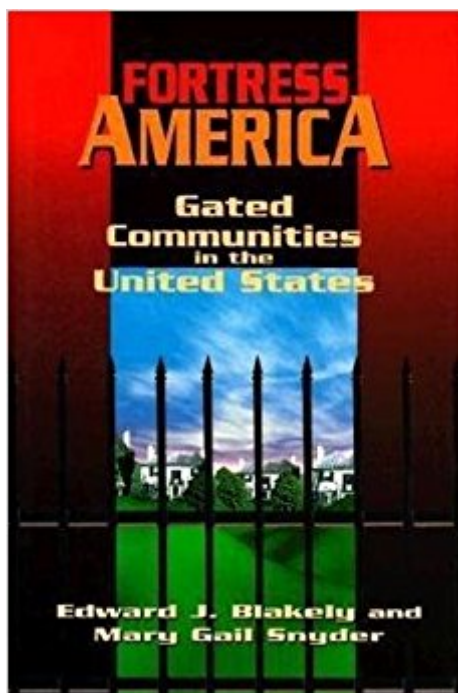


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Fortress America: Gated Communities In The United States



Synopsis

Gated communities are a new "hot button" in many North American cities. From Boston to Los Angeles and from Miami to Toronto citizens are taking sides in the debate over whether any neighborhood should be walled and gated, preventing intrusion or inspection by outsiders. This debate has intensified since the hard cover edition of this book was published in 1997. Since then the number of gated communities has risen dramatically. In fact, new homes in over 40 percent of planned developments are gated in the West, the South, and southeastern parts of the United States. Opposition to this phenomenon is growing too. In the small and relatively homogenous town of Worcester, Massachusetts, a band of college students from Brown University and the University of Chicago picketed the Wexford Village in November of 1998 waving placards that read "Gates Divide." These students are symbolic of a much larger wave of citizens asking questions about the need for and the social values of gates that divide one portion of a community from another.

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Customer Reviews

In their efforts to find a safe, quiet, traffic- and crime-free place to live, more and more Americans are turning to gated communities--self-enclosed developments barricaded off from surrounding neighborhoods, often using security guards to prevent intruders and screen visitors, sometimes even privatizing services traditionally left to local government. In *Fortress America*, authors Edward Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder analyze what this gating trend--what they call "forting up"--portends

for America as a whole. "What is the measure of nationhood when the divisions between neighborhoods require guards and fences to keep out other citizens? When public services and even local government are privatized, when the community of responsibility stops at the subdivision gates, what happens to the function and the very idea of a social and political democracy? Can the nation fulfill its social contract in the absence of social contact?" Their answer, unfortunately, is no. Blakely and Snyder argue that gating further divides our already fragmented society; it isolates segments of a community from one another and does nothing to address the social problems that barricades attempt to shut out. Instead, they suggest using crime prevention, traffic control, and community-building efforts to achieve the same effects. In *Fortress America*, Blakely and Snyder have produced a trenchant analysis that's only slightly marred by its wooden prose. Anyone concerned about the future of American communities should read this book.

Since the late 1980s, gated communities have proliferated around the country, attracting millions of homebuyers of all ages for reasons having to do with prestige, leisure, and perceived safety. In this thorough, well-argued book, which appeared in an earlier, abbreviated form as a working paper from the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Blakely (dean, Sch. of Urban and Regional Planning, Univ. of Southern California) and Snyder (city and regional planning, Univ. of California, Berkeley) take strong exception to the rationales for such communities. They argue that while gated communities promise seclusion and quiet, they are in fact exclusionary and that, surprisingly, they do not result in an improved sense of community. Although this book will appeal primarily to urban planners and other social scientists, its moral tone, sense of justice, and relative lack of technical jargon allow it to be recommended for general readers. Ellen Gilbert, Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick, N.J. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I found this book to be of some interest, as I served on the board of my HOA for many years. Many of the conversations covered in the book brought back familiar stories that I encountered: Few homeowners participate, communications problems amongst board members, and a general lack of enthusiasm by the community for interaction. But I did not find the book to be a great book, by far. I would recommend "Privatopia," by Even McKenzie every day of the week over it. There, you will find a much more thorough coverage of the history of common interest developments in the the U.S. and Britain. And there, you will find much more insight into the hows and whys of the growth of the industry. In the "Fortress America" book, what starts out well seems to just fizzle in the second half of the book, as if everything has already been said. What neither book covers well is the "industry"

that surrounds these gated communities and/or the politics at the local, state or national level concerning the current and future laws for gated communities. Maybe the whole subject has become "old hat," but I think that there could still be a fascinating coverage of the industry, certainly done better than in "Fortress America." There is a classic overview of the first Sun City in Arizona in a book called "Prime Time," by Marc Freedman.

Blakely and Snyders's FORTRESS AMERICA was a very interesting look at the growing trend of gated communities. The book was very well organized and presented. It was written in a clear and understandable manner, and based on solid research. The book identifies types of gated communities, the reasons behind them, and the problems associated with them. The authors examine the pros and cons and myths and realities of the gated community in America. It makes an excellent research tool or an interesting read for anyone interested in urban geography/ sociology, or city planning.

The authors of "Fortress America" had the resources and effort to put together a very good book on the subject of gated communities. Unfortunately they also had such a strong desire to prove their point that they fail to include the most relevant information... crime statistics. One wonders what else wasn't mentioned.

This is a response to Irving, Texas. The book contains plenty of crime statistics, in fact the best ones available. Perhaps the reviewer is talking about a different book. The Authors

I've studied the "Gated Community" debates for years, professionally, and this book hasn't a single original idea in it--the research is rehash, the conclusions tepid, and the writing itself is shallow at best, and sophomoric otherwise. One suspects this project was designed for Ivory Tower purposes, as the authors give no indication of ever having been involved in Urban Planning in any way--a necessary prerequisite for a monograph such as this, I'm afraid.... MY suggestion to the potential reader is to simply reflect on the obvious issues at stake in any discussion of Gated Communities, and *think*--for the present volume is sorely lacking in intellectual rigor as well.

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