

# State of the City: A Fit Place to Live?

"If the places where we live and work were really fit for human habitation," Lewis Mumford once asked, "why should we spend so much of our time getting away from them?"

This is a question to which New Yorkers must address themselves seriously before the exodus of people—and jobs—from their city reaches a level that could undermine New York's premier position as the international center of commerce, industry and culture.

The reasons for this flight to the suburbs and beyond are many and complex. But one reason, cited repeatedly by executives of firms that have quit New York, is that proliferating congestion and pollution have rendered the city, if not unfit for human habitation, at least less fit in their eyes than available alternatives.

New York is, in sorry fact, among the most polluted of American cities. It is also the most congested, with substantially higher concentrations of people and motor vehicles than any other city in the nation.

The picture isn't entirely bleak. There has been a significant reduction in air pollution from stationary sources—incinerators, factories, power plants, etc.—since former Mayor Lindsay quipped some years ago during a vacation in the Rockies that he wasn't used to breathing air he couldn't see. As a result of controls introduced during his administration sulphur dioxide has been cut by 73 per cent. Suspended particulates are now within Federal standards on a city-wide basis, though readings remain above acceptable levels in the South Bronx and parts of Brooklyn.

After a slow start, New York also is now well launched on a major \$2.5-billion program to clean up its badly polluted waters. Projects now under way for two major new pollution-control plants in upper Manhattan and Brooklyn and the progressive upgrading of twelve existing treatment plants are expected to enable the city to eliminate all dumping of raw sewage into its waters by about 1984. New York Harbor won't be swimmable, but it will be a lot cleaner, suitable for boating and other forms of aquatic recreation. Pelham Bay in the Bronx will become fit for swimming again—but not for another decade.

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