P.S. to the NEWS

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A DIFFERENT URBAN RENEWAL NEEDED

Most of us like to think that tomorrow is synonymous with progress and that our children will live in a better world than their parents knew. While traveling to my daughter's graduation from an eastern college last month, two articles in the same day's New York Times brought home to me one of the ways in which our children are denied basic rights and freedoms which their parents enjoyed.

One article was a gripping essay on the Op-Ed page called "I Hate Him; I Wish I Could Kill Him" by a young woman who eloquently described how she is "scared all the time" when she is going to and from work in the big city. She is terrorized when she is on the streets, in the elevators, in her car, in the stores, and even in her own apartment.

She has been attacked three times, her car robbed twice, and her various apartments invaded by five different sets of burglars. The fear in her heart is cumulative as she runs to avoid anyone who looks like he might beat her up.

On the job, she's comfortable in the man's world of business, but after office hours, she is in such constant fear that she has allowed herself to become "coupled with a male partner" just to survive in the urban world. A woman may be equal on the job, but she is not equal in the daily task of traveling to and from work.

The other article in the same newspaper told about the fear of people in Boston. As a result of racial tensions generated by the orders of activist Federal judges to bus schoolchildren and to integrate low-income housing projects, common-sense caution is making whites and blacks plan their routes to and from work with care, so as to avoid trouble.

Franklin D. Roosevelt once said "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Maybe that was true in the 1930s, but it certainly is not true in the 1970s. It is

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foolish for women NOT to be afraid in most of our nation's big cities.

I spent the year 1945-46 in Washington, D.C., as a single working girl. Most of the time, I walked to and from work, from 624 North Carolina Avenue, Southeast, to 710 Eighth Street, Northwest, a half-hour's walk right through the heart of the U.S. Capitol area. Even at twilight or in the dark, I was never afraid. I would not walk that route today.

I spent the year 1944-45 in the Boston area and was never afraid to go alone through the city. In other big cities where I lived or visited, I went about on streetcars, buses, subways, and on foot, without fear, at any hour of the day or night. My daughters do not enjoy those fundamental freedoms from crime and from fear.

We cannot provide a policeman on every block. Freedom from fear of being mugged depends on the overwhelming majority of our people having such basic moral principles that they are self-policing. Then the thin blue line can devote itself to rounding up the fringe of criminals.

"Urban renewal" sounded like such a beautiful vehicle to show our social concern. But urban rot is not primarily in deteriorating neighborhoods, not even in boarded-up windows or garbage in the streets. It is in the perverted scale of values that has allowed a bleeding-heart tolerance for criminals' rights to exceed our concern for the safety of law-abiding citizens.

The civil right to be free from mugging or being beaten up ought to be of a higher rank than the right to vote, to get a job, to receive a government benefit, or other evidences of social concern.

We had another freedom three decades ago that we have lost today: the freedom to spend our own money. When we got a job, we could keep most of it to spend as we chose, rather than giving 20 to 50 percent to Big Brother to spend for us from Washington.

This year's graduates should ponder the questions of whether higher taxes and more federal programs have made our cities a better or a worse place to live in, and how the present generation might regain the freedoms the last generation enjoyed.

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