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## Separate Places: Crime and Security in Gated Communities

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The drive to redefine territory and protect neighborhood boundaries is being felt in communities of all income levels throughout this country's metropolitan areas. In the last ten to 15 years, gated communities, one of the more dramatic forms of residential boundaries, have sprung up around the country. Millions of Americans are turning to walls and fences around communal residential space that was previously integrated with the larger shared civic space.

This era of dramatic demographic, economic, and social changes brings with it a growing crisis of future expectations. Many feel vulnerable, unsure of their place and their communities in the face of rapid change. This feeling is reflected in an increasing fear of crime unrelated to actual trends and to the growing number of methods used to control the physical environment for both social and economic security. The phenomenon of walled cities and gated communities is a dramatic manifestation of a new fortress mentality growing in America.

Gated communities are residential areas with restricted access that makes normally public spaces private. Access is controlled by physical barriers, walled or fenced perimeters, and gated or guarded entrances. Gated communities include both new housing developments and older residential areas retrofitted with barricades and fences. They represent a phenomenon different from apartment or condominium buildings with security systems or doormen. There, a doorman precludes public access only to a lobby or hallways—the private space within a building. Gated communities preclude public access to roads, sidewalks, parks, open space, and playgrounds—all resources that in earlier eras would have been open and accessible to all citizens of a locality. The best estimate is that 2.5 million American families have already sought out this new refuge from the problems of urbanization, and their numbers are growing.<sup>1</sup>

*This chapter is taken from the authors' book on gated communities* **Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States** (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1997).

This chapter describes some of the findings of a two-year study of gated communities conducted during 1994 and 1995.<sup>2</sup> The study involved a survey of representatives from gated community association boards,<sup>3</sup> dozens of site visits, and interviews with focus groups and individual informants in nearly a dozen gated communities in the San Francisco Bay Area, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Miami/Fort Lauderdale.

## Spatial Security

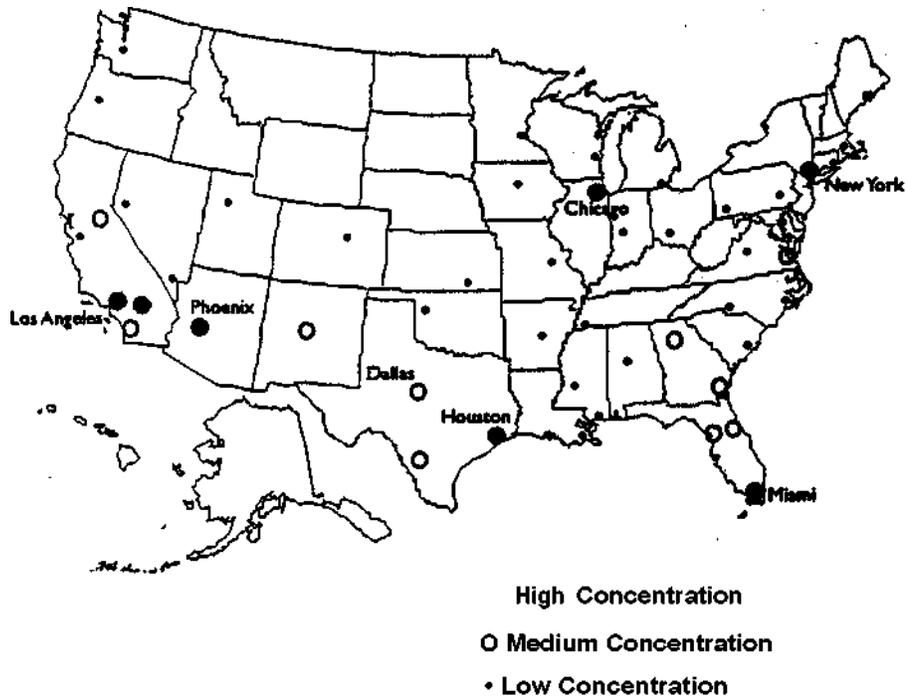
Gated communities in the United States go directly back to the era of the robber barons, when the very richest built private streets to seal themselves off from the hoi polloi. Later, during the 20th century, members of the East Coast and Hollywood aristocracies built more gated, fenced compounds. These early gated preserves were very different from the gated subdivisions of today. They were uncommon places for uncommon people. Now, however, the merely affluent and even many of the middle class can also have barriers between themselves and the rest of us. The first gates available to the mass market were those around master-planned retirement developments of the late 1960s and 1970s. Gates soon spread to resorts and country club communities, and then to middle-class suburban subdivisions. They have increased dramatically in number and extent since the early 1980s, becoming increasingly ubiquitous in most urban areas in the nation.

Gates range from elaborate two-story guardhouses manned 24 hours a day to roll-back wrought iron gates to simple electronic arms. Guardhouses are usually built with one lane for guests and visitors and a second lane for residents, who may open the gates with an electronic card, a punched-in code, or a remote control. Some gates with round-the-clock security require all cars to pass the guard, and management issues identification stickers for residents' cars. Others use video cameras to record the license plates and sometimes the faces of all who pass through. Unmanned entrances have intercom systems, some with video monitors, for visitors seeking entrance.

These security mechanisms are intended to do more than just deter crime. Both developers and residents view security as not just freedom from crime, but also as freedom from such annoyances as solicitors and canvassers, mischievous teenagers, and strangers of any kind, malicious or not. The gates provide a sheltered common space that excludes outsiders. Especially to the residents of upper-end gated communities, who can already afford to live in very-low-crime environments, the privacy and convenience of controlled access are more important than protection from crime.

Gated communities in their contemporary form emerged first in the Sunbelt, and they remain most common there. But they are now found across the country, in states from the West Coast to the East. Because they are primarily a phenomenon of metropolitan agglomerations, they are rarities in largely rural areas such as the deep South and most of New England.

Figure 4-1  
Concentrations of Gated Communises



Source: Univ. of California at Berkeley, Institute of Urban and Regional Development.

## A Walled World

Fear of crime has become an influential factor in nearly every aspect of our daily lives. In addition to the constant calls for more public monies and new public initiatives to combat crime, the private sector's role in crime prevention and control is booming. Gated communities are only one part of this trend. A National Institute of Justice study found that three times as many people now work in the security field, from equipment manufacturers to armored car drivers, as are employed by official law enforcement agencies. The number of security guards has doubled in the last decade and now surpasses the number of police. Private security outspends public law enforcement by 73 percent and is now clearly the nation's primary protective resource.<sup>4</sup>

The national reach of the media and their insatiable appetite for dramatic human interest stories mean that a crime committed in a small northwestern town is reported from Seattle to Miami. This dynamic fuels the fear of crime and the dogged perception that crime is worsening—even in periods like the early 1990s, when crime rates actually dropped. Almost 90 percent of Americans think crime has gotten worse,<sup>5</sup> but the violent crime rate in cities dropped 25 percent between 1981 and 1989.<sup>6</sup> And although 55 percent worry about being a victim of

Figure 4-2

### Personal and Household Crime Rates per 1,000, 1989

	Center Cities	Suburbs	Rural Areas
Violent Crimes	40.60	26.00	21.10
Rape	1.20	0.50	0.04
Robbery	10.00	3.90	2.10
Assault	29.40	21.60	18.70
Personal Thefts	86.00	70.10	45.10
Household Crimes	232.10	152.70	120.40
Burglary	79.30	52.20	48.50
Motor Vehicle Theft	26.70	16.80	6.10

Note: The rates for violent crime and personal theft are per 1,000 people 12 years of age and older. Household crimes are per 1,000 households.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey.

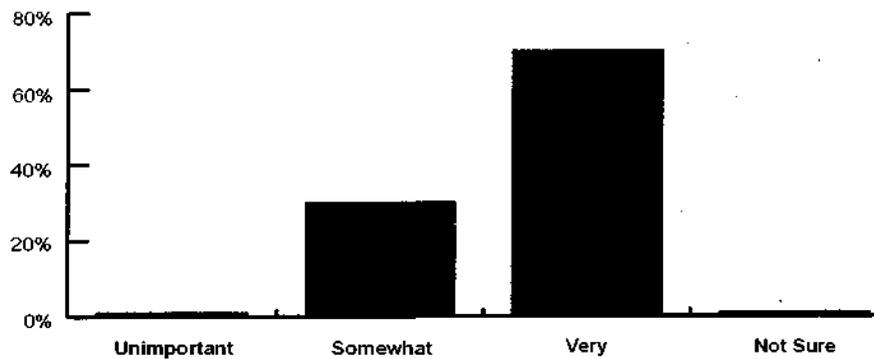
crime and the same percent feel inadequately protected by the police,<sup>7</sup> only 7.4 percent mention crime when asked what bothers them in their neighborhoods.<sup>8</sup>

The seeming randomness of crime is also responsible for this heightened fear. Cities are viewed as the core area of crime, but no one can be certain they are safe. Youth and crime are now synonymous, and minority youth bear a disproportionate burden of this rising fear. Strangers of any description are an automatic inducement to fear and distrust. This is one reason that traffic is of equal or even greater concern to many neighborhoods that close themselves off in the new equation of social trust, traffic equals strangers, strangers are bad, and bad means crime.

Realistically, crime is a far greater problem for lower-income people than for the better off. Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics's *National Crime victimization survey* show that it is also a greater problem in cities than in suburbs or rural areas. The rates for both violent crime and household crime such as burglary are about 35 percent lower in the sub-  
 In a lifestyle community, gates provide separation for leisure activities within. (Photograph unavailable)

Figure 4-3

### The Importance of Security in the Choice of a Gated Community



urbs than in cities. City residents are one and a half times more likely than suburbanites to be a victim of a violent crime or a household burglary. 9 Yet gates are primarily a suburban phenomenon. The real danger of crime bears no necessary relationship to the fear of crime. In places with high crime rates, places with low crime rates, places where crime is rising, and places where crime is dropping, fear can spur the gating of neighborhoods that were once open to their surroundings.

The results of the survey of homeowner association boards in gated communities show that security is a primary concern for those who buy in gated communities. The respondents certainly thought that they and their neighbors were drawn to fortifications around their subdivisions; nearly 70 percent of respondents indicated that security was a very important issue in the ultimate decision of residents to live in their gated communities. Only 1 percent thought that security was not an important motivation.

Gated communities are a response to the rising tide of fear. They can be classified in three main categories. First are "lifestyle communities," where the gates provide security and

Residents of a prestige community-  
the rich and famous, senior execu-  
tives and managers, successful pro-  
fessionals-see a secure place on  
the social ladder. (Photograph unavailable)

In a security zone, gates protect Inhabitants from some threat, real or perceived. (Photograph unavailable)

separation for the leisure activities and amenities within. Subtypes within this category include retirement communities; golf, country club, and resort developments; and new towns. Second are "prestige communities," where the gates symbolize distinction and prestige and attempt to create and protect a secure place on the social ladder. Subtypes include enclaves for the rich and famous; developments for senior executives and managers, and successful professionals; and executive subdivisions. And third are "security zones," where community safety is the primary goal. They may be center city or suburban, in rich or poor areas, but gates are primarily a protection from some threat, real or perceived. In the first two categories, the developer builds gates as an amenity and image that helps sell houses; in the security zone, it is the residents who build gates, retrofitting their neighborhoods to shield them from the outside world.

### **Social Security**

In the lifestyle communities, gates provide security and separation for the leisure activities and amenities within. They were the first mass-market gated developments, springing up in Sunbelt retirement areas such as Florida, southern California, and Arizona. This type of community remains most common in the Sunbelt but can be found throughout the country. Residents say their primary motivation for choosing to live in a given development is the

amenities provided, although security is a strong secondary motivation. Many of these communities are marketed for golfers, retirees, or empty nesters.

*Retirement Communities* Retirement communities are developed for middle- and upper-middle-class retirees who want structure, recreation, and a built-in social life. They range from the nationwide chain Leisure World to individual developments. Age restrictions, abundant recreation, security patrols, and gates and walls create nearly self-sufficient enclaves of senior housing.

At Leisure World in Silver Spring, Maryland, security guards board the public buses that serve the development, monitoring passengers while they are inside the walls to be sure "undesirables" did not enter the community on the bus. The borders are marked by gates, walls, fences, ditches, and barricades. Retirement communities like Leisure World have thousands of residents living in housing designed for a range of incomes and lifestyles, with dozens of social clubs and constant recreational activities. These retirement communities are the residential equivalent of a cruise vacation: a standardized product offering an all-inclusive package deal with no surprises. According to one resident, "I like the organized type of lifestyle. It's well structured and managed. When you get to be my age, you've had all the free-wheeling you can stand."<sup>10</sup>

Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho Mirage, California, is built around a lush golf course; the vista from nearly any of the narrow internal roads is of greens and palm trees. The gates are guarded 24 hours a day, and a roving patrol guards the grounds. For the retirees who live there, security was the primary consideration in their choice of a community. They also like the maintenance-free lifestyle, the aesthetics of the development, the amenities, especially the golf club. Said one resident, "I like the mode of life. I think it's conducive to good health and longevity." He finds he gets more exercise since he moved to Mission Hills. "You can't avoid it. It's not a compelling need. You just have nothing else to do."<sup>11</sup>

*Golf and Leisure Communities.* More and more golf and leisure developments, taking their cue from the gated compounds of retirement communities, are gated. Gates provide status and prestige, creating large, imposing, ornamented entryways to the country club lifestyle. "Members only" moves to another dimension when access to the greens, the club, and the streets is controlled. Many of these developments also offer tennis clubs, swimming complexes, and even polo grounds. Many developments on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, and in Rancho Mirage, Indian Wells, and Palm Springs, California, are this type. Some who buy property in these developments are golfers, but many others simply value the open space and greenery golf courses provide. The often luxurious clubhouses are a particular draw: "It goes back to when we were kids and all wanted to belong to a special **club**- a place where you feel special and not everybody can come into. That is the basis you start with, and it works whether you are talking about a club like this or about your favorite neighborhood bar."<sup>12</sup>

Blackhawk is a sprawling golf-centered development almost an hour east of downtown San Francisco. Houses in the various subdivisions range from \$300,000 to over \$5 million.

In addition to the main guarded, gated entrance, three of the higher-priced subdivisions have their own guarded gates, and several others have unmanned electronic gates. According to one resident, security in Blackhawk "comes from knowing that if you see someone on the street, you know [he's] OK." He says he finds it "a release and relief to come back here. You're dealing with elements [outside] that are sometimes very undesirable. It's like the old moat and castle. You get back to your spot and you feel secure."<sup>13</sup>

**New Towns.** Suburban gated new town developments are large scale, incorporating as many as several thousand housing units with commercial/industrial and retail activities in or adjacent to the development. New towns are not new, but gating their residential areas is. Living in these large planned communities has always reflected a certain choice of lifestyle; now more and more of them are offering the option of gated subdivisions.

Redwood Shores in Redwood City, California, is a planned community of apartments, townhouses, and single-family houses on the wetlands of San Francisco Bay. Wide divided streets pass mirrored mid-rise office towers to the residential developments built around streams and canals. Two of Redwood Shores's subdivisions are gated. Shorebird Island is a luxury enclave surrounded by water, its single-family houses accessible only by a private gated bridge. At the mid-price urban village condominium development of Lakeshore Villas, an exiting resident called out the access code to the researcher standing at the electronic entrance keypad.<sup>14</sup>

Green Valley, outside Las Vegas, Nevada, is a master-planned community that will have 60,000 residents by 2005. Walls are everywhere in Green Valley, with elaborate specifications in the master plan for their composition, height, and design. The development's covenants and restrictions prohibit homeowners from changing them in any way, including a ban on any openings in backyard walls. A marketing agent explains the appeal: "It's safe here. And clean. And nice. The schools are good and the crime rate is low. It's what buyers are looking for."<sup>15</sup>

The high-end tracts of Green Valley have gates as well as walls. A ten-year-old resident complained that his friends could not get in to see him without a call to the "policeman in the guardhouse." But the walls and gates of Green Valley cannot keep it completely safe; in recent years the community has dealt with a serial rapist, robberies, domestic murder, drugs in the schools, and a toxic cloud of chlorine gas released from a nearby chemical plant.<sup>16</sup>

### Status Security

Prestige communities are one of the fastest-growing forms of development in the nation. They feed on aspirations for exclusion and the desire to differentiate. The services of gate guards and security patrols add to the prestige of exclusivity; residents value the simple presence of a security force more than any service it might actually provide. The newer prestige communities tend toward ostentatious entrances and showy facades. They differ from lifestyle communities in that they do not boast extensive recreational amenities, although they do have carefully controlled aesthetics and often enviable landscapes and locations. Their motivation for gates is a desire to project an image, protect current investment, and control housing values.

*Enclaves for the Rich and Famous.* Enclaves for the rich and famous are the original gated communities in the United States; they have been with us for decades. They are the small compounds of privacy for celebrities and the gated summer communities of the very rich, found from the hills of Hollywood to the coasts of the Northeast. Highly exclusive, often hidden and heavily defended, they are the model for all gated communities proliferating across the nation.

Hidden Hills, near Ventura in southern California, is home to movie stars and celebrities, including Beau Bridges, Tony Orlando, and Bob Eubanks. An incorporated town since 1961, it has moved its city hall outside the gates so outsiders with business with the city need not actually enter it. Town council meetings are broadcast on the closed-circuit security video system to each house. Hidden Hills has been under court order to provide low-income housing according to state law, but it has resisted, even to the point of rejecting a nonprofit senior development. The battle for low-income housing, among other things, has attracted quite a lot of attention from the press, and some residents say they do not understand the criticism. A candidate for mayor asked, "Why is it that it leaves such a bad taste in people's mouths just because you have a community of people in expensive houses who just want to dose themselves off from all the crime and the rest of it in the city at large?"<sup>17</sup>

Cottonwood Valley is a wealthy hilltop community outside Dallas, where an elaborate, 24-hour gatehouse guards about 300 houses. The houses are all very large, dramatic, and imposing, each one custom built in any one of a dozen architectural styles. Most residents are not famous, but they are wealthy, and many are not averse to dropping the names of their well-known neighbors. A spate of murders in affluent North Dallas made them more aware that they live in a "kind of oasis." It offers the two crucial ingredients: security and privacy. And if security is the push into the gated community, privacy is the pull: "We can't keep the telephone from ringing at 6 o'clock at night, but we can keep people from knocking on our doors and constantly trying to sell us something. That's part of a gated community."<sup>18</sup>

*Top Fifth Communities.* Top fifth communities (referring to households in the top 20 percent of annual income in the nation) are meant to bring some of the prestige of enclaves of the rich and famous to those with less exclusive status. Top fifth developments are designed for senior executives and managers and successful professionals. Enclaves of expensive houses, sometimes custom built, are fenced off from their surroundings and marketed for their privacy and prestige. Such developments are often smaller than those for the less affluent, sometimes with only a dozen houses, although some incorporate hundreds of units. When the gates are manned, security guards double as a sort of concierge, providing notification of arriving guests, admitting housekeepers and gardeners, and accepting deliveries.

In affluent Pacific Palisades, located in the wooded slopes above the Pacific Ocean north of Los Angeles, gated communities are common. A resident of one of the newer developments noted, "We knew that [the guardhouse] was going to be here, and it was a factor. It just made it that much more exciting—not only does it give you security but also a certain amount of prestige."<sup>19</sup> In this region full of gated communities, sometimes gates alone do

not suffice; one community in southern California, Hidden Valley, spent \$50,000 on an electronic antiterrorist bollard of the type used to protect embassies and the Vice President's mansion. The device has impaled several cars that dared attempt to enter without authorization.<sup>20</sup>

Hernando County, near St. Petersburg, Florida, experienced a boom in construction of luxury homes in the mid-1980s. Doctors, lawyers, and business executives moved into ostentatious gated developments of custom-built houses. At the gated Waters of Weeki Wachee, a spokesman noted, "The gated entry, the full-time security, and the private streets all go along with the pattern and complement the price they pay for their homes."<sup>21</sup> According to a builder specializing in custom-built houses in the area's gated communities, buyers want houses "that make a clear statement about themselves and their lifestyles."<sup>22</sup>

**Executive Communities:** Secure environments are now available to the middle class as well. Executive communities are a dearly growing and ever more prominent form of development in many metropolitan areas, including Los Angeles and Orange County, and the suburbs of Houston, Dallas, Miami, Chicago, and New York. They usually offer no amenities beyond a gated entry, perimeter fence, or perhaps a pool or tennis court. Home to young professionals and middle managers, they provide the cachet of exclusive living to those with nonexclusive incomes. Many have electronic gates, and others have guardhouses at the main entrance. The gatehouse stands solely as a psychological deterrent to outsiders, as homeowners' associations sometimes never hire guards because of the high ongoing cost.

In a suburb of St. Louis, University Place was built with just this market segment in mind. A high-density development of 100 townhouses and single-family houses that sold for \$170,000 to \$235,000, University Place has a small green and a toddler playground. In seeming contrast to these modest amenities for the young families the developers hoped to attract, the subdivision's main entrance boasts not just a gate but a large monument as well.<sup>23</sup>

Jacaranda Pointe is a gated development in a suburb of Fort Lauderdale. Recently built, it is home to young families and a few singles. The houses are modest and resemble houses in any middle-income development, except for the security guard arm and an iron fence. The gate itself has caused seemingly endless frustration. It is a relatively low-budget keypad system, and although a guardhouse stands at the entrance, no guard has ever been hired to man it. The gate is prone to damage from people simply driving through and breaking the arm. Local youngsters have, cut off the power and pulled the phone out, and teenage vandals have shot out the guardhouse windows with BB guns. Still, residents are glad it is there. Especially important to these residents is the effect on traffic. "It might not stop real criminals, but it is going to deter young fellows from going a little fast." To these young families, it is the major benefit, because "our children are at risk."<sup>24</sup>

## **Turf Security**

**In** the security zone, the fear of crime and outsiders is the foremost motivation for defensive fortifications. This category includes three subtypes: the city perch, the suburban perch, and the barricade perch. They are called "perches," because it is not the developers who build

the gates, but the residents themselves, who are often desperately trying to hold onto their neighborhoods. Residents retrofit their neighborhoods with gates or barricades, erecting fortifications to regain control or to fend off some outside threat. By marking their boundaries and restricting access, they are often trying to build and strengthen the feeling and function of community in their neighborhood. Gates and street closures in security zones occur at all income levels and in all areas. The crime and traffic that residents fear may be real or perceived, near or far; the important point is not whether or not they need to cut off access to their streets, but that they feel they have to.

*City Perches.* In the city perch, neighborhood residents from the most affluent to the most desperately poor look to gates as a way to hold off the urban disorder they see around them. Sometimes the threat is on their own doorsteps, sometimes a number of blocks away. They are looking to protect themselves from crime and from traffic, wanting their homes secure, their streets safe to walk on, their children protected from speeding cars and predators. Sometimes unwilling, sometimes unable, to flee to the higher ground of the suburbs, they shore up in place.

Potomac Gardens in Washington, D.C., is an example of the use of gates in public housing, where residents are often walled off without asking for gates or even giving their consent. The installation of gates and fences in June 1992 inside and around the project initially angered residents to the point that firefighters arriving to put out protest fires were stoned by the crowd. Comparisons were made to jails and zoos, with residents telling reporters, "It's disrespectful. We aren't animals. We don't need to be caged." The security measures include identification cards, security cameras, and 24-hour guards. <sup>25</sup>The measures did dramatically reduce drug dealing and vandalism, however, and the majority of tenants came to support "the fence" within a few months.<sup>26</sup>

Whitley Heights is a community of historic houses in Hollywood Hills in Los Angeles. Just a few short blocks away is Hollywood Boulevard, with lanes of traffic, billboards, litter, homeless people, and apartment buildings in varying states of repair. There was little crime on the hill itself, but fear of the neighboring streets grew, and in 1986 the residents decided to gate off the two streets leading in to their community. "Gating was not propelled by any high increase in crime, but by a sense that we could not control our community," explained a past president of the homeowners' association. The gates were seen primarily as a traffic measure designed to control "who got up here." Opposition emerged from the neighbors in the apartment buildings on the other side of the new gate. Calling themselves CAGE, Citizens Against Gated Enclaves, they filed a lawsuit, and the dispute became the hot center of city-wide debates over street closures. In the end, the California Supreme Court ruled that public streets could not be closed off, and the Whitley Heights gates came down.<sup>27</sup>

*Suburban Perches.* Middle-class homeowners in inner-ring suburbs and smaller cities are also building walls and gates. Suburban perches are a more recent but growing phenomenon, as more and more problems previously thought of as urban occur in inner suburbs and smaller towns. In some cases, as the inner suburbs age and urbanize, the quality of life their

residents once enjoyed deteriorates. At other times, older suburban subdivisions, fearing they will be next, move to gate their entrances before real trouble reaches their doors. As with city perches, the danger may be traffic more than crime, as residents fear the impact of overburdened residential streets on their quality of life.

Outside Chicago, the suburb of Rosemont has taken to gating to an extreme degree. The village of 4,000 has installed gated checkpoints at the two entrances to its largest residential area. Manned by city police and paid for from city coffers, the guardhouses and gates allow police to record license plate numbers and entry times, and to question drivers. The few crimes that occur in Rosemont usually take place in a commercial area of freeway-exit hotels and businesses that serve nearby O'Hare Airport, not in the residential area, but it is this crime that prompted the gating. Residents fear the flow of strangers. Interestingly, almost half of Rosemont's citizens live outside these protective gates in three apartment buildings. The city claims that including lower-income renters in the taxpayer-provided secure area would be too costly.<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes crime is not even an issue for gating a community. In the wealthy, exclusive Brentwood district of Los Angeles, residents of the Brentwood Circle neighborhood gained permission to make their streets private, install fences, and build a 24-hour guarded entry. The concern was the potentially increased traffic from a new museum being built on a hill directly above them. No streets in Brentwood Circle lead to the museum, but residents feared that visitors would think they did. Of course, the gates are also expected to increase security, privacy, and property values. Said one resident, "We're delighted. Everyone who gets lost on Sunset comes up here. The guards at the gate will keep out the riffraff."<sup>29</sup> Not everyone in Brentwood Circle would second such inflammatory statements, of course. As in other suburban perches, they simply want to preserve the neighborhood as they know it.

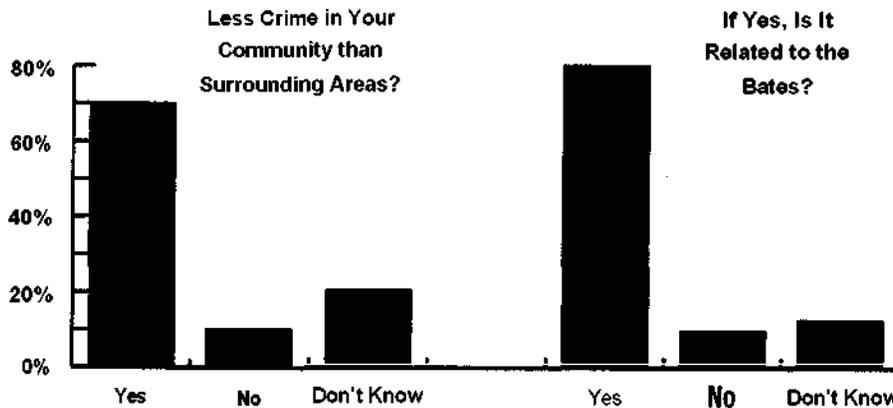
*Barricade Perches.* Barricade perches are the fastest-growing type of security zone. Like the other types, barricade perches are intentionally designed secure communities with restricted access to normally public spaces. But in this case, usually because they exist in neighborhoods with public streets, the complete closure of these communities is impossible. Instead, residents install systems of barricades, creating suburban culs-de-sac out of the city grid, leaving just one or two entrances to the neighborhood. As a result, they are not fully gated communities in the sense that they are completely walled or fenced and entrances guarded with gates. They come as close as possible to gating; that they cannot is the result of circumstance rather than intention.

Their reasons range from gangs and other pressing crime problems on their own streets to spillover crime, traffic congestion, commuters who use their streets as shortcuts, or general safety from the amorphous threats of disorder in the city. Proponents support street closures as an effective crime deterrent that helps maintain neighborhoods and levels of homeownership, and helps curb white and middle-class flight to the suburbs.

And just like Whitley Heights, these street closures often generate vociferous opposition. In the middle-class racially mixed Hillcrest area of Maplewood, New Jersey, five wrought iron

Figure 4-4

**Perception of Gates as a Factor in Reducing Crime**



gates were installed in 1993 to the outrage of neighboring Newark. As in many of these battles to close streets, the Hillcrest homeowners' association steadfastly maintains that it simply wants to reduce through traffic on residential streets. The section of Newark with which it shares a border is a poor, rundown neighborhood. Hillcrest residents want what the suburbs have, streets with culs-de-sac, which they say planners have dearly decided is preferred to the urban grid their houses were built on. Mayor Sharpe James of Newark went on a round of radio and television talk shows denouncing Hillcrest's "elitist" and "destructive" gates. The issue to James was "class separation," which will "cause divisiveness instead of cooperation." 3°

The Five Oaks neighborhood near downtown Dayton, Ohio, was struggling with growing through traffic from commuters, problems with prostitution and drugs, and the flight of long-time residents. The city's answer was a 1992 plan to install gates at streets throughout the community, creating eight minineighborhoods of three or four streets each. Each mini-neighborhood has only one entrance point, with the rest of the internal streets dosed with automatic gates. None of the feeder streets are continuous from one border to another. Closing the streets of Five Oaks has been deemed a success by the police and most of the residents, although some continue to oppose it. Crime is down and property values are up.<sup>31</sup> And as communities across the country fight against crime and middle-class flight, many are looking to Five Oaks and other barricaded communities as a model.

**Gates as Crime Prevention**

Residents say repeatedly that they want to protect themselves from crime, reduce traffic, and control their community. And they believe that the gates work. As one developer said, "Gated communities weren't around a while back. The world is a drastically different place as a result of increased violence and decreased municipal services." The gates, he believes, create "a

friendlier place, an open community because of the perception of safety, insularity, and being in their own little bubble. "3<sup>2</sup> In the authors' survey of gated communities, over two-thirds of respondents believed that their community experienced less crime than the surrounding area. Of this amount, a full 80 percent attributed the difference to the gates (see Figure 4-4).

But what is the reality? Does all of this security have any real impact on crime? The evidence does not suggest that it does. Police in all the areas where the authors conducted focus groups reported at best marginal differences in crime between gated and ungated developments. Most found no difference; crime rates varied by area but not between gated and ungated neighborhoods in the same area. A few even believed they hampered police efforts, because gates slowed response time, walls blocked sight lines, and residents gained a false sense of security, leading them to leave garage doors open and doors and windows unlocked.

Evidence of crime prevention is ambiguous, even in security zone communities, where data on crime rates are available for both before and after gating or barricading. Much of the available data are of poor quality, but even reliable studies show mixed or slight results from gating. For example, a study of closed-street neighborhoods in St. Louis compared with similar open-street neighborhoods in the mid-1970s by a planner who consults with governments and communities to design gating plans found great variations in the incidence of crime, but found that the closed-street neighborhoods in general showed lower rates, at least for some types of crime.<sup>33</sup> The biggest difference between open- and closed-street neighborhoods was in perception: those behind gates felt much safer on their streets.

Two of the more thorough and wide-ranging studies were conducted by police in Fort Lauderdale. The first found no significant change in rates for violent or property crime in a closed-street neighborhood. Auto theft, burglary, and some other crimes dropped considerably immediately after closure, but none were sustained for more than a short time.<sup>34</sup> A second study compared the change in crime rates in several closed-street neighborhoods with that of the city as a whole and concluded that the gates and barricades had no significant effect. That study also included a survey of patrol officers and found that the majority disliked the street closures. Most thought that they do not reduce crime, but do slow response time and inhibit police patrols.<sup>35</sup>

The ambiguous and spotty successes and failures of gates and barricades as measures to control crime indicate that although people may feel safer, they probably are not significantly safer. Thus, fear and anxiety feed on themselves. Gates and walls reflect fear and serve as daily reminders of the perceived dangers on the other side at the same time they do little to improve the reality. More than the fear of crime, of course, is behind the current wave of gating. Gates are reassuring in the face of anxiety heightened by economic, demographic, and social change. They exclude a world where one feels vulnerable. Even if crime were reduced in the gated developments, the city or suburban streets outside are unchanged and the metropolitan area is unchanged. Some proponents of gated communities argue that by providing private security, these developments are relieving the public policing burden, freeing resources to be used elsewhere. In most cases, however, they augment rather than replace police services, espe-

Figure 4-5

Trends in Crime Rates in Fort Lauderdale Neighborhoods, 1988 and 1989

	1988 (Percent Change)	1989 (Percent Change)
<b>Barricaded Neighborhoods</b>		
Riverside Park	-18	6
Sunrise Intracoastal	-6	-2
Tarpon River	-3	-8
Edgewood		-8
Average	-7	-3
<b>Open Neighborhoods</b>		
Coral Ridge	-15	0
Dorsey Riverbend	-18	6
Fort Lauderdale Beach	-9	-5
River Oaks	6	-9
Victoria Park	-13	9
Riverland	-7	-2
South Middle River	-18	-2
Croissant Park	-10	
Poinsettia Heights	-2	-6
Northeast Progresso	-11	-18
Melrose Manors	-9	14
Shady Banks	-13	15
Lauderdale Manors	-1	-11
Northeast Fort Lauderdale	-9	-2
Coral Ridge Isles	-8	-4
Average	-9	-1
<b>Citywide Average</b>	<b>-11</b>	<b>-2</b>

Note. Barricaded neighborhoods include all homeowners' associations whose boundaries coincide with police reporting areas that had street barricades installed during the full year. Open neighborhoods include all homeowners' associations whose boundaries coincide with police reporting areas.

Source: Fort Lauderdale Police Dept.

**cially where residential street patrols are not a significant part of police activities, as in the low-crime suburbs where gated communities are most common.**

## You Can Run But You Can't Hide

**There is little doubt that urban problems are the stimuli for this wave of gating. A growing underclass, high levels of foreign immigration, and a restructured economy are leaving many feeling insecure. Gated communities are a search for stability and control in the face of these**

dramatic demographic changes. The drive for separation, exclusion, and protection that gated communities represent is just a part of the larger spatial pattern of segmentation in which this country is increasingly separated by income, race, and economic opportunity.

Economic segregation is scarcely new. In fact, zoning and city planning were designed in part to preserve the position of the privileged by subtle variances in building and density codes. But the gated communities go farther in several respects. They create physical barriers to access, and they make public, not merely individual, space private. Many of these communities also privatize previous public responsibilities, such as police protection, parks and recreation, and a range of mundane civic functions from trash collection to street maintenance, leaving the poor and less well-to-do dependent on the ever-reduced services of city and county governments.

This privatization-in both senses is one of the more serious effects of gated communities on social equity and the broader community. The new developments create a private world that need share little with its neighbors or the larger political system. This fragmentation undermines the very concept of organized community life. We no longer speak of citizens, but of taxpayers, who take no active role in governance but merely exchange money for services. In the gated communities, many say they are taking care of themselves and have no desire to contribute to the common pool serving their neighbors in the rest of the city. In areas where gated communities are the norm, not the exception, this perspective has potentially severe impacts on the common welfare. Failed cities and gated communities are a dramatic manifestation of the fortress mentality growing in America.

Within metropolitan areas, poverty and economic inequality are no longer limited to the inner cities. Even formerly well-established, "good" suburbs now have their share of social and structural problems. The suburbs are becoming urbanized, so that many might now be called "outer cities," places with many problems and pathologies traditionally thought to be restricted to big cities.<sup>36</sup>

Gated and barricaded communities are themselves a microcosm of the larger spatial pattern of segmentation and separation. The growing divisions between city and suburb and between rich and poor are creating new patterns that reinforce the costs that isolation and exclusion impose on some at the same time they benefit others. These "turf wars," while most dramatically manifested by gated communities, are a troubling trend for land use planning. As citizens separate themselves into homogenous, independent cells, their ties to the greater polity and society become attenuated, increasing resistance to efforts to resolve municipal, let alone regional, problems. As one resident of the gated country club development Blackhawk said in a focus group, "People are tired of the way the government has managed issues. Because you don't really have control over how the money is spent, [you] feel disenfranchised. If the courts are going to release criminals and we're going to continue not to prosecute people and continue to spend money the way we've been spending it, and I can't change it, at least here in Blackhawk, I have a little control over how I live my life."<sup>37</sup>

This phenomenon of building fortresses has enormous consequences for policy. Allowing some citizens to secede from public contact and to exclude others from their economic and social privilege aims directly at the conceptual base of community and citizenship in this country. The old notions of community mobility and mutual responsibility are loosened by these new community patterns. What is the measure of nationhood when the divisions between neighborhoods require armed patrols and electric fences to keep out other citizens? When public services and even local governments are privatized, when the community of responsibility stops at the subdivision's gates, what happens to the function and the very idea of a social and political democracy? In short, can this nation fulfill its social contract without social contact?

#### Notes

1. Definitive numbers are unavailable. The difficulty in quantifying gated communities is complicated by their rapidly increasing numbers, the lack of any national or state data, and even the lack of firm data on the number of community associations. This rough estimate is based on the Community Association Institute's (CAI's) estimated number of community associations (150,000). According to CAI, 52 percent of all community associations comprise single- or multiple-unit dwellings arranged on streets. According to a recent survey of community associations on which the authors collaborated with CAI, 19 percent of community associations are gated, making a total of 14,820 that fit the authors' definition of gated communities. Using the median number of units in gated communities produces the estimate of 2.5 million households behind gates. The estimate does not include the significant and growing numbers of street closures.
2. See Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1997).
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5. *Time/CNN poll* by Yankelovich Partners, Inc., reported in Jon D. Hull, "The State of the Union," *Time*, January 30, 1995.
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33. Oscar Newman, *Community of Interest* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1980).
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