

## Self-Destruct Cities

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they go for more than ad hoc crises, could be used for restructuring cities' goals, and even the cities themselves. Rehabilitation and conservation must be emphasized over new construction. Government supports must be coordinated to strengthen what we already have.

But the basic problem is how to reverse a false value system that has been heavily invested in as the American way of life. Until those values change, our cities will continue to self-destruct.

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America the beautiful is the land of the disposable beer can and the disposable city. The American dream is of unlimited growth and profligate consumption. But the throwaway society isn't working anymore; it has backfired environmentally. With scarcity of money and resources added to a litany of familiar ills, it is now necessary to save, reuse, recycle and make do to help American cities survive.

But more than a reordering of priorities is required; it will take a revolution in the way Americans think and feel about their world. It is going to be a hard revolution to sell. The energy crisis and the urban crisis are good for a few headlines and hortatory political pronouncements before everything settles back into normal waste and excess.

The call of the National League of Cities for a policy of "urban conservation" is admirable, so far as it goes. Certainly the effort to conserve and stabilize existing urban resources is overdue. In today's cities, decay is accelerated not only by destructive and artificial development priorities, but also by the tax structure and the nature of Federal subsidies that encourage the expendable society.

The pattern that has been established of using up and abandoning what we have built and moving on to new facilities as long as land and money hold out has become both impractical and immoral. The practice of letting the older centers of cities rot while constructing new rings around them is finally seen to be folly. Not only is the new often claptrap, but the old contains the city's roots in community and time.

If any of this is to be corrected, urban programs will have to be re-examined at every level. Block grants, if