen that never reappear and are never put into context. He does a fine job of getting into the minds of his primary subjects but does not develop narratives that might make the book more readable. His findings cry out for discussion and analysis, but Jones too often simply dashes off a snide remark and moves on. His efforts to drag in other causes of his, like the use of birth control, are forced, and tend to make him look like an unbalanced conspiracy theorist—even to a reader friendly to a good conspiracy theory.

### SLUMS, SUBURBS, AND “URBAN RENEWAL”

One such tendency of Jones along these lines appears in his treatment of suburban housing, cars, and television as “tools of political control.” To hear Jones tell it, it is as if these developments and technologies were specifically designed for purposes of control. Indeed, we do spend our days staring into windshields and television screens, as Jones puts it, and this has consequences on a number of levels. But it is rather doubtful that Henry Ford cackled to himself that his Model T was sure to help control the masses. More probably, he thought it would be a good way to get around without horses. That the ethnic and racial battles of the past century were happening as these technological developments were introduced is doubtless more coincidental than Jones might have us believe.

The same could be said for other historical events Jones tries too hard to grab under the netting he casts. The presence of blacks in America and their migration northward had precious little to do with twentieth century Protestant suspicion of Catholics. It is likely, too, that there were powerful integration champions who did not fully understand the incompatibility of blacks and whites in the same neighborhoods, and might well have considered themselves to be righteous actors. *The Slaughter of Cities* lays out too many historical strands that just can't be tied together, and this is what ultimately prevents Jones's thesis from bearing heavy weight. If Jones meant to show that the housing battles of the World War II era and onward were an isolated effort to destroy the American city and the Catholics who lived there—an effort unconnected to any other historical event—he falls short. I came away from the book suspecting that support for settling blacks in urban ethnic neighborhoods was more a case of Protestant contempt for Catholics than a bloodthirsty desire to see them suffer.

If, on the other hand, Jones's goal was to catalogue this contempt—and the hypocrisy and shortsightedness—of the WASP housing engineers who played a part in turning American cities into uninhabitable slums, he has succeeded. It can hardly be disputed that the effort to “integrate” cities like Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit resulted not in harmonious mixtures of the races, but the near-total evacuation of whites. In many instances,

the Protestants themselves were not subjected to these social experiments, and protested more effectively when they were.

Of course, if the “urban renewal” projects were part of a plan to help preserve WASP power, it ultimately failed. Writers Richard Brookhiser and Robert Locke have weighed in on this topic, concluding that the exercise of WASP power was indeed enlightened – perhaps so much so that it proved its own undoing. They might have initially been willing to set quotas on Jews at Yale, but lacked the nerve to more aggressively maintain hegemony.

Rightly or wrongly, WASP-bashing is a popular sport, both among the political mainstream and in some quarters of the racially conscious right. To the former, they represent the starchy and repressed past, in need of livening up by some vigorous salsa dancing. To the latter, they are the effete tea-sippers who once had their hands on the wheel but caved in to multiracialism for fear of offending anyone. On the few occasions when WASPs are praised for their sturdy values, the praise is studiously uncoupled from any mention of race, and the reader is left with the impression that all six billion on the planet could become reserved and industrious WASPs by simply putting their minds to it.

A writer like Jones, however correct his conclusions, is granted maneuvering room in a political climate like ours by blaming the mistreatment of one white group on another white group – in this instance, the white group second only to Germans in their vilification: the British. He compounds this indulgence with a tad too much coyness on race, portraying blacks in many instances as innocents pushed around as much as the white Catholics. The stark behavioral differences between blacks and whites, and their tendency to overwhelm the best of intentions and plans, get little mention.

Today, the animating contest in the United States is hardly white Protestants versus white Catholics. To many observers, there is no longer a ruling class in America, and whatever else might be said about WASP hegemony, it was at least coherent and orderly. WASP power has been supplanted in large swaths of American life by Jewish power, something E. Digby Baltzell, the WASP who popularized the term WASP, thought could be safely brought on board. A plausible explanation for the atrophy of WASP muscle is exhaustion in the face of streams of immigrants, some more able than others, religious appeals to the oneness of mankind, and Coca-Cola commercials about teaching the world to sing. But if the Protestant Establishment meant to hold on to power, it appears to have surrounded itself no better than Caesar.

The more complicated ethnic and racial dynamics aside, Jones' *Slaughter of Cities* has given us a heretofore untold example of how a group, though numerous, can be subjugated in the most elemental of ways: where, and

with whom, they will live. Achieving this subjugation requires, obviously, hands on the levers of judicial and administrative power, but less obviously, the waging of an idea campaign that presents the goal as a universal good, and the opponents as not merely wrong but morally reprehensible. If the targeted group comes to believe this itself, so much the better. Ideally for the group seeking to subjugate, the targeted group will be unable to understand what is really happening to them, or to articulate a defense. The implications for whites today should be plain.

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