

compensation when practiced by dead white people, why passively stand by when the current Sudanese kidnap their black compatriots into servitude?

“We as a nation have grown and profited from the exploited labor . . . of people of every race, creed and condition of servitude, from the indentured servants of colonial days to the migrant workers of today,” Beauchamp says. “Can we even begin to imagine a social mechanism that could right wrongs of this magnitude that were committed so long ago?”

History offers so much to apologize for that it’s hard to know where to stop. The towering 19th-century historian Lord Acton said that “neither paganism nor Christianity ever produced a profound political historian whose mind was not turned to gloom by the contemplation of the affairs of men.” History depresses, saddens, chastens, tempers, and rigorously instructs us. It’s an essential process, Beauchamp says. But “no more apologies.”

SOCIETY

Shrink to Greatness

THE SOURCE: “Can Buffalo Ever Come Back?” by Edward L. Glaeser, in *City Journal*, Autumn 2007.

BUFFALO IS NOT THE ONLY old, cold city where urban fortunes seem stuck in reverse. Cleveland, Camden, and Detroit can tell the same tale. When cities shrink, increased poverty is a likely outcome. Declining areas with cheap housing become magnets for even more poor people, who drive up

demand for social services. Buffalo’s advantages—good transportation, plentiful electricity, proximity to Niagara Falls—are historic. Its disadvantages—bad weather and a lack of jobs—are city wreckers of the most modern sort.

Buffalo’s last boom occurred in the 1920s. It got its first great boost from the Erie Canal a century earlier, when it became a premier transfer point for wheat and other goods from the boats of the Great Lakes to the barges that traveled east on the canal. The invention of a steam-driven grain shovel made the city the world’s leading grain port. So much wheat was offloaded that it became a flour milling center. Its transportation advantages attracted steelworks, and with its access to the electricity generated by Niagara Falls it began calling itself the City of Light.

But eventually trucks and efficient rail transport undermined Buffalo’s *raison d’être*, writes Edward L. Glaeser, an economist at Harvard University. Its population, 580,000 in 1950, is now well under 300,000.

Since 1950, the federal government has invested billions upon billions of dollars in Buffalo and other failing cities, Glaeser says, but none of it has worked. The city “renewed” a district of its downtown. A 40-story bank headquarters designed by a famous architectural firm rose on its waterfront. A multimillion-dollar arena sprouted nearby. A \$500 million rail system running from the arena to the University of Buffalo took six years to build, but its ridership has been declin-

ing steadily for more than a decade.

The federal government should stop spending money on distressed *places* and instead use aid to help disadvantaged *people*, Glaeser argues. America’s taxpayers should not be bribing people to stay in Buffalo. Washington should invest in people-based policies such as the Earned Income Tax Credit to improve the economic futures of children, whether they stay put in New York State or move to Las Vegas. If Buffalo is to rebound, private innovators will have to make it happen. Better schools and safe streets might improve its odds of survival. But Buffalo should accept life as a smaller but more vibrant community, Glaeser says. It should shrink to greatness.

SOCIETY

America Escapes Again

THE SOURCE: “Crime, Drugs, Welfare—and Other Good News” by Peter Wehner and Yuval Levin, in *Commentary*, Dec. 2007.

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, CONSERVATIVE social commentators were predicting a precipitous and seemingly inexorable national decline. Former education secretary and drug czar William J. Bennett summed up the evidence most starkly: Since 1960 violent crime had increased 500 percent; out-of-wedlock births, 400 percent. The teenage suicide rate had tripled and the divorce rate had doubled. SAT scores had plunged by more than 70 points.