33 reflection

 [Name of the Writer]

[Name of the Institution]

**Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban?**

The study of book Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban? Brought me on the junction of history and social science; past and present urban planning and town planning in Canada. This book was very knowledgeable that is why I read it with mixed of emotions. The book was a mixture of storytelling and scholarly skepticism. Richard, the author of this book, is a prolific writer on the topics of historical geography who puts particular emphasis on social geography and social issues. This book has not left anyone disappointed. In his account writer has divided the history of suburban developing in three periods: first period starts from 1900s and ends on 1929, it is also known as early automobile period. Another period resulted after the formation of government policies which were the product of Great depression and second world war; it spanned between 1930 and 1945; third period which lasted between 1945 and 1960 saw the time when automobiles became pervasive. The book has elucidated all these periods elaborately. On the other hand, the book is also a travelogue which visits historic designs of the Canadian suburban areas. Some of the earliest designs which Harris discussed were the Shaughnessy Heights of Vancouver, Coldbrook Garden City in Saint John and the Uplands of Victoria.

The writer has also covered three major themes in his book Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban? He described that why Canadian suburban area formed themselves as a separate homogenous entity. His argument revolves around the regulations of mortgage and spread of Federal/ Municipal housing societies. His second theme tries to describe the relationship between the housing societies and the social life and the connection between them. Harris explains that the suburban areas are studied by two types of scholars; historical geographers whose primary focus was on geography and structure of the place while on the other hand urbanists and social historian who have tried to describe the nature of social life which existed in these areas. He is of the view that up till now little work is done to bridge the gap between these two fields. His third theme is to create a balance between advocacy for suburbs and its critic. Social theorists have tried to explain this phenomenon form extremist point of view, they are either advocating for it or criticizing it. This reason encouraged Harris to adapt a balanced approach to provide an opportunity to scholars to learn that why they have developed through the course of history, how they are valued by Canadian people and what they are?

Harris described that how modern-day suburbs which are mostly financed by corporate sector and dominated by automobile came into being. In early 1800s these suburbs existed in Montreal and Toronto/ modern widespread of these suburbs started in the 20th century. In 1910s and onwards urban population swelled and new ways of transportation discovered. One crucial element was the invention of street cars. These two factors encouraged maximum portion of population to move towards urban fringes by abandoning city centers are rural area. This movement of people gave rise to various communities namely: elite communities; wealthy, industrial suburban areas and shack towns. Shack towns mostly comprised of people that have owners who have built their own homes and are living in it. Most of the homeowners here belonged to working class who are living in suburbs from a long time.

The term of suburbs itself lack proper definition. Harris has described in the second chapter that Canadian suburban neighborhoods have not always been of low-density population. Harris main focus of discussion started by presenting various models of suburbs that existed during the entire history of Canada. Since the beginning of life on earth evolution remained an important phenomenon. He elaborated that how these suburbs evolved themselves into a conservative, high debt, well-structured and consumer-oriented landscapes. According to Harris, it was the second world war which gave rise to such communities in Canada. He further explained that by the passage of time these suburbs became standardized which were not promoted by the government. These were do-it-yourself projects which were introduced to bring home improvement. Home ownership was the main force behind the promotion of conservatism in the suburbs. If I look closely into the fabric of this issue, I found home ownership is the primary cause. Home ownership is an important investment which raises the concerns of the property owner in terms of price in the area. It was an important factor which encouraged the homeowners to resist any change in the area which could harm the price of property.

These newly formed landscapes now truly represent Canadian society of modern times. In order to properly analyze the situation, Harris fully utilized the information available in the form of geography, class, and ownership. Harris paid particular attention to the need of Canadian families as the main reason that encouraged them to acquire or build their homes on the fringes of North American metropolitan cities. He explains that biggest shopping malls are located in the centers of urban area while Coffee chains are located on city corners.

In the third chapter, the writer defined suburban areas in relation to the city. Harris argued in this chapter that city centers often lack the potential to form strong communities whereas suburban area offered space to form community. A good example is that anonymity in urban areas promotes alienation on other hands the residents of suburbs shares common values which encourages them to quest for forming a moral society. Expansion of industries during industrial revolution, deteriorating situation of urban areas due to population bloom and improved way of transport in the form of streetcars and then automobiles shaped the suburbs in their modern style. Employees used to drive their automobiles over a long distance to reach their workplaces.

Chapter four describes the emergence of variety of suburban patterns. When industries decided to move to suburban areas, its workers also followed the trend and moved to such vicinity. Living close to their workplace was convenient for them as they find houses at low prices. Social elite and middle class were never interested in Industrial suburban areas as they were always covered with smoke. Leaside a town planned by Canadian Northern railway in the year of 1912 was an exception. Various gardens, parks, and curvilinear streets were built. Homes were constructed with attractive architecture; in fact, this town was made beautiful. Later on, Canada Wire and Cable Company and Durant Automobile factory established themselves in this town. Leaside town was located outside the Toronto area.

Chapter five to seven comprise of government regulations that gave conformity to suburban areas. This includes regulations like codes for building, financial and health regulations. This shift in policies occurred between 1930s and 1940s. This regulatory policy saw some change in 1960s, but it was too little. Government regulations were significant for the establishment of suburban area in a disciplined and controlled way because it discouraged the construction of unplanned and un-regulated suburbs. Though these regulations were very effective at the same time, it hindered the natural growth of communities.

Chapter six brought corporate financed suburban areas into the light of discussion. These formed an integral part of suburban networks in Canada. They were wholly planned and well organized but still for some scholars they were considered unnecessary and without life.

The writer through book title intends to discuss whether an increase in the suburbanization means more conformity or not. He explains that it was 1945 which saw a population increase which opted for corporate suburbs that grew enormously around the fringes of largest metropolitan cities. By the passage of time, the suburbs of Canada became more standardized; there was the presence of standardized infrastructure involving street light system, sidewalks, schools, hospitals, parks, places of worship and shopping plazas in near vicinity. It was not only outside the house but inside was also standardized. Homes now had patterned ceilings, walls, rooms, and windows, bathrooms, drying rooms, kitchens, length and height. All this standardization created creeping conformity in the surrounding residential environment and in the experiences of people. Harris has also pointed out in his book that all residential areas were diverse in their development. While reading this book, I would like to appreciate that Harris did acknowledge this diversity in postwar Canadian Suburbs by concluding in the below-mentioned remark,

 *“the deeper conformity of the postwar suburbs was the way that they mandated a high level of consumption, encouraging people to define themselves through what they purchased by acquiring debt” (p. 173)*

Harris mentioned the reason that how these post-war suburbs came into being but he did not describe why debts were required to remake Canada. I want to say that it is not yet clear that who is doing what and why are they doing it or whom they are dealing with. Why debt society was necessary, is it some kind of conspiracy and if it is then what the motives of conspirators are? As far as I see the book failed to answer this question. I can see that writer has explained his conformity hypothesis in an alternative way by presenting a behavioral interpretation. His interpretation reveals that families opted for debts by themselves under the influence of their desires. In fact, Harris took a different course which lies between critic and advocate; it's the middle path which meant to balance both sides. He has tried to balance intended and unintended consequences.

Creeping conformity is an exciting book to read for people who are interested in social history and geographical history. It has successfully elucidated the evolution of suburban communities in an exciting way. Reader will get a chance to learn why Canadian suburbs were socially conformist places till 1945. They will also get a chance to learn that by 1960 these suburbs drifted further away from parent cities not only physically but also culturally. This increasing gap brought unanticipated environmental and social consequences. The book is also a travelogue which will attract the attention of its reader. It explains the early designs of suburban Canadian societies which decided to live on the fringes of big cities.

**Conclusions**

Harris has well explained the history of urbanization in Canada but the relation between environmental and social issues; greater culture and suburbanization is still underdeveloped. While describing the social and geographical history of early Canadian suburbs, the writer adapted a middle path between critic and advocate. The book talks in a passive voice about the conspiracy of producing a debt society to remake Canada but did not talk about the people behind it and their motifs, book has failed to explain that. However, this book not only explain the social and geographical history of Canadian suburbs, but it is also a travelogue.

**References**

Harris, R. (2004). *Creeping conformity: How Canada became suburban, 1900-1960* (Vol. 7). University of Toronto Press.