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Suburban slums

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This month's Atlantic Monthly has an interesting article about the coming socio-economic divide between urban and suburban residents. The article, written by Brookings Institute fellow Christopher B. Leinberger, argues that suburbs are going to be the next slums -- debased centers of soon-to-be ramshackle McMansions.

From the article:

"Today, (urban housing) carries an enormous price premium. Per square foot, urban residential neighborhood space goes for 40 percent to 200 percent more than traditional suburban space in areas as diverse as New York City; Portland, Oregon; Seattle; and Washington, D.C."

He makes his main point later:

"But much of the future decline is likely to occur on the fringes, in towns far away from the central city, not served by rail transit, and lacking any real core. In other words, some of the worst problems are likely to be seen in some of the country's more recently developed areas--and not only those inhabited by subprime-mortgage borrowers. Many of these areas will become magnets for poverty, crime, and social dysfunction."

The rail argument is an interesting one (though not fully fleshed out in the article), as it suggests that interurban rail would bridge the divide between 'burbs and cities. That was, after all, the original point of MAX light rail. Still, here in Portland, there are a lot of people who may disagree vehemently with this notion.