

Disillusioned

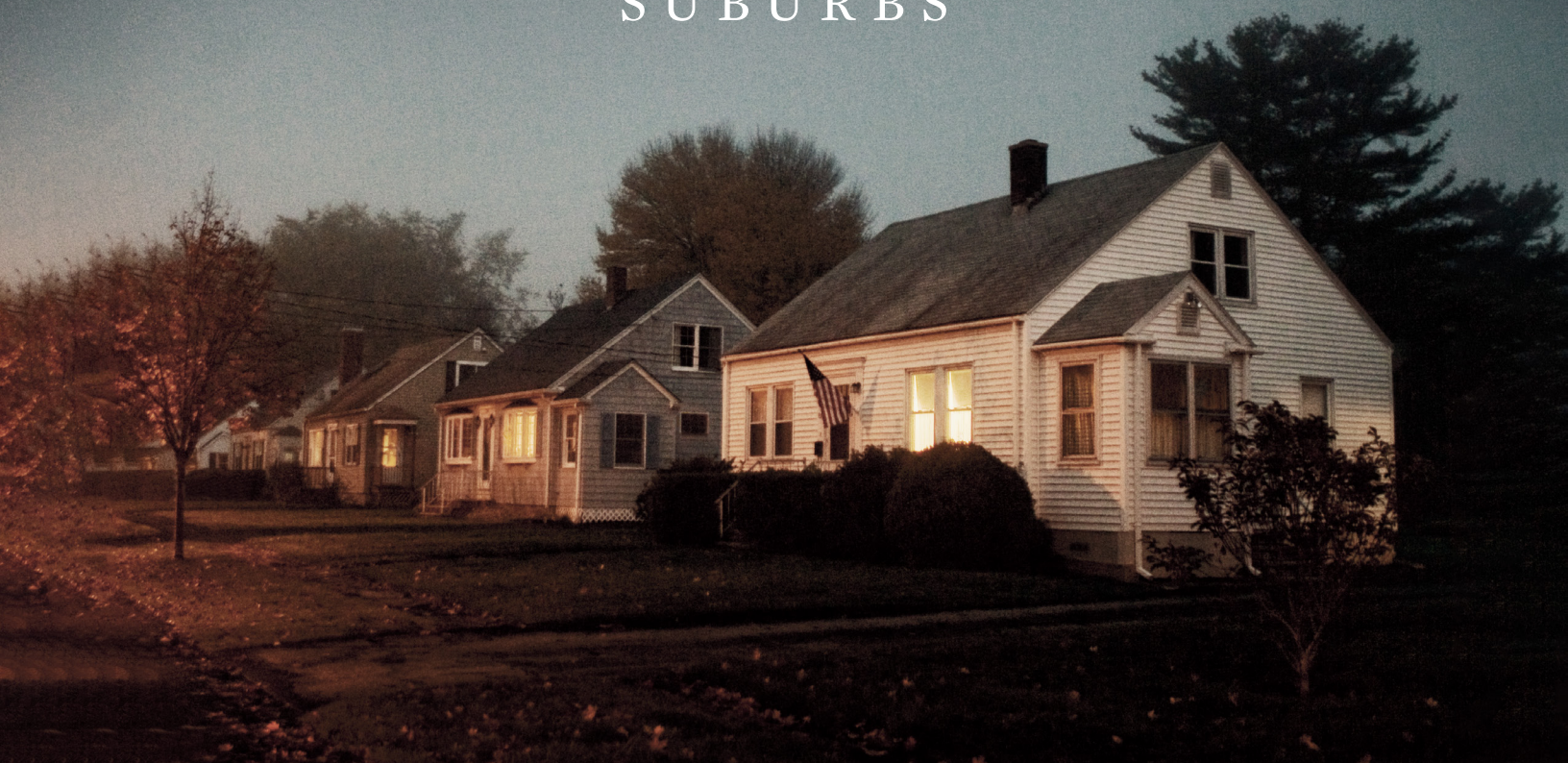
FIVE FAMILIES

and the

UNRAVELING

of AMERICA'S

SUBURBS



BENJAMIN HEROLD

— READING GROUP GUIDE —

Reading Group Guide for *Disillusioned* by Benjamin Herold

Questions for Discussion

1. What words, ideas, and feelings did you associate with the suburbs before reading *Disillusioned*? How did those change while reading the book?
2. Herold describes three main versions of the American Dream that helped shape suburbia: a desire to maintain exclusivity and preserve advantage, a desire for equal access to opportunity, and a desire for harmonious integration. What dreams draw families to the suburbs in the area where you live? How do those dreams vary based on families' racial and economic backgrounds?
3. What was your reaction to the anger, frustration, and disappointment experienced by the Robinson family in suburban Atlanta?
4. Herold describes the workings of suburban school systems outside Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Pittsburgh, and Los Angeles. Which felt most/least similar to the schools in your community? Why?
5. *Disillusioned* describes the tensions arising from rapid demographic changes in suburbia and its public schools, where the majority of students are now Black, Hispanic, Asian, or multiracial. Have you seen similar changes in the area where you live? When did they begin? What opportunities and tensions have resulted? How have the changes affected your daily life?
6. After her young son is called a racial slur at school, Lauren Adesina testifies before the Evanston/Skokie School District 65 board that racism is a form of trauma and the district needs to make preventing and responding to racist incidents its top priority. How did Lauren's testimony make you feel? Did you agree with the strategies that the District 65 board ultimately took to address the concerns she and others raised? Why?
7. What surprised you about the histories of the suburban communities featured in the book?

8. What was your reaction to the Beckers' decision to pull their children out of the public Lovejoy Independent School District and instead enroll them in a private online school affiliated with the right-wing John Birch Society?
9. How does Herold describe whiteness and its impact on public schools? Did his descriptions resonate with what you've seen and experienced in the schools where you live? Why?
10. Herold, who is white, writes about the opportunities and grace he received growing up, including his teacher bringing in a typewriter for him to use when he gets bored in class and adults declining to punish him when he is caught stealing money. How do these incidents compare to the experiences of the children featured in the book? How do they compare to your family's experiences at school?
11. At one point in the book, Bethany confronts Herold about his own racial ignorance and the illusions that result, including his unspoken assumption that Black families like hers will ultimately clean up the mess left behind by white families like his. What was your reaction to this confrontation? What emotions did Bethany's Epilogue provoke inside you?
12. Herold describes the Compton Unified School District and Jefferson Elementary as a hopeful model of how we can reimagine the suburban dream and make our suburban communities more inclusive and sustainable. Do you agree? Why?
13. Herold argues that America's fast-changing suburbs and their public schools are now the frontlines in the fight to realize America's promise. How do you think that fight is likely to play out in the coming decades? What's the outcome you'd like to see? What might your family do to help make that vision a reality?



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Disillusioned by Benjamin Herold



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