

## **Violent Crime & The Poor Side of Town**

### **What Happens Next – 04.03.2022**

Larry Bernstein:

Welcome to What Happens Next. My name is Larry Bernstein.

What Happens Next is a podcast where the speaker gets to present his argument in just Six Minutes and that is followed by a question-and-answer period for deeper engagement. Today's discussion will be on two topics: Violent Crime and The Poor Side of Town.

Our first speaker is Barry Latzer who is Professor Emeritus at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at CUNY. Barry is an expert in the history of crime, and he has recently released his newest book entitled *The Roots of Violent Crime in America: From the Gilded Age through the Great Depression*.

I want to find out why certain ethnic minorities commit more violence. What is the role of socio-economics in crime rates? Why have there been huge increases in crime since COVID? What happens when you defund the police? Should we police lesser crimes that disturb the peace like urinating in the streets? And are prisons filled with people convicted of drug possession?

Our second speaker will be Howard Husock who is a senior fellow at AEI. Howard will discuss his new book *The Poor Side of Town: And Why We Need It*. Howard argues that housing for the poor delivered by the private sector is superior, like in the old days when the landlord lived on the floor below. Public housing has failed, so let's figure out a workable solution.

Each month since the beginning of Covid, I evaluate the monthly employment report because it is the most important global economic statistic to help us determine the strength of the economic rebound.

This month was another exciting release. Here is what you need to know. The headline number of employment growth from the establishment survey was 431,000 and there were positive revisions for the previous two months of an additional 100,000.

In the first quarter of 2022, the average employment growth was just over 550,000 per month which was identical to the monthly average for 2021. This means that the economy is adding jobs at a very fast and very consistent rate.

The US unemployment rate fell by 0.2% to 3.6% with six million looking for work. These numbers are identical to February 2020 before COVID.

The total number of workers is still 1.6 million lower than pre-COVID, but at the current rate, this will resolve in just three months.

Hospitality and leisure are lower by 1.5 million and basically explains the entire job loss in the economy. There is enormous pent-up demand for travel and entertainment so we should expect this sector to hire workers at a very fast clip. This sector was responsible for 25% of all new hires last month.

Average hourly earnings were up 5.6% versus a year ago. This story is potentially problematic because on the positive it shows robust demand for labor but the negative is that it is inflationary and that will force the Fed to raise interest rates.

There continues to be a steady decline in teleworking for any portion of your job during the week. In January 16% teleworked, in February it was 13% and in March it was only 10% as Omicron has faded and people are getting back to the office in force.

There is substantial business uncertainty caused by the war in Ukraine, higher oil prices, and the like, but this did not slow down the US job market. It continues to hum.

I have some very good news to report, my What Happens Next intern Carly Brail got accepted to Harvard this week and she is beyond happy. Carly has been an incredible intern, reading two books a week to determine who should be speaking on this program. She is terrific, and I am sure she will make a fabulous contribution to her new university.

You can find transcripts for this program and all of our previous episodes on our website [whathappensnextin6minutes.com](http://whathappensnextin6minutes.com), and you can listen on Podbean, Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

Let's begin with our first speaker Barry Latzer.

Barry Latzer:

I'm Barry Latzer. I'm here to discuss the causes of crime. Criminologists blame everything on socioeconomic adversities: Poverty, residential segregation, female-headed households, high unemployment, and socially isolated large scaled communities.

These factors are relevant, so is gender, males do 10 times the violent crime of females. Age: Young males past 18 and before 40 do the bulk of violent crimes. If we only look at the last five years, which is what criminologists do, then we get a misleading picture. Criminologists need history and that's what I do in my research and writing.

When we look at the history of crime, what we see is that various groups that immigrated to the United States, or migrated within the United States, have very different violent crime rates, some extremely high, some quite low. And these differences have very little to do with social socioeconomic adversities. They were all poor with residential segregation, high unemployment, and socially isolated communities. From the late 19th century and into the 21st, some social groups had much higher violent crime rates than others, even though they were equally adversely situated, and that's the key to this.

The Jews, Japanese, Germans, and Scandinavians that immigrated here all had low violent crime rates. By contrast, the Irish, Mexicans, and believe it or not, the Chinese, at least in the late 19th and early 20th century, all had high violent crime rates. And most importantly for today's discussion, white and especially black southerners, who migrated within the United States from the South to the big cities of the North had extremely high violent crime rates. What's going on here?

These social groups subcultures engage in violence crime in response to what are perceived of as slights, insults. And it doesn't matter whether they're real. He's being offended, disrespected, insulted, he's willing to resort to his gun and engage in violence.

You look at their girlfriend the wrong way, they will resort to violence. And its interpersonal quarrel and conflict that causes the vast bulk of violent crime. I am talking about rape, murder, manslaughter, and especially aggravated assault, where you use a weapon and damage the victim.

Jews, Japanese, Germans and Scandinavians, low violent crime rates, even though they're in America, they have access to guns like everybody else. Criminologists need to take this subculture of violence explanation into account. And they don't want to because many people think it's racist, it's insulting to the group. But I would argue we're talking about a culture, not a race. The subculture of violence is influenced by cultural factors that means the beliefs, the values, the behaviors of a group. It's not racial. You can take people who are black-skinned, put them in England, put them in Africa, put them in Haiti, and they're going to have very different beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. Race is not determinant.

Culture is determinant. Therefore, it's not correct to say that subculture of violence theory is racist. It's not based on race. It's based on culture.

Larry Bernstein:

Why is the common wisdom that economic conditions affect violence and crime rates?

Barry Latzer:

The general public believes crime is motivated by a need to steal when you're poor. Maybe during the Great Depression (laughs) that was true. The United States has become much more affluent. Nobody's literally starving to death.

Violent crime is not motivated by these economic determinants. Violent crime: murder, rape, assault, that's motivated by interpersonal quarrels, not economics.

Larry Bernstein:

Given that culture changes slowly, generation to generation, how do you explain the major cycles in violent behavior?

Barry Latzer:

That's excellent, Larry, because that shows the limitations of the cultural explanation. Let's take the big crime boom that started in the late '60s and ran to roughly the mid-1990s, probably the biggest violent crime boom in American. Subcultures of violence don't (laughs) change that rapidly and therefore, that couldn't possibly explain. And it doesn't. What does explain that crime boom? There are three factors that do.

First demographics, the Baby Boom. Youth is certainly a key correlate of crime. The more youth you have the more violent crime. Simple as that. And so this explosion in the youth population was a key factor in the great crime boom. I call it the Crime Tsunami of the late '60s to mid '90s. Second, the criminal justice system had gone flabby. There was a big belief in rehabilitation in the early '60s and in the '50s. And we sort of let our guard down. Police didn't make as many arrests. Sentences were much lighter. At the same time the Baby Boom is increasing crime, you have this weakened criminal justice system that's punishing people more leniently.

Third, a huge migration of African Americans from the South to the cities of the North, and this occurred in different stages. It happened in the 1920s, 1940s and in the 1960s and this big migration of African Americans to Northern cities was a big contributor to high violent crime rates. Remember, African Americans were one of the groups with high subcultures of violence, and they brought that subculture with them from the South. Anyone who lived in a big city in the '70s knows this. I lived in New York; I know it. People in Philly, they knew it, Chicago, Boston, Detroit, certainly, absolutely, Detroit.

And a sub issue was the cocaine epidemic, but that didn't start until the late '80s and the crime wave was already well under way. By then the system had toughened up and the punishments were harsher and that was the beginning of the end. That's my explanation and the question is really perfect because it shows that even the subculture of violence theory cannot fully explain why crime rises and falls.

Larry Bernstein:

How do you explain the explosion in crime rates since COVID?

Barry Latzer:

Police were holding back. They were afraid to engage with suspected offenders. And the demonstrations with the George Floyd incident, the police were diverted because there were so many protests and they were so massive that police normally assigned to deal with violent crime were assigned to protests.

The police drew back. They weren't proactive the way they normally have been in the last few decades. They weren't pursuing suspects.

Larry Bernstein:

What do you think of Giuliani's implementation of James Q. Wilson's Broken Window philosophy?

Barry Latzer:

I was never fully persuaded that broken window worked. Disorder is important to quell. Low-level offenses must be pursued by the police and prosecutors. I just wrote a piece critiquing the new prosecutor in Manhattan for refusing to pursue these low-level offenses. Disorder matters. If you don't arrest people who are urinating in the streets, dealing drugs even at low-levels, drinking and making noise all night long. If you don't pursue these low-level offenses, then you get disorderly communities. And disorderly communities do breed serious crime.

I agree with Wilson and Kelling, but it's not sufficient. High crime has to be dealt with on its own and not just disorder. High crime has to be dealt with strictly. And I don't mean sentences have to be lengthened, but the police have to do their job. They have to find these offenders, arrest them, and then they have to be processed and punished. That's the most important thing to do. Disorder is also important to get under control, because it contributes to the decline of communities and cities. I was in New York in the 1970s. I remember when you had disorderly behavior in New York. It keeps the law-abiding people fearful and reluctant to go in public spaces. That has a big ripple effect. People aren't going to go to the shows, restaurants, and movies.

I'm not sure that arresting these low-level offenders, and by the way, they're not going to stay in jail very long for these crimes. I'm of mixed mind on it. I don't accept the theory that clamping down on disorderly behavior prevents felonies but is important to do in its own right.

Larry Bernstein:

People walking in the neighborhood reduces crime but disorder reduces walking traffic.

Barry Latzer:

I agree. They need to make sure that the public spaces are safe and then people will walk in those communities and that does discourage crime.

More law-abiding people in an area does mean fewer disorderly types.

Larry Bernstein:

How do you explain the sharp differences in violent crime rates between Chicago, Detroit, and Baltimore vs. NYC?

Barry Latzer:

There seems to be some contagion effect that takes place locally. Young people copy one another. They copy their misbehaviors. And in some cities, when some young people begin engaging in crime and disorderly conduct, other young people copy them and do the same thing. And that seems to spread. That seems to me to be the best explanation.

And once that copying hits a tipping point, then it explodes and seems to get out of control.

Larry Bernstein:

The public learns about police work from TV, shows like the Wire and Law and Order. Are these shows realistic?

Barry Latzer:

Not much, because police work is boring. If they portrayed all that boredom, you'd flip the channel to something else. Rarely are cases resolved with such finality as on television. It doesn't happen that way in the real world. Most crimes go unsolved. Large numbers go unreported.

Shooting. The overwhelming number of police never use their service revolvers on the job except in target practice. Television guys are shooting all the time that's unrealistic. So that's my beef with the dramatizations. It sort of misleads people about what's going on in the real world of policing.

Larry Bernstein:

Our approach to punishing criminals doesn't appear to work well, how can we do better?

Barry Latzer:

My proposal for certain populations where there's high rates of recidivism, mainly people who were released to parole from prison, we ought to use electronic monitoring more to substitute for incarceration. It provides some monitoring of the offender whereas under the current system, the overstretched parole officers can't monitor each and every prisoner.

Technology could be the way of the future, especially if we ever develop the technology to determine the behavior of the subject, not just the location. The current technology is like the GPS in your car. It can determine the location, but it can't really determine the behavior. Once we reach a point where we're technologically able to determine behavior, we'll see replacement of incarceration with high tech electronic monitoring. So that's the future. People are very disenchanted with the prison system. We don't have a good replacement. Maybe it's technology.

Larry Bernstein:

Rural Sicilians and rural Irish moved to urban NY, Chicago, and Boston. Was the rural to urban shift important in the violent crime story?

Barry Latzer:

When it comes to the subculture of violence, rurality is more of an influence than urbanity. Back in the 19th century, cities had less violent crime than rural areas. But when a rural group with a subculture of violence, the African-American, moves to the big cities? I argue that they'll transport that subculture of violence with them and it was the same for the Sicilian population.

Rural areas have high violent crime rates. In the first half of the 20th century, New York City had lower than average violent crime rates. The rest of the country was higher than New York City. Cities, tamed violent crime, at least that was the argument made in the 19th century. In the late

20th century, we assume it's just the opposite, that rural areas have lower crime, violent crime rates, and they do. In fact, the pecking order is urban highest, suburbs, rural areas, lowest of all.

Larry Bernstein:

How do you explain the sharp reduction in violent crime over time among the Irish, Italian, and Chinese-Americans?

Barry Latzer:

Class trumps culture. When people move up the social ladder, when they become middle class, more affluent, they shed their violent crime culture. If you look at middle class African Americans, their crime rates are much lower than lower income African Americans.

Affluence definitely reduces violence because you'd be out of your mind if you have a family, a decent job and wage, you'd be crazy to hold up a liquor store. Affluent people are not going to engage in crime. It would be self-destructive.

Larry Bernstein:

If I put you in charge, how would you change public policy?

Barry Latzer:

Woke prosecutors' policies are misguided. Disorder in cities is a disease. It ruins communities. Arrests have to happen. You can't look the other way and pretend this crime isn't occurring, and we see with the West Coast cities, Seattle, San Francisco especially, what happened when prosecutors didn't want to prosecute.

We must attend to disorder, even though these are low level offenses. The punishments here do not contribute very much to mass incarceration because they're very light punishments. These are people who get a couple of months in a jail and don't ever see a prison.

We have to stay the course when dealing with more serious offenses. We have to use our police wisely, we have to do hotspot policing. These interventions with gangs might work and intercept the firearms. Defunding the police that's just an utter disaster.

My formula is more of the same. I don't have any panaceas, however electronic monitoring and technology can be very beneficial for the criminal justice system and we should pursue that aggressively.

Larry Bernstein:

Is it true that prisons are filled with low level drug users and not violent criminals?

Barry Latzer:

55% of violent crime, the number for drug offenders is 14%. Of the 14%, 10% or so are drug dealers, they're people who were selling, they were in the business. So only a small percent, 4% or less are drug possessors that is they weren't selling. However, even that number is high

because many of these drug possession cases are simply cases that had problems and had to be pled down to drug possession. If police make an illegal seizure of the drugs, and they can't convict him of drug sales, they'll take the conviction for drug possession.

The assertion that the prisons are filled with low-level offenders, mainly drug offenders is false. Michelle Alexander who made this argument in her book the New Jim Crow, I just explode those arguments in my next upcoming book, they're totally false. The people in prisons are there because they've done very serious offenses over and over again. The argument that you have some kid smoking dope and he goes to prison, not true.

Larry Bernstein:

Do you think we will see a sharp drop in violent crime in the African American community in the decades ahead?

Barry Latzer:

Not in my lifetime, perhaps, but decades and decades from now, black violent crime is going to be a historical phenomenon only.

Who talks about Irish violent crime today, Larry? Or Italian violent crime, except for a few mafia movies that perpetuate the stereotypes. And it's going to be the same for African-Americans, I feel very optimistic on that score.

Larry Bernstein:

You mentioned that there are subcultures that are easily angered and resort to violence. Can we educate to dissuade them that this violent response is problematic?

Barry Latzer:

Anger management training, kind of thing?

You'd have to do such a mass level that it wouldn't be workable.

It's a long slow process. But the best thing that could happen is affluence. Affluence seems to do the trick. They move up the social ladders, they eschew violence, and the culture changes. That's the end of that subculture of violence. I don't think you could do it through education alone.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each episode on a note of optimism. Barry, what are you most optimistic about as it relates to violent crime?

Barry Latzer:

We have a huge gun problem and I'm not so optimistic about that. The NRA would say, guns don't kill people, people kill people, and there's a truth to that. I'm optimistic about African-Americans moving to the middle class and eschewing violence.



I think America, it sounds almost corny nowadays, but it is still a land of opportunity as long as our economy expands and as long as we don't discriminate against these groups, they will have opportunities. And, probably not in my lifetime, I'm an old man already, but it will happen. It took three generations with the Irish and the Italians.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks Barry, our next speaker is Howard Husock who is a senior fellow at AEI and author of the new book *The Poor Side of Town*.

Howard Husock:

My book is about the history and future of affordable housing. There was a time when we had affordable housing and it didn't involve Federal programs. We once knew how to build homes for millions of Americans at a cost they could afford in neighborhoods that had a good quality of life.

Few examples. In Philadelphia, between 1870 and 1920, a staggering 299,000 small row homes were built. Chicago had thousands of two flats, in 1940 it had 382,000 housing units in two-, three- and four-unit homes more than all its single-family houses. Oakland, California had bungalows. 12,000 built in just three years between 1921 and 1924.

We once had the formula for low income, affordable housing, which served as the foundation for healthy communities. Bronzeville in Chicago, Black Bottom in Detroit, Dorchester in Boston, East Harlem in New York, there were poor, good neighborhoods with landlords who lived in the same buildings as their tenants with small shops, churches and synagogues nearby and the mutual aid institutions that characterize healthy communities.

We chose to demolish what were labeled slums that drove me to write my book, *The Poor Side of Town and Why We Need It*. I blame a movement that began with Jacob Riis. Very celebrated author of a book *How the Other Half Lives* about 19th Century New York housing tenements on the lower East Side. A movement that he sparked and continues blindly today. Housing reform, a movement predicated on the idea that the private market fails the poor and must be replaced by government.

Riis was a pioneer photographer who was New York's leading police reporter. He was trained as a sensationalist and his approach to housing was aimed at images that shocked.

There was more to the slums than abject poverty. Hundreds of thousands of families lived normal lives. They worked, paid rent, fed their children, had hopes and dreams for the future. And crucially poverty was not a life sentence.

Riis set off a stampede of misguided reform. He germinated the idea of public housing, as championed by two New York Women, Edith Abbott Wood of Columbia University and Catherine Bauer. Both believed that the private housing market would fail. Both would join the

Roosevelt administration and Bauer would write the National Housing Act in 1937 for Federally financed public housing.

That Act would become the vehicle for slum clearance. Neighborhoods replete with small landlords, with families taking in lodgers, with single room occupancy hotels. Small shops and community institutions were swept away and replaced by The Projects. Planned communities without streets, stores or businesses. The failure and widespread demolition of public housing. This is the 50th anniversary of the implosion of the 33 towers of the Pruitt-Igoe Housing Project in St. Louis.

None of that stopped reformers for searching for government low-income housing. Today we're told mixed income housing is the way, ignoring a fundamental question: Why shouldn't poor neighborhoods also be good neighborhoods? They were in the past. We adopted draconian zoning laws which mandate exclusively single-family districts and mandating larger lots for such homes. This is a recipe for unaffordability.

We need to relax zoning laws to permit two and three family homes, smaller shops and businesses on ground floors. We need to stop deciding for the poor where they should live based on some planner's vision of income restricted housing. Government has distorted housing markets. It should get out of the business altogether.

Jane Jacobs reminded us, it's the spontaneous plans of thousands of builders and businesses that are superior to the housing planners. We need all sides of town, a full spectrum of housing types including a poor side of town.

Larry Bernstein:

What are the societal benefits of tenants living in the same building as their landlord?

Howard Husock:

Landlords are on the front lines of creating healthy neighborhoods because they screen their tenants. We're taking steps today to make it harder to screen tenants. That's a bad thing. You make too much noise, you're out. Landlords are enforcers of social norms. Tenants make demands on landlords. It's hard to have somebody upstairs with no heat, because they're living right there.

Larry Bernstein:

The Clinton administration banned felons from public housing, is that a good idea?

Howard Husock:

We have millions of people in prisons. We have to integrate these people into the broader society. We can't continue to isolate and marginalize them. Have some commonsense rule like you kept your nose clean for two years.

Public housing's biggest problem is this. You cannot own anything there. It's all owned by the government.

We all invest in our houses. We make it impossible for poor people to do it. African Americans were particularly disadvantaged by this, because they came to the northern cities at the same time public housing was sprouting.

Larry Bernstein:

Herbert Gans wrote the book *Urban Villagers* on Boston's slum clearance. City planners knocked down an entire poor neighborhood.

How should we evaluate a community and its institutions before we blow it up?

Howard Husock:

Gans wrote the *Urban Villager* about the West End in Boston. I lived most of my life in Boston. Jane Jacobs celebrated the eyes on the street and the North End of Boston, five story walk-ups, cannoli shops on the ground floor.

The West End was the same thing. It had a certain problem though. North End was almost all Italian American. The West End was diverse: Jews, Italians, Irish, Blacks. It lacked political power. And it got in the sites of the planners and they had this mistaken idea that we have to bring the middle class back to the city and we'll do it by getting rid of this slum and we'll subsidize by giving cheap land to build middle class luxury units.

50 years later these West Enders still have reunions, because they had neighbors that they knew. They owned the buildings and rented out to extended family members. There were so many permutations available. Shops on the ground floors. They supported that parish or local synagogue. The terrible irony today is that those buildings that they tore down would be worth more than the high rises that they replaced it with. They would be historic structures. Yuppies would be renovating them. Oh, my God, tragedy of the planners.

Larry Bernstein:

Jacob Riis who took the photographs and published *How the Other Half Lives* was memorialized with the Tenement Museum on the Lower East Side of NYC. When I took the tour recently, you could see across the street that these tenements were being renovated to sell for \$3000/sqf. Density is back and it trades at a premium. Why did we push people to move to less dense areas like Brooklyn and then eventually the suburbs?

Howard Husock:

The tenement museum, they refer to it as the urban log cabin. I love this phrase. It's so meaningful to me. It's Abe Lincoln. It's the ground floor before you get to the next better neighborhood, as opposed to a life sentence and the system fails and capitalism stinks. High density living. There's no doubt that if you make it impossible to run a rooming house because

it's too dense, you won't have any rooming houses and you'll have homeless guys on the street, which we have here in New York now.

Have to fight this battle, community board by community board all across this country. We have to get the idea that dense housing areas are actually desirable. They have a high walkability index.

The housing affordability formula is simple. As many units as you can have on the same amount of land, more units for the same square footage of lands. One acre zoning that's going to be an expensive house. Five 1200 square foot houses on the same lot, it's not as expensive. Levittown, the ultimate post-war suburb, derided by the socialists as little boxes. The houses were 750 square feet. That's not a garage in a lot of places and people were dying to move out of Brooklyn to get there. And they did.

Larry Bernstein:

Jane Jacobs argues in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* that as office buildings age, they go from Class A to B and then to C. The type of tenants changes and the building's use does too. Is this process critical to urban vitality?

Howard Husock:

She had a line, "New ideas need old buildings."

Unfortunately, elected officials try to hold back that tide. If your whole city is becoming C class, our property tax base erodes, you need to cut taxes so that people move in. Urban dynamism, that's what Jane Jacobs was all about. Not only *Death and Life of American cities*, but her magisterial book, *The Economies of Cities*, and *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*. All three need to be read. The first was a protest. The second explained how it should be done right and what happens in healthy cities. New ideas need old buildings. We have to accept that change.

There are about 100,000 illegal basement apartments in Queens and Brooklyn today. Illegal. 100,000. You can't slap every landlord with a fine and kick out all those tenants. It's not practical. So what should you do? Change the housing code so it's safe enough rather than some higher standard that is unattainable.

We need planning and zoning boards that embrace the advent of class C from class A and then facilitate the revitalization that can finally occur. Whole cities. The Buffalos, the St.Louises, the Detroites. They all need to learn this lesson.

Larry Bernstein:

Another Jane Jacobs idea was that one reason Greenwich village works so well is because there are short blocks with small streets. If you're going from point A to point B across the village, there are dozens of street routes you can choose to make the trip, and the different routes opens up the possibility for exploring many different small businesses.

Howard Husock:

That's a zoning issue. All these suburban subdivisions that we continue to build, they have designated street widths to accommodate automobiles when more Americans want walkable neighborhoods. They also ban commercial enterprises altogether. They segregate the commercial, residential and industrial. If you look at old urban neighborhoods, there would be a commercial bakery, but then the bakery also sold day old goods on the ground floor and next door was a clothing store. And guys lived upstairs. All of that is illegal in most cities today. But in the neighborhoods where it persisted, people are dying to move in there. We're mandating neighborhoods that people dislike. That is crazy.

Corbusier the super modernist architect who was really the force behind public modernist housing, he believed that cities should not have any streets. Literally, he said that. Cities with no streets and buildings should be placed, towers in a park. That was his phrase. And anybody who's been on public housing knows that those campuses have become free fire zones where people are afraid to walk across with good reason.

Larry Bernstein:

How long does it take for a new public housing project to turn into a disaster?

Howard Husock:

All the public housing projects look nice when they cut the ribbons. It only took 20 years from Pruitt-Igoe to go from winning architectural awards, literally, for Yamasaki, the architect, who also designed the World Trade Center to it being imploded. Everybody should look up the pictures of Pruitt-Igoe implosion. It's stunning. To replace, to this day, by nothing. Nothing. Empty land.

They radiate toxicity. There have been studies about crime, not only within public housing but within a radius of public housing. See the Wire.

Larry Bernstein:

You reference Nathan Glazer in your book, tell me why you appreciate his work.

Howard Husock:

I was privileged to know Nathan Glazer, Harvard sociology professor, somebody who would never be on a university faculty today. He was a thinker, not a statistician, and when it comes to sociology that's changed. One of his greatest books is called *The Limits of Social Policy*. And he says that any social program by its nature replaces some previous civil society arrangement, whether it was the family, the church, and has to be judged against that it replaces. And we have to be very careful and reluctant to do that. And when it comes to public housing, and Glazer himself was once a federal housing official and then he turned against all that.

He realized that institutions that were valuable and that social policy not only had limits but it had inherent weakness. His great strength was he could look at 20 studies and crystallize it in very clear and fair-minded writing.

Larry Bernstein:

When Brooklyn was settled 150 years ago, real estate developers would give land to build a church and then sell lots to parishioners in the immediate vicinity. Should we encourage mixed use like churches and other non-residential buildings next door to where people live?

Howard Husock:

The important thing, as with so many aspects of zoning and planning is not to preclude things. It's not just the market, it's private initiative. Let it take form.

It wasn't just churches. All the guys who started amusement parks at the end of transit lines understood that they were increasing the value of the land around it. Symphony Hall in Boston or Carnegie Hall in New York were built tightly into the urban fabric that developed music districts: music schools, sheet music sales places. One thing leads to another if you don't make it impossible to happen.

Larry Bernstein:

Contrast Carnegie Hall with Lincoln Center.

Howard Husock:

(Laughs).

Larry Bernstein:

To build Lincoln Center they had to knock down a dozen city blocks that had been the poor side of town.

Howard Husock:

West side of West Side Story.

Larry Bernstein:

Was replacing five story walkups with a planned modernist cultural venue a good idea?

Howard Husock:

You have that windswept open space, Government Center in Boston, the same thing. All these open spaces. They're too big and ill-defined borders. I don't think it's held up well, the grandness of the quasi-classical buildings like Carnegie Hall, Grand Central Terminal, are not matched by these modernist wannabes. It's not a terrible place, Lincoln Center, I'm not a fan.

Larry Bernstein:

How do you explain the success of fast-growing Southern cities like Houston, Atlanta, Charlotte, and Nashville?

Howard Husock:

Houston has no zoning. The Texas cities are permitting the housing market to respond to increased demand, there is a small homes movement, which is growing. Durham, North Carolina has it, Houston has it, you have closely adjacent townhouses where you can get a lot more homes on the same lot size. I hope they don't go in big for fixed rail transit. It's very expensive.

You can have other transit options, buses and maybe a surface trolley but they shouldn't be building subway systems like Los Angeles.

Larry Bernstein:

Some Southern cities are struggling like Memphis, Birmingham and New Orleans, why are these cities in trouble?

Howard Husock:

Crime is a big factor. The core responsibility of local government is to protect its population. New Orleans is not doing that. Police cities and if you don't do that, you're going to pay a price. My son lived in Clarksdale, Mississippi in the Mississippi Delta, birthplace of the blues. And he lived in a predominately Black side of town and the police took him aside when he moved there and said, "Look, if you buy a TV or something, son, don't put the box out on the street. Somebody will steal it.". How do people make investments if they think their investment is not protected? That has to do with the failure of the southern cities.

Larry Bernstein:

Raj Chetty is a very esteemed economist at Stanford and Harvard. He wrote a widely cited paper that says that poor kids who move to wealthy suburbs and attend public high schools outperform poor kids that remain in poor neighborhoods. What do you think of his research?

Howard Husock:

I've written criticizing his work. He ignores a number of things. First the practicality of it. How many people are you going to move to Scarsdale and Lake Forest? You're going to move the whole south side there, and then everything will be better? Like, I don't follow.

Number two, if you look closely at his data, boys 12 years and older didn't do as well. There's a certain sweet spot in the age range. Can you really have a federal program that says only families that fit this profile can take this opportunity? There are political impracticalities.

And then third, why can't a poor neighborhood be a good neighborhood? The failure is not the people. This is a governmental public goods failure. If the schools are bad, then the schools have to be fixed. Maybe they have to be all chartered. Maybe, voucherize them all. We have to fix the schools, not give up on making a poor neighborhood a better neighborhood. There's no practical alternative. We can't socially engineer poor people in America to live among upper middle-class people. No can do.

Larry Bernstein:

Core to the Chetty idea is that the poor will adopt the social mores of the wealthy. Is that likely? And could the wealthy adopt some of the problematic mores of the poor?

Howard Husock:

They're likely to remain in parallel universes. It's a theory that somehow these norms are going to rub off.

The settlement house model, the Boys and Girls Club model, the idea of preaching, the idea of investing in yourself, delayed gratification, I believe in middle class norms. Middle class people should dare to sell them, practice them, and preach them.

It used to be that American elites had confidence in those norms to go to Hull-House in Chicago and say, "Here's the right way to cook in a healthy way. You should really become a citizen. We'll help you learn English. Take music lessons, we'll offer them." The idea that they're going to osmose in the air if you go to Scarsdale High School, I don't think so.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each episode on a note of optimism. Howard, what are you optimistic about?

Howard Husock:

I'm optimistic that there's more communities adopting less restrictive zoning. Minneapolis abolished single family zoning. The thousands of volunteer Americans who make decisions will take in this idea that the physical environment influences our behavior and gives us different options about how to live.

Let's have a comeback of the two-family house so people can afford to buy because they rent the upstairs out to somebody else. Commonsense ideas that I hope local officials, under pressure from the electorate, will start to make better choices that's the theme of my book. *The Poor Side of Town and Why We Need It* and I believe in it.

Larry Bernstein:

You wrote an essay entitled *The Life of a House*, where you tell what happens to a residence built in the Dorchester section of Boston that evolves over time as the neighborhood changes.

Howard Husock:

Started off, a builder owner lived there with his extended family. Then it got sold to two sisters Yankee New England school teachers. Then it sold to a Swedish immigrant who subdivided it into smaller rooms and rented out the rooms.

The neighborhood became more dangerous. There was a shooting and they ended up selling it to these crazy hippies who were willing to pioneer in this tough neighborhood. And over time, their investment paid off tremendously and it still has the rental units and the family that's in there continues to rely on that income, the neighborhood is not nearly as bad.



So individual houses and their residents evolve in these fascinating ways. The key to the house's survival was that it could be subdivided and rooms could be rented, otherwise it would have been abandoned for sure. Cities, if we freeze them in place, they're going to get into trouble. That's the lesson of Jane Jacobs. That's my lesson too.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks to Barry and Howard for joining us today. That ends today's session. I want to make a plug for next week's show.

Our first speaker will be Irv Gellman who is a popular historian who has a new book entitled Campaign of the Century: Kennedy, Nixon and the Election of 1960. Irv disagrees with the historical narrative about this incredibly close presidential race. There is so much to discuss including election fraud, JFK's mistresses, and the first television debates.

Our second speaker will be Nicholas Eberstadt who is the Henry Wendt Chair of Political Economy at AEI. Nick wrote an op-Ed in the Wall Street Journal this week on the significance of North Korea's expanding missile program, and what does it mean for the safety of the US mainland and its South Korean neighbors?

If you are interested in listening to a replay of today's What Happens Next program or any of our previous episodes or if you wish to read a transcript, you can find them on our website [Whathappensnextin6minutes.com](http://Whathappensnextin6minutes.com). Replays are also available on Apple Podcasts, Podbean and Spotify.

Thanks to our audience for your continued engagement with these important issues, good-bye.