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[Poverty Reaches the Suburbs](#)

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Take a look at the picture on the left from a few years back. The perfectly manicured lawn is a luxurious green. Newly-built homes, uniform in architecture, look sturdy and clean, if not a bit drab. The neighborhood seems calm.

Flash forward to April 2009, when, [according to the photographer](#), a man just a few houses down shot a neighbor over a drug deal. Welcome to Suburbs 2.0.

According to a recent Brookings Institution [report](#), suburbs are "home to the largest and fastest-growing poor population in the country." By 2008, almost one-third of America's poor population resided in suburbs. No, not in urban wastelands or rural ghost towns -- [in the 'burbs](#).

A small portion of this growth in suburban poverty can certainly be attributed to middle class families losing their homes or jobs and slipping into financial distress. The equation is simple: middle class family lives in suburb; middle class family becomes poor; therefore, suburb becomes poor. But as much as the mainstream media loves a [riches-to-rags story](#), there just aren't enough well-to-do households suddenly plunging into destitution to drive this monumental change.

So why the changing face of suburban America, the birthplace of picket fences, two-car garages and shiny red lawnmowers? As with any question about deteriorating economic conditions in the past year, there's the obvious answer: recession. As the Brookings report suggests, some of the hardest-hit sectors of the economy, including real estate, retail, construction and manufacturing,

underwent a "suburbanization" over the past decade, relocating their factories and retail outlets to suburban areas. When the economy collapsed on these sectors, the employees were left with rubble -- no work, no money, and no ability to move away from their jobless neighborhoods.

But there's a less-talked about reason for the growth of suburban poverty: rich Americans' changing appetites. The suburbs used to mean tranquility, land and freedom; now, they seem stale. In a prescient *Atlantic* [article](#) from 2008, Christopher Leinberger writes, "These days, when Hollywood wants to portray soullessness, despair or moral decay, it often looks to the suburbs." Enter cities: bright, vibrant, bustling, hip. Over the past decade, the rich have flocked to the cities, bringing their money with them. The results? Wealth has left the suburbs, and the poor have been forced from the cities.

Granted, poverty is poverty, whether it's in the city or the outskirts. But metropolitan poverty does offer a few extra benefits, like easier access to food stamp programs (the Brookings report cites approximately 40 percent of poor families in cities using food stamps, compared to only 32 percent of poor suburban families). As gentrification of urban areas continues, it is essential that social services and government agencies keep up with the trends, reaching out to the suburban poor with strength.

You can read the entire Brookings Institution report on "The Suburbanization of Poverty" by clicking [here](#).