



Western Michigan University
ScholarWorks at WMU

Dissertations

Graduate College

8-2004

Levittown, Pennsylvania: A Sociological History

Chad M. Kimmel
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations>



Part of the Sociology Commons

Recommended Citation

Kimmel, Chad M., "Levittown, Pennsylvania: A Sociological History" (2004). *Dissertations*. 1240.
<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/1240>

This Dissertation-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



LEVITTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL HISTORY

by

Chad M. Kimmel

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
August 2004

LEVITTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL HISTORY

Chad M. Kimmel, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2004

I take the suburban community of Levittown, Pennsylvania, as my field of study. I use primary documents to tell the history of this community, a story filtered through a sociological perspective, one that is firmly grounded in the sociology of C. Wright Mills. "All sociology worth the name," argued Mills, "is historical sociology." An important voice in this story is that of the original Levittown resident--those individuals still living in their homes after 50 years.

As a sociologist, my task is to uncover and make real the interrelationships between biography (the individual resident) and history (the community of Levittown and the wider social, political and economic context within which it is a part). I use historical events such as the arrival of Levittown's first black family, the gas riots of 1979 and the decline of the local steel industry, for example, as markers of social change, plotting the evolution of this community through time. As history and culture evolve, so, too, does the community of Levittown. This project frames the story of Levittown as an evolutionary one, a story that not only has been influenced by, but has also responded to, the currents of a larger national and international history. Yet how do changes in history affect the lives of individuals? How do individual residents, members of a community, understand the social climate within which they live? These are the questions that guide this project.

UMI Number: 3135100

Copyright 2004 by
Kimmel, Chad M.

All rights reserved.

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3135100

Copyright 2004 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Copyright by
Chad M. Kimmel
2004

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I walked into this project with few expectations. I never found my community of any interest at all. It was “that suburb 45 minutes outside of Philly,” I would tell people. It was not until I entered graduate school that I realized Levittown did have a unique and sociologically rich history. I remember that moment clearly. I was introducing myself to the faculty at Western Michigan University, when one of them, Dr. Doug Davidson, raised the question, “Are you from the same Levittown Herbert Gans wrote his book Levittowners about?” I had not even taken my first course, and already, I was given a question I could not answer. How could Levittown be worthy of a book?

After my introduction to the faculty, I walked over to our university library, found Gans’ book, checked it out, and renewed it for the next three years—I didn’t want to let it go. That book gave me a sense of identity, no matter how great, grand, stigmatized, or standardized it was. It was mine. And I wanted to know more.

My expectations for this project grew as I dug deeper into the history of this community. They broadened and reached into new directions with every postwar magazine article I read, every newspaper clipping I found, and especially with every original Levittown resident or Levitt and Sons employee I interviewed. It is, indeed, one of the most interesting stories I have ever known.

However, it would be impossible to “know” this story independent of any help from others. For this is a story of a community now 52 years old. To know how the story began, I would need to find and talk with those who lived it. My introduction to

Acknowledgments--Continued

this voice came from the stories that my neighbor, Mrs. Josephine O'Neil, would tell, as we leaned against the chain-linked fence that separated our yards. She and her late husband, Harold, were original Levittown residents. It was the history of their lives that I would later become so deeply interested in. Thus, I should begin this long list of acknowledgements by acknowledging her first. I thank you Mrs. O'Neil.

I have had the pleasure of meeting and speaking with many dozens of people regarding Levittown's history and my interests in this research. Some I have leaned on heavily for information and detail. There are many others, however, that I chose not to reference. Their voices, though, were always in the back of my mind. Names changed for the purpose of confidentiality will be marked with "quotations." I should begin by expressing warm gratitude to Al and Helen DiGiovanni, "Betty" and "Donald Peart," "Arlene" and "Steve Olson," "Joann" and "Frank Clark," "Mary" and "Jack Remis," "Larry" and "Alice Franklin," Jack Rosen, Sam Snipes, Hal Lefcourt, Jerry Jonas, Norvin Nathan, the Honorable Judge Paul Beckert, Dr. James Austin, Dr. Marvin Bressler, Lorraine Campbell, Michele Picozzi, Jack Connolly, Joseph Huerter, and Nelson Kamuf. Taken together, these individuals have helped bring Levittown's story to life.

Many current and past residents alike were kind enough to share their memories with me, among them Dr. Petro, Joann Cosgrove, Garney Morris, Eric Hochreiter, Vicki Shimer, Tom Merila, Bruce Hall, Bob Lupton, Roberta (Bertie) Wright, Maggie, and Janice Hollenczer Bernath. I have also received great support from Levittown's 50th

Acknowledgments--Continued

Anniversary Committee, including Kathleen Menichella Walter, Mitch Stavitz, Cindy Peto, Jim Long, Hal, as always, and Russ DiGiorgio.

I have been particularly grateful for early scholarly guidance and support from Lenny Steinhorn, John Archer, Leon Deben, Alan J. Bliss, John R. Breihan, Leo Janes, Harry Yanoshak from the *Bucks County Courier Times*, David L. Phillips, Charles L. Jaret, Idee Winfield, Steve Conn, and Janet Bogdan. I also wish to extend a thank you to Kathryn Church, Joe Halberstein from the *Bucks County Courier Times* for his willingness to spread word of my research to the county, Jack Sutters for his insight into Quaker life in Lower Bucks County, and Tom Krawiec for his rich website on Levittown, Pennsylvania.

I am grateful to have met a good number of people who care deeply for history, many of whom work in positions that aim to preserve it for future generations. Among those I wish to thank are Polly Dwyer and Paul Manton of the Levittown Historical Society of Levittown, New York. They have the best homegrown local history exhibit that I have yet to see. Ann Glorioso and Michelle Fuchs, also of New York, work in the Levittown Public Library and were helpful in passing along to me their library's bibliography on everything Levittown. Steven Rees, reference librarian at the Levittown Regional Library in Pennsylvania, has built an expansive collection of materials and bibliographic information, and has compiled it in The Levittown Room. Rees has organized over twenty document boxes, each holding newspaper articles and other pieces of information relative to various themes in the community's history. He has worked

Acknowledgments--Continued

hard for me, and I thank him. The Bucks County Historical Society, under the direction of Beth Lander and her staff, has assembled a valuable collection of Lower Bucks County material, and I am grateful for her patience with my love of Mitchell and Breese's (1951) scrapbook. This collection, alone, has added great flavor to this sociological history. Lastly, Curator Curt Miner, of the State Museum of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg, assembled a wonderful display of Levittown memorabilia in May of 2002. I walked away with a pad of notes and a sense of humility that I am quite thankful for.

I would also like to extend a thank you to the faculty and staff of Thiel College, particularly Alan Hunchuk and Cindy Sutton, who housed me for a year as I taught and did research. The library staff was especially helpful. I wish also to thank the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania for supporting me, this last year, as I completed the writing of this project. Your patience has been especially kind.

Let me not forget Kalamazoo. The Department of Sociology at Western Michigan University fostered within me the confidence to tackle a project of this size. I applaud my friend John Van Wieren for his willingness to assist in the research process. But it was my dissertation committee, made up of Dr. Thomas Van Valey, Chair, Dr. David Hartmann, Dr. Greg Howard, and Dr. Debra Lindstrom Hazel, who provided the needed guidance on this journey through Levittown's past and present. I found the encouragement to explore, the need to clarify, and the want for insight in the assistance given by Dr. Greg Howard. Greg, you are a great teacher and friend. I thank you.

Acknowledgments--Continued

In the end I thank my family for their love and support. My mother, Connie Kimmel, also a Levittown resident, helped steer this project at a local level when I was not available. Indeed, she may have spent just as much time in The Levittown Room as I had. I love you and thank you. My wife, Andrea Bellucci Kimmel, has watched this project unfold from the comforts of an editor's pen. Support comes in many shapes and sizes, and Andrea always knew what worked best. You have my love.

I dedicate this project to a woman whose life in Levittown I was too young to appreciate, my grandmother, Mrs. Emma Rosenberg.

Chad M. Kimmel

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. LIFE BEFORE LEVITTOWN	9
Resisting Order	9
Lower Bucks County in the Twentieth Century	13
More of Everything	15
The Coming of Steel to Lower Bucks County	16
Everybody Needs a Roof	20
The Origins of Levittown	21
Ready or Not, Here We Come	22
Profits Outweigh Problems	27
Out With the Old, In With the New	30
Machines in the Garden	31
3. HISTORY OF HOUSING	33
Early Twentieth Century	33
Housing and the Second World War	38
But You Promised	46
Veterans in Need	47
Fear of Revolt	48

Table of Contents—continued

CHAPTER

The Housing Crisis in Context	50
Levitt and the Housing Industry	53
The Mass-produced Home	58
Fighting for Affordability	61
Can Success be Manipulated?	67
4. THE EARLY YEARS	79
Just the Three of Us	80
Let's Go In	83
The Levittown Showroom	86
On Your Mark, Get Set,...Buy!	88
A Philadelphia Couple	92
A Western Pennsylvania Couple	96
A Couple from Northeast Pennsylvania	102
Empty Pockets	106
Blossoming Under Ripe Conditions	108
Levittown Through Jack Rosen's Lens	111
For Sale: A New Way of Life	115
Always a Knock at the Door	117
You're Welcome	121
A Community in Print	123
Our Biggest Problem	126

Table of Contents—continued

CHAPTER

More Challenges	129
Your Opportunity is Now!	137
For the Children	144
Nothing Brought Levittown Together Quite Like God	151
A Sea of Change	157
A Community of Firsts	164
5. THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND HISTORY IN SOCIETY	169
Things Are Not Always What They Seem	170
One Race in This Place	175
Democracy in Housing	179
Breaking the Whiteness	187
A Dry Hot Summer	191
The National Climate	199
Communism in Context	204
The State Steps In	208
Conspiracy Theory	210
And It All Falls Down	214
The End of the Postwar Era	220
No Gas, My Ass!	226
Levittown: The Symbol of Everything Middle-Class	231
President Carter's Crisis of Confidence	233

Table of Contents—continued

CHAPTER

When Industry Falls	234
We Were the Lucky Ones	237
Where Did the Dream Go?	238
Deindustrialization as a Defined Socio-historical Event	243
Change Does Not Exist in a Vacuum	248
Levittown and the Deflated American Dream	250
Even Dreams are Stratified	252
A Changed Environment	258
The Graying of Levittown	261
6. CONCLUSION.....	268
A Brief Summary	269
APPENDICES	
A. Methods	280
B. Protocol Clearance From the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board	287
REFERENCES	289

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Map of Levittown, Pennsylvania	27
---	----

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this project I take the suburban community of Levittown, Pennsylvania, as my field of study. My goal is to tell the history of this community through a sociological perspective, one that is firmly grounded in the writings of C. Wright Mills. "All sociology worth the name," argued Mills (1959), "is historical sociology" (p. 146). An important voice in this story is that of the original Levittown resident; those individuals still living in their homes after 50 years. As a sociologist, my task is to uncover and make real the interrelationships between biography (the individual resident) and history (the community of Levittown and the wider social, political and economic context within which it is a part). As history and culture evolve, so too does the community of Levittown. Yet how do changes in history affect the lives of individuals?

On Friday, February 8, 2002, I parked my car outside of the home of Al and Helen DiGiovanni. It was 3:00 p.m. The DiGiovannis were original Levittown residents; they still lived in the home they had first purchased from Levitt and Sons, Inc in 1952. It was then a new house in a new community, one that was rising from over 5,000 acres of rich farmland in Southeastern Pennsylvania. I had talked with Al a few weeks prior on the telephone and explained to him my research project. It was at this time that I expressed my interest in interviewing him and his wife. I said I would call again, Friday morning, as a reminder of our appointment. "I'm not sure if I'll be in the hospital," he said half-jokingly, "but call anyway." My walk toward the DiGiovanni's front door was somewhat of a familiar one; it seemed as if I had experienced it hundreds, if not

thousands, of times before. My quick knock was greeted with a warm and friendly welcome. Yet once inside, I knew immediately where I was--I was home, but I was in someone else's house. For I, too, was a Levittown resident, but I was of the third generation. And with only six house designs making up a community of 17,311, there was a good chance of running into something familiar. Their house was the Levittowner, like mine, as compared to the Rancher, the Pennsylvanian, the Colonial, the Country Clubber, or the Jubilee. I knew, without asking, where the bathroom was. Their dining room table and living room furniture were in identical positions. Our televisions backed the same inside wall. All of this, however, only made my impressions of the interview even more difficult to understand. For nothing could have prepared me for what was about to happen.

To make my stay a comfortable one, the DiGiovannis offered me a soda and a tin can of Danish butter cookies. "Do you wanna see Levittown?," Al asked in his still quick North Philadelphia accent (A. DiGiovanni, personal communication, February 8, 2002). He grinned as he walked toward the TV, bending down to inspect the VCR. He had an impressive collection of tapes, many of which he had filmed himself. For Levittown's 40th anniversary in 1992, Al had captured the parade, the Ecumenical service and the burying of the time capsule. When the Levittown Library was rededicated, he was there with his video camera to record the event. In a few months, Levittown would celebrate half a century, and Al was well prepared. But what he was reaching for now, as I would soon find out, was something different. I couldn't wait. "Sure," I said.

It was a "March of Time" program filmed in 1954 for broadcast television. The title, *A City is Born: Levittown, PA*, caught my attention (Katzander, 1954). I never knew

such a film existed. Indeed, I had never given the thought of Levittown, as a new community, much attention. The half-hour program documented the birth of my town, from potential homebuyers viewing sample homes to conversations with Levittown residents, veterans of only a few weeks. The film was crafted as a tale of social progress. "Today," bellowed the film's narrator, "at the eastern extremity of the state of Pennsylvania a remarkable construction project is transforming the face of the countryside." In just two years, the film noted, Levittown will become "...the tenth largest city in the state of Pennsylvania" (Katzander, 1954).

After a few minutes, Al glanced my way, perhaps seeking my response. "I love it," I said. And I did. I enjoyed looking at what used to be; it was like looking into an old photo album, where one is always trying to see the familiar within a sea of strange faces. Yet at the moment, I was still unmoved. It was a novelty. It excited me, especially as I sat and watched it in the living room of complete strangers. The social context of this experience was certainly making an impression upon me. What exactly that impression was, however, I was not yet sure.

But it was not until Al and I traveled a few feet to the side, back into the dinning room, that my experience took on an entirely different set of flavors. Al began talking of life before Levittown. He served in the Second World War, and when he returned, he became a baker in North Philadelphia. "I was a hustler, a real go-getter," he kept saying (A. DiGiovanni, personal communication, February 8, 2002). At the time he had already used his GI benefit to purchase a small home not far from his job. But Helen had seen the Levittown house advertised in the papers and fell in love with it. "She was really sold on those big picture windows," Al was quoted as saying in a newspaper interview one

month before ("Levittown Still Young," 2002, p. A1). And on the day of my interview, it was obvious; Helen had never made a physical change to those windows in 50 years, which is quite rare in Levittown today.

The DiGiovannis, though, had only \$1,500 saved for a deposit. Without Al's BI benefit (giving veterans the right to purchase a house with only \$100 down payment), the mortgage company required a down payment of \$2,500, far beyond what they could achieve in the near future. By that time Al had started working for a subcontractor under Levitt and sons. He commuted 45 minutes one way each day from Philadelphia to seed lawns and to plant what was even then considered to be an impressive variety of landscaping. One day Al learned that a home had become available through a cancellation--he now needed to act quickly. With nothing to lose, he approached a Levitt and Sons employee in the office and asked him for advice. "He called Bill Levitt, President of Levitt and Sons, on the telephone," Al whispered in a shaky voice. "After hanging up, he turned to me and said that Bill would lend me the thousand dollars--a personal loan!" At this moment in our talk, Al's voice began to crack up; he was now crying. His wife, Helen, was asleep in a living room chair--I could see her out of the corner of my eye. The volume on the TV had been turned up loud and I could still hear early Levittown residents joyfully describing their new homes. "Me," Al cried. "He gave me \$1,000" (A. DiGiovanni, personal communication, February 8, 2002).

I didn't know what to do. How should I respond? In some odd way, I felt honored. And while it wasn't the first time Al had told this story, in some strange way it felt like it was. Why would a man three times my age want to tell me, a stranger, a story that would knowingly bring him to tears? What did he want me to know? The focus of

the interview had now changed dramatically. The questions that I had prepared, those on my yellow note-pad pertaining to family history and financial status, lost their significance. I knew, at that moment, that I had tapped into something far more important than I had originally imagined.

New thoughts raced through my mind. A personal, interest-free loan from the President of the largest home building firm in the nation, a man who had just two years past been on the cover of *Time* magazine, meant something terribly special to Al DiGiovanni. Fifty years later, that story still had an effect.

Al would pay Bill back \$5.00 out of each paycheck for the next 20 years. And whenever he could, Al made it a point to wave hello to Bill, even when the physical distance between them prevented others from doing so. Al always waved.

It had long been dark before I left the DiGiovanni home. Helen had risen from her nap and was hungry. We all were. They invited me out to dinner, but I declined, graciously. I needed to be alone. I needed to make sense of what just happened. The hours that I spent with Al and Helen turned me on to a new appreciation for Levittown, PA. Indeed, it was in the DiGiovanni home where the heart of this project was formed.

Levittown was the creation of Levitt and Sons, Inc. Abraham Levitt, and his two sons William (Bill) and Alfred, formed their company just as America entered the Great Depression. By 1948, *Life* magazine considered them the nation's biggest housebuilder. It would be a title held for another seven years. But the Levitts built more than houses; they built entire communities, complete with schools, churches, parks, ball fields, and shopping centers. Between 1947 and 1964, they built 17,447 homes in New York, 17,311 homes in Pennsylvania, and 12,000 homes in New Jersey, naming them all Levittown. In

France, 20 miles south of the Eiffel Tower, Levitt and Sons created the 700-house development named Les Residences du Chateau. In Puerto Rico, it was more of the same: Levittown Lakes, and Levittown De Puerto Rico.

The Second World War forced the Levitts to find new ways to build faster and more efficiently. Time-and-motion studies, for example, reduced wasteful labor practices, thus increasing productivity. The postwar years also provided ripe conditions for mass building: an unprecedented demand for housing; a GI Bill of Rights and a powerful Veterans Association guaranteeing mortgages with the full weight of the federal government; and, as Bill told *Harper's* in September of 1948, "banks busting with money" (Larrabee, 1948, p. 82).

Levittown represents a moment in time when the unimaginable became possible. First-generation Levittown residents vividly remember the opportunity of homeownership afforded them by Levitt and Sons. Many had migrated from Philadelphia or Trenton, NJ. Others came from the coal regions of Northeast Pennsylvania or from one of the small steel communities in Western Pennsylvania. As in all of these areas, homes were expensive and hard to find, often requiring large cash deposits. The Levittown home, selling for \$9,990 in 1952, was something many could afford. Black families, however, were not permitted as homeowners.

Levittown, PA, whose very existence speaks to a coalescence of ripe social, political, and economic forces, however, has come of age under less than ideal conditions. In 50 years, much of what had first drawn residents like the DiGiovannis to Levittown is now difficult to find. Neighborliness or communality is in short supply. The industries that once provided stable work and good salaries are now closed. Yet

what Levittown continues to offer is what made it most famous--an affordable house to call home.

This project frames the story of Levittown as an evolutionary one, a story that changes, adapts and responds to the currents of history. The concepts vital to understanding this story, I believe, are culture and community. "Culture," wrote Kai Erikson (1976), represents "...those modes of thinking and knowing and doing that a people learn to regard as natural, those beliefs and attitudes that help shape a peoples' way of looking at themselves and the rest of the universe, [and] those ideas and symbols that a people employ to make sense of their own everyday experience as members of a society" (p. 79). In this project, I understand forces of social change (i.e., rural and suburban, agriculture and industry, prosperity and recession, affordability and inflation, segregation and integration, etc.) as the mechanics of culture making. They are the forces that have the power to transform culture. And changes in culture become visible through the effects that they have on individual lives. "Each epoch when properly defined," argues Mills (1959), "...reveals mechanics of history-making peculiar to it" (p. 152).

Community, or "communality" as Erikson calls it, refers to "...the network of relationships that make up [a person's] general human surround" (1976, p. 187). It is, Erikson continues, "...a state of mind shared among a particular gathering of people...a quiet set of understandings that become absorbed into the atmosphere and are thus a part of the natural order" (1976, p. 189). This state of mind, I believe, is subject to the same forces of change that have the power to transform culture through time. Community is not something that people move into. It is not a purchased product. It is, in and of itself, a lived achievement, a shared experience. When this process of sharing stops or takes on

features of a different nature, the community that once existed will also evolve. It is to this story of social change that I now turn.

In Appendix A, I outline my research methodology. In Appendix B, I include a copy of my protocol clearance letter from Western Michigan University's Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). In chapter II, I briefly explore life in Lower Bucks County, Pennsylvania before Levittown. In chapter III, I outline the social history of housing proceeding and following the Second World War. I pay particular attention to the social context within which the business of building houses was transformed into an industry. The story of Levitt and Sons guides this history. In chapter IV, I describe life in early Levittown, PA. It is here where the concept of community is explored. In chapter V, I introduce the changes in history that, as I argue, have transformed the culture and community in Levittown. I use this chapter to focus my sociological perspective, one that views an interrelationship between biography and history in society. Lastly, in chapter VI, I briefly summarize my project and highlight those parts of the story that I believe are most important. Strengths and weaknesses of this project and future research needs are also explored.

CHAPTER 2

LIFE BEFORE LEVITTOWN

Resisting Order

The organization of settlers into townships or villages was a contested issue in late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century Pennsylvania. William Penn urged settlers to live in agricultural villages. His reasoning was simple: order was a civilized and rational concept. "Ordered space," wrote Bucks County historian James Lemon (1972), "would mean orderly and happy lives" (p. 98). William Penn planned Philadelphia in 1682 and adapted a gridiron system, a pattern that was popular in Sir Christopher Wren's London (Jackson, 1985). As a planning ideology, the gridiron system sought straight, right angles, which, wrote urban historian Kenneth Jackson (1985), "simplified the problems of surveying, minimized legal disputes over lot boundaries, [and] maximized the number of houses that fronted a given thoroughfare..." (p. 74). The rationality of this belief system, however, went much further. This clean, efficient, utilitarian grid, Jackson continued, "...testified to man's capacity to overcome the hostility of the land and to civilize a continent" (Jackson, 1985, p. 74). It was the dominant planning ideology of the day. Like Philadelphia, Penn wanted his countryside to reflect these same rational qualities.

Penn proceeded to push his views. He envisioned rural communities where farmers and other laborers lived in village squares. Meeting-houses were to be placed at the center. All of this would fit within townships where ten, fifteen, or twenty families would hold between 100 and 500 acres (Lemon, 1972, p. 100). Despite Penn's wishes,

settlers (mostly Quakers) resisted this level of organization. Villages did not materialize as proposed. Instead, individual farmsteads lay scattered throughout the region. But why did settlers favor living on separate farms, distancing themselves from each other and centers of trade?

This preference stems from a unique rise in individualism, an idea that differed dramatically from typical peasant values in Western Europe. "By the turn of the eighteenth century," Lemon (1972) explains, "the agricultural village had become, in social terms, an anachronism" (p. 108). It was an outdated philosophy. During the Medieval Ages there was a feudal open field system that consisted of two closely interdependent parts: the demesne and the tenements (Lemon, 1972; Bloch, 1965, p. 241). The former consisted of a block of land in which anything harvested was given directly to the Lord. The latter, however, consisted of the peasant's holdings. This was their preserve. Regardless of an individual's stake in the land, they were often bonded through common interest, and "by submission to common agricultural practices" (Bloch, 1965, p. 242). By the late seventeenth century, however, all of this had changed.

As settlers in a new land, cut free from the control of Manors and Estates, the concept of individualism began to take on a reality of its own, providing new meanings for a new way of life. Part of this freedom was the desire to make their own decisions, not to be constrained by the common cause, as was thought to exist in more organized villages and townships. This freedom of choice and decision had its roots in the ideas of the Enlightenment--a philosophical movement of the eighteenth century that promoted the individual's ability to reason and to use rational judgement. Under this climate, traditional ideas, doctrines and institutions were brought into question.

While many settlers chose the individual farm over the village square or central market place, townships were not dismissed entirely. In fact, on September 27, 1692, a division made within Bucks County produced seven townships (this project will address only those townships or boroughs relevant to Levittown). Three townships and one borough are important for the purpose of this study: Falls, Buckingham, and Middletown and the borough of Tullytown.

County representatives named Falls Township after the falls (a small rapid) in the River Delaware. Although the falls were not large, river traffic could not pass over them. Therefore, in order to link travelers between New Jersey and Pennsylvania, ferries were often in service above and below the falls. Falls Township sat along one of the most significant routes of travel between Philadelphia and New York, a "vital artery serving commerce, politics, culture, migration, and every other aspect of society" (The history of Falls Township, 2001, p. 46).

Within the political boundaries of Falls Township, Thomas Riche, in 1786, laid out a town and called it Riche-town. John W. Tully, licensed innkeeper of the Black Horse Inn in Riche-town as of 1796, was said to have "rolled out a barrel of rum for the native's enjoyment one night" (Falls Township, 2001: 36). According to local legend, the residents honored Tully's generosity and changed Riche-town to Tullytown. Founded in 1816, Tullytown became a separate borough in 1891 (Direction Associates, Inc., 1986, p. 10).

Buckingham Township also emerged on September 27, 1692. During this period, William Penn, again, was pushing for the development of market towns, especially towns along the river that could serve as ports of trade. Buckingham, like Falls Township, was

ideally situated along the banks of the river. By 1692, the village of Crewcorn (today called Fallsington Village) had already been established within Falls Township, but as one local historian claimed, "it was too small and scattered, and was not laid out as a compact town" (McNealy, 1970, p. 55). Therefore, Buckingham was an ideal location for a market town. The local government picked a location near an already serviceable ferry, and on June 9, 1697, filed a petition to have the town laid out. It was called New Buckingham. On the 14 day of November 1720, New Buckingham was incorporated as a borough and called New Bristol (later just Bristol). The township of Buckingham later changed its name to Bristol Township, identifying itself with the newly planned town.

In addition to the townships of Falls and Bristol, Middletown Township was also created in 1692. Unlike the other two, however, Middletown does not border the River Delaware. It lies to the north of Bristol Township and is bounded on the west by the Neshaminy Creek (McNealy, 1970). It was in the middle. Hence the name, Middletown.

While the townships of Falls, Bristol, and Middletown were primarily agricultural communities, the new town of Bristol in the 17th century was quickly growing a significant industrial base. One of the better known and earlier industries in Bristol was shipbuilding. Bristol was, historians note, the only location in Pennsylvania above Philadelphia where such an industry was established (McNealy, 1970). Artisans built the first ship--a sloop called the Expedition--in April of 1727. In addition to sloops, Bristol produced schooners, steamboats, ferries, barges, and tugboats. The fastest ship on the River Delaware, the Morning Glory, was built in 1740, in Bristol.

The Durham Iron Works, built in 1727, produced the first iron in Bucks County. The tall brick furnaces produced items necessary for everyday life including firebacks,

cooking utensils, tools, and cannon balls, the latter of which were purportedly used in the Revolutionary War (McNealy, 1970, p.102). Grist and sawmills and iron forges followed, locating themselves in or around Bristol.

Lower Bucks County in the Twentieth Century

Despite the importance of these early industries, the agricultural industry had always been the dominant economic force in LBC. And at no other time had the conditions for farming been better than during the First World War (Kyvig, 2002). Responding to the increased demand placed upon them by urban growth and vast food shortages in Europe, farmers bought new machinery and put even larger sections of land under cultivation. Yet shortly after the war, the American economy entered into a recession. The markets for crops and for livestock had all but dried up. Land values dropped off sharply. Smaller farmers, like those in LBC, were discouraged from pressing on with little profits. "The demands of wartime had caused employment, capital investment, production, and prices to soar," wrote historian David Kyvig (2002). "[But] when the war ended and the federal government immediately cut back its spending, overall economic activity went into a tailspin" (p. 6). It would take two decades, and another World War, until the agricultural industry recovered.

W. Paul Starkey Sr., a truck farmer and producer of vegetables, took advantage of this slump. In 1920 he bought 1,800 acres in LBC consisting of 14 separate family farms along the Delaware River (The history of Falls Township, 2001). Using his knowledge of large-scale tractor farming, and drawing on the emerging technology of refrigeration, Starkey grew and trucked a variety of vegetables to markets in Philadelphia and New

York. These new technologies enabled Starkey to produce more for less. Urban residents, who often could not afford fruits and vegetables, now found these tasty items within reach. The conditions were ripe, and the Starkey Farms Company prospered.

Like Starkey Farms before him, Karl C. King, in 1929, purchased a 5,800-acre tract of land and called his new company King Farms (King, 1974). In addition to what Starkey produced, King added beets, broccoli, rhubarb, and spinach. By employing advanced agricultural techniques, King ensured that all land was in constant production. Embracing technological innovations together, Starkey and King made farming a large-scale industry in LBC and prospered. That they did well during the Great Depression speaks to the benefits of their economies of scale.

Small and large farming alike did exceptionally well during the Second World War. Like the previous war, markets were intensified by labor migration patterns. Farmers in LBC, wrote county historian George Lebegern (1975), experienced "incredible prosperity." "...Their incomes nearly doubl[ed]" (p. 134). Bucks County had a higher value of farm production in 1950 than did most of the counties in the United States ("Farm Production," 1952, p.A1). The 3,751 farms in Bucks County grossed \$134 more per acre than did farms elsewhere in the country (Lebegern, 1975).

This prosperity, however, would not last. Between 1950 and 1959, there was a 37 percent decline in the number of active farms in Bucks County (Lebegern, 1975, p.134). Across the nation, this "...exodus from the land," wrote historian Eugenia Kaledin (2000), "represented one of the greatest demographic shifts in contemporary history." "The shift to agribusiness, the control of gigantic farms created from the consolidation of small farms--...with the help of government subsidies--did little to improve the quality of

life for most farm workers..." (p. 69). An agricultural history some 300 years long had come to an end.

More of Everything

"We need more steel mills!," screamed the title of Bryant Putney's 1947 article in *The Nation*. "America's industrial plant," wrote Putney, "is too small to meet the immense demands of a full-employment economy." "...The steel outlook is...one of the gravest in the economic picture" (p. 95). Years earlier, though, United States Steel had embarked on a record breaking expansion program so as to bring the total annual capacity to more than 100,000,000 tons of steel--a record in the history of the corporation (Fisher, 1951). Still, the nation wanted more steel. This increased demand stemmed from the backlog of demands not met during the war years, particularly in the area of housing, automobiles, appliances, and other products requiring steel. American industries needed to produce more than ever before.

When the Second World War ended on August 14, 1945, most of Western Europe lay devastated. Some cities were in complete ruin. Clean water was in short supply.

The winter of 1946-47 [wrote historian James Patterson] had been the worst in memory for western Europeans. Blizzards and cold in Great Britain, France, and Germany had brought commerce and transportation virtually to a standstill, creating frightening shortages of winter wheat, coal, and electricity. The gears of Big Ben froze, and England at one point was but a week away from running out of coal (Patterson, 1996, p. 130).

These conditions, the American leaders well knew, bred "economic discontent" among Europeans (Patterson, 1996, p. 130). A social climate such as this was fertile ground for Communism, something most Americans feared terribly. In response, Congress passed the Marshall Plan in 1947. The Marshall Plan was a stimulus package that aimed to

support European growth in the rebuilding of their economies, particularly in the areas of heavy industry.

Yet the Marshall Plan was made up of more than simple humanitarian undertones. "...The aid," Patterson (1996) explains, "would give the Europeans the means not only to rebuild themselves but also to buy American goods. The Marshall Plan, in short," he continued, "would abet American prosperity as well as European recovery" (p. 130). By perpetuating a healthy open market system, Communism, which posed a threat to American democracy and world power, could be held in check. As President Truman's Secretary of State Dean Acheson put it:

These measures of relief and reconstruction have been only in part suggested by humanitarianism. Your Congress has authorized and your Government is carrying out, a policy of relief and reconstruction today chiefly as a matter of national self-interest (Zinn, 1995, p. 430).

Two decades later, the economies of Germany, Italy, and Japan would forcibly return to compete with America once again. But for the moment, America was the most powerful economic force in the world.

The Coming of Steel to Lower Bucks County

While the postwar American economy was, at first, slow to produce the products and jobs needed to satisfy the wants of its citizens, this quickly changed. In the early years following the war, industries struggled to meet the demands placed upon them by returning veterans and their new families. The already high consumer demand for goods and services was pushed even higher by what one historian referred to as "...the most amazing social trend of the postwar era": the baby boom (Patterson, 1996, p. 77). In 1946 some 2.2 million couples said their vows. Before the end of the year, an

unprecedented 3.4 million babies were born--four million more were born every year between 1954 and 1964 (Patterson, 1996, p. 77). The demand for consumer products was never greater.

As part of its expansion program, U. S. Steel began looking for ways to service the new markets along the East Coast, for this market was one of the largest steel markets in the world. Interest in locating steel closer to the consumer grew considerably when the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed the "basing point-pricing system" in 1948, thus forbidding corporations from building into their prices the costs associated with transportation (The history of Falls Township, 2001, p. 137). A year earlier, the Federal Trade Commission brought charges against 100 companies associated with the steel industry for these practices. But before the Trade Commission arguments moved forward, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed this system in another case (i.e., The Cement Case) (The history of Falls Township, 2001, p. 137). U.S. Steel, fearing a similar decision, began quoting prices from the mill.

Prior to this decision, U.S. Steel and many other companies would charge the same amount for a product regardless of where customers were located. By doing so, companies force customers near them to pay more for a product than it is worth. With the disbanding of this system, then, the distance between steel and consumer became a fundamental factor when competing with other steel industries for the same contracts.

The availability of iron ore also presented a problem, as well as an opportunity. Prior to U.S. Steel's eastward expansion, iron ore had been extracted from the Lake Superior region: Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. But the Second World War had drained nearly a half billion tons of ore from this source, raising the issue of depletion

and the need for conservation (Fisher, 1951). A search for other deposits found Venezuela a suitable target. Lower Bucks County, much of it along the banks of the Delaware River, seemed like an ideal place to build a steel mill and to establish a seaport where foreign sources of ore could be unloaded.

On an early spring day in 1948, Thomas B. Stockham--former Mayor of Morrisville and representative of Manor Real Estate and Trust Company--approached Paul and Austin Starkey, of Starkey Farms Company, and made them an offer on their 1,884 acre tract of land. Although the actual offer is unknown, the Starkey family sold their land for \$800 per acre, an amount which was unprecedented in LBC. Word of this sale spread, and soon \$800 an acre turned to \$1,000 an acre, but Stockham kept buying. Sixty properties and 3,800 acres later, at an average price of \$1,300 an acre, Stockham handed over the property to the Carnegie Illinois Steel Corporation on March 13, 1950. Nine months later, in December of 1950, U.S. Steel announced their plans to build Fairless Steel Works, the largest integrated steel mill built at one time in the history of the country. The mill honored U.S. Steel's President Benjamin F. Fairless.

The coming of U.S. Steel sparked an entire industrial and population boom. A series of advertisements published in the *Delaware Valley U.S.A.*--a publication of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* newspaper--highlighted these changes. "From farm land to booming industry in just two years is the story of the Fairless Works of the United States Steel," read an advertisement entitled, "Another step forward in the Delaware Valley" ("Another Step," 1953). It described the "enormity" of this new industry in a language that reflected power, speed, strength, and efficiency:

nine hungry open-hearth furnaces housed in a building a quarter mile long...capacity of 1,800,000 tons of steel...world's fastest cold-reduction

mill...in a single minute a mile of steel ribbons rolls out of it...strip steel processed at the rate of 1,000 feet a minute ("Another Step," 1953).

A year earlier, this same publication spoke to the speed at which the plant was being built, suggesting that "records are being broken to complete the ultra-modern Fairless Works." It, too, spoke to the power behind this new industry, referring to the "ten-story high furnaces" with their "gargantuan appetites," able to "gobble up 84 carloads of iron ore, coke, and limestone everyday" ("Fairless Steel," 1952, p. 25).

"If you like to watch industry flex its muscles, and aren't allergic to noise, dust, and heavy truck traffic," wrote the *Philadelphia Inquirer* magazine in 1951, "take a tour of the countryside around Philadelphia. There on former farm lands and meadows, you'll find the nation's productive capacity growing in an amazing way" (*Philadelphia Inquirer* magazine, 1951, November 11, p. 2). The steel mill also attracted many other industries and businesses to the area. The proximity to steel enabled one to profit from cheaper transportation costs. This factor, alone, may have lured the National Tube Company, American Steel and Wire, and the Kaiser Metal Products Plant to LBC. Previously established industries like Kaiser, for example, expanded current operations in order to capitalize on these new markets.

Across the river in New Jersey, many other factories and businesses were established in order to supply the growing demand for steel related products, or other services related to the area's growth. There was an "almost endless list of other firms" expanding or enlarging their plants. In fact, it was estimated that "some 270 businesses planed to build in this boom region" (*Philadelphia Inquirer* magazine, 1951, November 11, p. 2). "These estimates, though," warned one publication,

are on the conservative side--the boom will be even greater than the present projections indicate. If only half of what you are told comes about, this area will have the greatest industrial boom in the history of the country ("Financial Basis," 1952, p. 28).

Earlier that same year, U.S. News and World Report called the Delaware Valley "the future Ruhr Valley of America" ("Ruhr Valley," 1952, p. 26).

Everybody Needs a Roof

The first pioneers of this industrial boom were the thousands of steel construction workers and their families who settled within the Philadelphia-Bristol-Trenton area, all within a short distance from the emerging new steel plant. Housing in the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, was in short supply, and what was available was quickly exhausted or priced out of reach for the common laborer (the housing shortage will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3). In turn, thousands of construction workers purchased house-trailers. Hager's article entitled "Trailer Towns and Community Conflict in Lower Bucks County" chronicled some of the initial reactions of the community to this new trailer-home population. The community feared that such a large transient population of workers would disturb the peaceful order believed to exist in the area. In the end, though, "despite...hostilities, misunderstandings, and resentments," Hager (1954) wrote, "there was no record of any serious clash between trailer residents and local communities" (p. 36).

In order to meet additional housing needs directly related to the steel mill and the influx of other business and industry, U.S. Steel financed construction of a housing development called Fairless Hills--a community of 4,000 houses on 2,000 acres of land not far from the mill. It was within easy reach, "but not too close to its smoke stacks"

("New Towns," 1951, p. 141). Fearing the stigma associated with company towns, U.S. Steel hired realtor John Galbreath to build the community through the Danherst Corporation--a corporation owned by Galbreath. The Danherst Corporation began assembling the first of its 4,000 Gunnison prefabricated houses on April 14, 1951 (U.S. Steel owned Gunnison) (The history of Falls Township, 2001). By encouraging the formation of an independent building corporation, U.S. Steel diffused the possibility of an employee/employer conflict over the housing situation. This cut the ties of employee dependence and employer control, leaving a sense of individual home-ownership, which was, if only an illusion, the foundation to the postwar American dream.

The Origins of Levittown

It is understood that 20 farmers from LBC joined forces in the spring of 1951 and approached realtor Virgil Wille, an associate of William T. Wright Company in Newtown. They wished to sell their property jointly, rather than separately, under the assumption that a greater value per acre could be achieved. As the story goes,

one of these farmers proceeded to a party in Trenton, became inebriated, and boasted to his friends that he had sold his farm (rather than listed it for sale) to a big developer like Levitt and Sons, Inc. on Long Island. A newspaper reporter at the party wrote a headline story that Levitt was coming to Bucks County (The history of Falls Township, 2001, p. 206).

William J. Levitt, president of Levitt and Sons, Inc., was said to have called the company upon hearing of this proposed sale, for he had no information on this purchase, nor did he know anything about Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Through a series of events that has not, as of this writing, been recorded, Levitt and Sons soon began purchasing land in LBC.

The population boom in LBC, which followed the great industrial expansion of U.S. Steel, brought not only a need for housing but also a great demand for services. The milkman and the mail carrier became almost as important as doctors and dentists. Buyers and browsers swamped local stores. Shops in Bristol and Trenton could not stock their shelves fast enough. In one year, the Morrisville Bank added 2,000 accounts and expanded its deposits by half ("Another Step Forward," 1953, p. 29). Its president, Herman L. Margerum--who was described as "busier than an overworked bee"--treated himself to a \$500 desk and soft carpet, anticipating a move to a bigger and better office. "I told the directors at our last meeting," said Margerum, "that they would have to wipe their feet before they came in" (*Philadelphia Inquirer* magazine, 1951, November 11, p. 2).

The Bell Telephone Company of Pennsylvania assured residents of "more and better telephone service!" Their 1953 ad featured a picture of a stocky black, finger-dial Windsor telephone hovering high above a picture of a sprawling Levittown. "We're pushing ahead with an expansion program that never ends," the ad read. "We've added thousands of people to the telephone team...for it is our job...and our responsibility...to provide telephone service when it's needed and where it's needed" ("Another Step Forward," 1953, p. 32). All businesses prospered.

Ready or Not, Here We Come

While the Delaware River had been responsible for the placement of the region's earlier industries, the same river would now provide a different generation of people with new forms of social and economic growth. The path of the Delaware River from

Trenton, New Jersey to the Atlantic Ocean, wrote one magazine, resembled "the horn of plenty...spilling over with opportunities for pleasant and interesting living" (*Delaware Valley U.S. A.*, 1958, September 23, p. 16). However, was LBC ready for such a cornucopia of change? Barry Norman Checkoway, in his 1977 dissertation entitled Suburbanization and Community: Growth and Planning in Postwar Lower Bucks County, Pennsylvania, claimed that LBC was ill prepared for changes of this size.

"There never developed in LBC before 1950 a climate conducive to growth," wrote Checkoway (1997, p. 72). Since the first settlers began clearing the land for farming in the seventeenth century, the entire region--with the exception of a few market centers--remained primarily a handful of scattered agricultural communities. The population, too, remained fairly small and unchanged through the years. In the century between 1810 and 1910, for example, Bristol Township gained only 984 people (1,008 and 1992 respectively) (U.S. Census Bureau). Urbanization and suburbanization were occurring, but only in areas west of Philadelphia. While Checkoway points to accessibility as an important factor in understanding non-growth--for LBC was plagued with poor roads and limited railroad and trolley service--he also draws attention to the power of local culture, particularly ideas of individualism and the decentralization of government and authority. Indeed, with the belief that they had left behind a system of oppression and control in Europe, many early settlers in America were resistant to those who encouraged them to reunite themselves under a centralized power structure in their new communities. Why should they discard a system only to rebuild it at a later date? They sought a style of life different from what they had fought so hard to leave behind.

These ideas, over generations, became deeply embedded in the social fabric of community life.

The culture of LBC before the postwar industrial boom retained many of the ideas, values, and beliefs cherished by the first settlers of William Penn's Holy Experiment. This experiment took on a reality of its own through Penn's Great Law of 1682, which, among other things, "abolished the English law of primogeniture," allowing property to be divided among all family members, not just the eldest son; authorized the "disposing of real-estate," so long as it was done in the presence of two witnesses; and most importantly, guaranteed religious freedom, that he or she "shall freely and fully enjoy his or her Christian liberty...without any interruption or reflection" (Davis, 1975a, p. 43). Free to practice a new way of life, early settlers formalized a unique worldview, one that stressed individual property rights and a sense of freedom in daily affairs that they had never had before. Settlers were less likely to support the centralization of control and decision making through the creation of town centers and other organized forms such as townships. Although the county created many townships in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, they were often politically weak. Settlers, particularly Quakers, felt that the province and its style of life could be controlled best through counties (Lemon, 1972). Over time, residents embedded these ideas within the social fabric of daily life in LBC.

The evolution of this unique cultural perspective found its way into and shaped the economic institutions of LBC, which were oriented more toward local markets (i.e., Bristol and Newtown) than large urban centers (i.e., Philadelphia and New York). Facilitating this "localism" was an "anti-urban imagery" created by the local press

(Checkoway, 1977, p. 59). Local newspapers at the turn of the twentieth century often criticized city life for its congestion and inadequate housing conditions.

The city industrial workers has one chance in eight of living to be 70 years old [wrote the *Bristol Courier* in 1926]. The farmer has once chance in three....There, in a nutshell, you have a graphic picture of what urban civilization is doing to us. Health is close to the soil (Checkoway, 1997, p. 59).

By emphasizing the disadvantages of the city life and promoting the advantages of small town life, newspapers strengthened the "spatial separation" and "cultural distance" between the two (Checkoway, 1977, p. 60).

This small town tradition dominated the political structures of LBC as well. For example, there existed a resistance to outside governmental interference: monies offered by the state and federal government for local projects were often rejected (Checkoway, 1977; Mitchell & Breese, 1954). Transformation and modernization meant an increase in taxes and the powerful Republican machine prided itself on keeping taxes to a minimum. Further, since LBC was primarily an agricultural community with independent farmers owning much of the land, zoning ordinances, planning commissions and subdivision regulations did not exist. Many surely believed there was not a need. Public services, too, were limited. The majority of residents had their own wells for water and drain fields for the disposal of sewage, assuming they had indoor plumbing.

"Whenever we built in the past," recalled Bill Levitt in a 1954 television program,

we found local government experienced with meeting the problems of a modern community. But here in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, we found local services on the level of 1900...there was no water, no sewers, no highway department, no adequate police [and fire] departments--we had to start from scratch (Katzander, 1954).

Under these conditions, large-scale industries, like steel and housing, met little resistance from local government. In fact, developers and newcomers alike often had to reach out to government officials at their private residences, calling on them after hours in order to conduct business ("New Towns," 1951).

LBC was not prepared for this modern industrial boom, both in industry and in housing. "Developments of this scale," argued the director of the University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Urban Studies, James Mitchell, in 1951, "always strike in places not prepared for them" ("New Towns," 1951, p. 138). Small developers and industries alike found the region unattractive. Only organizations as large as Levitt and Sons Inc., The U.S. Steel Corporation, and The Danherst Corporation could develop an infrastructure where one did not exist and make it profitable. We started with "absolutely nothing," Levitt said,

and everything had to be done at once. We had to build houses for people to live in. We had to build a water system, a sewer system. You have to set up a police department, put in roads, [and put in] street lights so that people feel secure (Katzander, 1954).

Within a period of four years, Levitt and Sons, Inc. would build the 10th largest city in the state of Pennsylvania, Levittown, with a population over 70,000 people living within 40 separate sections (or neighborhoods) totaling 17,311 houses. Levittown stretched across four municipalities: the townships of Bristol, Falls, and Middletown and the borough of Tullytown (see figure one below). Not only did businesses surpass the expectations of owners, but school populations boomed and church attendance soared--even participation in civic and volunteer associations were at an all time high. In 1958, for example, "...two thirds of the children in Bucks County attended schools in buildings

that did not exist seven years earlier" (*Delaware Valley U.S.A.*, 1958, September 23, p. 35).

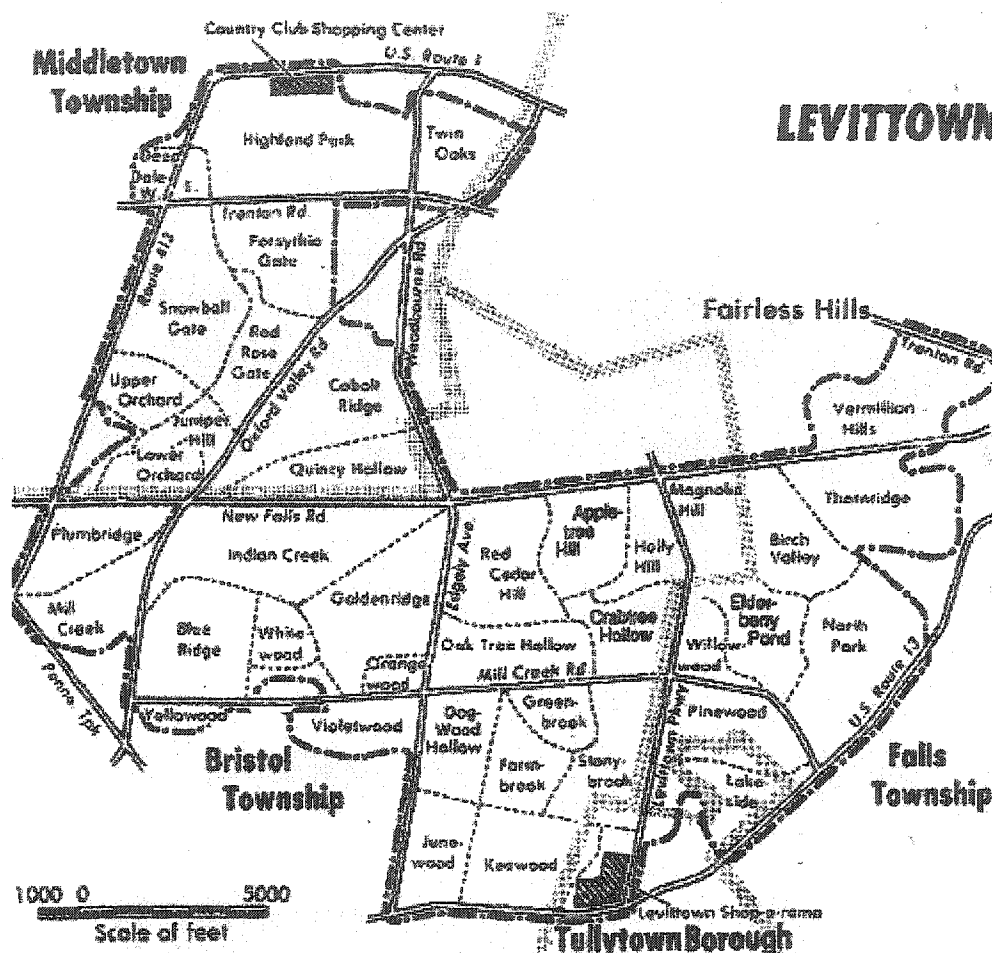


Figure 1. Map of Levittown, Pennsylvania.

Profits Outweigh Problems

In January of 1952, Ross L. Leffler, assistant executive vice president of the U.S. Steel Corporation, commented at length on the impact U.S. Steel would have upon the economy of the Philadelphia area. After speaking to the number of jobs steel would

bring to the region, both at its plant and at other secondary businesses, Leffler ended with a short story:

A year or so ago, the editor of a California newspaper was asked if a new steel mill in his town had created any serious problems. The editor replied, 'Yes, we have had some very real problems, but we just wish we had a hundred more that would be as profitable' ("Tells Conference," 1952, p. 6).

Leffler's comment set the tone for the community's response to steel. "In all the arguments for and against big steel," read the *Bucks County Traveler* in 1953, "one fact has been pretty well neglected: many sections of the country would give almost anything to have a Fairless Works in their backyard" ("Has 'Big Steel,'" 1953, p. 13). Voices in support of steel were often the only voices heard.

In an early study assessing the attitudes of local political and civic leaders toward industrialization and population influx in LBC, Bressler and Westoff found that two-thirds (67 percent) of their pool of leaders were in favor of the upcoming events, while the remaining third (33 percent) were not (Bressler and Westoff, 1954). Those in favor said things like "...more money will be spent here in any twelve months than has been spent here in the last ten years," and "we'll finally get a city sewage system in the area." Those who disapproved said, "there aren't many places with traditions that are worth something. They should have left ours be," and "there will be too many Negroes coming in here for my tastes" (Bressler and Westoff, 1954, p. 237). In the end, the researchers point to status in the local power structure as the common denominator, where those with greater power had more favorable opinions toward industrialization than those with less power and status. Still, others who directly benefit from local jobs put it more bluntly:

"they are all 'damn sure' that big steel is good for this county" ("Has 'Big Steel,'" 1953, p. 13).

In the midst of this optimism, many residents--former artists and commuters to the city--panicked and "took flight at the news" (Mitchell and Breese, 1954, p. 20). They sold their homes and went elsewhere. Some farmers were able to sell their land and buy two to three times as many acres in places like Maryland and parts of Delaware.

Other farmers, like Karl King of King Farms Company, kept their land. It now sat adjacent to the steel mill, and continued to produce vegetables for distribution to markets in Philadelphia and New York. However, King--newspaper reporter, turned farmer, turned congressional representative--faced a different problem. In 1954, his yields fell off sharply, a loss of \$150,000, the first great loss in the history of King Farms Company. The immediate leaf discoloration and stunted size of the vegetables puzzled experts from local state colleges and chemical companies. King decided not to run for a forth congressional term, but chose instead to return to the farm in order to assist with the emerging crisis.

"It was 1958 before we realized what was happening to us," King wrote in his 1974 autobiography (p. 176). He concluded that the crop suffered from air pollution from the steel mill--a subject of which little was known at the time. King instituted a suit for \$1,540,000 in damages in 1961, and after a grueling 10 years, agreed to an out-of-court settlement, something the judge urged both sides to do. One of many situations that concerned King was the limited pool of pollution experts from which he could draw.

"...We had difficulty securing experts for out testimony," King (1974) wrote, "because

the steel company promptly hired the few men who, at that time knew something about air pollution damage to vegetation" (p. 177).

Soon after filing the suit, King realized that his vegetable operation would not survive. "We eventually ceased operations completely," he wrote, "and sold off all equipment in a big farm sale" (King, 1974, p. 177). After 32 years of King Farms Company, an operation that even President Eisenhower applauded, the doors had finally closed.

Out With the Old, In With the New

As this building boom emerged, news reporters and journalists were quick to cover the unfolding events. Many of these news reports featured subtitles like "2,600 acre site for plant," "to build 200 houses a week," "real-estate developing four lane highway," "house sales...total nearly 5 million dollars," and "oil companies expanding." In 1952, the *Bristol Courier*--a popular daily paper born in the nineteenth century--reported "there is hardly a well known business publication which has not devoted some space...to the actual or potential growth of this metropolitan area" ("Tells Conference," 1952, p.1).

But articles praising the new and emerging developments in LBC were not alone. Other news carried titles like "prosperity and headaches," "growing pains expected," "traffic another problem," and "board meets to discuss problems created in county." The most telling headlines were those that addressed the impact of steel upon the local agricultural community: "giant steel mill displace farmers," "hundreds to lose homes," "spinach having a rough time: crop being crowded out by Levitt's builders as project goes

forward," and "rural life to vanish, business interests have hopes of vast trade increase" ("Bristol Township Board," 1952; "Discuss Problems," 1952; "Spinach," 1951; and "Giant Steel Mills," 1951).

Through these observations, we can see the decline of one culture, farming, and the emergence of yet another, heavy industry. The agricultural story that had long been apart of the social fabric of LBC would soon end. The transformation from a rural county to an urban one was dramatic. It was, wrote Lebegern (1975), a "human ecological revolution" (p. 36). The population increased by 40 percent between 1940 and 1950 and 177 percent between 1950 and 1960 (49,504 / 69,343 and 69,343 / 191,806 respectively) (U.S. Census Bureau). By 1960, 75 percent of the county was considered urban (Lebegern, 1975).

Machines in the Garden

At no time in its history did LBC ever witness the size and sheer number of machines brought in by U.S. Steel, Levitt and Sons, Inc., and the Danherst Corporation. "An armada of giant earthmoving machines--tractors, bulldozers, trucks, etc.--," a local history book explained, "roamed over the spinach and asparagus fields, snorting into the earth and lurching over the terrain" (The history of Falls Township, 2001, p. 141). Machines transformed entire landscapes. Taken together, these three corporations cleared approximately 11,300 acres. An estimated 10 million cubic yards of earth-- "enough to fill the Empire State Building five times"--was moved by U.S. Steel alone in order to raise its entire elevation 20 feet above river level (The history of Falls Township, 2001, p. 141).

Levitt and Sons, Inc. used similar machines to clear the land. A promotional film produced by the Ford Motor Company in 1956 ironically entitled "The Quiet Revolution" displayed the many uses of the Ford tractor in Levittown, the "symbol," said the narrator, "of modern American living." The Ford Motor Company promoted itself as the backbone of the housing industry. "From Levittown to Los Angeles," whispered the narrator, "the quiet revolution continues, as a great industry provides better homes for modern American living."

Since the days of William Penn, residents of southeastern Pennsylvania have lived an agricultural story, one that prided itself on small town life. The great industrial boom of the mid-twentieth century, however, produced a radically different story, one with little resemblance to the former. To capture the evolution of this story, specifically from the perspective of the Levittown resident--that mid twentieth century newcomer--is the essence of this project. Before moving forward, though, I believe it is necessary to review the history of housing, especially as it pertains to mass suburbanization in the early 1950s. It is to this history that I now turn.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORY OF HOUSING

To rightfully address the business of building homes from its infancy as a disconnected body of builders, building anywhere from one, two, to three homes a year, to a politically and economically powerful industry, building millions of homes a year, one must first sketch out the social context of this business in the 1920s and early 1930s. For it was within these years that the business of building homes both rose and fell in great extremes. The social, political, and economical climate, too, changed dramatically, influencing the rise of a new benevolent President, and social reforms leading to great social change.

Early Twentieth Century

It is a common understanding that the decade of the 1920s was a prosperous one, and it was. "But that prosperity," as social historian Howard Zinn (1995) reminds us, "was concentrated at the top" (p. 373). Between 1921 and 1927, overall wages increased. Within this same period, the number of people unemployed fell from 4,270,000 to 2 million. For many, the times were good. For many others, they were great. However, the distribution of wealth of this decade was extremely skewed. One-tenth of one percent of the families at the top received as much income as 42 percent of the families at the bottom (Zinn, 1995, p. 373). For the building business, 1925 was a peak year, with 937,000 houses built and sold (Gervasi, 1946, p. 78). The more depressing news of poor working conditions, labor struggles and general poverty was hidden--this type of

information was not disseminated. As Zinn (1995) states, "there were enough well-off people to push the others into the background" (p. 374).

Good economic times, however, would soon end, as would the invisibility of those in poverty. The roaring twenties came to a screeching halt in October of 1929. The stock market crash of this year marked the beginning of the Great Depression, a period of years stretching on into the Second World War. It would be an epoch in our social, political, and economic history of catastrophic proportions--an epoch referred to as the "crucial era" (Nash, 1998).

The Ford Motor Company, which had employed 128,000 workers in 1929, had only 37,000 remaining in 1931 (Zinn, 1995, p. 378). U.S. Steel, employing 224,980 workers in 1929, had not a single full-time employee on April 1, 1933 (Levine & Levine, 2002, p. 30). Put simply, 15 million, or 33 percent of the workforce in 1933, were without jobs (Nash, 1998, p. 3).

Without work and the financial means to support daily living expenses, many individuals lost their homes. In the five years between 1929 and 1934, there were 1,020,000 foreclosures, at times reaching 1,000 foreclosures a day (Gervasi, 1946, p. 78; and Jackson, 1985, p. 193). The business of building homes fell 95 percent. Putting all of this into perspective, one early report suggested that "the builders trade...never really recovered" (Gervasi, 1946, p. 78). Joseph Mason (1982), in his richly informative History of Housing in the U.S.: 1930-1980, put it bluntly: "the industry just died" (p. 6).

Confidence in democracy, in capitalism, and in freedom had diminished. The human spirit had been crushed. Large numbers of people, some to protest the conditions, others simply in need of shelter, camped outside the White House, erecting primitive

communities made of tarpaper and cardboard (later called Hoovervilles). People walked around with their pants pockets pulled out; they were Hoover-pockets. In Chicago, it was the same story. Mayor Anton Cermak warned a house committee. "[T]he federal government," he said, "could either send relief to Chicago, or it would have to send troops" (Kennedy, 1999, p. 88). John Steinbeck, in his classic book The Grapes of Wrath, is said to have referred to people of the depression era as "dangerous" (Zinn, 1995, p. 380).

The American people responded to President Hoover's inaction by electing Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) as President in November of 1932. It was up to FDR to regain the confidence of the American people. To do this he had to first reorganize the economy and stabilize it (Zinn, 1995, p. 383). In what is now called The Hundred Days, FDR began to rebuild and repair the economic system, and along the way, he began to rebuild peoples' trust (Nash, 1998). Only eight days after becoming President, FDR initiated a series of radio chats with the American people. "I want to talk for a few minutes with the people of the United States about banking," said the President in his first radio address (Nash, 1998, p. 33). He did so in a clear and simple, jargon-free language, and at the same time humanized the White House with an "infectious optimism" (Nash, 1998, p. 26). FDR assured the American people that help was on the way.

One of the first innovations toward restoring the nation's confidence was the establishment of the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) in June of 1933, and later, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in June of 1934. Years later, the FHA would be viewed as "...the most significant housing legislation in U.S. history." "[N]o other government agency," wrote Mason (1982), "had done so much for so many at such low

cost to the taxpayer" (pp.10, 65). Essentially, both programs (HOLC and FHA) aimed to protect and to promote home ownership. Before 1932, home loans were issued with three to five year maturities requiring 40 to 50 percent down payments (O'Connell, 1989, p. 185). Under the current economic conditions, individuals simply could not make these steep payments. The HOLC, and later the FHA, insured long term mortgage loans, covering 90 percent of the value and extending the repayment period to twenty-five to thirty years, which thereby lowered monthly payments (O'Connell, 1989). According to housing historian Kenneth Jackson (1985), these agencies "...[did] not build houses or lend money...they induce[d] lenders who [had] money to invest it in residential mortgages by insuring them against loss with the full weight of the U.S. Treasury (p. 203).

All of this government intervention, however, was new for the people of this period. Following the First World War and on into the 1920s, the federal government had taken a more passive role in the affairs of American daily life. 'American Individualism' was the catch phrase of the day; it was also the title of President Herbert Hoover's book. Experts managed social problems. Scientists, using the famed and well respected scientific method, embarked on social engineering projects in an attempt to rid society of its ills, thus stabilizing the societal and therefore the economical order (i.e., The American Eugenics Movement). Individualism, wrote Nash (1998), was the "basic foundation of a democratic society" (p. 23).

With the advent of the Great Depression, and the life threatening conditions that followed, people began to question the limited success that these experts had in stabilizing the economic order. Capitalism--the essence of American individualism--had

failed them. How could it again be trusted? People, then, began to look more toward the federal government, rather than the individual expert, for help.

Many of the policies put forth by FDR, which aimed to alleviate unemployment and mortgage foreclosures, thus promoting a secure economic system, helped facilitate a change in thinking about the government's role in daily affairs. The largest agency born out of the emergency policies of FDR's "100 days" was the Works Progress Administration (WPA). In eight years, the WPA employed 8.5 million persons (7 percent of the workforce) at a total cost of \$11 billion dollars (Kennedy, 1999, p. 253). These once unemployed persons "built half a million miles of highways and nearly a hundred thousand bridges" (Kennedy, 1999, p. 253).

FDR also proposed a plan for economic security, in light of any other future depressions. What evolved was the social security program. It was a "measure of prevention" and a "method of alleviation." "No one can guarantee this country against the dangers of future depressions," said Roosevelt, "but we can reduce those dangers" (Kennedy, 1999, p. 270). In 1935, this program offered some 26 million workers a measure of security from such dangers. The policies of FDR's New Deal changed the character and climate of American life. It did so because it changed the relationship between Americans and their government. This "restructuring," Nash (1998) declared, "amounted to nothing less than an organizational revolution" (p. 1).

The home building trade, as did many other businesses and industries, indirectly benefited from the elevated social and economic conditions. Housing historian Joseph Mason (1982) put this relationship in simple terms: "homes are only built and bought by people with jobs, an assured financial base, and confidence in the future" (p. 9). An

increase in the number of houses built and sold following the New Deal initiatives highlighted the return of better living and working conditions. Rising above an unprecedented low of 93,000 homes built in 1933, builders, by 1937, had completed and sold 336,000. The building of homes had increased about 100,000 a year. In 1940 alone, there were 603,000 homes completed (Mason, 1982, p. 30). Builders found financing, buyers, and conditions favorable to taking risks. And as history would tell, great risks in the business of building homes were often met with great rewards.

Housing and the Second World War

The Second World War, beginning on September 1, 1939, and ending on August 14, 1945, transformed the social and economic and political order of America. One of the most significant changes occurring during the war years was domestic mobilization--the large migration of men, women, and children to specific regions for the purpose of war work. Housing historian Gwendolyn Wright (1983) aptly refers to these areas as "arsenals of democracy," taking the phrase from one of FDR's fireside chats (p. 242; Nash, 1998, p. 125). Arsenals were those areas employing thousands of people who worked to produce planes, tanks, guns, ships, and other war materials. Large plants and factories, under government contracts, switched gears and retooled their machinery to aid the war effort.

Such a dramatic mobilization of people, however, produced new problems concerning adequate shelter. San Diego, for example, doubled its population during the war. Los Angeles gained an additional 30 percent in four years, as did the San Francisco Bay Area. "The war transformed the once rural West Coast into an urban society," wrote

Gerald Nash (1998, p. 165). Columbia University historian Alan Brinkley (1996), commenting on these demographic shifts, referred to this mobilization as "the single biggest ethnic migration in American history" (p. 315).

Between 1910 (when the first great migration began) and 1940 [Brinkley writes], approximately 1.5 million blacks moved from the south to the north. In the 1940s alone, 2 million African Americans left the south and 3 million more moved in the twenty years after that. The migration brought substantial numbers of them closer to the center of the nation's economic, cultural, and institutional life (1996, p. 315).

The communities within which these wartime industries were located, however, were ill suited to house workers and their families. The federal government responded to this emergency by providing ample financing for low-cost rental housing and easing the restrictions placed upon wartime materials (i.e., lumber, iron for nail making, copper for plumbing, etc.). This enabled wartime builders such as William J. Levitt, of New York's Levitt and Sons, Inc., and West Coast builders David D. Bohannon and Fritz B. Burns, for example, to produce thousands of homes for defense workers. "For the first time," Mason wrote (1982), "builders had an assured market and ample funds, plus a patriotic motive to get the job done quickly" (p. 31).

These builders, and many more like them, answered the call and built an unprecedented 2.3 million homes between 1940 and 1945 (Mason, 1982, p. 35). The importance of this accomplishment reaches far beyond alleviating the immediate need for housing--the rate of speed at which the number of houses were built in such a short period of time rests solely on the use of mass-production techniques, a system never used before in the building business. This particular way of building homes would set in motion a revolution in the building trade, elevating it to that of an industry.

Before the war, most builders completed a few houses a year, often building one at a time, and using profits from the sale of one home to buy materials in order to begin yet another (Mason, 1982; Wright, 1983; and Jackson, 1985). Others, however, like Levitt and Sons, Inc., built as many as 200 homes a year. Their first house--a half-timbered Tudor style with six rooms and two bathrooms--sold for \$14,500 in 1929 (Matarrese, 1997, p. 36). A year later, they would sell another 18 homes priced at \$15,000 (a company record, but one quickly broken). Between 1929 and 1941, Levitt and Sons built and sold 2,800 custom built homes on Long Island ranging from \$9,500 to \$18,000 (Levitt, 1964, p. 62). However, as war spread through Europe in the late 1930s, and on into the early 1940s, the federal government set priorities on private housing, making building materials difficult to obtain. Soon, the Japanese would attack Pearl Harbor, and the government responded by halting all private construction not essential to war needs.

William J. Levitt, President of Levitt and Sons, recalled the situation in a short memoir years later.

The times and circumstances prevented us from building the kind of luxury homes we had built up to that time [he wrote]. We couldn't permit ourselves to tread water until the war's end. So we did what had to be done. What had to be done was to change our entire concept of building. We couldn't even fall back on that comfortable cliché, 'the difficult we do immediately; the impossible takes a little longer.' We had to do the impossible immediately (Levitt, 1964, p. 60).

Levitt and Sons won a government contract to build 750 low-cost rental homes for Navy officers in Norfolk, Virginia--a place that was reported as needing "houses almost as badly as it needed destroyers" (Bernard, 1948, p. 104). For Bill, his younger brother Alfred, and their father Abraham, the Navy's need was "practically a command"

(Bernard, 1948, p. 104). "And like everything else in those days," Bill remembered (1964), "the deadline for completing them was yesterday" (p. 60).

Under these heated conditions, the Levitts did not think twice about buying and plowing under \$25,000 worth of unharvested spinach in order to begin construction early. In 18 months, they not only completed the original contract of 750 rental houses, but also acquired priorities for and completed another 1,600 row houses for shipyard workers.

"In Norfolk," Bill explained (1964), "we had for the first time all the ingredients we needed to put mass-production of houses to its first test. We had demand. We had materials and financing. We had crews and craftsmen blessed with imagination" (p. 63). Simply put, Levitt workers found new ways to do old jobs. Stick framing wall sections on the ground and lifting them into place replaced the time consuming method of building a wall from the ground up. However, the most interesting innovation came from a Levitt engineer. Sewage disposal units were built with concrete blocks, and would often take a half a day to build and install. The engineer found that burial vaults, with some minor alterations, worked very well as septic tanks. Thus, in the time it took to install one concrete block tank, Levitt and Sons now installed 15 to 20.

"Opportunities of such unprecedented scope," wrote one journalist in 1944, "taught the builders how they may give better values to customers through savings made possible by scientifically managed quantity production," a process outlined years earlier by Frederick Winslow Taylor (Sparkes, 1944, p. 11; Taylor, 1998). "Norfolk," Bill Levitt wrote, "proved that mechanically the revolution was possible, that it was one step closer to realization; and it made us hungry for a full-blown, unhampered try at mass-producing houses" (Levitt, 1964: 63). This opportunity provided Levitt and Sons with

what the same journalist called a "revolutionary gain in understanding" (Sparkes, 1944, p. 11).

Not all pre-war builders, however, could secure highly competitive war-housing contracts. Indeed, by 1942, 75 percent of all builders were out of work. Many of these men either sought jobs in war plants or enlisted in the war, most often serving in the Navy's construction battalion, the Seabees (Mason, 1982). Since the material shortages were projected to get worse, Bill put Levitt and Sons on hold (transferring the presidency to his father, Abraham) and followed his colleagues into the Navy.

The Seabees provided Bill with a "magnificent laboratory in which to experiment with low-cost mass-housing and analyze it with his peers--a chance he might never have had in civilian life" (Halberstam, 1993, p. 133). With less than a humble attitude, though, Bill would make it a point to remind others that the Navy, which, as he put it, "had the pleasure of my company, learned much more about building from me than I did from them" ("The Industry Capitalism Forgot," 1947, p. 67). Nonetheless, while in the Navy, Bill continually urged his fellow Seabees to take advantage of the projected postwar demand for housing. As Bill would say, "just beg, borrow, or steal the money and then build and build" (Halberstam, 1993, p. 133).

Bill looked forward to those postwar years where builders, like him, would capitalize on the urgent need for housing. Postwar America looked bright and prosperous for the builder. However, not everyone shared this level of optimism.

"We are all aware that there is a general fear of a postwar slump," warned George Soule in his 1942 *New Republic* article entitled "The Postwar Depression." "It has been drilled into our head that depressions follow wars" (1942, p. 74). And such a fear was

justified. Following the First World War, and peaking in 1920, inflation soured and material goods grew scarce. A depression resulted a year later as the inflated values and prices of available goods collapsed (Soule, 1942, p. 74). A decade later, after another collapse, America entered a depression of unprecedented proportions. Throughout World War II, wrote historian John Jeffries (1996), "...most Americans were less confident of victory over the Great Depression than of victory over the Axis" (p. 190). Such a perspective resulted from what Jeffries (1996) called a "depression psychosis"--the fear of a return to the depression once the stimulus of war had ended (p. 65). The conditions of depression and war leveled one's hope and expectations of brighter economic times. Now people were more cautious and prudent.

However, there were some who, in light of the wartime conditions and fears, looked optimistically to the future. In a 1943 *Atlantic Monthly* article entitled "The Unimagined America," Archibald MacLeish called upon the public to imagine and believe in a better America.

The great majority of the American people understand very well that this war is not a war only [he wrote}, but an end and a beginning--an end to things known and a beginning of things unknown. We have smelled the wind in the streets that changes weather. We know that whatever the world will be when the war ends, the world will be different. There is hardly a meeting of three men in earnestness that does not say so... We have, and we know we have, the abundant means to bring our boldest dreams to pass--to create for ourselves whatever world we have the courage to desire... Now is the time for the re-creation, the rebuilding not of the villages and towns but of a nation (pp. 59, 61).

MacLeish (1943) believed that if America failed to imagine a glorious future for itself, it would not only fall short of a victory in war, but it would also, as he put it, "lose us our victory at home" (p. 59). In addition to MacLeish, many others, including the American Legion, were concerned about what the future would hold for Americans in

general, and for the millions of returning veterans in particular. The Bonus March of 1932 where thousands of W.W.I veterans descended on Washington, demanding cash for bonuses promised to them by the federal government, had not been forgotten. President Hoover's militaristic response to that march left a number of veterans dead and many others wounded. Indeed, the American Legion did not want history to repeat itself; they wanted to protect the veterans once the war was over.

Toward this end the Legion drafted an overall bill of veteran's rights in December of 1943, and proposed it to Congress in January of 1944. In June of 1944, FDR signed it into law as the Serviceman's Readjustment Act (Ross, 1969, pp. 89-124; and Skocpol, 1996). The GI Bill of Rights, as it was called, provided all veterans with educational benefits (one-half of all college students in 1947 were veterans), readjustment benefits (unemployed veterans could collect \$20 a week for 52 weeks), and guaranteed loans for homes or for the purchase of farms or businesses (Jeffries, 1996; and Ross, 1969). Under the GI Bill, the Veterans Administration guaranteed housing loans to veterans with a fixed interest rate of 4 percent and, at times, waived the requirement for down payments.

FDR was well aware of the depression psychosis that existed. George Soule's *New Republic* article forewarning a postwar slump only put into words what was on the minds of many Americans. Even before the American Legion drafted the bill, FDR had verbalized the mounting responsibility that the federal government had in preventing a return of depression-like conditions. On July 28, 1943, FDR addressed America in one of his by now popular fireside chats.

...we are, today [he said], laying plans for the return to civilian life of our gallant men and women in the armed services. They must not be demobilized into an environment of inflation and unemployment, to a place on a bread line, or on a corner selling apples. We must, this time,

have plans ready...The members of the armed forces have been compelled to make greater economic sacrifice and every other kind of sacrifice than the rest of us, and they are entitled to definite action to help take care of their special problems (Buhite and Levy, 1992, p. 264).

It became predictable that following a fireside chat, FDR would receive thousands of letters from American listeners. It was not a surprise that FDR's talk of a veteran's entitlement to special provisions provoked heated debate, not only among politicians, but also among many American letter writers. One man wrote,

Your proposals...amount to a knife in the back of democracy...government by the doles is socialistic and the flowering of socialism is dictatorship...Paul does not want Peter's handouts (Freidel, 1990, p. 504).

Similarly, another man stated,

I believe in the system of free enterprise as opposed to bureaucratic governmental control...your boondoggling in our nation...should be stopped (Freidel, 1990, p. 506).

A less critical response to the President's plan for demobilization and reconversion, but an equally passionate one, came from a self-identified "proud Navy man's wife."

Your talk made me picture the remainder of the war as a terrific, horrible, driving black thunderstorm and the peace, the wonderful freshness and cleanness that comes when the storm is over. When that day comes, it will always be like that forever and ever (Freidel, 1990, p. 514).

The response to FDR's New Deal policy concerning the veterans was great and varied.

Critics who charged "socialism" would grow in number, and their voices would carry on into the housing issues following the war.

But You Promised

The storm referred to above ended on August 14, 1945. America's involvement in the war was over. Whether or not it was followed by a wonderful freshness or a sense of cleanness was (and still is) the subject of much debate. What is certain, though, returning veterans, in addition to their families and friends on the home-front, found certain needs and desires unmet by postwar America, particularly in the realm of housing (Wright, 1993).

Some reports suggested that veterans came home at a rate of 25,000 a week (Mason, 1982, p. 45). Others reported that the Army and Navy demobilized as many as one million veterans a month ("Mr. Wyatts Shortage," 1946, p. 105). However, since wartime America built very little housing for civilian use, housing in the postwar period quickly grew into a national crisis. The nation, it was understood, could only meet half of all housing needs. Approximately 1.5 million veterans and some 3 million civilians were forced to live doubled up with friends and relatives (Gervasi, 1946, p. 21).

President Harry Truman, aware of the growing demand, told the country, "we urgently need about 5 million additional homes--now" ("Mr. Wyatts Shortage," 1946, p. 107). "The U.S.," wrote *Fortune* magazine, "[was] suffering from a housing shortage, probably its worst since 1607, when John Smith wondered where he would spend his first night in Virginia" ("Fortune Survey," 1946, p. 266). Despite this slight exaggeration, *Fortune* reported that two-thirds of the people it surveyed in 1946 were aware of a serious housing shortage in their own communities ("Fortune Survey," 1946, p. 266).

In 1945, A *Detroit Free Press* headline read, "Dog-tired soldiers can't come home to Detroit. There aren't any houses." One classified ad listed a 7x17 foot icebox for sale.

The box, the ad stated, "could be fixed up to live in like a trailer" ("News: Housing Crisis," 1945, p. 5). One man stood on the street corner wearing a sign that read, "Must our child be born in a tent? Has anyone got an apt...call WE 0887" ("Mr. Wyatt's Shortage," 1946, p. 105). Still, five others in Norwood, Ohio called the police shortly after hearing about the arrest of a man who strangled his wife--they all wanted his house!

Veterans in Need

Earl W. Eng, a bomber pilot from St. Paul, Minnesota, was typical of this much larger group of people seeking shelter. Following the war, Earl returned to his parent's house, picked up his wife and new baby (which he had never seen) and headed to Chicago to fulfill the American Dream of homeownership (Gervasi, 1946). After days of hunting, Earl and his family were broke and homeless. Returning to the security of his parents was his only alternative.

Earl encountered what FDR feared and what wartime journalists predicted: inflation. From racketeering landlords advertising apartments for \$47.50 a month but demanding an additional \$52.50 a month to rent a few pieces of furniture, to housing prices that were well beyond the means of the average family, Earl and 3.4 million other shelter seekers faced a bleak future (Gervasi, 1946, p. 21). Homes built years before the war were priced considerably higher than their estimated worth--some increased in value almost 200 percent. For example, a \$6,000 home built in 1940 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, cost \$9,000 in 1946. One veteran from Mt. Vernon, Ohio, was asked to pay \$8,250 for a house, which, on the regular market, would bring only \$3,500 to \$4,000. This same GI wrote a government bureau of his experience.

We fellows can't possibly pay...the outrageous prices some of our so-called good citizens are asking...we've all heard a lot of talk about giving the GI a chance when he returns to civilian life. Do you suppose there's some chance that something might be done to give the ex GI a chance to make a home and also a living for his family? (Gervasi, 1946, p. 80).

The housing shortage was as serious and compelling as war itself. And Earl Eng, still empty handed after a month of house hunting, grew angry and disillusioned. "I want a place to live," he shouted loudly and publicly. "I want a home, a decent one that I can afford" (Gervasi, 1946, p. 21). Earl was not alone, however. His cries were echoed by millions of others. Indeed, these cries were far too many to ignore.

Fear of Revolt

In June of 1947, *Life* magazine ran an editorial that asked, "how do we get housed? The industry and the government aren't much help. We'd better help ourselves" ("How do we get housed," 1947, p. 36). If the government or the system of free enterprise could not relieve the housing shortage, many believed, the American public would be forced to do it themselves.

Through magazines, journals, newspapers, and even handwritten letters, many Americans informed the government and business leaders that they were dissatisfied with the housing problem. "Irritated by the scarcity of adequate shelter at adequate prices," *Life* reported,

people have become highly critical not only of the kind of deal the building industry is presently offering them, but also of the way the whole housing show is now run. They are looking for some way--public, private, either or both--that will get them housed ("How Do We Get Housed," 1947, p. 36).

Finding a home for Earl, his wife and baby, and millions of other home seekers, reported *Collier's* in 1946, "was only slightly more (or less) important than preventing the threatened disaster" (Gervasi, 1946, p. 79). Indeed, a disaster--a runaway, inflationary economy, and the social turmoil and possible social revolt that would follow--was not too far away. Capitalism had failed Americans before; it could do it again. And the American public had reasons to be afraid. The Great Depression was something they had remembered well.

In 1948, Joseph Guilfoyle and John S. Cooper, writing in the *Saturday Evening Post*, warned that the cost of home building was too high. "What few appreciate," reported Guilfoyle and Cooper (1948), "is that, saving modern miracle, it's going to stay that way for a long time" (p. 32). And it did, at least until the Housing Act of 1949. That act, however, was some years away-- the housing crisis was an immediate concern.

A special roundtable on housing convened in 1949, and sponsored by *Life* magazine, was attended by a number of housing industry leaders. The goal: to see what the industry can do to solve the problem. *Life* magazine concluded that

the American people are so dissatisfied with their housing that they are launching upon substantial public programs--federal, state and municipal. And while there is certainly room for intelligent public housing, there is a danger in the peoples' present attitude. Public programs have a way of leading to more public programs, and unless we know precisely what we are doing we could quickly find ourselves involved in housing in a highly socialistic way (Davenport, 1949, p. 74).

When putting into perspective America's attitude toward housing following the war, it is not surprising, then, that on March 22, 1947, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9835, signifying the federal government's fear of a possible social revolution. Thus, in order for the "establishment...to make capitalism more secure in the

country, and to build a consensus of support for the American Empire," wrote social historian Howard Zinn (1995), "it had to weaken and isolate the left" (p. 420). President Truman, in an attempt to protect the vulnerable economic situation, sought out--as Senator Joseph McCarthy would a few years later--those persons disloyal to the American creed of democracy: the communists. For ideas of the left, particularly that of self-government (i.e., socialism), had become popular during the depression conditions of the 1930s, and could be drawn upon, in desperation, to solve postwar problems. How much riper would the conditions surrounding the housing shortage get?

The Housing Crisis in Context

How did Americans understand the housing shortage in 1947? Particularly, why was there such a great demand for housing? And why couldn't the American system of free enterprise address the problem? There were several factors associated with the housing crisis. Taken together, however, these factors represent a broader constellation of forces, all acting upon each other, and producing a particular outcome. Indeed, no single factor can explain the complexity of this crisis.

First, the social context of that era is uniquely tied to the ideas, values, and particularly the desires that followed the war. Historian David Kennedy (1999) explores this part of life in the postwar period.

For millions of men born during and just after the Great War of 1914-18, their experience as GIs defined their generational identity as nothing else could, not even their long boyhood agony during the Great Depression. Would War II took them away from home, taught them lessons both dreadful and useful, formed their friendships, and, if it did not end them, shaped the arc of their lives ever after. For those who survived, the war laid up a store of memories that time could not corrode--indeed, memories often embroidered by time's indulgent hand (p. 712).

For men, as well as women, growing up under the fading shadow of one war, trying to survive the worst economic times of modern society during the Great Depression, and then being forcibly plunged into a Second World War lasting six long and uncertain years, forever imprinted upon their biographies a psychology of fear and skepticism. Their perspective was (and still is) a reflection of those very conditions brought about by war and economic need. Many veterans, and wartime citizens alike, had little knowledge of what it was like to live in a time of prosperity, particularly, one that was available to working class people.

Greater equality in pay and better wages overall were not, however, an indirect or unanticipated consequence of the ending war. Economists Claudia Goldin and Robert A. Margo (1992) refer to this period of leveling as the "great compression"--the narrowing of income gaps between 1930 and 1970 (p. 1). One of the most important factors when considering this compression is FDR's use of wage controls during and immediately following the Second World War (see also Mills and Rockoff, 1993; and Rockoff, 1984). These controls, along with other economical and political manipulations, and including the social norms, values and desires that come with a higher standard of living, gave rise to a large and new middle class, one that now felt they could afford, and believed they were entitled to, homeownership (Kelly, 1993, pp. 78-161; Jackson, 1985; and Dean, 1945).

These more comfortable living conditions spawned increases in family formation through marriages and birthrates. The summer of 1946 witnessed an unprecedented number of weddings. And the birth cohort that followed, ending in 1964, became known as the baby-boom generation.

While the above factors and conditions bring into perspective the dramatic and urgent need for housing, they do not, however, explain the lack of that housing. The business of building homes, it should be noted, was examined more closely and criticized more heavily than any other business in the postwar period. "Housebuilding," reported *Fortune* magazine in 1947, "is the one great sector of modern society that has remained largely unaffected by the industrial revolution" ("Let's Have Ourselves a Housing Industry," 1947, p. 63). For housing was "the industry that capitalism forgot" ("The Industry Capitalism Forgot," 1947, p. 61).

Some saw the housing shortage as "nothing less than a housing scandal" (Davenport, 1949, p. 72; "The Housing Mess," 1947; and "The Promise of the Shortage," 1946). Taking into consideration many of the published commentaries on the problems associated with the business of building homes, *Fortune* magazine leveled a critical blow to those in the business.

...[T]he housebuilding business [they wrote] is medieval in its restrictive, guildlike organization, archaic in its production methods, inadequate in its capitalization, and obscene in its politics...it is subservient to an antique trade unionism that, for half a century, had identified collective bargaining with high rates, low output, resistance to innovation, and a succession of dreary jurisdictional quarrels...Only major money and modern organization, plus brains, will ever rescue the housebuilding business from its feudal controls and its chronic incompetence ("Let's Have Ourselves a Housing Industry," 1947, p. 2; and "The Industry Capitalism Forgot," 1947, p. 61).

Indeed, housing did not resemble an industry following the Second World War. "But why couldn't people have houses like fords?," asked *Look* magazine in 1947 (Arnold, 1947, p. 21). An answer to this question was rooted in archaic building codes and practices, union labor restrictions, and the complex web of the manufacturing and distributing building materials that all seemed to suffocate the business. A lack of

standardization in building materials also played an important role in this problem (Sparkes, 1944, p. 43; Arnold, 1947; "How do we get housed," 1947, p. 36; and "Let's Rebuild our Building Codes," 1947). Simply put, builders paid too much for too little, and customers found it difficult to impossible to afford even the cheapest home on the market, which was now priced at \$10,000.

Union labor, homebuilders argued, was overpriced and underproductive. They practiced featherbedding techniques that set limits on the amount and/or kind of work they would perform. Unions also refused to use innovations in machinery and tools that would speed up productivity (i.e., cement mixers, paint spray guns, etc.), and often refused to work on projects where such technology had been used on the job. Moreover, producers of building materials were monopolistic and non-competitive, thus setting their own price and profit. All of these factors contributed toward making the price of a home far more expensive than average families could afford.

Levitt and the Housing Industry

In 1946, Levitt and Sons of Long Island, New York, was selling homes priced at \$9,990, but found that most people could not afford the \$80 monthly payment. The company realized that the market for a cheaper home was much larger than they had originally surmised. In order to reduce the price, though, and still give the consumer a house of reasonable size and property, changes would have to be made to the building conditions criticized by *Fortune* magazine. Methods of mass production would have to be utilized in order to build great numbers of homes at low cost.

The story of housing is one of great transformations. What was once a business grew into one of the most powerful industries in the nation. "It is often the case," wrote Tom Lewis (1997),

that one person in an industry rises above the rest, accrues fabulous wealth, and so dominates the public imagination to become synonymous with the enterprise itself: Rockefeller in oil; Carnegie in steel; Ford in automobiles. In the newly emerging housing industry of the 1950s it was Levitt (p. 75).

Levitt and Sons revolutionized home building and became the force that transformed a once archaic business--one that purposefully avoided technology--into an industry equal in size to that of chemicals, automobiles, or steel (Mason, 1982; and "Levitt's Progress," 1952, p. 155).

Levitt and Sons, Inc. was born during a period when many other successful businesses were closing their doors: 1929. Abraham Levitt, founder of the company, enlisted the help of his two sons William (Bill), then 22 years old, and Alfred, then 18, with the first family building project--to develop and sell off land they owned which sat adjacent to a sewer disposal plant on Long Island. Surprisingly, their first house sold quickly, as did the next four. Recalling the first year's building record of 18 houses in 1929, Bill (1964) boasted, "Years later, our crews would build eighteen houses every morning before knocking off for lunch, then come back and build seventeen more before calling it a day" (p. 62). Between 1929 and 1941, Levitt and Sons built and sold about 2,800 houses, and amassed a great deal of capital and knowledge of building which proved essential to building successfully in the postwar period.

"If the first great business figure of the American century was Henry Ford," David Halberstam (1993) wrote, "the second, arguably, was William J. Levitt" (p. 132). In his

book The Fifties, Halberstam would devote an entire chapter to Bill Levitt and his company Levitt and Sons.

Bill was eager to succeed at a young age. He dropped out of New York University in his third year because, as he put it, "I got itchy. I wanted to make a lot of money. I wanted a big car and a lot of clothes" ("Housing: Up from the potato fields," 1950, p. 70). By 1950, Bill, now 43 years old, had made the cover of *Time* magazine. They described him as a

cocky, rambunctious hustler with brown hair, cow-sad eyes, a hoarse voice (from smoking three packs of cigarettes a day), and a liking for hyperbole that causes him to describe his height (5 feet, 8 inches) as 'nearly six feet'...he is the leader of the U.S. housing revolution...the most potent single modernizing influence in a largely antiquated industry ("Housing: Up from the potato fields," 1950, p. 67).

He was his own best press agent and the company's best salesman. But, as cocky and self-confident as he was, he was not the only potent force in the Levitt business.

Alfred Levitt, arguably, was equally talented, but significantly more humble than his elder brother. At 18 years of age, Alfred put his knowledge of architectural theory and design to a test as he drafted, often on scrap pieces of paper or used lunch bags, the first Levitt house. It was an immediate success. He was a self-taught architect and a great admirer of Frank Lloyd Wright, whose ideas of open space Alfred adopted and made reality in many of the Levitt home designs. He was, from the very beginning, Vice President in charge of design and construction for Levitt and Sons.

Unlike Bill, however, who drove an expensive Cadillac convertible and wore only the finest tailored suits, Alfred drove to work in a nondescript Ford coupe and, as one early journalist noted, "didn't give a whoop how he dress[ed]" (Bernard, 1948, p. 106). He lived on 3 1/2 acres of farmland situated on then rural Long Island, and worked out of

a bare but functional office. Bill, on the other hand, rented a twelfth floor Manhattan apartment and steered the company from an office ten times the size of his younger brother. Alfred was the quiet dreamer. Bill was the public figure. In fact, it would not be unlike Alfred "to wake up at 3 a.m. with an idea for a movable storage wall" ("4,000 Houses Per Year," 1949, p. 88). Press conferences and other public gatherings made Alfred uncomfortable. He was at home with a pencil in hand, hovering over an architect's desk.

Abraham Levitt, referred respectfully to as 'father' by Bill and Alfred in public as well as in private, founded the company but quickly stepped aside, letting Bill take the reins as President. At the end of World War II, Abraham was 66 years old and did not want, nor need, the pressure of running a large building firm, for he had long since made his mark in the business world.

Abraham was admitted to the New York State Bar in 1903 and practiced real-estate law successfully until 1929. Even before graduation, Abraham wrote a well-received book on the subject. Law, though, was not his only interest. As a boy growing up in late 19th century Brooklyn, New York, he attended literary and social clubs and was a voracious reader. Bill and Alfred referred to him as the social philosopher of the family, one who lectured them on art as well as baseball. As Chairmen of the Board for Levitt and Sons, Abraham provided his sons with "legal knowledge, a philosophical outlook, and the maturity necessary for a stable company" (Wattel, 1981, p. 469).

Abraham's most visible contribution to the company was his philosophy of landscaping. Early in the company's history, Abraham sold his sons on the importance of trees, bushes, and flowers when building homes. "Almost everything we have learned

about improving the appearance of our communities," recalled Alfred, "we have learned from father. Every social idea this company had was the result of father's pressing and persuading" (Wattel, 1981, p. 470). Abraham Levitt soon became known as "Gods gift to the nurseryman" ("How They Lived," 1982, p. 82). He was a "modern Johnny Appleseed" according to his son, Bill (Levitt, 1964, p. 68).

In Levittown, Pennsylvania, Abraham set a new company record for landscaping. The largest of the Levittown homes--the Country Clubber--received "two and a half street trees, one shade tree, three fruit trees, 12 white pines or Norway spruce, 24 flowering shrubs, a climbing rose, one grapevine, 12 mountain laurels [Pennsylvania's state flower], two rhododendrons, three azaleas, and 12 myrtles" ("How They Lived," 1982, p. 82). With a landscaping budget of 8 million dollars in 1952, it is not surprising that *Fortune* magazine would draw attention to Abraham Levitt's accomplishments. "No other man in history," they wrote, "ever had so much money to spend on decorative vegetation" ("Levitt's Progress," 1952, p. 156).

Beyond the economic aspect of landscaping, one that saw trees as "nature's biggest sales agent," Abraham wanted to make practical a social philosophy that he felt very strongly about ("Don't Say it's not...", 1967, pp. 38-39; "The Economics of Trees," 1953, pp. 130-135; and "Trees," 1957, p. 161-163). Behind the vision of an aesthetically pleasing community, with its tree lined streets and patches of flowering plants and shrubbery, it was the social meaning or response that one develops in relation to such pleasing surroundings that fueled Abraham's desire to landscape. The social aspect of landscaping motivated him.

I feel an inner glow of satisfaction (in more senses than one) [wrote Abraham Levitt] when I pick and eat a ripe apple or juicy pear off my own

tree. The fact that I grew it fascinates me and gives me pleasure and contentment not purchasable anywhere...I find joy in watching nature's wonder unfold (Levitt, 1950, p. 73).

The Mass-produced Home

Toward the end of 1946, Levitt and Sons realized that in order to tap the large demand for housing, they would need to build a house cheap enough for veterans and other civilian postwar shelter-seekers to afford. According to government economists, the average worker in 1948, making \$50 a week, could afford a \$5,000 home (Guilfoyle and Cooper, 1948, p. 32). Here lay the challenge: to build a practical house at an affordable price. Alfred went to work redesigning America's most popular house: the Cape Cod Cottage.

This type of house, which had its origins in Colonial America, resurfaced in the 1930s and 1940s with great popularity. The design became a "national institution" ("The Cape Cod Cottage: Part II, "1949, p. 101). Due to the poor economic conditions of this period, the Cape Cod became the builder's economic house; it represented the cheapest amount of space that could be put together under one roof. In addition to the FHA officially approving the design of the Cape, which freed up financial resources for the builder, popular magazines such as *House and Home* gave the public its approval. Indeed, "during the decade between 1930 and 1940," read one early article, "no style was seen more often in the mass magazines than the Cape Cod Cottage" ("The Cape Cod Cottage: Part II," 1949, p. 103).

Interestingly, in 1944, three years before Levitt and Sons would reinvent this house design, *Architectural Forum* ran a three part series entitled "Planning the Postwar II

House of 194x" (for the war had not yet ended) in which they reported "the Cape Cod model is through as a first-class merchandising item, and that the builder and his collaborators would have to offer a much better product to compete successfully in the open market" ("Planning the Postwar House: Part II," 1944: 69). In such a short period of time, though, and under great demand, not only did the government and builders come to disagree, but so did realtors, banks and those tens of thousands of new Cape Cod homeowners. *Architectural Forum* could not have been more wrong.

Levitt and Sons experimented with a number of Cape Cod Cottages, testing various heating methods. They believed that the most effective and economically efficient heating method was to embed radiant heated coils into a cement pad upon which the home would sit. The method of building homes without basements, however, was prohibited under the township building codes on Long Island, an area where they intended to build 2,000 mass-produced rental homes for veterans (Matrarrese, 1997, p. 40; and "Let's Rebuild our Building Codes," 1947). This building code presented an obstacle for Levitt and Sons. But in a style and flash that would come to symbolize the influence and personality of this company as an industry leader, Bill tackled the problem head on.

In 1947, no other voice, arguably, was more powerful than that of the veteran. They had tremendous weight in all levels of government. Bill Levitt, sooner than anyone else, appreciated and capitalized on this powerful political group. The GI had access to public credit through the GI Bill and was more likely to be in the market for low-cost new housing. The GI was also, as Bill quickly realized, a great "propaganda lever" (Larrabee, 1948, p. 81). With this in mind, Bill scheduled a public hearing at the local

township hall near the site of his future project. This hearing would decide the fate of their basementless home design. His goal: to pack the town hall with as many home-hungry veterans as possible, all clamoring for their piece of the dream.

In a letter sent out to hundreds, if not thousands of people who had shown interest in the rental project, Bill warned them in capital letters:

THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF ALL! BE AT THE PUBLIC MEETING...IF YOU WANT MODERN, COMFORTABLE, BEAUTIFUL HOUSING AT A RENTAL WITHIN YOUR REACH, YOU MUST BE THERE! WE'RE DOING OUR PART; YOU MUST DO YOURS! (Matrarrese, 1997, p. 67).

Reports vary, but the company estimated 1,200 veterans in attendance. The township, under pressure, repealed the code, and by July 1, 1947, there were already 1,000 men at work on 800 Cape Cod Cottages on what was once an expanse of potato fields ("The Industry Capitalism Forgot," 1947).

In the first 12 months Levitt and Sons built 4,000 houses. Within the next three years, they would build an additional 13,447 to complete their Levittown, New York, project. "There is no secret to mass-producing houses," Bill lectured, "its merely size plus organization" ("Housing: Up from the Potato Fields," 1950, p. 71). "Everything that is wrong with U.S. housing," he continued, "can be licked by size." By 1948, *Life* magazine deemed Levitt and Sons "the nation's biggest housebuilder" ("Nation's Biggest Housebuilder," 1948, p. 75).

Bill was a master at understanding and even predicting the housing market, particularly the desires of homebuyers. He knew what people wanted and how much they could afford. "We believe that the market for custom housing, like that for custom tailoring, no longer exists," he said early into the company's first Levittown project.

"People who want to buy that kind of thing will always be able to get it, but the real market is for the ordinary, mass-produced suit of clothes...you can't build \$30,000 houses by the six thousands" (Larrabee, 1948, p. 87).

Fighting for Affordability

Indeed, homebuyers would settle for the ordinary as long as they could afford it. Thus, in order to build an affordable home for thousands of people, Levitt and Sons had to fight to overcome restrictions of design, often set by local building codes, restrictions on needed building materials, and restrictions on the use of unionized labor.

"How can building costs be cut?," *Life* magazine asked a panel of housing experts in 1949. Among the three experts on the subject representing the panel was Bill Levitt, cigarette in one hand and a raised fist in the other. His answer to the question was simple: Be big enough to fight! In his estimation, "builders...are a poor and puny lot," he spat, "too small to put pressure on materials manufacturers or the local czars of the building codes or the bankers or labor. A builder ought to be a manufacturer," he said, "and to this end must be big" (Davenport, 1949, p. 74). Bill did not consider himself a builder; he was a manufacturer of homes, and a leader of a new revolution in housing, the essence of which was size and organization.

While the showdown at the town hall in May of 1947 was arguably Levitt and Sons' first major punch in the fight against outmoded and archaic building codes and restrictions, their second and most aggressive action came five months later. Unlike Alfred, Bill loved to speak to the public. He "...makes a speech every time he gets a chance," wrote *American Magazine* reporter Tom Bernard in 1948, "usually taking that

chance to get in a dig at one or a dozen of the thousands of things he is convinced are wrong with the building industry" (p. 106). His chance came in October of 1947 when the Producer's Council invited him to talk at their annual meeting in New York City.

One journalist put into words the edgy moments that preceded Bill's speech, for it is certain that many people in the room that morning were familiar with the tactics and philosophy of this groomed industry leader.

Wearing the grin of a man who enjoys a fight [wrote one reporter], he eyed [the audience]...like a champ waltzing easily toward a nervous opponent. Then he let go with a powerhouse wallop ("I Can't Get it Wholesale," 1947, p. 10)

What angered Bill the most was the lack of control that he had in the process of building and equipping a home with all of the needed materials. This limitation stemmed from the "invisible costs of home construction"--those costs that are charged to the builder, and therefore passed onto the customer, but that do not make the product any better (Guilfoyle and Cooper, 1948, p. 32). These costs were most visible in the methods used to distribute building materials--from manufacturer, to distributor, to wholesaler, to builder. This process forced the builder to pay retail prices for essential building materials, increasing the cost of the products almost 100 percent. Bill refused to use the phrase "handling charges" to describe this mark-up process, because, as he stated, "middlemen often get their cut without seeing the building supplies" (Guilfoyle and Cooper, 1948, p. 33). "If this system were eliminated," Bill stated, jokingly, "there would be a considerable saving--if only in three penny stamps" (Larrabee, 1948, p. 115). Indeed, if a reasonable savings in one part of this process was eliminated, there would be a savings of approximately 33 percent (Guilfoyle and Rutledge, 1948, p. 115). The

savings could be passed on to the customer, making a low cost home a reality for more people.

Under the climate of these current restrictions, Bill refused to call his business an industry. And he made it a point to draw attention to this distinction during his speech to the Producer's Council.

The only reason for the dissimilarity between the house manufacturer and every other manufacturer [Bill lectured to his seated guests] is the system of distribution of raw materials by the companies largely represented in this room this morning...I say categorically that if there is to be an industry made out of this group of individuals calling ourselves the building business, you, in the producing end of materials and equipment, must set your own house in order if we are to actually become an orderly house...when by his very existence he [the distributor/middleman] contributes to the high cost of housing, then he unwittingly becomes a parasite and the malignancy grows and grows until today we are faced with a national emergency...we don't need him and yet he occupies pretty much the same position as Mr. Petrillo's standby musicians at a record broadcast...A large company...can perform where individuals are helpless and disunited...the solution to better values in housing lies in your hands, but it will take industrial statesmanship and guts to accomplish it (Levitt, 1948, pp. 253-256).

Levitt and Sons, far earlier than others, was well aware of the inefficiency plaguing the distribution of materials. Acting as early as 1935, they created a company of their own, The North Shore Supply Company, as a way to avoid some of the handling charges. Levitt and Sons bought everything from wallboard to kitchen sinks, and had it transported from the manufacturer by rail car directly into their supply yard. There they accumulated and stored all the materials needed for their projects.

The availability of other supplies, however, fluctuated greatly according to demand, production, and governmental controls. For an organization as big as Levitt and Sons, though, such fluctuation was cause for serious concern. "To a company on the

move," Bill (1964) cautioned, "nothing is more frustrating, nor more damning, than a lack of supplies."

We wouldn't let ourselves be stopped by shortages [he continued]. When cement was unavailable in this country, we chartered a boat and brought it in from Europe. When lumber was in short supply, we bought a forest in California and built a mill. When nails were hard to come by, we set up a factory in our own backyard and made them ourselves" (p. 66).

By owning the very materials needed to complete a home, Levitt and Sons could eliminate the manufacture's mark-up, which for lumber was about 30 percent ("The Industry Capitalism Forgot," 1947, p. 168). In addition, the Levitt-owned mill cut wood specifically for their housing needs, thereby eliminating waste and ensuring the most efficient use of materials.

Many builders who employed union labor found union rules and regulations problematic, especially those builders who tried to use mass production techniques. Disagreements between employee and employer often led to work stoppages, which would cripple any large-scale production schedule. Levitt and Sons had yet another solution to this problem: no union labor.

Bill was highly critical of unions. He viewed them as safety nets for the least productive workers. In an interview with David Halberstam in the early 1990s, Bill referred to the mistake made by Thomas Jefferson, that of referring to all men as "equal." We were never all equal, he said.

Some were more talented, some compensated for lack of talent by working harder, and some were neither talented nor hardworking and that was where the union came in. The job of the union [Levitt said]...could be reduced to a simple idea: the protection of the slowest and least efficient worker (Halberstam, 1993, p. 138).

"I am not against unions," Bill stated to *Time* magazine in 1950. "I just think we can build houses faster without them" ("Housing: Up from the Potato Fields," 1950, p. 71).

Capitalism's claim of superior efficiency requires the use of power equipment and production line methods, but craft unions, especially those in the building trades, would have no part of it. For seven months between 1945 and 1946, unions picketed a Levitt project on Long Island for their use of non-union labor (Liell, 1952). The union's reaction to Levitt's open shop policy lost its momentum quickly, though. To understand the lack of resistance toward Levitt's policy, it is important to first understand the economic climate of the late 1940s and early 1950s. As Liell (1952) noted,

times were good; there were plenty of jobs for all; and it was difficult even to get pickets...Many union men bolted, and according to one picket, even an officer of the union crossed the picket line because wages were so good on the other side (p. 108).

One picketer left the line to look at a Levitt house. He liked it so much; he bought one ("Housing: Up from the Potato Fields," 1950, p. 71).

Levitt paid as good as, if not better than, union wages. In fact, Levitt set up a unique incentive system which enabled a worker to make a flat rate per job without limiting the number of jobs completed, or the rate of speed at which one worked. No other example better exemplifies the benefits of this approach than that of the DPs. Many of the non-skilled laborers working on a Levitt project were of foreign descent, and were warmly referred to as DPs: displaced persons. Their goal was to work as much as possible and send a portion of their wages back home to their families in cities like New York, Trenton, or Philadelphia. The incentive system, for them, was an unlimited horizon, one only hampered by poor weather and personal fatigue. In order to work through the night, especially during cold winter months, many men built bon-fires for

light and warmth. Alfred Levitt, while driving home one evening, spotted a fire and drove over to investigate. He found men still working on an unfinished house. "How come?," he asked. "We only had a few more feet to go," they said, "so we thought we'd finish by firelight and start on another house tomorrow" (Bernard, 1948, p. 106).

Levitt also had direct control of 50 or so subcontractors, each responsible for hiring and managing their own crew of men. Levitt broke down the construction of a house into 26 separate steps (i.e., pouring the foundation, framing, roofing, electrical work, plumbing, etc.), and each subcontractor saw to it that each step was accomplished according to schedule, budget and specifications ("A Real \$ Value in Small Homes," 1947, pp. 8-9; "The Most House for the Money," 1952, pp. 152-153; and "PB Reveals Levitt's Building Methods," 1959, pp. 80-91). Each job's price was negotiated between Levitt and his subcontractor in advance. Every penny that a job took over the agreed upon price came out of the subcontractor's profit margin.

Each of these 26 steps was further reduced, making the job of one man, for example, to do nothing but caulk windows, bolt washers to the floor or paint window trim. This standardization and division of labor lead to increased efficiency. The formula was simple: the more one completes, the more money one makes. "The same man does the same thing every day, despite the psychologists," Alfred stated. "It is boring; it is bad; but the reward of the green stuff seems to alleviate the boredom of the work" (Halberstam, 1993, p. 136). The subcontractor system, then, "leaves the firm in full control but gives every one of its strawbosses [subcontractors] a direct financial interest in keeping the men moving" ("The Industry Capitalism Forgot," 1947, p. 167; see also Fox, 1952, pp. 34-35; "Housing: Up from the Potato Fields," 1950, p. 71; and

Larrabee, 1948, pp. 82-84). This system fell under Bill's favorite phrase: "vertical organization" (Larrabee, 1948, p. 82).

Can Success be Manipulated?

It would be misleading to suggest that such a successful production record had been planned from the beginning; it was not. As early as 1952, Bill admitted, "we never dreamed this thing would reach these proportions" ("Levitt's 12th Floor Apartment," 1952, p. 3). Levitt's building record was fueled by much more than skill and ability. Even Bill's aggressiveness could not explain the scope of their projects or the success of their business.

"Housing," Bill (1964) lectured, "isn't like the proverbial 'better mousetrap'. Even if you can turn out a better product, at a lower cost, other things have to be going for you or it won't work. By 1947, those 'other things' were going for us" (p. 64). Put simply, "the dice were loaded," he said. "We had known all along we could mass-produce houses if there was a market for them and credit for builders. Now the market was there and the government was ready with the backing. How could we lose?" ("Up from the Potato Fields," 1950, p. 70).

Yet the risk of loss was always present in the Levitt formula. Levitt and Sons could have lost if the owners of the manufacturing and distribution process refused to sell directly to them, or if local government held their ground, refusing to change law to suit the needs of house hungry veterans--a change, it is sure, made in the name of social progress. They could have also lost if unions were filled with satisfied workers making good wages. But they did not lose. There was an unprecedented demand for houses.

Returning GIs had an entire Bill of Rights and a politically powerful Veterans Association. The economy was sound and reliable. And, "at the end of the war," Bill noted, "the banks were busting with money" (Larrabee, 1948, p. 82). Under such conditions, great risks were met with even greater rewards.

...[A]ny other builder [wrote *Harper's* Eric Larrabee], at any other time, would not have had the veteran market, would not have had the organization, could not have bypassed union restrictions, and could not have secured the financing. The Levitt story is of how he was relieved of some of these obstacles, got around others, and ran into the remainder head foremost and knocked them down (Larrabee, 1948, p. 82).

Between 1947 and 1948, Levitt and Sons built 6,000 Cape Cod Cottages for veterans only, renting for \$60 a month--no money down (Matarrese, 1997). In response to the Housing Bill of 1949, which extended the rent controls of 1947, thereby limiting the return on investments made by many large scale rental projects like that of Levittown, the company quickly switched gears and built "for sale only" (Kelly, 1993, p. 32; and Baxandall and Ewen, 2000). Avoiding the obstacle of public resentment toward this immediate change, Levitt and Sons redirected the blaming finger and pointed it at the federal government, then an indefensible target. "Sorry Kilroy," read a full-page ad, most likely published in any one of the New York newspapers, "but you've got to buy whether you like it or not...your Uncle Sam says so."

All of a sudden [the ad continued] the great economists of that famous organization have decided that it is wrong for us to rent to you and that for the general good and welfare of the nation you must buy. Please don't ask us to make sense out of this type of reasoning...all we can do is to agree with the poet that 'whom the gods would destroy they first make mad'...Kilroy...just smile...that's what wins wars! (Levitt and Sons Advertisement, n.d.).

Levitt and Sons was again identifying with GIs by referring to them as Kilroy, a big nosed cartoon character that had been scribbled on everything from German pillboxes

to the Statue of Liberty's torch during the Second World War. Every veteran recognized the image. By placing blame elsewhere, the company entered their new phase of building unscathed, perhaps even reaping more veteran support in return.

The second phase of Levittown, New York, began in 1949--with the introduction of their new ranch style home, the 49'er. This phase ended in 1951 ("The most popular builder's house," 1950, pp. 134-135). The new design sparked what *Architectural Forum* called "...the most spectacular buyers' stampede in the history of U.S. housebuilding" ("4,000 Houses Per Year," 1949, p. 84). Although a model of the home had not yet been built, 3,000 veterans, over a period of three days, stood in line outside of the sales office, waiting for their chance to pay a down payment. Several hundred people brought GI sleeping bags, cots, and chairs, and built a fire to keep warm as they slept and waited throughout the nights. They did all of this to keep their place in line ("4,000 Houses Per Year," 1949, p. 84).

Some families, like Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Levey and their three young children, moved from the 1948 Cape Cod Cottage into the new 1949 Rancher. And when the redesigned 1950 Ranch was introduced, they, like hundreds of others, upgraded ("Levitt Adds 1950 Model to his Line," 1950, p. 141). Similar to automobile manufacturing, Levitt and Sons began to offer a new model, if only a redesign, every year. "I'm a kind of General Motors of the building industry," Bill admitted years earlier (Gulfoyle and Rutledge, 1948, p. 114).

Between May 1947 and November 1951, Levitt and Sons built and sold 17,447 houses. Since 1929 they had sold 200 million dollars worth of houses ("Levitt Adds 1950 Model to his Line," 1950, p. 141; and Matarrese, 1997, p. 65). In 1950 alone, they

set the national building record: 5,333 houses--a rate of 35 houses a day (Levitt, 1951, p. 81). The company held the title as the "nation's largest housebuilder" until 1955, when they fell into second place ("Nation's Biggest Housebuilder," 1948, pp. 75-78; "Biggest homebuilders of 1953," 1954, pp. 40-41; "Biggest homebuilders of 1954," 1955, pp. 40-41; and "Biggest homebuilders of 1955, 1956, pp. 152-157).

It is not surprising that journals, magazines and newspapers of the day described the company with the phrase, "as Levitt goes, so goes the nation" ("Levitt's 1950 House," 1950, p. 136). Bill, too, would often refer to his company in similar terms: "If Levitt goes air conditioning, the building industry goes air conditioning," he would say. "It's as simple as that" ("Levitt, Carrier Sign a Giant Contract," 1956, p. 46). "Without trying to be funny," Bill (1968) admitted, "we are No. 1, after all, and the right kind of people always like to be with the winner" (p. 64).

Although Bill had good reason to be modest, humility was not part of his, nor his company's, vocabulary. "In Levittown [New York]," Bill boasted, "99% of the people pray for us" ("Housing: Up from the Potato Fields," 1950, p. 70). And when asked to describe the ways in which the company overcame obstacles, or to comment on any of their mass production techniques, Bill would smile, turn his palms upward--as if to suggest that no one could humanly have done otherwise--and proudly say: "...it is literally impossible to avoid making millions of dollars by applying even a moderate amount of intelligence to the bundle of craft operations which are sometimes described as the housebuilding industry" (Larrabee, 1948, p. 80; and "4,000 Houses Per Year," 1949, p. 84).

The Levitts firmly believed that as they moved their company forward, they sympathetically pulled the industry along behind them, all the while keeping the public and the industry full aware of where they were being pulled and what progress they were making. They were a burr in the industry's hide, and all three Levitts fully enjoyed their role.

They were at the top of their game. Their competitors were quite a distance away, and presented no conceivable threat. This situation made the company "restless," teetering on the edge of boredom. "Having accomplished most of the impossibles," explained *Architectural Forum*, "...they find that things are...almost too easy to be interesting" ("4,000 Houses Per Year," 1949, p. 92).

Regardless of their status in the industry, however, Levitt and Sons did not take for granted their success. They were fully aware of the larger political and economical forces that fed them. John Liell (1952), who studied the new community of Levittown, New York for his doctoral dissertation, asked the important question: "Is Levittown the result of special circumstances or is Levittown the result of Levitt's building organization?" (p. 180). Surely, one cannot dismiss the effect of the Levitt formula: size plus organization. Their use and mastery of mass production techniques--a skill that would make Frederick Winslow Taylor blush--also played a significant, and arguably, an immeasurable role. Nevertheless, certain conditions had to be present. The time had to be ripe.

Liell was not the only person interested in understanding the success of Levitt and Sons. Eric Larrabee, writing for *Harper's* magazine four years earlier, in 1948, stated that "it cannot be shown decisively that such an operation at any other time than the

present would have been, or will again be, possible (p. 87). A few years later, Liell (1952) delivered a statement similar to the tone of Larrabee's: "...it is questionable whether these circumstances can be reproduced in sufficient exactness to permit other builders to imitate them in other places" (p. 346).

Indeed, the success of Levitt and Sons was rooted in a plethora of circumstances out of their control. The type of house they built, the dimensions of each room, the size of the lot upon which it sat, whether or not it had a basement, the availability of necessary materials to build a house and the process of obtaining them, which would determine the price of the home and the profit of the firm--all of these factors were inextricably intertwined with Levitt's method of building homes. It was a highly dependent relationship. And it was one into which Bill often entered wielding all of his talents of persuasion and flashy finger pointing, in order to change the formula to guarantee a Levitt success.

The popularity and affordability of the mass-produced automobile and the widespread building of highways must not be overlooked. Together, they played a significant role in the success of large suburban communities like Levittown. "The automobile became the passport to the postwar American dream," wrote one historian (Lewis, 1997, p. 80). Homes priced within reach of the average family were more plentiful on cheaper land outside urban centers. Transportation, then, was a necessity. The automobile offered the average family a level of independence it had never before experienced, and the highway gave the auto easy access to new and interesting places.

But highway building, too--like the GI Bill of Rights and the FHA/VA lending policies--was a federal response to presumed fears. President Eisenhower feared the

recession that followed the Korean War. As a Republican--like Herbert Hoover--Eisenhower was haunted by the crash of 1929 (Lewis, 1997, p. 86). He would see to it that nothing of the sort happened on his watch. A public works project of grand proportions, he believed, would provide the momentum needed to maintain a healthy social and economic climate. Events such as this, when looked at in retrospect, seem directly linked to decisions made within a unique and definable climate. Yet history happens too quickly to fully understand the complexity of these relationships. At any one moment in time, events seem to happen in random order, well beyond the control of even the most knowing of all persons. Levitt and Sons, like other industry leaders, were always responding to the currents of history, never knowing for sure what would surface next.

Much of this great social dynamic was out of the company's control, or more specifically, the company's size and organization could not easily influence historical events. Commenting on such a delicate relationship, Liell noted, "disturb one [factor], and the structure crumbles" (1952, p. 180). On June 25, 1950, when North Korea invaded South Korea, the structure supporting Levitt's success in New York did, indeed, begin to crumble. America would soon be again at war.

In 1951, like 1950, Levitt and Sons projected completing another 5,000 or so homes. They would finish their Levittown, New York, project and begin a new community of 1,750 homes called Landia. Slowly, however, America began preparing for war, and did so by first tightening its economy. These changes hit Levitt and Sons in July of 1950, when the federal government changed credit requirements for homebuyers. Whereas a non-GI paid a \$400 application fee for a Levitt home, now they were required

to pay \$750--one week later it jumped to \$1,040. Twenty-five percent of those individuals who had already paid and applied for a home wrote Levitt and Sons with a request: "Give us our money back" ("A United Front for the Industry for the Long Pull of Rearmament," 1950, p. 11).

The federal government's new grip on the housing industry was called "Regulation X," and it was the first in a long line of controls related to the Korean War. Because of these controls, Levitt was forced to cut their building starts in 1951 in half to 2,500 houses. Some builders expected to cut as much as 75 percent under their 1950 completion records.

Architectural Forum described the scene.

After taking their Regulation X medicine for the first few weeks, house builders still thought that as a reducing tonic it was slow poison. Instead of getting a girlish figure as a result, they felt building would be more apt to come out looking like a fugitive from a concentration camp ("News: Building and Controls," 1950, p. 9).

Bill Levitt, however, would not give in to slimming down without a fight. On October 23, 1950, with typical Levitt flair and flashy finger pointing, he delivered a dramatic speech at a Herald-Tribune Forum held in New York City. He (1950) called on those in power to use "horse sense" when issuing controls, and thus reducing the economy's overall productive capacity. "We can supply all the need of our armed forces," he stated, "and still produce a goodly share of civilian requirements" (p. 70).

My belief in American ingenuity and the American way of life [he continued] is so deeply imbedded that I can't think in terms of scarcity, cutting-back. I've never been anything but a builder; I know only how to create, not to destroy...If we need--really need--some control, well and good. But let us always keep a weather eye on the one powerful weapon we must preserve, our great productive economy. Let's build up--not tear down! (Levitt, 1950, p. 71).

Two months later, at the start of the new year, 1951, Levitt and Sons was forced to return 650 deposits to prospective buyers of their Landia project, which was scheduled for construction on March 15, 1951 ("Landia," 1951, p. 139; and Levitt, 1951, pp. 80-88). The government's clampdown on the use of war-vital copper for civilian use was particularly damaging to the company, for they had used quite a bit of it in home construction--from radiant coils embedded in the cement foundations to flashing for roofs (*Newsday*, 1951, January 5, p. 25).

Part of the successful Levitt formula was to buy massive quantities of materials directly from the manufacturer and stockpile them until they were needed. Now, their North Shore Supply Company was cramped with everything from tubs to toilets. The company needed desperately to build. To cut back on production would mean a significant loss, for they had built and geared the company to handle a certain volume of building. Anything less would call for a complete restructuring, something Levitt and Sons did not want to do.

Immediately, Levitt and Sons decided to adapt their community idea of Landia to house defense workers of the new defense plants being built around the country (Levitt, 1951, p. 88). The newly built Fairless Steel Works of United States Steel, located in Lower Bucks County, Pennsylvania, was such a facility. The level, open farmland was an ideal setting for another Levittown.

One month after canceling the Landia project in New York, Levitt and Sons began bidding on 1,500 acres of land outside of Fairless Steel Works. Under wartime controls and material shortages, however, the company would not be able to offer Pennsylvania a similar quality home at such a low price, as it did in Long Island--a

product that made Levitt a household name. Not only would homebuyers have to pay more for their home, but they would also be required to pay, due to changes in credit restrictions, a larger application fee. The obvious solution: designation of the area as a Critical Defense Housing Area. Such a title would relax credit controls and would enable residents to make use of special FHA mortgage insurance. The builders, too, benefited. They would be eligible to receive priorities on scarce building materials, getting more of them sooner, and for less cost (Housing and Home Finance Agency, 1952, pp. 4, 8-9; and "Housing: Levittown, Pa," 1951, p. 98).

The struggle for the Critical Defense Housing Area designation took approximately nine months, from late February 1951, when Levitt and Sons announced their plans, to October 8, 1951, when the federal government announced their approval. In order to move forward with their project, Levitt and Sons needed that designation. Without it, such a project would not have been possible. Bill, once again, prepared his speech.

In August of 1951, six months into the debate to designate, Bill met with and spoke to industrialists and civic leaders of Lower Bucks County at a luncheon held in Philadelphia. He warned his audience that if the area were not designated as critical, "...slums, trailer camps, and every [other] kind of police problem" would follow ("Levitt Warns," 1951, p. 1).

We need oil tanks, we need steel tubing, we need copper water pipe [he said]...If the area is declared critical, we'll get them. If we have to use substitutes, the homes are going to be loaded with junk ("Levitt Warns," 1951, p. 1).

It was Bill's intention to paint a dreary picture. No one would reasonably choose to have the houses in their community loaded with junk. He made it a point also to

mention that he was going ahead with his plans "come hell or high water" ("Levitt Warns," 1951, p. 1). Whether Levitt and Sons would have followed through with the project without the critical designation, we will never know. Most likely, they would have backed out and relocated the project elsewhere. However, the company did not have to make that decision. Those attending lunch that day were quick to follow Bill's instructions, which were

...to get as mad as I am at the stupidity and absence of any kind of reasoning in the government's refusal to list the Bucks County area as a critical one...[and]...to bring pressure to bear on their Congressional representatives and on the federal agencies to bring about the critical designation ("Levitt Warns," 1951, p. 1).

The introduction of Levitt and Sons to Lower Bucks County, Pennsylvania, is a terribly important, but often untold part of the Levitt story. This transition from New York to Pennsylvania highlights the evolution and adaptability of the firm to social conditions out of their control. The foundation did not crumble from under them. Indeed, the Levitt story is less a story of unanticipated outcomes and more one of desires made real through social, economical, and political manipulation. "There is something more than opportunism involved in bringing together such varied elements--political, economical, technical, social, financial, psychological, and just plain personal--and making them function smoothly together," wrote Eric Larrabee in 1948 (Larrabee, 1948, p. 87). Bill is an "extemporizer," he continued, but "one of such great skill that he is scarcely conscious of it himself" (Larrabee, 1948, p. 87).

Levitt and Sons entered Pennsylvania and turned the poor building conditions of the day on their head. What followed was a new community, of new home designs, and a

philosophy of community building and planning that would transform the way of life in Lower Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

In New York, Bill (1964) noted, "we began with a house, we ended with a city" (p. 68). Levittown, Pennsylvania, however, would be different. Levitt and Sons would begin by building a city--a city from scratch.

CHAPTER 4

THE EARLY YEARS

On Saturday December 8, 1951, at the edge of a farmer's field in the southeast corner of the state of Pennsylvania, there sat three homes of modern structure and design. The homes were built by Levitt and Sons and were situated in a row, separated by some 20 feet, yet surrounded by trees and rolling fields, they looked out of place, even somewhat lost when considering their position and density relative to other homes in the area. But directly behind them, along the south bank of an abandoned canal, someone had painted large white rocks and had assembled them into a pattern of letters, forming a word. Taken together they spelled out the name of a new community: LEVITTOWN.

Of the estimated 15,000 to 50,000 people who flocked to these homes that weekend, entering the parking lot at a rate of 65 people per minute, residents of Philadelphia outnumbered them all. Many others were from Trenton and Camden, New Jersey and the surrounding Mid-Atlantic region. They came to inspect the newest line of homes offered by the nation's biggest homebuilder, a company that, according to *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Colliers*, *Harper's*, *Fortune*, *Life*, and *Look* magazines, seemed to also offer the biggest value. Some people, it can be assumed, were interested only in the event itself, treating it as if it were a practice in window-shopping. Thousands of others, more serious, more determined, came to buy.

Christmas, though, was less than three weeks away, and for any other builder, holding an exhibit prior to the biggest holiday season of the year would have been a bad business decision. But for Levitt and Sons, the timing mattered very little. Indeed, for

many postwar house-hungry Americans, securing a Levitt built home for themselves and for their families would have been the greatest gift of all. And many did so in record numbers.

Hundreds of men, women and children, wrapped in their warmest of winter clothes, stood in lines thick with people so that they, too, could soon have a peek inside one of these popular homes. The day had been cold, and a steady, daylong drizzle made standing outside in long lines even more miserable. Yet in front of them, streaming from the rooftops of two of the homes, were long drags of smoke. Fires were ablaze. It would soon be their turn. And Levittown, Pennsylvania was slowly becoming a reality.

Just the Three of Us

On showcase that morning was the Levittowner, the Country Clubber, and a rental home called the Budgeteer. The Levittowner was the cheaper, and as expected, the most popular home among the three. The \$9,990 Levittowner boasted 1,000 square feet of living space which included three bedrooms, a large living room with an open three-sided fireplace, one full bath, and a fully equipped kitchen complete with refrigerator, stainless steel sink, metal cabinets, electric stove, and an automatic clothes washer. All of this, including the carport and storage shed, was to be situated on a 70 foot wide by 100 foot deep parcel of land. The estimated mortgage: \$60 a month at a 4% yearly interest rate.

The Country Clubber, a larger version of the Levittowner, boasted 1,600 square feet of living space and sold for \$16,900. It included three bedrooms and two baths, and had an expandable attic space with room for two more bedrooms and another bath. The expansive kitchen included a nine-paned double-glazed window (compared to the

Levittowner's six-pane), a refrigerator, electric stove, automatic dishwasher, clothes washer and dryer, and ample dining space. The lot was noticeably larger than that of the Levittowner, 100 feet by 120 feet. "General Motors doesn't build the simplest and cheapest vehicle that will provide transportation," Alfred Levitt noted that same year, drawing the intended parallel between GM automobiles and the Levitt standardized home. "It packs a lot of chrome right up front where everyone can see it, and chrome sells cars" (Levitt's Progress, 1952: 164). The Country Clubber, with its modest rooflines, half-bricked façade, and enlarged lot, was indeed the most impressive house for the money. And by packing a home's chrome up front, it represented a significant achievement in young Alfred's design.

The Budgeteer, however, had an odd presence among the other two homes. This 750 square foot rental unit had a flat roof and, when built in pairs (as it was designed), sat 10 feet away from its sibling unit, separated only by an overhead grapevine trellis. But while the rent for the Budgeteer was \$65 a month, the mortgage for the larger Levittowner was \$5 less. Had someone made a mistake? *House and Home* magazine, in their review of this exhibit, referred to Budgeteer situation as a "man bites dog story"--never before in the history of the company had a potential buyer ever snubbed a Levitt and Sons home design ("New Levitt Houses Break All Records," 1952, p. 98). By the time 1,300 people completed applications for the Levittowner, only one person had requested the Budgeteer. That this person, sensing the gimmick between renting for more or owning for less, joined the others in applying for a Levittowner and thus securing the fate of the Budgeteer, it is not known. But what can be said with certainty, nothing resembling the Budgeteer was ever built again.

The reason for designing the Budgeteer stems more from government wishes than Levitt market analyses. "We offered rental houses in Pennsylvania," Bill Levitt said, "because everyone in the government insisted that people wanted them" ("New Levitt Houses Break All Records," 1952, p. 98). It was, quite possibly, the National Housing Committee and the FHA who held such beliefs. But a rental unit of any kind went against the best judgment of the company, particularly that of Bill. "I believe it is a fraud to make a man rent a house," he said. He doesn't rent his clothes or his car or the other things he needs" ("New Levitt Houses Break All Records," 1952, p. 98).

Yet not everyone in government, as Bill very well knew, was of this belief. Some members of Congress, particularly Senator Joseph McCarthy, were against rental units, favoring homeownership instead. Those who rented, it was commonly understood, were not wedded to their neighbors, their town, or possibly, some feared, their country. They could easily come and go, which would weaken the ties between neighbors, thus eroding any chance at a stable community. "No man who owns his own home and lot can be a communist," Bill Levitt would say years earlier. "He has too much to do" (Larrabee, 1948, p. 84). Bill perhaps first voiced these words as he led Senator McCarthy and officials from the American Legion, the National Housing Committee, and the FHA through Levittown, New York in August of 1947. For it would become common practice of Levitt and Sons to say whatever pleased the benevolent ears of the powerful.

McCarthy, though, had not been the first to proclaim such sentiments; many had heard this perspective before. Years earlier, President Roosevelt himself advocated for a nation of homeowners, suggesting that such a nation would have a real share in their own land and would thus be unconquerable (Dean, 1945). And with the force of the federal

government, he made such an idea reality by establishing, in 1933, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), which, among other things, made it national policy to protect home ownership (Jackson, 1980: 421).

The Budgeteer was Levitt's way of telling certain members of government 'I told you so.' Proving others wrong had become something Levitt and Sons took great pride in. And Bill loved every opportunity.

The exhibit center formally opened at 10:00 a.m., and by that time, the vast parking lot had already been jammed with cars. After the lot filled, people began parking along the highway fronting the exhibit. Some reports suggest that traffic had backed up clear to Philadelphia. Salesmen for the company, relying on loudspeakers to amplify their voices over the excitement, begged milling homeseekers to come back another day. Very few took their advice since all accounts spoke of the swelling crowds. "It was clearly [the area's] biggest day," *House and Home* reported, "since some local boys, assisted by General Washington, defeated the British during an earlier Christmas holiday at the Battle of Trenton," which had taken place only a few miles away ("New Levitt Houses Break All Records," 1952, p. 98).

Let's Go In

Well before the exhibit doors formally opened, it was known that Levitt had purchased the services of Macy's, the famed New York based department store, and received, in turn, truckloads of their best home furnishings. Also known was that Miss Beatrice West, New York's renowned color consultant and decorator, had been chosen by Levitt and Sons to fashion the interiors of each home, making real what many people

would only see on display in magazines such as *The Ladies Home Journal* or *Good Housekeeping*. Rather than entering an empty shell of a house, visitors were invited to stroll through and admire a completely furnished home; it was as if the owners had just stepped out and would soon return.

The Country Clubber's dinning room table was set for a mid-afternoon tea. A set of sleek furniture encircled a large television set in front of the home's grand picture window. Such an arrangement, however, would not be an unfamiliar sight in the postwar period where mass-production made such items affordable to those with average salaries. "The TV, not the fireplace," Alfred Levitt told *House and Home* magazine some months later, "is now the center of the home" ("New Levitt Houses Break All Records," 1952, p. 103). And indeed it was, for everything seemed to radiate out from its center.

Lamps glowed throughout the home. A fire cracked beneath a ticking schoolhouse clock. And a copper skillet hung fashionably to one side of the bricked fireplace. The bedrooms and kitchen were equally well furnished. Books lined the shelving beneath the staircase, and long brass rods held curtains at the windows. A framed picture of an attractive woman stood prominently on a living room end table as if to imply "beautiful people live here."

The interior of the Levittowner, on the other hand, while smaller in size and more humbly decorated than the larger Country Clubber, reflected efficiency from floor to ceiling. Indeed, every square foot served a purpose. The kitchen and the dining room were essentially one open space, but with the use of a sliding bamboo curtain hung on ceiling tracks, the room could be divided into two separate areas. The two bedrooms and bath were accessible off an "L" shaped hallway at the back of the house. An open three-

way bricked fireplace, a Frank Lloyd Wright design made practical by Alfred Levitt, sat at the home's center, offering good heat to all rooms. "There's no point in trying to do something," Alfred explained, justifying his use of Wright's ideas, "unless it can be handed out to the great masses of people as a cultural increase" (*Newsday*, 1997, September 28, p. H28).

The Levittowner boasted other advances in efficiency and value. A sliding wall in the living room, when pull closed, made a third bedroom. Two large six-paned picture windows brought in streams of natural light, which not only decreased the need for electric light, but also opened up the rooms to elements outside, making a once small space seem much larger. Visitors to this home also found the floors covered with black asphalt tiles veined with random splotches of off-white. This innovative flooring eliminated the added cost of carpet, absorbed heat from the embedded copper coils circulating water in the foundation, and made cleaning easier and less expensive. These were all qualities of the Levittowner that residents of financial means would not take for granted. Indeed, some residents would refer to these special features decades later as gestures empathetic to this historical period and its people.

Like the Country Clubber, Miss West furnished the Levittowner with the best furniture and accessories that Macy's had to accommodate small spaces. Wrought iron hooks protruding from the red brick fireplace held an assortment of fire tools. A 15-inch television set sat atop a short rectangular table with thin, spindle legs. And a tall pole lamp stood faithfully in the corner; its three bullet-shaped metal shades had the capability of directing light into many different directions at once. It was a symbol of modern

American lighting, a complex and fast shaped lamp for a complex and fast moving world (Johns, 2003).

The Levittown Showroom

After circling through the sample homes, visitors concluded their tour at the House of Levittown exhibition building, a 50-yard long rectangular structure with walls of glass and a flat roof ("Levittown, Pa., on the Assembly Line," 1952, pp. 26-27). The visitor's entrance into the building was eased with the help of automatic doors, an invention that fit well with the Levitt method. Inside, the assembly line method of building and buying was in its most efficient form.

There were crowds of people everywhere, which, ironically, worked against Levitt's method of form and fashion. Many sat cramped on benches lining one glass window wall. In front of them stood still more people. One young father, fearing the safety of his young infant, hoisted his son high over his head and onto his shoulders, away from the crowds of anxious but no less pushy homebuyers. A long counter staffed by a dozen or so salesmen dressed in dark business suits dominated the center of the room. On the counter sat a number of black telephones, cords strewn everywhere, along with a few well-placed glass ashtrays. The sign above the salesmen read "Applications and Information"; it was their job to provide both.

On the other side of the counter, yet still in the middle of the room (set up much like a department store so that customers could walk around and examine the merchandise), Levitt and Sons displayed at least one of everything that went into the building of a Levitt home ("Levittown, Pa., on the Assembly Line," 1952, pp. 26-27). An

exhaust fan sat atop a bundle of copper coils used for plumbing and radiant floor heating. Above this hung a sign that appropriately read "Kitchen Exhaust Fan." Next to it, with its door propped open, stood an electrical fuse box. Also on display were a couple of light bulbs, seven pieces of sheet-rock, three five-gallon buckets of spackle, and a single roll of tape. Of this, the sign read "Tape and Spackle."

Perhaps the most interesting part of the exhibit, and for children, indeed, the most entertaining, had been the speckled paint display station. The goal of this portion of the exhibit was to display the strength and durability of a new wall enamel called Plextone, which, when applied toward the end of a home's construction, covered every square inch of the interior. Levitt and Sons used this product exclusively. Indeed, *Popular Science* magazine referred to Levittown, Pennsylvania as "the only city in the country where a paper hanger would starve to death" (Weldon, 1952, p. 116).

The display featured a piece of wallboard painted in a "pistachio version of chocolate chip ice-cream" and an electronic brushing device. For the customer's delight, the electronic arm repeatedly moved a hard-bristled scrubbing brush back and forth over the painted wall board. The brush never stopped, and the paint never wore out. "This new wall enamel," *Popular Science* half jokingly predicted, "gives promise of outlasting the house" (Weldon, 1952, p. 116).

Every part of the Levitt built home had been accounted for--even the roofing nails were on display. Visitors could touch and experience for themselves what went into a Levittown home. They could also determine whether or not a Levitt built home truly represented "America's Biggest Value," as a sign in the exhibit center loudly proclaimed.

"You can't fool the public," Bill Levitt stated in a *Saturday Evening Post* advertisement two years later, in 1954.

The price tag doesn't sell the house [he continued]. People look at every part of it and they're looking for value every inch of the way. That's why we use so many nationally advertised, especially Post-advertised, materials and appliances... We know these are the names home hunters trust most. And we know we can stake our reputation on them, too ("You Can't Fool the Public," 1954, p. 34).

On Your Mark, Get Set...Buy!

For many young couples of this day, a home was something they desperately needed, and what Levitt and Sons offered was something they could surprisingly afford. It had been a dream within reason. Homeownership, finally, had become possible.

It would be unlike Levitt and Sons to make any part of their business difficult, especially for the customer. Levitt and Sons took care of everything, only an application and a deposit of \$100 were needed to begin the process. Indeed, for many people, the most difficult part of buying a Levittown house had been the deposit itself. Yet even this requirement was unheard of in the home building business; it was far below what other banks and builders required. It was an obstacle that many would overcome. "People who don't have the down payment", *House and Home* wrote in 1952, "will apparently beg, borrow or steal to get it" ("New Levitt Houses Break All Records," 1952, p. 98). In New York, Levitt and Sons took one man's deposit in GI unemployment checks. And in Pennsylvania, a salesman told one man to leave his wristwatch as collateral. "And when you get paid on Tuesday", he said, "just bring the money up" (*The New York Times*, 1990, May 6, p. 1, section 8). He did.

Levitt and Sons reduced the process of buying a home to its most simple form. Yet the origins of this streamlined process in manufacturing had been an ongoing trend for some time now. Indeed, efficiency has played an important role in social progress since the agricultural revolution some 10,000 years past. Yet in recent years, this type of development was heralded as an almost sacred tool within America's economic system. During the first decade of the 20th century, President Theodore Roosevelt called for the need of "national efficiency," and it was with this that Frederick Winslow Taylor stepped up to the challenge (Taylor, 1998, p. iii). What concerned Taylor (1998) were those "less visible, less tangible" forms of inefficiency, the "larger wastes of human effort" (p. iii). He outlined what he called The Principles of Scientific Management as a way to combat these wasteful practices and called for "more competent men" to rise to the challenge.

In the production of homes, the Levitts were such men. "Bill and Alfred share a kind of efficient impatience," observed *Architectural Forum*, early in 1949.

...they hate memorandums and lengthy conferences, the abracadabra of big business. They handle the matter of a buyer's contract, sometimes considered a delicate operation involving several attorneys and possibly a psychiatrist, with the aplomb of a supermarket cashier ("4,000 Houses Per Year," 1949, p. 88).

Frederick Winslow Taylor himself would have called the Levitt method the "one best way" to build homes (Kanigel, 1997).

In 1952, it took an average of two weeks to purchase a home and clear a title. (The title itself took most lawyers a day to complete two.) Levitt and Sons reduced this entire process to two simple half-hour steps, completing as many as 80 titles an hour. Indeed, one pregnant housewife, who while at the Levitt office began having labor pains,

broke even the fastest company record. Under these conditions she concluded the entire home purchase in one minute flat ("Birth of a City," 1952, p. 75).

"You're invited to live not just to exist," read an early Levitt and Sons ad, showcasing a hand-drawn picture of a Levittowner surrounded by mature trees and flowering plants. A typical Levitt ad also highlighted a number of special features found both within the house (i.e., Bendix washer, G.E. refrigerator, Tracy stainless steel sink, etc.), as well as in the community (i.e., five Olympic sized swimming pools, playgrounds, a Town Hall with an opera sized stage, etc.). In New York, Levitt and Sons ran weekly full-page ads in *The New York Times*, *The Herald Tribune*, *New York Daily News*, *The New York Mirror*, *Newsday*, and *The Levittown Tribune*, the latter of which was owned by the company (Baxandall and Ewen, 2000, p. 135). (As of this writing, in the year 2003, a one-time full-page ad in the real-estate section of *The New York Times* costs approximately \$138,000.) For anyone eagerly searching for an affordable home on an average salary, it was hard not to be familiar with what Levitt and Sons had to offer.

In Pennsylvania, the company used similar advertising strategies. Full page ads in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Delaware Valley Advance*, *The Bristol Courier*, and *The Trenton Evening Times*, just to name a few, spouted phrases like "Sixty Dollars a Month" and "Gracious Living Modestly Priced," and reminded readers that "there is nothing to compare with it anywhere." One ad asked and answered its own question: "When is a dollar more than a dollar? When its used in Levittown, THE MOST PERFECTLY PLANNED COMMUNITY IN AMERICA! (*Bristol Courier*, 1952, February 29, p. 1). Indeed, any doubts that readers had in terms of the quality and value of the Levitt product

were surely put to rest by these words, written in the *Delaware Valley Advance*,
September 29, 1953.

Everyday more people buy more houses from this company than from any other builder in the world. A visit to the Levittown exhibit any day or evening will show the reason why (p. 85).

Six weeks after the sample home exhibit opened in early December 1951, Levitt and Sons accepted over 2,000 home deposits. Four weeks later, they had obtained another 1,500. This volume of purchasing had been unprecedented in the business. "It's a new record even for us," the company representative admitted, "and we've been setting new records for speed, for value, for soundness of construction for a long time now" (*Bristol Courier*, 1952, January 18, p. 2).

Of these deposits, 40 percent of the people called Philadelphia their home, 27 percent resided in some other Pennsylvania town. New Jersey residents, mostly from the state capital, Trenton, made up another 28 percent. The remaining 5 percent were from 10 other states, the majority of which were in the Mid-Atlantic region, but some relocated from states such as Texas or Michigan ("Levittown Home Sales," 1952, p. 3). To keep up with this rising demand, Levitt staffed the exhibit center seven days a week, from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Weeks later they would not close their doors until 10:00 p.m. To show their appreciation for this grand scale of buying, and to further advertise their product, Levitt and Sons ran another full-page ad in the *Bristol Courier* three weeks into the new year. "Mr. and Mrs. Levittown 1952," wrote the company, "You're Wonderful People" (Mr. and Mrs. Levittown, 1952, p. 4).

A Philadelphia Couple

Frank and Joann Clark were among the many thousands of homeseekers who made their way to the Levittown exhibit in 1952. Five decades later, they refer to themselves as original Levittown residents. They were born in the early 1920s, and grew up in Kensington, a typical row-house corner-store neighborhood in the then more populated West Side of Philadelphia. The streets and sidewalks were long and narrow, which forced vehicles of any type to straddle the curb so that others might pass. Joann's grandmother lived only a block behind her, as did a few other members of her family. As a child, Joann vividly remembers the awe of her neighborhood at night, as patterns of light would appear at the hand of a man who walked about the streets, carrying a flame, and leaving a wake of burning gas lamps to illuminate the sky. He was the lamplighter, an ever present figure in early twentieth-century city life.

Joann and Frank did not know each other as children, nor had their parents ever met before, which makes the move of both families to the underdeveloped Northeast part of Philadelphia, Tacony, even more interesting. They lived at the corner of a street of row homes, but beyond them lay fields of trees and grass. And it was here, Joann remembered, where her mother "could hear the frogs at night and the crickets." "My mother really thought that she was moving to the country," she recalled (J. Clark, personal communication, February 11, 2002). And perhaps it was the country in the early 1930s, or at least the edge of the city. At that time the line between the two had been clear. In time, however, that line would altogether disappear.

Joann and Frank were both strict Catholics and attended the same Catholic High School, although he was a bit older and had already graduated by the time they met.

Their first encounter happened at a church sponsored dance. The church, Joann recalls, more than any other social organization, was the heartbeat of social life in this community, as it was in most other communities throughout the city. It orchestrated events and gatherings for people of all ages, from children's after school programs to teenage dances. Many adult women formed Rosary Clubs and toured each other's homes, repeating the prayer and sipping tea. Men, among other things, formed church sponsored bowling leagues and competed with other parishes in the city.

A month after Joann graduated high school, in June of 1942, Frank was drafted into World War II. "I saw limited action," Frank said, in a humble and shaky tone (F. Clark, personal communication, February 11, 2002). But Joann remembered reading something entirely different in the few letters she received from him, often arriving months after they had been written. She, like millions of other news hungry civilians, relied on information found in such sources as *Stars and Stripes* or from film clips at movie halls to fill in the story of the evolving battle. "He doesn't like to talk about it," she said, "it was a very difficult time...he saw a lot of combat." Frank fought at Guadalcanal and in the Solomon Islands, and was in the landing in the Philippines. He considered the jungle his home for three long and uncertain years.

Frank survived the war. Some of his close friends, however, did not. He returned to Joann riding by train from San Diego in January 1946. The two married later in October of the same year. "There were lots of weddings," Joann remembered. "It was a big year for weddings." In fact, in 1946, Joann and Frank were among some 2,300,000 others who chose to tie the knot.

Frank and Joann lived with her mother in a thin, bricked Philadelphia row-home. Within a few years, though, their living conditions changed. The home that they had all rented was sold, and they would need to vacate quickly. Joann had also become pregnant. Joann's mother moved out, and the couple found a little unit in a nearby housing project. But soon this, too, was sold. "We had great difficulty finding something," Joann recalled (J. Clark, personal communication, February 11, 2002). "Housing was a problem and everybody was eager to get a house, but it was very difficult because all these veterans came home and all got married." By this time, Joann and Frank had two children, and before long, they would be without a place to live. They wanted more space, and ideally, they wished for something different, something better. "We did not want to buy into the housing project," she explained.

You are young and have ideals [she said]...everybody wanted a single home. That's what everybody's dream was; even though you came from a row house, you did not want to raise your family in a row house.

Joann's brother informed her that there were houses being built up in Bucks County. "Bucks County," she remembered thinking, "where's that?" Even though this part of the state was less than 30 miles away, Joann and Frank knew very little of the area or its people. If it was known at all, it was for its agricultural reputation, or for the value of its scenic beauty. Determined, Joann and Frank packed the kids, fueled the car, and drove toward their destination on the Roosevelt Boulevard, a state road, and the most direct route to this part of the county. There, alongside another road, Bristol Pike (now Route 13)--a colonial road connecting New York and Philadelphia, and at the corner of a farmer's field--sat the House of Levittown Exhibit Center. They inspected the homes,

conversed with salesmen, and to Joann's delight, took in the speckled paint and electronic brush display.

Their hopes, however, were not deflated; it had not been a wasted trip, as perhaps they thought it would be. The exhibit impressed them. The display of materials used in each home convinced them that the homes would be of good quality. If anything, they were more impressed by, and drawn to, the sheer value of the Levitt product. It was, they felt, the best house for the money. "It is very difficult for young people to realize how tight money was," Joann said, recalling the economic conditions of her young adult life (J. Clark, personal communication, February 11, 2002). "I don't think that it is even possible for them to imagine now because things are so very different." The Levitt house "just looked to us like...something that would be possible." And "as far as money was concerned," she continued, "it was something we could begin seriously thinking about."

The Clarks moved into their Levittowner on Fireside Lane in the Farmbrook section in October of 1952. In addition to Farmbrook, and at the end of what would turn out to be a six year building project, there were 39 other sections in Levittown ranging in size from 51 houses to 990, with an average size of 430 (Popenoe, 197: 113). At the end of all the building, Levittown, Pa consisted of 17,311 homes. Each of the 40 sections had a circumferential drive from which its interior streets were connected. The goal of this community design was to steer clear of the troublesome gridiron patterns that plagued urbanized areas like that Philadelphia.

Fearing that the individual resident would get lost in the bigness of the Levitt project, Alfred Levitt also developed theme sections, like Magnolia Hill, where mass plantings of Magnolia trees would identify a section for its residents, separating them

from the many others. The entire section of Oaktree, for example, would one day be shaded under a canopy of thick shade. Other sections like Dogwood Hollow, Crabtree and Forsythia Gate would have similar plantings. "The people who move into Magnolia Hill," Alfred explained in an early interview, "will co-share a school and a swimming pool and a ball park.

They will be encouraged to have a ball club that will compete for medals and other honors [he continued]...In this way, we hope that the individual will not be the occupant of the big city, Levittown, but rather an individual well known to his neighbors in Magnolia Hill (Katzander, 1954).

In the early years of construction and design, the Levittowner came in four styles and seven separate colors: weathered black, heather green, autumn brown, red, gray, yellow, and blue gray. Pre-colored asbestos-cement panels were used for the exteriors of each home. One would be hard put, though, to find the same style house in the same color. This sameness occurred every 56th house. And due in part Alfred's anti-gridiron street pattern, spotting an identical house on the same street was not possible (Weldon, 1952, p. 258).

A Western Pennsylvania Couple

Not all of the seven color schemes were equally well liked. "I hope its not a yellow siding," Mary Remis remembered her husband, Jack, telling a Levitt salesman (M. Remis, personal communication, April 7, 2002). They both stood in front of the large map, the salesman pointing to a property with his finger; Jack, having already addressed what had been bothering him, stood silent.

He and his wife, Mary, both from small towns outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, did not care for the color yellow. It was, arguably, the most disliked color

in all of Levittown. While reasons varied according to taste, a more practical dislike stemmed from the many months without grass or vegetation, thus exposing everyone and everything to blowing dirt, mud, dust and other types of construction debris. It was also thought that bugs were drawn to the color yellow. A yellow-sided house, it was believed, collected it all.

"Why do you care?," Mary remembered the salesman asking in response to Jack's question of color. "You have a good location. You won't have no houses across the street from this place, and the two houses on each side of you face a different street." The house had indeed been positioned well. It sat on the inside of the drive, facing a Levitt-built creek used for storm water overflows, and beyond it lay nothing but woods. The view from a dining-room table outside the kitchen picture window would have been one of unobstructed beauty, free of houses, other peoples' children, and curious neighbors. Taking all of this into consideration, Jack reluctantly responded with an "ok." "For \$100 down," Mary thought, "how could you complain?" (M. Remis, personal communication, April 7, 2002).

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, had been an industrial power throughout the late nineteenth and well on into the twentieth century. Its many billowing smokestacks, forever producing a smoke filled sky, dominated the shores of the Ohio, Monongahela, and Allegheny rivers. Mighty tugboats nudged barges brimming with coal down these rivers, navigating the many steel bridges that, from above, seemed to sew one river's edge to another. And it was here, in the small steel town of Homestead, where Mary and Jack first met. They were born only a year apart: Jack in 1919 and Mary in 1920.

Mary's hometown of Lincoln Place could not have been friendlier. "Everybody knew everybody else," she said. Even on her long walks around the neighborhood, she never felt uncertain about the names of the people she passed. "It was always 'Hello Mr. or Mrs. so and so'." And this level of neighborliness did not stop there. If someone in the community, particularly on her street, were sick, everybody would chip in and do things for them, from paying bills to buying groceries.

At the edge of her street, where the houses turn into rolling hills of wild flowers in the summer and the best terrain for sled riding in winter, sat the McDivitt family. Mr. McDivitt was a bricklayer, and as a consequence of his profession, he would often get horrible sized blisters on his hands. His wife, who suffered from chronic asthma, had also been frequently ill. They were long time friends of Mary's family, as were many other people on her street, but the McDivitt's were in great need, and they, as Mary considered them, were deserving people.

On weekends, when she did not have school, Mary would assist the McDivitts in cleaning their house. During the week she would even cook meals and wash dishes. The McDivitts did not have to ask for help, nor did they perceive the actions of their neighbors as intrusive or as just another handout. "This is who we were," Mary explained. "This is what we did" (M. Remis, personal communication, April 7, 2002).

The Great Depression of the 1930s hit working-class communities in Western Pennsylvania, like Lincoln Place, especially hard. When jobs left these areas, they normally did not return. It was not uncommon to find social agencies, represented by kind women with patient smiles, visiting local elementary schools in these depressed areas. They inspected children's shoes and offered replacements to those in greatest need.

They also checked teeth, and, when necessary, facilitated the use of dental services at prices everyone could afford--free.

As a child, Mary needed neither of these services. Jack, on the other hand, needed both, but never admitted it. He did this more out of embarrassment, Mary recalled, than humility. Jack's mother hemmed and mended hand-me-down clothes. His socks, it is sure, had been darned more times than the number of toes on both his feet. They had their electric turned off more than once, Mary remembers, and would often have no choice but to cook over an open fire.

But "Jack's mom could take anything and make a meal out of it," she boasted, and paused to give her fond memory justice. One family meal consisted of nothing more than one large baked onion cut up into pieces for everyone to share. A turkey was known to be on the table only once a year, at Christmas. But this meal, too, was rationed, with the remaining bird hidden so that it could resurface at another meal, on another day, in another form.

Jack's father ran a strict and limited ship at home. There was no drinking and no card playing. According to a philosophy that he never fully explained to anyone, Jack's father did not believe in homeownership. He would forever be a renter. Perhaps, under poor economic conditions, renting made more sense. One could not lose a home they did not own, nor would one be responsible for any types of repairs. Yet this was a philosophy that Jack would come to reject. Jack, according to Mary, wanted more for his family than his father provided for his own. Levittown would be Jack's crowning achievement.

"This was all hard for me to understand," Mary tried to explain. "If [my family] couldn't afford something, my dad would make it." He made Mary's first vanity and even a variety of miniature furniture for her baby dolls. After retiring as an engineer at a brick company, he found work at a hardware store, and after that, somewhere else. "He never sat still," she said (M. Remis, personal communication, April 7, 2002).

Many years later, Mary sees much of her father in herself. "I grew up doing hard work all the time," she said plainly. "That's why I am like I am today...this is all I know."

At seventeen years old, then in the 11th grade, Mary quit school. Jack had just graduated. It was 1937, and in less than one year's time they married and remained close to their hometown areas for ten more years. Jack, like thousands of his peers, joined the League of Steel Workers and began to work his way up through the mill's social ladder. One of the better ways to achieve a higher title, and therefore better pay, was to obtain a transfer to a newly built mill, one often hungry for experienced workers who needed little or no training, and could begin working immediately.

That opportunity came in 1953 when U.S. Steel was recruiting workers for its Fairless Steel Works along the shores of the Delaware River in Lower Bucks County. Jack jumped at the chance and moved to the area, boarding with an elderly couple in Morrisville, PA, all the while searching out living accommodations for his growing family. He left Mary with their six-year-old daughter in Pittsburgh until he found something reasonable. On the shop floor he heard word of Levittown, and before long, it became a new place the Remises would call home.

Mary, Jack, their daughter, and now a 3-week year old son moved into their yellow-sided Levittown house on October 16, 1953. And while the color was not what they were told it would be, it was a new home, one that they now owned, and they loved it. But they would not be there for long, or so they believed. Like many other struggling postwar veterans, Jack and Mary considered this home the first step up to bigger and better things. And yet she would have considered it unthinkable then, Mary, five decades later, found herself sitting in the same Levittown house.

Like many other soon-to-be owners, they made it a nightly ritual to drive by the building project to check on the changing shape of their future home. Everyday they witnessed an evolution, and soon enough, the house had been completed. While visiting the job site one day, a laborer (working for a subcontractor, who worked for Levitt and Sons) approached Jack with an opportunity that would enable him to take a more active role in the building of his home. What Jack did not know was that throughout the construction site, others like him were being asked the same question. "Do you have ten dollars," Mary remembered the worker asking. "Why?," they replied. "If you give me ten dollars," he explained, "I can assure you that these men will do a better job at building your house" (M. Remis, personal communication, April 7, 2002).

The Remises did not have ten dollars. In fact, most new Levittowners did not have extra money, especially to pay for a home in which meeting the deposit was enough of a challenge. But this was just one example; many other residents were approached and guaranteed everything from the use of more nails per shingle to more caulk per window, all at a reasonable price, of course.

The most promised, and, under the conditions, the most enticing guarantee ensured future residents of more cement in the slab foundation. And this deal, more than any other, had often been taken into consideration, for there had been a level of skepticism, even fear, in buying a home without a basement. Parents of many young homebuyers warned their children that homes made without basements, and constructed with wood rather than brick or stone, would "blow away in the first good wind." The logic was simple: the thicker the foundation, the better your home's chance of braving severe weather. Building homes without basements had been something new to postwar Americans. They had good reason to worry.

A Couple from Northeast Pennsylvania

The concept of building an entire community from scratch, complete with schools, parks, and community facilities produced many questions and raised some fears, most revolving around the level of quality of a mass-produced home selling for only \$10,000, and requiring a deposit of \$100 (this too was, in certain periods, waived for veterans under the FHA/VA).

Arlene Olson laughingly remembers her father-in-law's comments when he visited them in their new Levittown Rancher in March of 1954. "What kind of house is that, that you only have to put down \$100?," she remembered him asking (A. Olson, personal communication, December 26, 2001 and February 7, 2002). He was from Scranton, Pennsylvania, as was Arlene and her husband Steve. At the turn of the 20th century Scranton was the third largest city in the state, smaller than only Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, respectively. Like Pittsburgh, it had a history embedded in a strong

industrial economy: first iron, then steel, and later the mining of anthracite (hard) coal. After World War II, though, coal production declined dramatically. And even under these less than ideal economic conditions, housing was terribly expensive. Indeed, a typical single family home along one of the cities' many crowded streets required a deposit of \$10,000 before purchase. (Prior to the FHA, described in detail in chapter 3, mortgages were limited to one-half to two-thirds the value of the home [see Jackson, 1985, p. 204].) Levitt's requirement, understandably, raised a few eyebrows.

"We would have had to save money for...ten years for the down payment," Arlene said. It is no wonder that Steve's father found the Levitt home of great interest. After his inspection, which consisted of a thorough walk around the house, stopping to take in the enormous thermo-paned picture window, and peering up at the steep roof lines leading to the unfinished second floor, he admitted, he was impressed. "Ahhh...seems pretty good...it really seems pretty good," Arlene remembered him saying in an approving tone, which pleased both her and her husband, Steve, greatly. "I don't know what he expected," she laughed (A. Olson, personal communication, December 26, 2001 and February 7, 2002).

Arlene was born in 1918, and grew up in a largely Polish community in the south side of Scranton. She lived in a city where the downtown, she pointed was really "downtown." From the center of town there were four sections, or neighborhoods, that sprouted outward and steeply upward (known officially as North, South, East, and West). In times of fog, the steep streets might have looked as if they rose into the heavens. If you are in your car, and you have to go down, Arlene warned, "pray that your brakes hold well."

She, like many other children, walked to school, and occasionally enjoyed a game of hopscotch on the sloping sidewalks in front of her home. One evening around 4:30 or 5:00 p.m., Arlene and a group of her friends were entertaining themselves with this friendly jumping game when out of the corner of her eye she spotted something, someone, and they stopped. Stepping off the trolley, at the bottom of her street, and walking toward them up the rising hill, were a handful of men. They were covered in black coal dust from head to toe. They resembled dark shadows creeping slowly and wearily in their direction. "I can picture some of those men," she vividly recalled. "They were so weary and tired"; their eyes must have seemed to speak it, as if their bodies did not. "We were playing on the sidewalk and [we] moved out of their way. [You] just wondered how they could make it, and yet they went back the next day," she said, "and did it over again" (A. Olson, personal communication, December 26, 2001 and February 7, 2002).

When the Great Depression came to Scranton, it seemed to linger on and on, well into the postwar period, and long after the economic conditions improved elsewhere. Many people who had steady work during the war had lost their jobs when it ended. Working in the mines had been, for many, their only alternative. When Steve Olson returned from the War, he found his wife, Arlene, and their four-year-old daughter waiting for him. They met in Sunday school as children and married a year later in 1939. But what Steve did not find awaiting him were jobs, other than work in the mines. But Steve did not care for this work. He believed that he could achieve better working conditions for more pay. Scranton, however, offered few opportunities for him and his growing family.

The local newspapers had been advertising jobs for U.S. Steel's Fairless Steel Works, in addition to many other steel associated businesses then booming in Lower Bucks County, Pennsylvania. In response, Scranton families by the hundreds left their hometown in search of work in these growing industrial areas of Pennsylvania, and although they would forever refer to Scranton as "home" in conversations with family and friends, many would never return again ("Coal towns," 2002, pp. A1, A3). Steve eventually found work in Trenton, New Jersey, and it was there, while he was reading the local city paper, that he came across an ad for Pennsylvania's newest community, Levittown. This would soon become the Olson's new hometown. "What do we have to lose?," Arlene remembered Steve asking her. With little money saved, and in need of a home, Levittown seemed like the answer. Indeed, they had very little to lose. But they had so much to gain.

"When we were young," Arlene stated with certainty, "everybody was poor, and we did not know the difference." Saving money was especially difficult to do in Scranton. "We came down [to Levittown] on a shoestring like everybody else," she said. "If somebody calls [someone] rich," she remembered thinking, "then you thought you were rich too" (A. Olson, personal communication, December 26, 2001 and February 7, 2002). Everybody was similar to everybody else. Everybody, she believed, was poor.

Writing in 1958, John Kenneth Galbraith, in The Affluent Society, drew attention to a period of unprecedented American affluence that was then only a few generations old. Arlene Olson's words speak of such a period, one in which affluence had not yet seeped into the lives of working-class people. She understood her position in the working-class world as one that was little different from anyone else.

The ideas [Galibrath writes] by which the people of this favored part of the world interpret their existence, and in measure guide their behavior, were not forged in a world of wealth. These ideas were the product of a world in which poverty had always been man's normal lot, and any other state was in degree unimaginable...poverty was the all pervasive fact of the world (p. 1).

Arlene's perception of those around her is firmly grounded in her experiences in Scranton, Pennsylvania, during the 1930s and 1940s. The economic gaps between rich and poor were, perhaps, not as widely visible as they would be in much larger cities like Philadelphia or Pittsburgh.

Empty Pockets

Larry and Alice Franklin, like the Clarks, Remises and Olsons before them, jumped at the chance to own a Levitt home. "The idea of green grass and open space," Larry stated emphatically, "was to me, paradise!" He and Alice, along with their new child, lived in a cramped Philadelphia apartment. Like the Clarks, the Franklins also grew up in row-houses but wished for something better, something different for their own family. With limited economic means, something less cramped and suburban meant something mass-produced. In 1953, the FHA loosened its deposit requirements, which, for a short period of time and to the surprising delight of many, enabled veterans to purchase homes in Levittown for no money down. "That sounded like a good deal to me," Larry remembered thinking, "because that's about what I had" (L. Franklin, personal communication, March 12, 2003).

The Franklins were broke. Their city rent alone drained over half of Larry's monthly income, leaving little for the purchase of other daily necessities. They had to move, and Levittown seemed possible. But Larry's credit history and yearly income

statement would have blocked this opportunity for homeownership in Levittown. He simply did not make enough money to qualify for a mortgage, and with Alice not working, they had little hope of ever owning a home of their own. Alice's brother, an accountant, devised a strategy, albeit an illegal one: he would set up a bogus account and credit history for Larry so that, on paper, he looked like an acceptable risk. It worked. "It was touch and go for a while," Larry humbly admitted. "I was just about able to pay the mortgage, but I made it" (L. Franklin, personal communication, March 12, 2003).

Levitt and Sons knew very well that most of their new homebuyers lacked large incomes and substantial savings. What the Levitts built, then, was something Bill called a "ready-to-eat-house." "That's a house," he explained, "into which the new owner can move [into] and start living at once" ("Levitt's 12th floor apartment," 1952, p. 3).

To further ease them into this community, the company provided residents with everything they needed. Each home's oil needs were satisfied in advance by the Meenan Oil Company, a business well known to Levitt and Sons since they had serviced every one of their 17,445 houses in Levittown, New York. O'Connor and Company handled Levittown's garbage collection, and did so, understandably, with a smile. "If your garbage collection man tips his hat and wishes you a cheery 'Good Morning'," wrote the *Levittown Times*, "don't be the least bit surprised" ("Levittown Garbage," 1952, p.4). Like a paternal guardian, Levitt met the needs of Levittown residents, and by doing so, made other businesses and corporations unquestionably rich.

Inside the homes, the kitchens were complete with stainless steel sinks, enameled metal cabinetry, modern appliances and running water. The last known accessory to be installed in a Levitt built home was the toilet seat, and Levitt and Sons bought over

19,000 of them. A Levitt sponsored product advertisement for the Church Toilet Seat Company claimed that these seats were "the best seat in the house." Of course this made the manufacturer "naturally proud" ("Over 19,000 of Them," 1955, p. 197).

A move from Philadelphia to Levittown, for example, calling on the services of a moving company, cost approximately \$15.00, a day's pay for the average worker in 1952. Those who chose the less expensive alternative piled their belongings into borrowed cars and pick-up trucks, with chairs tied to rooftops and pieces of furniture protruding from trunks. But beyond the expenses needed to get to Levittown, once there, as Joann Clark explained, "[residents] did not have to put money out for lots of things." "[Levitt] knew," she continued, "that these people were not yet established" (J. Clark, personal communication, February 11, 2002).

Rather than have residents purchase expensive carpeting, Levitt had all floors covered with an extremely durable and easy to clean black asphalt tile. "They were your pride and joy," Joann boasted, recalling the demanding but rewarding work of keeping the floors at home free of dirt and grime. "You waxed those floors and they were beautiful!" Indeed, in many other postwar communities, floor wax was the biggest selling item in hardware stores year round. "Honest to God," said one store manager to *Harper's* magazine in 1953, "I think they eat the stuff" (Henderson, 1953a, p. 28).

Blossoming Under Ripe Conditions

For many residents of Levittown, their home, the community of Levittown itself, was a stepping stone to bigger and better things. Levittown had been considered a starter community. This low-cost home had been all one could afford, and some, like Larry

Franklin, could barely make the monthly payments. One month followed another, and before long, one year turned into two. And as time past, people rose in rank and salary at their places of employment, and slowly began to accumulate and save more and more resources; it had been something they had never had the opportunity to do before. Many would move on. Still, others would not.

As a new community, Levittown residents would establish a new way of life for themselves and for their families. They were the new rising middle-class generation, a product of unprecedented governmental manipulation (Kelly, 1993; Baxandall and Ewen, 2000; and Gilbert, 1981). As Kelly (1993) put it,

It is the underlying thesis of this book that the redefinition in class which resulted from the housing policies of the FHA and the GI Bill is among the most important contributions of the Roosevelt/Truman years (p. 240).

Housing policies, Kelly (1993) argues, such as the FHA and the Home Owners Loan Association, should be viewed less as a response to social needs, and more as a response to great public fear and the rising tide and popularity of communist ideas that gained strength during the Great Depression. Following the war, a solution to the demand for housing was slow to surface, and many of those in need grew impatient. One-third of the unemployed during the 1930s were in the building trades (Jackson, 1985, p. 203).

Proprietary housing, then, was a way to social engineer complacency among a disgruntled public (Kelly, 1993, p. 164). The federal government, Kelly (1993) wrote, "...stave[d] off a socialist revolution...[with] a socialist solution. The dispute was not in whether the government should fund, but whom--and how" (p. 166).

Creating jobs, controlling wages, and greasing the wheels of a mass-production economy were just a few of the mechanisms used to bring these changes about. "Never

before or since," wrote James Gilbert (1981) in his examination of postwar America, "has the government intervened so seriously and successfully in the lives of Americans" (p. 15). It was the continuation of Roosevelt's New Deal. Levittown was a postwar symbol of this intervention, and its inhabitants were the direct beneficiaries.

Unlike turn of the century homogeneous suburbs, where all residents were, for the most part, firmly rooted in one particular class or another (most likely that of the upper-middle class), Levittown, and newer suburban communities of this period, were quite different. "Life styles on a single Levittown street," wrote William Dobriner (1958) of his early Long Island community, "may range from those of a second generation, working class, ex-Brooklynite of Italian 'extraction' to those of a struggling young executive of 'The Organization', to those of a medical intern from an 'upper-upper' New England family who is completing his residence at a local hospital" (p. xxiii). This mix of education and occupation existed in Levittown, Pennsylvania, as well. It was common to find steelworkers from Pittsburgh, or the hard coal regions of Scranton, living next door to white collared professionals from Trenton, New Jersey, or Philadelphia. Some worked in the steel mill or at another local factory job, while their neighbors commuted the train daily back and forth into the city for work. Still, further down the street there likely lived a doctor, a lawyer, a college or university professor, and still more steelworkers and others employed in the local industrial economy.

Different, too, were the many backgrounds represented on a typical Levittown street. This was an unexpected experience for Joann Clark, who, coming from Philadelphia, assumed most of her new neighbors would be displaced Philadelphians as well. Her Texas neighbor, surprisingly, proved her terribly wrong. "He would crack me

up," she chuckled, "because he would be out there in his cowboy boots and his western style hat weeding the lawn." The family across the street from her called Missouri their home. Next door: Canadians. "It was very interesting," Joann reflected, "to have so many different kinds of neighbors" (J. Clark, personal communication, February 11, 2002).

Levittown Through Jack Rosen's Lens

Jack Rosen, a Philadelphia journalist and amateur photographer, moved to Levittown in 1952 like hundreds of others. Like many other Philadelphians, including the Clarks and the Franklins, Jack and his wife, Susan, and their baby (with another on the way) lived in "an impossible third floor apartment." It was "nice," Jack said, but "crowded" (J. Rosen, personal communication, February 11, 2003). The Levittown home sounded like a great deal to Jack and to his wife, also a Philadelphia resident. In fact, they found the Levitt house hard to resist. A two-bedroom apartment in Trenton, New Jersey, for example, rented for \$85 a month in 1952. That same year, Levitt and Sons offered a three-bedroom, 1,000 square foot modern home on a 70x100 foot lot with brand-name appliances for \$100 down and \$60 a month. For many it was cheaper to buy than it was to rent.

Early Levittown residents, according to Jack, were "an interesting group." They "were young and adventurous," he recalls. "Intellectuals...who were interested in everything and tried very hard." Paul Beckert, Levittown's first lawyer, who would become years later a respectable county judge, made a similar observation of his neighbors. As an early resident himself, #561 out of 17,311, he remembered reading that

in the first few years, Levittown "had the highest percentage of college graduates of any community in the United States." Paul, himself, was among this educated group and had no problem finding others like him. "They were not your standard blue-collar workers who eventually filled up Levittown," Jack explained, comparing Levittown past with Levittown present (J. Rosen, personal communication, February 11, 2003). It would be reasonable to suggest, then, that the educational benefits guaranteed through the GI Bill of Rights played an important role in enlightening these young homeowners, and thereby transforming and enlivening the culture of many new communities in the postwar period, including Levittown.

But in what ways were they "adventuresome," as Jack had observed? Were they not just Americans in search of better job opportunities and the chance to own a home? Indeed, they were, but it was the context of their lives, the unpredictability of the day's events, and the differences in experience that came with life following the Second World War that separated them from previous generations. "They were leaving their families behind," Jack stated plainly, remembering well a time when strong familial and community bonds kept generations of one family on one street or in one neighborhood. There was a sense of great risk involved in making the decision to move to Levittown. No one else had done this before. No one knew for sure what it would be like. "They didn't know what they were getting into," Jack said simply (J. Rosen, personal communication, February 11, 2003).

The houses had not yet been built, and although Levitt had a glorious track record in New York, people had only sample homes to look at in Pennsylvania. There were sketches by artists of what the homes would look like with mature landscaping, but as

everyone knew, this would take years. Further, the homes sold by Levitt were priced 40 percent less than any other builder's homes of the same size, which, for many people, produced some concern. What would be the integrity and soundness of a home built for so few dollars?

Newspapers, popular magazines, academic journals and books, as well as novels were filled with harsh statements about this new suburban way of life. They criticized not only Levitt and Sons and other builders for thinking of a home in mass-production terms, but predicted that the residents themselves would turn out to be nothing but conforming drones, destined to digest the sameness of the homes that surrounded them, and that their children would suffer the same fate (Mumford, 1961; Keats, 1957; and Whyte, 1956). Friends and family, most buying into this attack on suburbia, warned early buyers that they were making a serious mistake.

Indeed, many people chose where they would spend the rest of their lives based on a salesman's explanation of a map that only a few understood. It was one of the most important decisions they would ever have to make, and yet, at that moment, they knew very little about the finer details of Levittown.

And if all of this was not enough to cause doubt or promote fear, the location was yet another important factor. Situated in the southeast corner of Pennsylvania, upon soil that had only recently sprouted the county's best asparagus, Levittown was worlds away from home. "They are cutting family apron strings," one paper announced in 1952, "and [are] showing the whole world that they are not afraid of the future" ("Welcome Levittown," 1952, p. 1).

Early Levittown residents, however, defied such a generalization. They were in many ways different from the limited design and style of the houses they occupied. Yet for the moment, they shared a sameness that reached far beyond the facades of their pastel colored homes; it was a sameness that had been grounded in the context of their very lives.

The conditions of fear, of want, and of need were the conditions of life for the majority of American people born before or during the Great Depression. Some early residents of Levittown, as children, either got a fresh piece of cardboard in their shoes every day or accepted handouts at school. If they could not afford to purchase toys, they, or their parents, made them. When food was in short supply some families divided one large onion for supper. Others, at their parent's request, made the routine trek to local rail-yards in search of scraps of fallen coal from passing cars. Another young boy, who would later come to own his own Levittown Ranch style home, remembered his mom taking in boarders to their home, complete strangers, for a charge of \$1.00 a week. She also gave away the only other pair of trousers he had--his church pair--to a young boy in need. This generation of people worked with what they had, or they did without.

Such a life-course shaped their worldviews. It defined their sense of need, their ability to want. In turn, these conditions produced a generation of young adults very much aware of their dependence on others, one that accepted, were grateful and had great respect for the role of authority in daily affairs, from local religious figures to boss-like politicians; one that followed customs and traditions, and adhered to religious teachings relentlessly; one that led lives restricted of choice, of privacy and of opportunity, delaying gratification and always conscious and cautious of what to expect from the

future. In return, many Americans received (or perceived) strong communities. They had great confidence in themselves, in their neighborhoods, their neighbors, and in their governments. At the moment, many believed that their lives were stable and secure--the Korean War and the Cold War that would follow, however, produced new fears and uncertainties.

The idea of community, then, must not be viewed as something that one buys into. It is not a byproduct of the ways in which homes are situated along curvy streets, or a mere reflection of the number of parks and playgrounds per square mile. It has nothing to do with the themes of particular sections. Rather, community is a lived achievement, a shared experience. Levittown, though, would be unlike anything these postwar Americans had ever experienced. Yet many were eager for the challenge.

For Sale: A New Way of Life

June 23, 1952 was unlike any other Monday in Lower Bucks County. It began and ended with a steady, and at times, heavy rain. The puddles were endless and unavoidable. The air had become unseasonably cold. "The weatherman refused to cooperate," the *Levittown Times* reported in their first printing as the community's official newspaper. But despite this unpleasant weather, it was a special day, one that, as the *Levittown Times* stated, "made many people happy in spite of the adverse elements and confusion" ("Move-in Day," 1952, p. 1).

Levitt and Sons chose 20 families from the many hundreds available to mark the birth of their town on this move-in day. From this pool of residents they chose the token first Levittown family, John and Philomena Dougherty and their two teenage daughters,

Carole and Rita. "I was really surprised and excited that they would ask us," Philomena said, "and we were very happy to go along with it" ("Fame Joined Doughertys," 1977, p. 2). Coming from their government housing project in Philadelphia, Levittown was a dream made real.

Philomena, who described herself as a "ham," but who had been described by the *Saturday Evening Post* as a "trig and vivacious" woman "not much over thirty," loved all of the attention that came with this grand event (1954, September, p. 27).

Newspapermen, camera crews, photographers, and the everyday curious, swarmed around the Doughertys and the other 19 families on this bright but sunless day. In keeping with fashion, Philomena wore a white lace blouse and velvet skirt, hardly an outfit to be tramping about in the mud and windy rain. But on this day, everyone dressed.

The Governor of Pennsylvania, Mr. John S. Fine, in a letter written to and later republished in a special edition of the *Levittown Times*, five months before this opening day, extended a warm welcome to the state's newest community. "It is unusual for a rural countryside to blossom into a full-blown urban community within the span of a few months," the Governor wrote, "but the exceptional has become the order of the day in the dynamic development of eastern Bucks County" ("Text of Governor Fine's Greeting," 1952, p. 4).

Being a Levittown resident, the *Levittown Times* pointed, "is...a pioneer activity, which makes each of us a Daniel Boone or Benjamin Franklin" ("Modern Pioneers," 1952, p. 1). "The development of Levittown life will be in the hands of every resident." The Governor also saw himself as a willing participant in this vibrant growth. We all, he

said, "have a certain kinship in pioneering this economic transformation" ("Text of Governor Fine's Greeting," 1952, p. 4).

Life in Levittown would be something new for everyone. Few had ever experienced this type of living before. It was a community built all at once on acres of open farmland, far from friends and family. They were outsiders to area natives, and, for the most part, complete strangers to each other. Yet, when taken together, they were some of America's first suburban pioneers!

Always a Knock at the Door

Beyond the news-media frenzy, sparked both by public curiosity and by company promotions, new Levittown residents were kindly asked to confront yet another intrusive, but at times, helpful, part of suburban living: the door to door salesmen. "Pardon me, madam," wrote the *Trenton Evening Times*, "but may I have a moment of your time?" ("It was a Big Day," 1952, p. 3). This phrase indeed was the theme song on this day as the first 20 families occupied their homes.

There were salesmen for bread, milk, meats, laundry, television, encyclopedias, insurance, burial plots, storm windows, sashes and screens. They patrolled the streets in plain cars, decorated delivery vans and trucks, and some of the less modernized, rural salesmen pulled their wares by horse and wagon. These arguably were the children's favorite.

The salesmen were smart. They did their homework. Each day they knew which families were making settlement and on what street they would soon be moving to. Joann and Frank Clark, traveling from Philadelphia with their car packed full, crossed

over a narrow wooden bridge, straddling an abandoned canal, and headed toward their new home. There were large piles of dirt everywhere, and beyond them, trees as far as the eye could see. "It was like having a covered wagon," Joann recalled (J. Clark, personal communication, February 11, 2002). And as we pulled onto our street, she said, "the milkmen were all out there waiting for you." "We looked at them," she remembered, "and they said, 'ok, you can go in first.'" After 10 or 15 minutes, milkmen began parading through the Clark's kitchen, talking with them about their products and giving out free samples, hoping to get them as another customer.

For other residents it had been just another variant of the same story. One couple was following their moving van down the street to their new home when a bread truck, traveling past them, spotted the moving van and turned around in the street. "He stopped at the door with free bakery samples," a woman said. "After that, salesmen came soliciting for months" (History of Falls Township, 1968, p. 62). Indeed, it was not uncommon to hear new residents caution each other with the phrase "Don't turn around, there's someone following us" ("Around Town," 1952a, p. 2).

As a customer of a bread man, for example, the resident would be able to pick whatever breads interested them from the comfort of their front door. The milkman, on the other hand, responded to notes left in empty bottles stationed in tin boxes within an arm's reach of the house. "It was wonderful," explained Mary Remis (M. Remis, personal communication, April 7, 2002). "There were a lot of things like bread and milk that you didn't have to go to the store for." And "when you're raising children," she continued, "those are the two things that you have to have in the house."

A conversation between a frozen food salesman named Oscar Boons and a new Levittown housewife was captured in a documentary film when Levittown was two years old.

"By now," the narrator of the film stated, "Oscar has so many customers that he doesn't really care if he makes another sale." But as Oscar would soon make known, he had something else to sell, "a secondary sales talk" (Katzander, 1954).

"I sell a line of frozen food right from the truck to the door," Oscar told the resident. "I called this afternoon to find if you might be interested in the healthful line of frozen foods. We'll be cruising through this section of Levittown on each Friday", he pointed out.

"I am sorry," she replied, "but I already have a frozen food man."

"Well, that's all right," he continued, stashing away one brochure in his pocket and pulling out another. "We understand there are a lot of fellows coming in to see you ladies, but while I am here, I thought maybe I could talk a little bit about politics." He paused only long enough to end one sentence before quickly beginning another. "I happen to be the Democratic Committee man in this area...and also a commissioner", he explained.

"I am sorry," she replied again, still uninterested, "but my husband and I are both Republicans."

"Well, that's quite all right," Oscar repeated, now for the second time. Yet he was not finished, and although she might have wished he were, he had one last sales pitch.

"You see," he continued, "we are out hunting for good Republicans because we feel we can convert them into good Democrats."

"That would be a pretty tough job," she said nervously, not certain how to respond, either to Oscar or to the cameramen.

"Well," Oscar said finally, "I really came here to sell you frozen foods, but we will be back to see you later on."

A great number of Levittown residents enjoyed these purposeful visitors, and gladly welcomed them into their homes. The reasoning was simple: shopping was difficult. The closest food store and shopping area had been the small town of Bristol, three miles away. A larger shopping area could be found in the city of Trenton, New Jersey, which sat some six miles in the opposite direction, across the Delaware River. A food store in Levittown would take several more months to open.

Most families fortunate enough to own a vehicle owned only one. And with the husband away during the day, women, left with any number of young children, were unable to do much traveling in times of need. Some residents developed an efficient car pool system and picked each other up along the way, a unique system that must have made Levitt and Sons proud. Others relied on self-employed taxi services and purchased rides for 25 cents. It took a few decades for some women to learn how to drive. Many others, however, never did; it simply was not necessary in Levittown, as long as there were a few trustworthy friends on hand.

As time passed, however, the thrill of buzzing salesmen rapping on metal screen doors did wear out. One resident estimated that 26 salesmen visited her home the very day she moved in ("Birth of a City," 1952, p. 76). Within a period of 15 minutes, one family received "three quarts of milk, a pint of cream, a pound of butter, one dozen eggs and a certificate for free dry cleaning" ("Around Town," 1952a, p. 2). Still another

resident remembered two salesmen waiting in her kitchen while her husband talked to another in the living room. "The way we stopped that," she explained in an interview published in the late 1960s, "was to buy screen and storm sashes so we could point to them and say, 'see, we have them already'" (The history of Falls Township, 1968, p. 62).

Others simply stopped answering the door. Some hid behind their own furniture, muffling their giggles, so as to make it look and sound like nobody was home. "Some [salesmen] were rather persistent," Stella Rowan wrote in her weekly newspaper column on Levittown entitled 'Looking Back', "and would knock loudly on both the side and front doors (*Bucks County Courier Times*, 1989, October 18). They were not above peeking through windows to see if anyone was home [either]," she recalled. "Talk about aggressive."

Joann Clark, however, confronted the problem directly. She, too, believed that some salesmen were overly determined to make a sale. They kept coming back again and again, she remembered. One milkman had finally worn out his welcome. In a forward tone, she turned to him and said, "you know, my husband is becoming very suspicious of you!" And "that is how I got rid of him," she recalled decades later, laughing (J. Clark, personal communication, February 11, 2002).

You're Welcome

Soon after residents moved into their new homes, there had been yet another knock on their screen doors. Yet these visitors would be welcomed with open arms; few, if any, would have turned them away. Out of a concern for their new neighbors, and quite possibly an attempt to advertise one's business interests, the Bristol Chamber of

Commerce and the Mill Street Business Association sponsored The Goodwill Hospitality Service.

Two women, a Mrs. Robert Williams and a Mrs. Catherine Benhart, dressed in formal blouse and skirt, welcomed new residents and their families, at times visiting as many as 30 new families each week. They did so until every last home had been welcomed. To each new homeowner they offered cheerful answers to troubling questions, such as concerns over transportation, where to find a specific church, or how to locate other necessary items. They also brought gifts, which were, perhaps, the most memorable part of their visit.

"When a family moves to a new section of the country," Mrs. Williams explained in a newspaper interview, "one of the very first things they need is service. With this in mind," she continued, "we have secured gift certificates from merchants for essential services," such as dry cleaning, mechanical repairs and other home related needs ("Levittown Newcomers," 1952, p. 1). And whenever possible, area merchants made it their goal to stock brand name products familiar to new residents, products that had been only available in specific states or regions of the country. This kind gesture helped make a new resident's transition into Levittown both an exciting and comfortable one. And there is no doubt that their kindness went unappreciated.

Two other welcoming services were established as well: The Welcome Wagon and The Welcoming Committee of the Levittown Civic Association (LCA). Women of the Welcome Wagon were described as being "smiley and personable" ("Welcome Wagon," 1952, p. 2). They, too, carried gift baskets with presents from local civic-minded merchants. The Welcoming Committee of the Levittown Civic Association were

residents of Levittown themselves, and while they did not bring gifts, they did offer whatever assistance they could to new residents.

"I know you are just getting started," said one LCA Welcoming Committee representative to a new resident, "but I'd like to welcome you here on behalf of the community. Have you any problems that you have run into that I might be able to help you with?" (Katzander, 1954). 'Where are the babysitters?,' had probably been the most often asked question from young mothers in Levittown. The *Levittown Times*, described the "baby sitter shortage" as a serious problem, for it "keeps Levittown parents tied up" which inhibits civic participation.

A Community in Print

We [The *Levittown Times*] have been requested by the Slater family of Levittown to inform new residents that the warranty card for the stove may be found in the broiler, under the chrome rack. Don't accidentally burn it. It's important ("Advice," 1952, p. 8).

The *Levittown Times*--"Levittown's Home Newspaper"--had arguably been the most important resource for residents of this fledgling community. Editor and publisher Ira Joachim, managing editor Martin Lupow, and associate editor Barbara Archer, published their special preview edition in late January of 1952, almost six months before the first residents would move in. At five cents a copy, the paper was an immediate success.

As a local paper, delivered weekly, the *Levittown Times* featured only those stories concerning the resident of Levittown. Someone living in another community, with no interest in Levittown or in Levitt and Sons, would have found this paper of little interest.

Mr. Lupow published a weekly column entitled "Around Town" in which he reported observations of neighborliness, announced birthdays, and delivered, as he put it, "...any bits of gossip or chatter that you'd like to read about" ("Around Town," 1952a). One sign of neighborliness he observed had been the sighting of a neighbor who was "watering the new shrubbery for an absent neighbor who [didn't] know it was planted yet" ("Signs of Neighborliness," 1952, p. 5).

The only woman on staff at the paper, Mrs. Archer, wrote perhaps the most widely read and anticipated column, "For Women Only." But unlike any other feature of the paper, this column targeted only two aspects of the Levittown environment: the housewife and mother, and her kitchen. "Just think," she wrote, "at the same time, without leaving the room, you can prepare a roast, do the dishes and wash the week's laundry. It's truly the type of living we've wanted for a long, long time" ("For Women Only," 1952a, p. 3). "Housekeeping," she continued, "really can be fun."

Each week Mrs. Archer shared information with other women about meats and vegetables. She spoke directly to the "household budget director," and reminded them to stock up on those food items that were plentiful and reasonably priced. "Now is the time to gorge on many of the good things of summer," she advised everyone in an early July column ("For Women Only," 1952b, p.6). Every other week, she published recipes, often submitted by new residents themselves.

This sharing of information, however, did not focus solely on food or grocery store etiquette. Mrs. Archer was also a new resident of Levittown, and she knew that there were hundreds of other women living in the same type of home (the Levittowner) and working in identical kitchens. Perhaps someone had an ingenious method of

completing a task that someone else had not yet thought of. Did anyone, she asked, have a "solution to the ever present problem of where to hang a deluxe wall type can-opener?" "If you've already installed your own," she continued, "why not let other Levittown housewives in on your secret" ("For Women Only," 1952c, p.6).

She called this kind of information "creative thinking," and took the idea a step further by introducing the "Kitchen Kink" contest in early July of 1952. Kitchen kinks, she explained, were those "novel ways of doing things," those "time-saving short cuts" that make life easier ("For Women Only," 1952b, p.6). Levittown housewives were encouraged to write down their kinks on postcards and submit them to Mrs. Archer at the *Times*. Each week's winner, undoubtedly Levittown's most creative woman, received a \$1.00 award!

The *Levittown Times* also encouraged older residents, those who lived in their homes for more than a few weeks, to submit words of advice so that newcomers could be better prepared for life in Levittown. Under the title "Advice for New Residents," the *Levittown Times* published a number of practical tips. "Be careful of your hot water," warned one woman. "It's HOT!" ("Advice for New Residents," 1952, p. 8). The *Saturday Evening Post*, in an article that formally introduced Levittown, Pennsylvania, to the world, wrote that the water was so "amazingly, scaldingly [*sic*] hot that it brought screams of pain from unwary users in almost every house" (Thompson, 1954, p. 71). Some residents, after a short self-inspection, adjusted the water heater and fixed the problem. Others, however, "...concluded that William Levitt deliberately and mischievously...plotted to parboil the whole community" (Thompson, 1954, p. 71).

Our Biggest Problem

Three weeks after the first residents moved in, *The Levittown Times* asked their readers "what is your biggest problem?" The response was overwhelming. And when taken together, resident responses clearly identified a struggle that had been community wide.

"The dust," answered Mrs. Rumble in her letter to the editor. "I can't hang...any clothes outside. We feel like real pioneers" (Rumble, 1952, p. 4). "Mud is the biggest problem," complained Mr. Peto. "It's hard to keep the floors clean" (Peto, 1952, p. 4). Indeed, this is why many early residents advised others not to put rugs down on the floors until lawns of grass appeared to cover the exposed soil.

Mud and dust were, perhaps, the most pronounced problems in the lives of early Levittown residents. Songs and comic phrases emerged to pay homage to perils of life without grass. "Dust Molly and me," had been a phrase repeated by residents whenever they saw great clouds of dust chasing automobiles, or when an unsuspecting wind puffed the stuff through their window screens, leaving a film on everything in its path. As a safety measure, but more as a way to limit the amount of dirt flung into the air, police urged residents to drive slowly, often halting and warning those who did not, especially construction vehicles speeding through the project under pressures of efficiency.

"We felt that distant shopping would provide the biggest problem for new residents," the *Levittown Times* admitted in response to the many resident complaints. "We were wrong! Picture the housewife who had just dusted and polished the living room turning around to find a fine coating of dust on everything she had just cleaned" ("Dusting Your Doorstep," 1952, p. 4).

But when it rained, the dust transformed itself into its evil twin: mud. Children loved it. Adults hated it. One mother, possibly visiting a relative or friend in Levittown, asked, "How can I ever get my children to go home from this muddy paradise?" ("Around Town," 1952b, p. 9). From mud pies to mud cakes, children always found ways to entertain themselves, and in so doing, often lost boots, shoes, gloves and toys to that great abyss that was their front yard. "Only a mudder could love this place," one resident joked.

Levitt and Sons, taking into consideration resident outcry to these conditions, addressed the situation by neatly stacking 50 or so pieces of chipped slate in front of each finished home. They were slightly larger than a standard sized sheet of paper and provided a degree of protection, albeit only a temporary one, before the lawns were seeded and grass arrived. Residents used them to line the outer edges of their driveways or to make walkways between the door and the sidewalk. Once grass had arrived, residents often incorporated their slates into new patterns, making small patios or more elaborate landscaping features.

One resident, however, had been given more slates than any of his neighbors, or so it had been believed, enough to make two patios. This gave rise to an immediate concern. If everything was equal in Levittown, the residents thought, how could one receive more slates than his neighbors?

At a neighborhood social event, Mr. "two-patio" had too much to drink and laughingly told others how clever he had been during the initial weeks of homeownership. He confessed that during the late night hours, he scampered around in the dark and took two slates from every other pile. The response to his remarks was

immediate, even terrific. "Everyone was furious that a 'crook' lived amongst us," a resident angrily remembered, putting her memory into writing decades later ("May I Add," 2002). The entire neighborhood unsympathetically shunned the whole family. And within a year's time, she recalled, "they sold their home and moved on." This well may have been the community's first attempt to rid themselves of those persons possessing qualities unbecoming of a Levittown resident, but it would surely not be their last. Indeed, Levittown's next concerted effort, five years into the future, would make national news.

Yet the slates were no match for the mud, for they, at times, offered residents an unreliable form of protection. In heavy rains the slates often became slippery in the mud, and to the unfortunate surprise of neatly dressed residents, or worse, their visitors, the slates would often slide out from under foot, leaving one off balance, or worse yet, on the ground.

The floors of a home were also of great concern. Unlike dust, which could be brushed off or swept up, mud required the on-hands-and-knees scrubbing power of a Levittown housewife, a role and duty deemed appropriate in 1950s America. It is no surprise then that shoes quickly became an unwelcome sight. With nowhere else to go, shoes usually lined the outside of a home's doorway, which, to one visiting journalist, resembled "the entrance of a Moslem Mosque" ("Birth of a City," 1952, p. 76).

One resident, when asked by a curious sightseer for a tour, responded with a sarcastic but honest answer.

Sure lady, you can go through our house to see what it's like to live in Levittown. The entire tour is one-dollar, to cover the cost of cleaning mud off the floor ("Around Town," 1952c, p. 9).

More Challenges

No story of Levittown, Pennsylvania would be complete without addressing two other situations confronting its early pioneers: the invasion of Japanese beetles and limited telephone service. Unfortunately, there had been too much of one and not enough of the other.

In order to build Levittown, Levitt and Sons cleared hundreds of acres of forest, plowed over and filled in many natural waterways, excavated two large sand pits (which later became Levittown Lakes), and reconfigured thousands of acres of land elevations for proper drainage. This great degree of human intervention disrupted the natural balance of the many separate ecosystems, or bio-regions, existing within the boundaries of the Levitt and Sons project. Taking together Levittown, U.S. Steel's Fairless Steel Works, and the 2,000 home community of Fairless Hills--and every other building program in this boom area--it would be reasonable to conclude that the natural ecological balance of much of Lower Bucks county had been dramatically effected. The beetle invasion that followed (the bug, not the band) had been a direct result of this disrupted environment.

The onslaught of these small bugs came at a time when much of Levittown was in bloom. Grass had been planted and was growing very well in many sections of the community. Trees were dressed in leaves and a great number of flowering plants and shrubs were showing their colors. This sense of life, however, was quickly reduced to "brown lace" by "voracious little monsters," as Stella Rowan remembers, reflecting back

on the event in her newspaper column some forty years later (*Bucks County Courier Times*, 1989, November 1).

Japanese beetles covered Levittown like dust had only months before. Children, doing their part to defend their community from these unwelcome pests, armed themselves with pickle jars and discarded nylon stockings and began an intensive bug collection campaign. Hanging out clothes under these conditions had been especially distressing to the Levittown housewife. Each piece of laundry had to be thoroughly examined, as beetles liked to nestle in the folds of sheets, pillowcases, pant pockets and towels. When outside, beetles even found their way into one's hair, up shirtsleeves, and often down the front of a woman's blouse. "While not harmful to anything but vegetation," Stella wrote, "they did inspire revulsion over the invasion of one's self" (*Bucks County Courier Times*, 1989, November 1).

For a great number of Levittown residents, the location of their new community was worlds away from anything familiar to them. Indeed, they often referred to themselves as "in the middle of nowhere," or "out in the boon-docks." This new lifestyle presented a critical and pressing challenge; it required an adjustment to a set of conditions never before experienced. This new style of living, far removed from family and friends and forced to battle limitations on mobility and limited outside communication, had been, perhaps, the most profound situation challenging residents. Some assimilated immediately and were quite comfortable with their surroundings. For many others, however, it would take much longer. And to do all of this without the help of a telephone, being able to reach out to those you knew and trusted, made the transition into Levittown even more difficult to digest.

"This was an all together different type of living for us," Mary Remis recalled (M. Remis, personal communication, April 7, 2002). Coming from a small town with deep roots, Levittown, with its growing pains intermixed with strange faces and alien voices, had been a frightening place. "I cried for a solid year," she admitted, shaking her head. "I hated it!" She missed her family, her neighborhood--the familiarity that came with generations of conversation and neighborliness, "doing things for each other," as she would say. She wanted to go back home.

Alone in a house with a six-year old child and a 3 week old baby--her steelworker husband away until early evening--Mary felt isolated, detached. Yet she was most likely not alone with these feelings. Levittown, wrote David Halberstam (1993) in his epic telling of the 1950s, "...was not unlike an old whaling port where the men periodically went off for several months to hunt their quarry, leaving their wives to tend the community. But here," he pointed, "the men returned home at 6 p.m. each night" (p. 137).

"I had no family here," Mary explained, "and when I was in need...I didn't have anybody" to turn to (M. Remis, personal communication, April 7, 2002).

Understandably, she felt uncomfortable approaching complete strangers with personal requests. And because nobody offered help, as would customarily be the case between strangers in her town of Lincoln Place, Mary felt even more apprehensive about having to knock on someone's door if she needed something.

Not only did Mary first perceive other residents as "distant" and unwilling to offer assistance in advance of need (although limited communication between neighbors could have been attributed to moving in during the colder fall and winter months, whereas

people are more likely to be inside their home than outside socializing in the yard), she also strongly believed that many families emigrating from Philadelphia to Levittown, or from other urban areas for that matter, held an extreme dislike for steel families. Indeed, a hate relationship would not be stretching such a perception. "They absolutely hated the steel workers," she said plainly, and this was "well known...a lot of the people I know felt the same way." "They just thought we were scum," Mary stammered angrily, "[but] we weren't scum...I mean, you have to work some place."

For many people in the 1950s, Levittown was a status symbol; it was an escape from the crowded cities and smoke-infested industrial towns, and it symbolized a step up on the social and economic ladder. In Mary's Levittown, some city workers stigmatized manual laborers, the latter, according to Mary, represented a different class of people--a group disenfranchised from the 1950s corporate America. The understanding was that people with few economic resources and less education would care less for their home and property. For the city escapee, the home was an investment, and no one wanted to see his or her dream devalued on the market by neighbors who were not of an appropriate social status.

As early as November of 1953, some 70 percent of the purchasers of Levittown homes were from Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey. Many others were from Trenton, New Jersey ("Mortgages Totaling," 1953, p. 17). Blue-collar workers from small towns in Western and Northeastern Pennsylvania were, early on, of the minority, both in numbers and in public opinion.

For Levittown pioneers, who were often separated from friends and family by many miles, the telephone was a lifeline, an arm to lean on when the reality of this new

style of living grew uncomfortable, even unbearable. Levitt's rate of completing homes, though, far exceeded Bell of Pennsylvania's ability to deliver service, which put many residents without service for months. Frank and Joann Clark went without a telephone for over a year. There had been public phones scattered through each section of homes, but calls could only be made, they could not be accepted. Those residents not fortunate enough to have a phone booth outside their home or on the corner of their street had no alternative but to walk to the nearest one, often standing in line many minutes to make just one call.

In Levittown, Joann Clark lived less than 30 miles from her family in Philadelphia, but if it was not next door, or around the corner, it may have well been hundreds of miles away, much like the distance separating Mary Remis from her family. Joann, however, had an immediate reason to worry. Her mother was terribly ill, and she believed it would be only a matter of time before she passed. Joann's sister, unable to place a call to her directly, had to call the local police department, then situated in Levitt's Budgeteer sample home. It would be their responsibility to relay messages to individual residents. And when residents themselves were in need, either with a pregnancy, sickness, or some other emergency, it was the police again who were to be summoned by way of the public telephone.

On a warm June day, eight months after first becoming a Levittown resident, and still without a telephone, Joann was alone in her front yard tending to her new plantings of flowers and shrubs when something caught her eye. She stopped and stood up. "I could see this police car coming up the street," she said in a soft voice. "I knew that my mother had died" (J. Clark, personal communication, February 11, 2002).

Joann Clark and Mary Remis were forced to confront the unpleasant conditions that came with establishing life in a new town. Inadequate means of communication, and for some, complete isolation, were features of community life they had not expected. The muddy lawns and dust filled air, and swarming beetles were not items or events pictured in the Levitt advertisements. What prevailed, and therefore what motivated residents to stay and confront these conditions without quitting and running home (as some did), was a vision of community, of a community becoming. Some of those who stayed in Levittown were committed to family and to community. Others, it is certain, meant only to stay for a short while as they moved up the ladder of social mobility. Unforeseen occurrences, however, (i.e., death of a spouse) may have forced some to stay longer than they had originally expected.

When the Dougherty family celebrated their one-year anniversary in Levittown they expressed their delight in finally seeing grass and trees in replace of mud and dust. "But as messy as it was," Philomena reflected in a newspaper interview, "we thought it as beautiful" ("First Residents Amazed," 1953, p. 1).

A resident of a Levittown, New York, relied on his imagination to recall his first impressions.

You can still remember walking up to your new home...it was legally yours. You didn't see the unlandscaped mud on your lawn, you saw thick green grass and flowers, all kinds of flowers. And when you opened the door--what a feeling it can be to put a key in the door and open it!--you didn't see the emptiness, you saw a cozy furniture arrangement around the fireplace. Looking out of the huge living room window, you didn't see the tractors busy leveling the land, you saw a future park, all dressed up in thick trees and birds, so many, many birds. And as you walked around the room, just touching things, it was so easy to imagine noises in the silence--your wife busy in the kitchen making another fancy dessert, the crying of a brand-new baby... (Martin, 1950, p. 16).

"Suburbia," writes urban historian Kenneth Jackson (1985), "symbolizes the fullest most unadulterated embodiment of contemporary culture...[it is] both a planning type and a state of mind based on imagery and symbolism" (p. 6). What the resident of Levittown, New York imagined was a reflection of the cultural values held by members of the new middle-class. The want of a private garden, an oasis, a space one could call their own, however, had been an emerging value since the early 19th century. Yet only the wealth could afford such luxuries. Urban centers were crowded, loud, dirty, and at times, extremely unhealthy. "Homeownership," argues Jackson (1985), "was seen as a counterweight to the rootlessness of an urbanizing population" (p. 50). These values were (and still are) surely present in the American culture. And with the introduction of favorable housing policies, the GI Bill of Rights, mass-production, and the automobile, these dreams were now within reach for more Americans than ever before.

The *Levittown Times*, in their early years, wrote about issues that were of concern to the Levittown resident. Articles addressing the growing pains facing this new community were not styled in a pessimistic manner. Indeed, it would take many years before a caustic word would ever be printed. Rather, this paper wrapped community news with an alternative message; they wrote as if residents were not alone in their problems, and that solutions to them were in sight.

Indeed, the *Levittown Times* made progress of any kind front-page news. And when they wrote of daily challenges, they did so in the context of a pioneer lifestyle, as if to remind these children of the depression that the American way was a result of committed struggles, that sacrifices were honorable and beneficial to the greater good. Living under such conditions, as they would say, "...makes each of us a Daniel Boone or

Benjamin Franklin" ("Modern Pioneers," 1952, p. 1). By crafting words in this manner, the paper made life in Levittown not only easier to digest, they also gave residents a sense of accomplishment and pride in being a member of a community in its infancy. For as history surely reminded them, this was a deep rooted American tradition.

"The thrill of being among the first to live here," wrote the *Levittown Times*, "to really be a pioneer in establishing Levittown life, habits and customs, cannot be underestimated.

Here, we can truly appreciate the great American Heritage of Freedom as established by our ancestors in 1776. We can live in peace and in freedom, in their true meanings. Our homes and land are our own, and we are free to conduct our lives as we see fit. This is Levittown, U.S.A--a perfect place to celebrate Independence Day in humble appreciation for all that is ours...("Lest We Forget," 1952, p. 4).

These messages of patriotism could not have come at a better time--a time, it can be sure, when many residents like Mary Remis, were wishing they were elsewhere. But what happened to those residents resistant to such talk? What happened to those who never wished for a new way of life, one that would elapse under the watchful eyes of news media and of neighbors peering through picture windows or fenceless backyards?

As to how many people sold their homes and moved on, it is difficult to estimate. But for many, time provided the answer. "I got to the point," Mary said, "where I thought to myself, '[Mary], this is where you have to be, this is where your husband works, [and] this is where the money comes from--make the most of it!'" "And then, " she said, her face now brightening. Then "the [Levittown] shopping center came, and that was the most wonderful thing" (M. Remis, personal communication, April 7, 2002).

Your Opportunity is Now!

Levitt and Sons promoted their town as "The Most Perfectly Planned Community in America!" (Levitt Sales Brochure, 1952). Disagreements, however, exist as to the extent to which it was "planned", for an agreed upon definition of this concept is hard to pin down (see Kelly, 1993, pp. 35-59). But what can be said of Levittown, Pennsylvania is that the social complexity of community that evolved could never have been fully preplanned by Levitt and Sons.

Organizing the social aspects of Levittown was something Levitt and Sons could not do. The residents, themselves, would have to step up to this challenge. Yet again, they were not alone; they had help. It was the *Levittown Times*, again, who would repeatedly prove to be an invaluable asset to the survival and success of this young town.

The *Levittown Times*, with its staff living in and writing about Levittown, was truly a community-paper. Their writing spoke directly to the resident. Words such as "our" and "we" were used continuously, conveying to the reader a sense of collective ownership. The *Levittown Times* was not, nor did it want or ever try to be, an objective observer. Rather, it spoke as one neighbor would speak to another. The effects of this authentic style of reporting were often seen in letters to the editor. "You are doing a grand job on our 'home newspaper'," wrote one woman. "We know we shall enjoy every issue..." (Howell, S., 1952, p. 4).

More telling, though, were letters from soon-to-be residents, those receiving and reading the *Levittown Times* in Philadelphia and parts of New Jersey, and as far away as Massachusetts and South Carolina. Although they were not yet Levittown residents, the paper brought them closer to their future community as nothing else could.

"This paper," wrote a Philadelphia women, "...is so friendly and genuine in its tone...My husband and I are counting the days when we can become Levittowners" (Taylor, 1952, p. 4). A New Jersey women thought the *Levittown Times* fostered a sense of belonging, for it answered and addressed the questions that were troubling her, and made her believe that there really was, as she said, a "welcome awaiting" (Zweig, 1952, p. 4). "I suppose its only natural," another women thought, "to be so eager to read...about a town in which you'll soon be a resident" (Baltz, 1952, p. 4).

Residents of this new community possessed something culturally unique. Their parents did not have it, nor would, as the decades would reveal, any other future generation. As a result of the social, political, and economical realities of mid-twentieth century, young adult Americans had a level of confidence in the future, in progress and in technology, that had been unmatched in history.

As survivors of the Great Depression and of a Second World War, many believed they had been given a second chance at life. That the news media, Hollywood films, popular literature and musical lyrics professed these messages of a changed world, only cemented this line of thinking (Sklar, 1994; Long, 1985). A life in Levittown would be something that they could make for themselves, shaping it as they saw fit--a practical application of their hopes and dreams. They were free, as the *Times* reminded them, to establish customs and habits, as well as civic and social organizations. The ability to set precedent for Levittown's living conditions, the *Times* wrote soon after the first residents moved in, "was in the laps of the first people." "It is up to you," they declared, "as Levittown's first citizens to 'get the ball rolling'...Your opportunity is now!" ("You're Wonderful," 1952, p. 3).

When the *Levittown Times* asked, "What kinds of organizations would you like to have here at Levittown?," residents responded with great enthusiasm. "I'd like to join a Young Republican Club," wrote one woman. "It would [also] be nice," she continued, "to have a club which sponsors picnics and dances and sectional organizations such as a Stonybrook Social Club (another one of the 40 sections in a completed Levittown), to get acquainted with other residents" (Bernhardt, 1952, p. 4). Others requested groups for young married couples, for child-care and cooking skills, and organizations or groups to feed their many religious needs.

Mr. E.T. Hughes, aptly described by the *Levittown Times* as an "avid bridge player," sought out others interested in the game. He, too, wanted to form a group. Before long the Levittown Bridge Club was formed, becoming the community's "first social organization," and beginning a trend of firsts that would continue on for many years to come ("Seeks Members," 1952, p. 2). "I'll join a knitting club if one is organized," another woman wrote, adding her own excitement. "And I'll baby-sit too!" (*Levittown Times*, 1952, August 21, p. 2).

In postwar suburban communities like Levittown, Pennsylvania, "joining" was a way of life for early residents. "Levittown," wrote *House and Home* magazine in 1957, "is one of the greatest neighborhood-social-group, civic association, joiner-places imaginable" ("Is Levittown Only the Start," 1957, p. 57). Indeed, in some postwar communities, the common boast was, "you name your activity and I'll bet we have a club for it" (Henderson, 1953b, p. 81).

Harry Henderson, a journalist for *Harper's* magazine who in 1953 interviewed residents in the newly built suburbs of Park Forest, Illinois, and Levittown, New York,

found that membership in such groups gave people an opportunity to express themselves, something that most wanted but seldom had the chance to do. This involvement also fostered friendships between residents with common interests.

Adults in Levittown, Pennsylvania, however, were not the only residents eager to befriend their neighbors. Children, too, had similar needs. And as each home was occupied, children quickly began to outnumber adults by great numbers, which only increased the needs not yet met. A letter from Miss Eva Steiner to the editor of the *Levittown Times* drew attention to this emerging demand.

I am a girl of ten and a half [Eva wrote] and have no friends of my age. Probably most of the other children my age don't have any friends either. I think it would be a good idea for us to put our address and age in the paper and then get in touch with each other. It would certainly give us more friends and make us happier (Steiner, 1952, p. 2).

Indeed, within two weeks of Miss Steiner's letter, the *Levittown Times* introduced the first "Kiddie Kolumn [sic]" and prominently displayed the names, ages, and addresses of those children who sought companionship in this growing community of strangers ("Kiddies' Kolumn," 1952, p. 5).

Within a month's time of the formal birth of Levittown, community residents began to organize themselves to better manage their civic affairs. Almost everyone who answered the *Levittown Times'* call for groups or organizations requested that some type of civic association be assembled. "The sooner we have [one]," a resident wrote, "the better we would like it" (Sokol, 1952, p. 4).

At first, two separate groups, unknowingly calling themselves The Levittown Civic Association (LCA), began to organize and hold meetings. But in what was aptly described as "the true spirit of good neighborliness," the two groups united ("One Plus

One Equals One," 1952, p.4). On August 5, 1952, with over 100 residents packed into the Edgely firehouse, the LCA held their first meeting. By 1954, there were some 1,500 dues paying members representing approximately 25 percent of Levittown's population (Thompson, 1954, p. 71).

The need for such an organization arose from the divisions that existed within this growing community, namely, the three townships and one borough Levittown was built within. They each had their own governing bodies. Levittown, however, existed in name only. The boundaries of this community fell within the political boundaries of these four separate municipalities, and the residents of Levittown lacked representation on the boards of these governments. But as their numbers grew by some 200 families a week, they quickly realized the benefits that would come with a locally elected leadership, one that voiced their concerns over the economic, governmental and social conditions affecting their community.

Meetings of the LCA were much like town hall meetings found in small New England villages, where residents and non-residents alike could come and voice their concerns. "The [LCA]," Paul Beckert claimed, the association's first president (1952-1953), "was the only one that spoke for anybody." "It was in action, if not in fact," reported the *Saturday Evening Post*,

a sort of local government with social overtones...It helped bring Levittowners together in groups of common interest and thereby greatly speeded the conversion of a community of strangers into one of acquaintances and friends (Thompson, 1954, p. 71).

On a mid-afternoon September day, ex-naval officer and young lawyer, Paul R. Beckert, stepped away from his law office on Mill Street, in Bristol, and walked toward the Old Keystone Hotel for a quiet lunch. During the course of this meal, Saul

Morgenstern, a neighbor of his in Levittown, who also happened to be a good friend of Ira L. Joachin, then Senior Editor and Publisher of the *Levittown Times*, approached Paul.

"How would you like to be president of the civic association?," Saul asked.

"I don't know," responded Paul, surprised, but still open-minded to the opportunity. "Well, give it a try," Saul suggested.

After a quick moment of deliberation, Paul said, "ok." "That is exactly the way it happened," Paul said with no hesitation five decades later (P. Beckert, personal communication, December 4, 2002).

Before long, the *Levittown Times* displayed Paul's picture in the paper and fully endorsed his candidacy for president of the LCA. Out of four candidates, the tall, blond, thirty-one year old lawyer, Paul Beckert, won the majority of votes, and became the LCA's first president, "the most important local office in the community's gift" (Thompson, 1954: 71).

On election night, the crowd was intense. Between 400 and 500 Levittowners, news reporters, and the just plain curious, packed themselves into a room built to accommodate only 150. The crushing pressure forced one man up against a glass window, which, under the strain, shattered into pieces ("Levittown has Matured," 1977, p. 2).

The young mothers and fathers and newlywed couples in the crowd, most new to politics but well aware of corruption and vested interests, were eager to promote trustworthy and honest representatives. And if they, for whatever reason, thought that someone was not of these qualities, little hesitation would be given in letting their opinions be known. This became quite clear when Levittown resident Norvin Nathan, also a young a lawyer, but one who had grown suspicious of one of the candidates, stood up and yelled, "I smell a rat!" "This," he continued in the same breath, "has all the

earmarks of a put up job!" (N. Nathan, personal communication, March 26, 2003; see also "Levittown has Matured," 1977, p. 2).

"That got the crowd roaring like an old western," he recalled five decades later.

Nathan, like Beckert, was in his early 30s and was a lawyer by trade. He had recently moved from Philadelphia to Levittown in order to capitalize on this growing population, one, he thought, was in great need of legal services. But unlike Beckert, who eventually befriended Levitt and Sons' President Bill Levitt, thus securing for his law practice an ideal corner property near the heavily traveled Levittown Shopping Center, Nathan had only two options: either open up a small practice in the Shopping Center and lose, as he explained, "a degree of self-respect"; or work out of his Levittown home which was then poorly situated for a business. He chose neither of these.

"I was a snob," he said. "I wanted to keep going down to the city to pick up my \$50 a week check," which was, according to yearly income figures, far below the nation's average salary of \$3,850 (N. Nathan, personal communication, March 26, 2003). And on this election night, it had been the city of Philadelphia from which he had just returned, still wearing his gray lawyer's suit and vest.

As the evening progressed, it came time to nominate and elect the Treasurer of the LCA. While the crowd brewed over their options, Nathan remembered that one man stood up, and while pointing to Nathan, shouted, "I nominate that guy! There, in the gray vest!" The crowd, still remembering Nathan's earlier show of courage and principle, roared again. Such democracy in action was yet another example of Levittown's uniqueness as a preplanned suburb in postwar America. "I got elected by a fluke,"

Nathan recalled, laughing. "Nobody knew who I was" (N. Nathan, personal communication, March 26, 2003).

For the Children

In the midst of mud, dust, beetles, and winds of swirling political activity, early residents were challenged by yet another community need not met: education for the young. "Where will our children go to school this fall?," asked the *Levittown Times*. The first school year was now less than two months away. The schooling of our children, they continued, is "the first vital issue about which Levittowners can get together" ("No School This Fall?," 1952, p. 4).

While Levitt and Sons were quickly building houses and planning the construction of community pools and shopping centers, they were not building schools. This, they believed, was the responsibility of state and local governments. Including such costs into the overall price of a home would render their products unaffordable, far beyond the reach of the typical Levittown resident. Levitt did, however, donate land throughout the community for educational facilities.

Yet as the beginning of the first school year loomed, there were no schools in sight. The community's first school, John Fitch Elementary, was only in the planning stages and would take another year to complete. By September of the following year, 1953, not one school had been opened. Yet families moved into Levittown each week, continuously, often pushing or guiding two or three children up the driveway. Education for Levittown's young was of great concern.

By 1953, 40 percent of Levittown had celebrated less than ten birthdays.

Teenagers were rare, as were those residents over 45 years of age. Indeed, visiting grandparents often drew stares from many Levittown children who found these intruders fascinating, for they so differed from the normal life of such a young community. As some residents would point out, it was not uncommon to find between 30 and 40 children living and playing on any one street in Levittown. Pregnancy, one Levittown, New York resident claimed, "is our major industry" (Henderson, 1953a, p. 29). Others refer to pregnant women as "the Levittown look" and called the community "fertile acres" or "the rabbit warren" (Henderson, 1953a: 29; "After Hours," 1958, pp. 80-81).

In Levittown, Pennsylvania, Dr. H. Blake Hayman, known to many at "Levittown's baby doctor," established a unique pricing system for the delivery of new born children: \$150 for the first child, \$125 for the second, and the third, free. Repeat customers had been the cornerstones of his practice. Between 1953 and 1991, he delivered over 50,000 children, and became, according to the American Medical Association, "the nation's largest practice" (N. Nathan, personal communication, March 26, 2003; see also "Levittown's Baby Doctor," 1994, pp. 1, 5).

A three-year pregnancy cycle, one in which women had children every three years, in addition to the influx of new residents, could easily overwhelm a school system and create situations of unprecedented proportions. These problems were nowhere more prevalent, however, than in Lower Bucks County, and Ulrich Frank, chairman of the educational committee of the LCA, knew this more than anyone else. He had been chosen to lead this special committee in gathering information on the extent of the education problem. Their findings, though, revealed a bleak picture. "Levittown is one

of the best planned communities in the nation," he stated in November of 1953, "but it has one of the most makeshift and inadequate school systems at the present time" ("Levittown's School Needs," 1953, p. 5).

The first solution to Levittown's problems came through Wistar Institute, a farm and collection of buildings owned by the University of Pennsylvania. At less than two miles from Levittown (although years later it would become surrounded by it), Wistar Institute provided an ideal temporary location for the John Fitch Elementary School until its formal building was completed. Seven classrooms were used to accommodate 230 students, but even this had been inadequate in relation to the tremendous need. To ease this demand, students were required to attend half sessions, either 8:00 a.m. to noon, or noon to 4:00 p.m. Of the 15,000 students in the state of Pennsylvania, who, in 1954, attended part-time sessions, over half (8,600) lived in Lower Bucks County. And most of these students, arguably, lived in Levittown ("Take the Case," 1954, p. 5). The problem of education had reached levels never before seen in Pennsylvania.

Parents new to Levittown often escorted their children to this temporary school, so that they too could meet their children's principal and teacher. It is no doubt that such introductions happened daily as new residents arrived and began settling themselves into the community. After one such introduction, Mrs. Theodore Jack left her daughter, Susan, at school, where, at the request of her new teacher, she quickly took a seat among her classmates and began to color and draw. Sitting beside her was another young girl of similar age.

"Are you new here too," Susan asked inquisitively.

"No," her classmate replied in a plain voice, "I've been here *three days* [italics added]" (Katzander, 1954).

The opening day of Levittown's first school in late 1953, although a great accomplishment, brought few cheers and only lukewarm smiles. By then, conditions worsened. The population in Levittown had risen dramatically, from 1,620 families in September of 1952 to almost 6,000 families the following year. Of these almost 25,000 residents, many were, or would soon be, of school age, which would further cripple an already limping educational system.

Yet Levittown was not alone in their struggle for adequate educational facilities, nor for faculty to fill these many needed positions. The entire nation was short 160,000 elementary school teachers in 1952. In response to such an unprecedented need, 21 of the nation's leading institutions initiated cooperative programs aimed to enhance the number of school teachers they graduated ("Bucks Co. Teacher Shortage," 1952, p. 4).

Relations between Levittown parents, particularly mothers, and those associated with the building and planning of schools, reached a peak in May of 1954. At 10:00 a.m., on a rain soaked Thursday morning, 150 mothers and children, armed with umbrellas and signs, staged a protest against Levitt and Sons ("Rain Interrupts," 1954, p. 4). Mothers of the Birch Valley and Magnolia Hills School Site Committee, a voluntary resident association, were angered when a tract of land near their homes, which they had understood to be the site of one of Levittown's schools, had been re-designated. The land now would no longer be used for a school, but would instead hold more Levittown houses.

Understandably, they were furious. Many felt they had been lied to. In protest, mothers and children, at times reaching 200 strong, swarmed the site, and stood ankle deep in mud with their signs raised high in the air. "Save our School," "Help Us Get A School," and "Levitt, Keep Your Promise" were just some of the phrases these protesters used to deliver their message.

One young mother, Mrs. Victor Biondino, dressed in a knee length overcoat, thick lipstick, and a fashionable hat, brought to the rally her four year-old son, Joseph, and her twin sons Patrick and Victor. She wore a sign of protest on a string, around her neck, like a large impressionable necklace. This allowed her to hold the hand of her one son, who, for the occasion sported an official Daniel Boone Coonskin cap. In the other hand she held on to a baby carriage carrying her other two children ("Drenching Downpour," 1954, p. 14). And there were many more like her.

But when the company posted large red-lettered No Trespassing signs on the property, the protesters receded to the street. And when the company threatened them with legal action, they receded again. "We are prepared to invoke every process of the law," Levitt and Sons warned, "to prevent the continuance of these acts, in justice to ourselves, and to protect these people from the accidental dangers inherent in their violent trespass" ("Drenching Downpour," 1954, p. 14). However, the loss of this school, as the protest group claimed, would subject their children to traffic hazards, in that they would have to cross a main highway to get to the nearest school. Yet no matter how strong they voiced their protest, they were no match for Levitt and Sons. The company would win the battle and would go on to build 83 homes on land once designated for school purposes.

A planning consultant for the state of Pennsylvania, after reviewing census data and assessing community educational needs relative to the services currently offered in 1953, recommended to the Bucks County Planning Commission that 16 to 20 schools be built for the community of Levittown alone. And do not "be too stingy," he warned, reminding them that schools built only a few years ago are today overcrowded (Mitchell and Breese, 1951, p. 711). These recommendations were surely heard, and before long, the educational needs of Levittown, a pressing concern for almost two years, had finally come to resolve.

Matching the severity of the problem facing this growing community, the solution was equally terrific, even unprecedented. In a period of only six years, from 1953 to 1959, 21 new schools were built for Levittown residents. Five of the 13 elementary schools opened in a single year, 1954. In this same year, Bristol Township School District hired 75 new teachers ("The School Boom," 1977, p. 4). What evolved, then, was an answer proportionate to the problem. Indeed, part-time sessions were no longer needed. And barring yet another spike in population growth, one equal to that of the great baby boom, it would be reasonable to suggest that Levittown will never again need part-time sessions.

School names tell an important part of the Levittown story, in that they reflect some of the cultural values and beliefs held by the community. Only two of the schools, Manor Elementary and Penn Valley Elementary, were not associated with a person, but rather a place. However, the remaining schools identified themselves with important figures in local and national history. Of all of the schools built, there were three authors, five presidents, an inventor, a local land owner, a Catholic school who named themselves

after the dogma that the Virgin Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin, a bishop, a saint, a queen, two humanitarians, a statesman, and arguably the most well known President and CEO of the day: Walt Disney.

Customary to each school's grand opening, there would be a ribbon cutting ceremony and celebration to follow. Whenever possible, someone representing the person for whom the school was named would make an appearance, often speaking a few words, as if to grant the school and its student population permission to honor them. Mr. Walt Disney himself made the trip to Levittown in September of 1954, and was greeted by some 7,000 children and their parents. Author Carl Sanburg visited his middle school in 1959. His value for reading and for books had been observed that day as he sat among the children, reading stories to them. His clear voice and gray hair would be forever imprinted in the memories of those who shared that experience. Even President Dwight D. Eisenhower flew in by helicopter for the opening of his elementary school. Teachers understood in advance that The Battle Hymn of the Republic was Eisenhower's favorite song and thus prepared their students to sing it as he arrived on the scene (Krawiec, 2003). Each grand opening marked yet another first for this community. And they always seemed to be a grand affair.

The schools with their fresh coats of paint and sleek modern designs both smelled and looked new. The tile floors shined with little wax, and the faculty, many with newly minted degrees, were eager for the challenge and impressed with the pay. New buses were purchased to transport students from home to school and back home again, often dropping them off within a few yards of their front doors. Entirely new administrations were assembled and placed in individual schools, so as to properly and efficiently

manage a system of education that had not existed there before. Five of these schools had, adjacent to their recreational areas, an Olympic sized swimming pool measuring 75 feet wide and 125 feet long, and ranging in depth from 3 1/2 feet to 12 feet. "What boy or girl will play hooky from the....new swimming hole?," a new teacher asked as she celebrated the birth of yet another community landmark ("Opening of the John Fitch Pool," 1953, p. 3).

Nothing Brought Levittown Together Quite Like God

In April of 1953, seven clergymen representing different Protestant denominations, along with a handful of local news media, occupied the office of homebuilder Bill Levitt. That morning, crowded around Levitt's large oak desk, they unrolled a set of architectural drawings and revealed, for the first time, "a preview of their dreams" ("Millions to be Spent," 1953: 1). Their dreams of newly constructed church steeples and outbuildings would also be meeting a great demand, a want made even greater by the fact that, on this day, not one church could be found in Levittown, and that nationally, the desire for religion had reached levels not seen since the dawn of the industrial revolution. "Almost everybody in the United States today," Will Herberg wrote in his 1955 report on American religion, "locates himself in one or another of the three great religious communities," namely Protestant, Catholic or Jew (p. 59).

The figures denoting this upward trend in the draw of religion are telling. Between 1926 and 1950, church membership grew more than twice as fast as the overall population, with as many as 60 percent of Americans claiming church membership in 1953 (Herberg, 1955, p. 60). Thirty-nine percent of those polled by Gallup in 1950 said

they had attended church in the last seven days. Fifty-one percent were in agreement seven years later (Gallup, 1972a, pp. 1462, 1480). By 1957, over two-thirds of Americans (69 percent) perceived the influence of religion as increasing in American life (Gallup, 1972a, p. 1482). Indeed, President Eisenhower, who according to Gallup was the most admired man in America throughout the 1950s, urged in 1954 that "Under God" be added to the Pledge of Allegiance, and it was (Ehrenhalt, 1995, p. 223). "Whether we judge by religious identification, church membership, or church attendance, whether we go by the best-seller lists, the mass media, or the writings of intellectuals," Herberg (1955) wrote, "the conclusion is the same: there is every sign of a notable turn to religion among the American people today" (p. 13).

In its early years, Levittown had been as diverse religiously as it was ethnically. Protestants in 1953 represented the plurality of new residents, 41 percent or some 10,250 persons. Catholics, also large in number, reached 39 percent, while the remaining 15 percent were persons of Jewish faith (5 percent of the residents in 1953 were nondenominational) (Philadelphia Council of Churches Survey, 1953; "Levitt Encouraged Spirituality," 2002, pp. C1, C2). The absence of formal places of worship, however, did not stop these different groups from finding each other, nor did it inhibit the subsequent growth and formation of church memberships. One needed to only pick up the *Levittown Times*, or one of the local New Jersey or Philadelphia papers to find information on church services.

"The Rev. Louis A. Kaufmann of the Hope Lutheran Church," reported the *Trenton Evening Times*, "is conducting services in the Fallsington Library" ("Millions to be Spent," 1953: 1). Other Lutheran services were being held in the Edgely fire house,

the home of a volunteer fire company who had graciously opened its doors to many groups and organizations in Levittown. A reverend of the local Reformed Church announced that he was holding Sunday school classes in a Levitt and Sons construction office, not far from the sample homes, and that adult services were at the William Penn Center, yet another space offered to the community by area residents. This space, however, had been owned by a local Quaker Society as old as William Penn himself. One Episcopal Minister put his address in the paper so that interested persons would know where to find him. Catholics, too, used the Edgely firehouse, holding as many as five masses there each Sunday. Horse stables and farms were not off limits to Catholics either, said one church member in an interview celebrating the community's 50th anniversary. "There was still asparagus coming up out of the ground," she remembered, "and some of the church priests were pulling it up" ("Levitt Encouraged Spirituality," 2002, p. C2).

As congregations grew, the need for adequate space became an even greater concern. Like the school problems of the day, temporary locations of worship could only accommodate a certain number of people, a situation that pressured religious leaders to hold numerous services each day in order to meet the need. Yet increases in numbers of church attendees brought the potential for greater financial resources. This, for many, meant swapping offices, fire halls, and farm stables for churches of their own.

Levitt and Sons made it their policy to donate a 1.5 acre parcel of land to each newly formed congregation (although there is record of a \$1.00 charge, which may have been for tax purposes) but they did so with the reservation that all building plans be submitted to the company for approval of architectural design, and that construction

begin within one year of the land grant ("More than \$7 Million," 1954, p. 23; see also "Levitt Encouraged Spirituality," 2002, pp. C1, C2). Some churches, like that of Hope Lutheran and St. Michael the Archangel, would eventually acquire more land, often at a discounted price, so as to build educational classrooms, playground, and increased parking facilities. Hope Lutheran Church, for example, paid \$40,000 for land that Levitt and Sons purchased earlier for \$55,000 ("Survey Shows," 1954, p. 3).

The year 1954 marked a period of furious building in Levittown. The sounds of construction were heard throughout the community, indeed, many hammers were swung throughout much of Lower Bucks County. With plans established and monies acquired, churches began rising as quickly as Levitt built homes. Surpassing the year's record of five elementary schools, congregations (five Protestant, one Catholic) and their building crews completed six churches totaling \$1,395,000. Yet even these structures could not fully accommodate the community's growing religious needs. On one Sunday morning, at Emile Methodist Church, 1,009 children arrived for Sunday school. "We put them in closets and coatrooms," a teacher admitted in an interview decades later, "just to fit them all in" ("Levitt Encouraged Spirituality," 2002, p. C2). Many prayed that the children would "not all come at the same time." In response, established churches quickly began enacting expansion programs, which, when taken together, totaled an additional \$3,700,000. Before long, five other churches and two synagogues were under construction, amounting to another \$2,100,000.

Levittown, within a span of only a few years, invested over seven million dollars in new church construction. It was a degree of religious building that the county and state had never before witnessed, not since, perhaps the seventeenth century, when

friends of William Penn, seeking freedom from religious persecution, established themselves upon the shores of the River Delaware. But not every person saw this construction in simple terms. "Remember," one clergyman pointed out in an interview one year before construction began, "we're not just building buildings, we're building congregations" ("Millions to be Spent," 1953: 1).

Levittown, it should be understood, was a community of strangers. Of course there were some who knew a few others, a family member here or there, or even some friends who moved into the community together. But it would be reasonable to conclude that each person's neighbor was someone that they had never seen before. Taken together, then, these strangers fought and worked to build schools and churches. Through their efforts they created community. And throughout all of this, the church played an important role, for it provided them with an assemblage of familiarity.

In a place where everything is new, from the dialect of a store clerk, to the barren landscape of a construction site, familiarity is something that most people look to find. The commonality of faith, the reciting of prayers in unison, for example, was for some, comforting. But as much as it may seem, Levittown had not been the only community struggling for security and familiarity in this postwar period. "You wanted to find people like yourself, and feel connected with people you knew something about, were sure of," a resident from another planned community in 1953 said. "The church was the place you turned to" (Henderson, 1953b, p. 82). Indeed, five decades later, one journalist would write: "...nothing seemed to bring the people of Levittown [PA] together quite like God" ("Levitt Encouraged Spirituality," 2002, p. C1).

Yet Levittown residents came together for different reasons: some for social activities or the need for group identification, others for family counseling or a true desire to be counseled spiritually. Still others turn to the church for less religious, more secular reasons. Alan Ehrenhalt, in his exploration of Chicago suburbs of the 1950s, claims that during this period, "religion was ceasing to be a matter of faith and becoming a matter of social identity." Unlike urban or small town institutions of the past, religious institutions in the postwar period, particularly in suburbs, Ehrenhalt (1995) writes, were "...the beginning of something new" (pp. 224-225). The decade of the 1950s, then, presents itself in history as a paradox, a historical epoch in deep but seemingly unnoticeable transition, a time of, as Herberg (1955) writes, "...pervasive secularism among mounting religiosity" (p. 14).

To better understand the existence of these competing forces in history, and to shed light on the existence of Herberg's paradox, one must explore the rise of religion alongside the rising fear of the Communist Menace. Put simply, the rise in popularity of religion stemmed partly from an American resistance to Communism, for communists were not thought to be God fearing people. The most significant source of the Cold War in the 1940s, and arguably on into the early 1950s, writes historian James Patterson (1996) , were the "...two very different societies and cultures [who] found themselves face-to-face in a world of awesome weaponry" following the Second World War (p. 135). Each worried about their security. In America, a strong religion, many believed, would overpower the ideas of communism (a history that is detailed in chapter five). That religion would reach its peak in popularity in 1957 and begin a steady decline clearly speaks to the weakening of communist fears at the end of the 1950s.

A Sea of Change

In order to put Levittown in context--its people as well as the community organizations they established--one must remember that they did not exist before that first rain-drenched mid-summer day in 1952. Their community had been built from scratch, stretching from just 20 families on June 23, 1952 to over 70,000 residents six years later. The four separate municipalities that encompass Levittown had only 21,359 persons combined in 1950. Yet by 1960, there were 117,726 (U.S. Census Bureau). It is both easy and reasonable to assume that Levittown accounts for a large portion of this population boom. By comparison, Bristol, Pennsylvania--Levittown's 263 year-old neighbor three miles away--had 7,104 people in 1900, and by 1960, had gained only 5,260. With such a manageable population, Bristol had the opportunity to evolve socially, economically, and politically over hundreds of years. Levittown, and every other preplanned postwar community, did not. "We had to start from scratch with absolutely nothing," Bill Levitt told television audiences in 1954, "and everything had to be done at once" (Katzander, 1954). Levittown residents, too, faced similar challenges.

Unlike Bristol of the mid to late nineteenth century, Levittown was not a mature, wise, and stable community as it approached its industrial revolution in the early 1950s. Nor had prestige been something a Levittown resident acquired at birth, a resource that would be subsequently passed down the generations in the form of a family name, nor would they be bequeathed great assets such as an estate or other large parcels of property. Levittown did not have a benevolent political boss, as Bristol had in Joseph Grundy, who

would support the community financially, and who would represent them with great power and influence politically.

The story of Levittown is quite the opposite. Levittown was a child born in 1952, an impressively immature community built all at once, and forced to navigate the waters of a modern, technological and mass-produced revolution sweeping the country. Levittown was as inexperienced as it was naïve. Yet this community, unincorporated and split between four governments, needed leadership badly; and while wearing their hearts and interests upon their chests, as any child would, they strongly believed that they, too, would one day become a single political entity. However, the forces of history, of power, and of influence would prove them terribly wrong.

As quickly as they moved into their homes, most residents began chatting with their neighbors. They picked up their pens and wrote their newspaper editor, informing everyone else about their wants and needs. We need groups, they would say. We want organization. And to a degree, they were all the same, varying mainly along ethnic or religious lines, but even these differences were not dramatic enough to block progress. Race had not yet become an issue.

Their homes differed slightly by color and design. Those who owned a Levittowner knew that their houses were identical on the inside--everyone knew where the bathroom was! And "nobody's home," Mary Remis would recount years later, "was richer looking than the other," for they were equally proud to admit they were equally broke (M. Remis, personal communication, April 7, 2002).

Under these conditions, Levittown residents built churches, schools, and formed groups and organizations in record numbers and did so at lightning speeds. The

development of this kind of social infrastructure, Harry Henderson pointed out (1953b), was dependent upon what people referred to as "wheels": "persons of importance and influence who work hard in organizations, accept responsibility, and speak up at meetings" (p. 86). And in postwar communities, where, for the most part, social hierarchies and deep historical roots were not present, opportunities to advance oneself socially were plentiful, and the award system was, as Norvin Nathan and Paul Beckert would agree, curiously democratic.

The church, Henderson suggests, is where the wheels begin their training. For it had been considered by residents the most important organization among communities of this period, and was, no doubt, one of the first ways people met each other and began to interact. Here residents could immerse themselves in small groups of religious flavor and build for themselves a degree of confidence and maturity of voice, which would enable them to enter more community-wide organizations with accomplishments and some notoriety. Residents in Levittown, then, as opposed to those towns or cities rich with history, faced only modest resistance when furthering themselves socially and politically.

One self-identified wheel from another suburban community in the early 1950s described their climb up the social ladder within their community.

In other towns I would never have had the chance to grow as I did here. I never set out to be anything special. I just saw problems and started working on them. Pretty soon I got to be a 'wheel'...and [I] like it (Henderson, 1953b, p. 86).

Important to this story is an understanding of this new social climate within which these many changes were taking place. The popularity of religion in the period following the Second World War was dramatically different than that of the early twentieth century. The industrialization period, born in the late nineteenth century and traveling through into

the early decades of the twentieth century, changed the relationship between employees and employers, and between people and their labor. Entire communities were founded upon the presence of new industries. Many others died as a result of them.

Science had captivated the minds and imaginations of the American people, so much so that many began to question traditional beliefs and values, favoring instead a boundless overreliance in the progress of social life at the hands of great industries and their leaders. It was "an age intoxicated with utopian dreams...[of] social reconstruction," wrote Herberg (1955, p. 76). Religious traditions began to disintegrate. Indeed, even up until the 1920s, faith in a supernatural force of any kind, Herberg (1955) wrote, "was taken as a sign of intellectual backwardness or imbecility" (p. 66).

The Great Depression of the early 1930s, however, and the advent of the Second World War, sparked many questions about an unbridled faith in progress and in technology. Where had science been when society needed it the most? How could the strength and might of our greatest industries deceive those very people who devoted their entire lives to them? Regrettably, Americans saw the organizations and ideas in which they once believed strongly collapse into economic ruin before their eyes. Their hardened faith was brought into question. As time passed, people slowly began to search for more grounded, traditional ways to understand, or cope with, the social conditions under which they lived. They would no longer look toward science for salvation, for as they had seen, it, too, deserted them at a time when they could not have needed it more.

With the ending of the Second World War, and within a few years, the beginning of a war in Korea, Americans concerned themselves less with economic conditions and more with foreign relations. The economic conditions at home had dramatically

improved, but new fears arose from abroad. Over half (54 percent) of Americans polled in 1953 believed that the Korean War was the nation's most important problem (Gallup, 1972b, p. 1288). Toward the end of the decade and on into the 1960s, "keeping the peace" was on the minds of most Americans.

The day's events were sobering and realistic. Almost one-third (30 percent) of Americans, when asked in 1954 to account for the increase in the nation's church attendance, pointed to fear, unrest, and an uncertainty for the future as the most important factors associated with this change. Another 19 percent understood it as a renewed faith in God (Gallup, 1972b, p. 1293).

Living in such an unsettling climate, the fear of war weighing heavily on the public's mind, people sought comfort in life through family. Some turned to religion, taking comfort in, and thereby capitalizing on, large groups of civic-minded folks like themselves. "...Security," wrote Herberg in 1955, "is becoming more and more the urgent need of our time" (p. 73).

For many, a home of their own in Levittown, membership in a community church or some other social organization, and a growing family, alongside a number of close friends who happened to be even better neighbors, were, perhaps, the most stable, predictable, and secure features of one's life. Getting involved, and for some, achieving a wheel-like status, was yet another way to harness some control--if only an illusion--over the speed and complexity at which America was moving forward, progressing, it seemed, in all directions at once.

The steady increase in religion's popularity, and of its perceived influence over daily life in America, can be only partially explained. The extent to which God, and not

man, had been the most important element in this change, particularly in new suburbs like Levittown, is unknown. "But it is clear," writes architectural historian and social critic Thomas Hine (1986), drawing an analogy between religion and the rise of another popular social event of the 1950s, "...tupperware was not the most important aspect of a tupperware party" (p. 35).

The postwar period in America represented an entirely new approach to daily living. It was as much an end to one way of life, one culture, one historical epoch, as it was to the beginning of yet another. It was indeed a definitive period in this nation's history. If a photograph depicting this period were possible, one might view a people leaning forward, hands outstretched, both wanting and being able to afford items and experiences unlike anything else they had ever before seen, a lifestyle that would have been unimaginable just one generation ago. From the architecture of tall buildings to the common kitchen appliance found in most Levittown homes, people of this period looked less to the past for inspiration than they did toward the future (Johns, 2003, p. 5). A caption to such a picture might have read, 'Let's get on with it! Let's get on with the future!'

No longer were drab colors used either. Instead, vibrant two-tone combinations of turquoise and taupe, charcoal and coral, canary and lime, among many other shades of pastel blues, pinks, and greens, all of these, made up the palate from which many products of this period were painted (Hine, 1986, p. 12). The words "never before" were used to introduce such things as automobiles built by Ford to homes built by Levitt and Sons, and in so doing, history was continually remade, each time taking on modern, bright, and unprecedented qualities, never before seen.

At the hands of standardization and mass production, and at the helm, a government controlling prices, creating jobs, and feeding large corporations, much of what was for sale had been made affordable to millions of Americans. Indeed, by 1951, the average American was a male of 30 years of age, married, the father of two children, owner of a refrigerator, a radio, a telephone, and with an annual salary of \$3,000 and a FHA insured mortgage, he owned his own home, in Levittown (U.S. Census Bureau, as cited in Liell, 1952, p. 204).

By the mid 1950s, nearly 60 percent of Americans had an annual salary between \$3,000 and \$10,000, and had thus achieved, according to Duke University history professor William H. Chafe (1986), a middle-class standard of living (p. 112). As early as 1953, 35 percent of the nation's population earned 42 percent of the nation's income (Hine, 1986, p. 16). The gap between social classes in relation to the products or services they each could afford had never before been so small. Electrical appliances, which once before had been considered a luxury item to previous generations, but now common in most households, were being used more than ever, nearly tripling the amount of electricity ever used in one decade, the 1950s (Kaledin, 2000, p. 128).

But the essence of this period, the very qualities that elevate it socially above any other, has less to do with the simple process of accumulating possessions or recording the amount of electricity used. What is more important, rather, is to consider the context within which this behavior, this new lifestyle was taking place. They are "having things," Thomas Hine (1986) writes, "in a way that they'd never had before..." "It is an expression of outright vulgar joy in being able to live so well" (p. 4). Hine refers to this period as "Populuxe."

Progress in the postwar years had not been an abstract achievement; something documented only in academic history textbooks and talked about, decades later, in college classrooms. For many Americans, and Levittowners alike, progress had been real; it had tangible qualities. You could see it all around you. Progress was their Levittown home and all the colorful trinkets and devices they packed within it. It could be found in a better standard of living, higher wages, better health care. Technological progress enabled American capitalism to take a "quantum leap forward", for Americans had developed, between 1955 and 1973, over half of the world's significant inventions (Gilbert, 1981, pp. 160, 164). Such developments produced not only an affluent nation, but also one that held great confidence in themselves and their industries. "Optimism," writes historian James Gilbert (1981), "[was] the natural creed to many Americans" in postwar America (p. 4). And when considering what had been made available to them since the end of the Second World War, enthusiasm for and faith in the future would be only natural.

A Community of Firsts

The first flower--a New Dawn Rose--bloomed in Levittown on Tuesday August 19, 1952. The event took place at the home of a proud Mrs. Madaline Smith, of 148 Stonybrook Drive, in the early morning hours. Two other rosebuds, she informed the *Levittown Times*, were expected to "burst forth" any day ("Tis the First Rose," 1952, p. 2). In a community still plagued with mud and dust--the presence of either dependent upon the amount of precipitation--Mrs. Smith's announcement marked an achievement of growth in this developing and still awkwardly new community. There is little doubt that

word of Levittown's first flower spread quickly enough, well before the event was formally reported to the rest of the community two days later. And it would not be unreasonable to assume that even a few interested persons paraded by the Smith home, along their sidewalk, in order to catch a glimpse of this historical moment for themselves.

But this event would not be the only first in Levittown. As days turned into months, and months into years, the community would experience countless other milestones, and would welcome many of them with parades and grand openings. Yet, retrospectively, a great number of events that brought the community together in celebration and praise, like that of Mrs. Smith's first Levittown flower, would seldom ever be remembered or mentioned again. These events and experiences would be the very progress that future generations would come to ignore and take for granted, as if these milestones were always there, or indeed, that they had never existed at all.

Perhaps the first of firsts in Levittown, the presence of which officially established and recognized this community as a place on the map, arrived with the mail on July 1, 1952 at the hands of the United States Postal Service. Levittown was now on the delivery route of one of the oldest and most respected organizations in this country's history. Temporarily formed as a branch of the Bristol Post Office, Levittown was referred to as a "mounted route," one in a distant area requiring house to house foot delivery with the assistance of the automobile ("Bristol Office Provides Wide Mail Service," 1952, p. 4). The term, though, would evoke a time, only a few decades past, when horses aided the delivery of mail.

Like many businesses and services molded on smaller populations, the postal service also had concerns about providing for so many new people in such a short period

of time. And no time of year fueled more of these fears than Christmas. Lawrence M. Mulligan, acting Postmaster for the Levittown Branch at Bristol, realized that many new migrants to Levittown had families many miles away, and this, he predicted, "will swell the flood of Christmas mail even more" ("Bristol Office Provides Wide Mail Service," 1952, p. 4).

The setting of precedent had become a daily occurrence in the early years of Levittown, and the community paper, the *Levittown Times*, made it their duty to inform residents of their progress. Miss Theresa Dunn, born on July 7, 1952, won Levittown's First Baby Contest, and by doing so received 20 separate prizes from local businesses ranging from diapers and shoes to a \$25 U.S. Government Defense Bond. Even her parents received gifts: a Van Husen shirt and tie for dad, and a pair of cozy slippers for mom ("Dunns Win Twenty Prizes," 1952, p. 1).

One week following Mrs. Smith's rose sighting, Dr. Marvin Browndorf, Levittown's first doctor, received Levittown's first telephone. Another doctor, Stephen Rosofsky, became the community's first dentist, Dr. James Austin, the first Optometrist. This line of firsts continued for many more years. Most all of the early doctors practiced out of their Levittown homes, as would many other professionals. Indeed, some would go on to buy two homes: one for residence, one for business. With Levittown's 17,311 homes by 1958, and with the communities of Bristol and Morrisville, Pennsylvania and Trenton, New Jersey only a few miles away, professionals found Levittown an ideal business location. "What bigger drawing card could you have than here?," asked Dr. Austin, who five decades later still practices optometry out of the same Levittown home

office (J. Austin, personal communication, February 19, 2003). His son, also a doctor, is a partner in this now well established practice.

Philomena Dougherty, wife and mother of the first Levittown family, remembered how quiet Levittown had been at night. "The only sound of life at night," she said in a newspaper interview one year after moving in, "was the policeman's footsteps as he patrolled the area" ("First Residents Amazed," 1953, p. 1). Indeed, some residents could hear the whistles of trains speeding along the Delaware River in the dead of night, some 2 miles away. An observer of 1950 Levittown, New York remarked that at night, Levittown seemed to lie under a "cork blanket" (Martin, 1950, p. 16).

The darkness that draped over this Pennsylvania community, however, disappeared all at once on the evening of October 28, 1952. Yet those silent nights would linger on some time into the future. No longer were residents forced to navigate their way through dark winding roads and lanes with beams of light streaming only from their automobiles. The dependable glow of a lamp from a neighbor's window, like a beacon in a sea of sameness, was no longer needed to find one's way home. On this night, 4,000 streetlights--"the most modern lights in the entire nation"--came to life, providing, for the first time, an umbrella of light over this growing community. But these lights were only the beginning. Thousands of more lights would be installed over the next couple years ("Levittown Street Lighting," 1952, p. 5; and "Lighting that New City of Levittown, PA," 1953, p. 141).

With century old stone houses plowed over and demolished, agricultural fields leveled, and creeks and streams now filled in, an entire way of life, one that had been rooted in a deep agricultural story, had been erased at the hands of 20th century progress.

What remained had been an open space within which Levitt and Sons would build their town, and a town in which people would build their future. And every step along the way was a first.

The first residents of Levittown built friendships when they fought for and built schools. They shared common struggles when they stood behind each other at any one of the public telephones. They constructed churches and formed neighborhood baby-sitting cooperatives. There were block parties and grand openings, each equally well attended. "This church was built by the people and for the people," one resident declared in a newspaper interview many years later, "and it came about because so many families worked so hard" ("Levitt Encouraged Spirituality," 2002: 2C). Residents of Levittown achieved community by building it, both physically with brick and mortar, and socially with welcoming committees and neighborhood coffee klatches, a place where women taught each other to be great mothers while becoming even better friends.

Original Levittown residents were organizers of community life (Miner, 2002). Levittown, then, had been more their doing than any other generation that would follow. Yet as time passed, it came to resemble less the hopes and dreams of postwar America, and more the reality of a nation no longer able to sustain an unobstructed view of unbridled progress.

CHAPTER 5

THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND HISTORY IN SOCIETY

On the eve of Levittown's second birthday, in June of 1954, it was clear that the community had not fallen short in their number of achievements. At this time there were 32,500 persons occupying some 9,000 homes. Levittown now covered 3,200 acres. Residents walked on 190 miles of sidewalk, drove on 97 miles of streets, talked on 7,000 telephones, and watered enough grass to cover 17,000 football fields ("Levittown Two Years Old," 1954, p. 11).

Six churches with morning, afternoon and evening services were well underway. Five schools were slated to open in late August. And already four of the five Olympic-sized swimming pools had children and adults alike splashing away within their walls. The long awaited and much anticipated 20 million-dollar Shop-a-Rama, Levittown's newest shopping center—purportedly the largest open-air, walkable shopping complex east of the Mississippi River—opened its doors in late March.

Arguably, no feature of the community was more refreshingly entertaining during hot summer months than the Levittown Theater. It was not uncommon to find lines of people streaming from its ticket booth and wrapping out into the parking lot. Disney blockbusters flickered for children, and Marlin Brando's "On The Waterfront," which made its debut in 1954, pleased the adults and critics alike. "We're no longer just a lick and a promise," Bill Levitt boasted to news media the previous summer. "We've got stores open, swimming pools and playgrounds in use, our own railroad station (22 trains a day)—we're in business" ("The Fastest Selling Houses," 1953, p. 129).

Indeed, in just under two years the community had obtained much of what it both needed and wanted. They were, it seemed, moving forward at a comfortable pace. Activities such as lawn work, childcare, and neighborhood get-togethers had long been established. Residents now followed routines. "Levittown has caught on," Bill Levitt stated. "Its settled down to a steady thing" ("The Fastest Selling Houses," 1953, p. 129).

Things Are Not Always What They Seem

Yet while progress was made and even measured for the record books, community life to this point had not been a continuous strand of celebration. Not long into the new year of 1954, the *Levittown Times* regrettably reported what became known as "Levittown's first sensational crime story" ("Neighbor Confesses," 1954, p. 1). "It was another education," Betty Peart explained in an interview almost five decades later (B. Peart, personal communication, February 11, 2002). Taking almost 50 years of Levittown's history into consideration, Betty, an original Levittown resident, admitted, "[it is] the only thing that I have in my memory that was bad."

On Friday evening, January 22, 1954, Betty and her husband Donald called on their neighbor's daughter, 15 year old Marta Gibbons, to baby sit their two young children. Marta and her parents were good friends of the Pearts. As neighbors, they visited each other's homes, and during the summer months, they took turns holding parties in their backyards. On a few occasions, they and others living on Timber Lane, in the Thornridge section of Levittown, would collectively block off their street from traffic and set up tables of food and drink on the sidewalks. "The mail man use to love to come

through on those days,” Betty fondly remembered. “It was a great way to get acquainted with everyone.”

Many new residents to this community either had small children or were expecting them soon. Babysitting was in great demand. The *Levittown Times* even drew attention to this babysitting shortage, and would—much like they did with the Kid’s Korner of years past—list the names and addresses of young girls willing to take on the challenge. Marta, at 15, was most likely one of the older kids on the block, and a good candidate for this position. The Pearts were one such couple in need. They trusted Marta. She was their friend.

Across the street from Marta and her family, and a few houses down from the Pearts, lived the Capp family. George Capp, 22 years old, and his wife, Mable, a year younger, were expecting a child of their own. Like other residents on the street, the Pearts knew and were friendly with the Capps.

In Levittown, George was a mechanic and handyman, so it came as no surprise that he would call on Marta that Friday night, January 22nd, at the Peart’s home where she and her little sister, Sue, age six, were babysitting the Peart’s children. Marta’s father had a car broken down outside their home. George wanted to fix it. But as Marta would tell George, neither of her parents would be home that evening. Her mother, hospitalized for a heart condition, had been away for several weeks, and her father would be spending this night with his wife in Philadelphia. Having understood this, George returned home.

Betty and Donald relieved Marta and Sue of their babysitting duties around 9:30 p.m. that evening. The sisters walked home. According to the *Levittown Times*, reporting details of George’s confession given to Police, George had again that evening

conversed with Marta. He walked across the street and summoned her. He talked again about the work that needed to be done on her father's car. Within a few moments, George lured Marta to his car and drove off in the cold night to nearby Curtis Lake. There, in the back seat of his car, he forced her to drink whiskey, ripped off some of her clothes, and "criminally assaulted her" ("Neighbor Confesses," 1954, p. 1).

Marta fled "the machine" and began threatening George; she was going to tell his wife what he had done. Fearing this he ran after her in the dark, along the lakeshore, and slapped her in the face. "Her screams enraged him," the *Levittown Times* wrote, "and he struck her hard."

Then, as she broke away [the paper continued], he darted back to his automobile, where he kept a .32 caliber automatic pistol, chased her a few feet, and fired one shot after her, striking her in the head, behind the left ear. The girl fell ("Neighbor Confesses," 1954, p. 3).

He proceeded to drag Marta's body face down for some 200 feet through the frozen woods, finally placing her into a shallow ravine. As George drove away, he gathered what remained of Marta's clothes from inside the car and tossed them from the window. "The garments," wrote the paper, "fell on the limb of a tree and hung there" ("Neighbor Confesses," 1954, p. 3).

The search for Marta began in earnest the next day, Saturday, after one family reported that she never arrived to baby-sit their children. Two days later a police search team found Marta's clothes hanging from a leafless tree branch. Shortly after that, they found Marta.

Levittown was devastated. "Many Levittown housewives," wrote the *Levittown Times*, "especially those in Thornridge, barred the doors of their homes when the tragedy was announced...and many mothers refused to permit daughters to baby-sit" ("It

Happened Here," 1954, p. 4). Indeed, even the paper made changes in response to this event. "... Whenever possible," they explained, "articles of a sensational nature will be relegated to a position no farther forward than page three in the future" ("It Happened Here," 1954, p. 4).

"It could have happened anywhere in the world," the paper continued, "but...IT HAPPENED HERE!"

For Betty Peart, that stable and secure world she felt most comfortable in was quickly and dramatically changed. It had been turned upside down. Raised in a rural Maine village, Betty was sheltered from many of the qualities that were present in larger communities. "I just couldn't believe [it]," she said. "But he did!" (B. Peart, personal communication, February 11, 2002). The very man she had been kind to, went out of her way for, had betrayed the trust of a young girl, Betty's dearest friend.

George Capp was an orphan child from Virginia who had, a year earlier, traveled north with a carnival to Levittown, Pennsylvania. The event would be called St. Mike's Fair; it would routinely take place in the parking lots of St. Michael the Archangel church and school. In time it became one of the most anticipated events of the summer. But while working the carnival, George suffered an injury that required an extensive period of hospitalization. Meanwhile, the fair had ended and moved on, leaving George behind, alone.

Learning of this sad situation through some friends, Betty enlisted the help of her Levittown Girl Scout Troop. Under her direction, the girls wrote get-well cards to George in the hospital. George, however, could not read. But like a caring small-town New Englander, Betty responded by sending along a few girls from the troop to read the

cards aloud to him. This kind act was nothing atypical for Betty, she learned at a young age to do things for others. Like Mary Remis' neighborhood in Pittsburgh, Betty worked hard to create relationships with people, even those with whom she had only recently met.

The effects of Marta's murder on Betty went far deeper than anyone, not even Betty's husband, Donald, could have imagined. "She just couldn't get organized," Donald recalled decades later (D. Peart, personal communication, February 11, 2002). Their lives were turned upside down, and Betty, having befriended both George and Marta, had to spend a great amount of time in the Bucks County courthouse, in Doylestown, an hour drive to the north. Even the day-to-day care of her own children grew into a difficult task. Often unable to change diapers in a timely manner, her baby developed a bad rash. Doctors visited Betty, as did her local Lutheran minister. She just could not get back on her feet. "I had so many friends that bolstered me up," she remembered. "I had never known anyone that was a murderer. I was so sheltered, I guess."

Convicted for the brutal killing of Marta Gibbons, George Capp was sentenced to death by the electric chair. His wife and new son moved away from Levittown for three or four years, then returned. But their return was not warmly welcomed. "The poor kid was a spitting image of his father," Betty said, "and that was one of the things going for him that wasn't good."

The Capps never made themselves known in Levittown again.

For Betty and Donald, this part of Levittown's history "was just a bad time." And for Betty, it was yet "another education" (B. Peart, personal communication, February 11, 2002).

One Race in This Place

Years earlier, in May of 1952, almost one month before residents would begin moving into their new Levittown homes, a writer for *The Nation*--a leading liberal magazine--toured the sales exhibit and spoke with an honest salesman staffing the counter. But unlike other people attending the exhibit that day, this journalist had little interest in buying a home. Rather, what interested him was Levitt and Sons' racial exclusion policy. How was such a policy enforced? Who enforced it? It was a story he wanted to tell.

"There's something I want to ask you about that's very important to me" [wrote *The Nation* journalist of his conversation with the salesman]. The salesman lifted a reassuring hand. "You mean the talk that's going around about colored people living here?," he asked. "Listen, this is the point of sale--strictly between you and me--and believe me, we sell to whites only, mister" (Allen, 1952, p. 525).

Levitt and Sons, however, was not alone in their want to exclude blacks from the communities they built. This was a common practice of the day. Indeed, even the federal government, through the FHA, wanting to protect their investments, grew increasingly concerned about what "inharmonious racial or nationality groups" could do to property values (Jackson, 1980, p. 436). Neither the homeowners, nor the financial institutions granting mortgages, or the FHA who insured lenders against loss with the full weight of the U.S. Treasury, wanted a risky investment. "If a neighborhood is to retain stability," warned the FHA in their Underwriting Manual, "it is necessary that properties shall

continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes” (Jackson, 1980, p. 436).

This stability was achieved through “restrictive covenants.”

Before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1948 (*Shelly v. Kramer*) that restrictive covenants were “unenforceable as law and contrary to public policy,” and before this ruling was enforced years later on February 15, 1950, companies like Levitt and Sons printed such covenants in bold-lettered words. Clause #25 in a 1948 lease of a Levittown, New York home read as follows:

THE TENANT AGREES NOT TO PERMIT THE PREMISES TO BE USED OR OCCUPIED BY ANY PERSON OTHER THAN MEMBERS OF THE CAUCASIAN RACE, BUT THE EMPLOYMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF OTHER THAN CAUCASIAN DOMESTIC SERVANTS SHALL BE PERMITTED (Matarrese, 1997, p. 69).

Now, in 1952, unable by law to print such statements into formal contracts, Levitt and Sons, and nearly every other builder, used the point of sale—the salesmen—to filter out those unwanted persons. As the salesman stated, “we sell to whites only, mister” (Allen, 1952, p. 525).

However, to understand the decision of Levitt and Sons of excluding blacks from buying into their communities as an act of racial prejudice would be misguided, or worse, an oversimplification. It was, instead, a business decision, or so Bill explained.

In an August issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, 1954, Bill Levitt put his company policy on racial exclusion in simple terms.

As a Jew, I have no room in my mind or heart for racial prejudice. But, by various means, I have come to know that if we sell one house to a Negro family, then ninety to ninety-five percent of our white customers will not buy into the community. That is their attitude, not ours. We did not create it, and cannot cure it. As a company, our position is simply this: we can solve a housing problem, or we can try to solve a racial problem. But we cannot combine the two (Thompson, 1954, p. 72).

It would not be until April 10, 1968, 14 years later, and six days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King that Levitt and Sons, in a full-page ad in the New York Times, pledged to end their policy of racial discrimination.

As a tribute to Dr. King [read the ad], this company has adopted a new policy—effective at once—eliminating segregation any place it builds—whether it be in the United States, or any other country in the world...The forces of bigotry and prejudice must not be permitted to prevail any longer, and we urge all builders...to do their part in making America once again the ideal of the world ("Tribute to King," 1968, p. 262).

But this policy was years away, and Levittown, in 1954, was still being referred to as a "white island" ("How Lower Bucks County," 1954, p. 4). According to the *Saturday Evening Post*, "Levittowners, collectively, have not yet come to grips" with "the problem of Negro exclusion" (Thompson, 1954, p. 72). Though individually, many residents were, as one resident put it, "conscience stricken about the race question" ("Perfect Planning'," 1954, pp. 1, 31).

One concerned citizen, drawing on his understanding of the rights and liberties afforded to all Americans, wrote of his displeasure with the current situation. "Surely it is strange that few if any Negroes have moved to Levittown," he wrote in a letter to the editor. "Those of us striving for a democratic community ought to make sure this peculiar circumstance is brought out into the open and thoroughly examined, otherwise all the talk about equality becomes meaningless and hypocritical. I would hate to think the most perfectly planned community in America is leading an ostrich existence" ("Perfect Planning'," 1954, pp. 1, 31). Some writers responded with applause, thanking others for "pricking [their] conscience" ("Perfect Planning'," 1954, pp. 1, 31).

Others, however, strongly disagreed. They argued that a "large majority of the residents moved [to Levittown] because there were no Negroes" ("Perfect Planning',"

1954, pp. 1, 31). To what degree the community was for or against the presence of black families is, at this time, a matter of speculation. What is certain, chatter between both groups remained mostly in letters to the editor or in conversations between like-minded neighbors. Some white residents mixed their opinions on race with humor. "What's the worst six words that one could say to a white person?," joked a pre-Levittown resident of LBC. "Howdy brother, I'za yo new neighba" (I. Pool, personal communication, March 7, 2003). Some neighbors wove their thoughts on race into threats. 'I'm going to sell my house to a black person,' they would half-jokingly say to their neighbor. But as another area resident stated, these threats were only that, threats. "No one ever did it."

As time passed, one area newspaper, the *Trenton Evening Times*, described the residents of Lower Bucks County as a group "living in a goldfish bowl." Such comments pertained largely to the community of Levittown. For it came to symbolize a new housing pattern, one that reflected the changing climates of social life in postwar America.

...The eyes of the world are on [them] [the paper continued]. For, what happens here may help to bring American democracy to new and greater heights. Or it may establish an evil pattern that could tend to destroy the freedom on which this country was built ("How Lower Bucks County," 1954, p. 4).

Clearly, the character of Levittown as an all white community was an issue that troubled residents and non-residents alike.

As early as 1952, a representative from the Philadelphia Housing Authority observed that "Levittown and Bucks County have now become an outstanding opportunity and a national front line for the growth of a strong but adolescently [*sic*] fearful American democracy" (Allen, 1952, p. 325). Indeed, Levittown, and the entire

developing area, was on stage. The evolution of this community would be routinely documented in local newspapers, journals, and other widely read and popular magazines.

Democracy in Housing

Even though Levitt and Sons was not admitting blacks into their community, another builder and developer was: George Otto and Morris Milgram. Promoting the slogan "Under Quaker Leadership, Democracy in Housing," Otto and Milgram, in addition to 65 other mainly Quaker supporters, began to develop a 55-acre tract of land in Lower Bucks County with some 140 ranch-style homes. When the first residents moved into their new homes in late November of 1954, it was, as the New York Times described, "the first postwar interracial housing project in Bucks County" ("Bucks County Gets Interracial Housing," 1954, p. 86). They called it Concord Park.

Long before Levitt and Sons came to Pennsylvania, there had been rooted in Bucks County a strong, organized and respected Society of Friends. Tracing their family lines back to the very Friends William Penn himself brought over to America in the late seventeenth century, they lived in and around the Village of Fallsington, one of the oldest villages in what would later be called Pennsylvania (Penn's Woods). There, not far from the banks of the River Delaware, Friends met in the same meetinghouse for over three centuries. And on the inside of this meetinghouse, on a wall covered by wide pine boards, they imprinted their beliefs in bold letters.

We believe in the capacity of every man [the inscription read] to co-operate in building a creative community where prejudice, discrimination and human want give way to equal opportunity to all ("Perfect Planning," 1954, pp. 1, 31).

These beliefs were made practical when George Otto, a prominent Quaker, builder, and realtor, gathered other Friends and raised \$150,000 to make the idea of Concord Park a reality. This project, Otto said in an early newspaper interview, “gave Friends and friends the opportunity of putting their money where their beliefs were” (“Negro, White Neighbors,” 1954, p. 1, 6). Supporting Concord Park was yet another way Quakers made real their beliefs.

Morris Milgram, Otto’s partner in the project, went on to build three more interracial communities in Philadelphia and Princeton, New Jersey before the 1950s ended. “His activities,” *House and Home* wrote, “are prompted as much by conscience as commerce” (“Chicago Suburb Fights,” 1960, p. 70). Two of his company’s advisors, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and ex-baseball player Jackie Robinson, applauded his efforts.

The Quaker principles of quality in opportunity and true democratic communities, free of both prejudice and discrimination, were fundamental features of their faith. But when these beliefs are put beside the overall climate of postwar America, they stand in stark contrast—teetering on radical—which makes any progress made by Quakers at this time even more dramatic. Furthermore, their accomplishments did not go unrecognized. If “complex human relations puzzles...can be sorted out,” argued the *Trenton Evening Times*, with persons working together for “the mutual good” of their community, then “a large share of the credit will be due the Quakers” (“William Penn Center,” 1954, p. 14).

On hearing that U.S. Steel was coming to the area, and imagining the social changes that would follow, the Quakers immediately began pooling resources and forming work groups. The Human Relations Council, under the leadership of Clarence Pickett, secretary of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), had been one of

the earliest Quaker achievements toward this end. The Council began years earlier, in 1952, with an earnest desire to protest the Negro exclusion policies held by the Danherst Corporation, who, as of April of 1951, had already begun building the community of Fairless Hills for the growing population of steel workers and their families. By 1952, Levitt and Sons, too, was on their list.

Within two years the Council grew to 200 strong. It was as much interracial as it was interfaith. Quakers, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews were all represented. Council members were managers as well as common laborers. Together they worked to make sure the growing area had enough schools, playgrounds, and other facilities. Socially, they chose to "exert an educational influence in the new communities" in order to "foster an understanding among all groups" so that residents would work together in cooperative and democratic ways ("Perfect Planning," 1954, pp. 1, 31; and "William Penn Center," 1954, p. 14). Indeed, if nothing else, they sought to make sure that the daily changes taking shape in the area did not, as one journalist for *The Nation* aptly put it, "...secede from the Bill of Rights" (Allen, 1952, p. 525).

As part of their evolving educational program, the Human Relations Council, as well as the newly organized Friends Service Association (FSA), now under the direction of prominent Quaker Paul Blanshard Jr., conducted "incident control" courses and organized "weekend work camps." They gave talks with titles like "Coming to Grips with Change" and "Meeting Problems in Human Relations in Lower Bucks County" ("William Penn Center," 1954, p. 14; "Friends Service Association," 1953, p. 13; and Thompson, 1954, p. 72). The FSA, Blanshard said, was established to give "emergency assistance in areas of human need" ("Name Paul Blanshard," 1953, p. 42). Within the

context of this flurry of activity, it was not at all surprising to read in 1954 that the William Penn Center, the Quaker meeting house built in 1789, was “the busiest building in Bucks County” (“William Penn Center,” 1954, p. 14).

Three years later, however, in 1957, despite the variety of workshops, courses, and lectures—all of which promoted racial tolerance and democracy in housing—Levittown was still all white. It was now the middle of summer, and for five solid years, groups associated with the Society of Friends and the William Penn Center had made only modest gains. Concord Park, which broke ground in 1954, had been the most significant achievement made toward fostering a truly democratic community, but even this project faced obstacles. Namely, it took three long and uncertain years to fill all of the 140 homes. This is not to say that these homes, priced between \$11,000 and \$14,000, were not wanted. Indeed, a “...flood of Philadelphia’s house hungry Negroes,” as one magazine put it, were breaking down the doors to get in (“Chicago Suburb Fights,” 1960: 75). White buyers, however, were of the scarce kind. Fifty of the first 60 applications were made by black families (“Milgram Built Houses,” 1997, p. D8).

To protect this interracial development from going “swiftly all Negro,” as *House and Home* predicted, Milgrim chose to initiate a quota system, something he referred to as “balanced occupancy” (“Chicago Suburb Fights,” 1960, pp. 70, 75). Whites, Milgrim directed, would make up 55 percent (77 homes), while black families would occupy 45 percent of the community (63 homes). To attract white buyers, he targeted rosters of liberal groups, such as Americans for Democratic Action. At parties he interviewed people, jotting down names of white persons he thought would make good candidates for his interracial communities. Many years later it would become known that he even put

up \$3,000 of his own money to facilitate the purchasing of a home by a white couple. Indeed, when homes in Concord Park went on the market, black families would often bid thousands of dollars more for a house than whites were willing to pay. Middle class black families, barred from typical suburban developments like Levittown, found themselves trapped in deteriorating urban centers. Paying more for a home outside of the city, they believed, was worth it. But often, this, too, was not enough to escape.

“The white people [of Concord Park] were all people of good will,” explained Sam Snipes, “but [they did not have] much earning power.” “The black people were strong junior executives, they were economically powerful” (S. Snipes, personal communication, January 16, 2003). As an early Quaker, one who traces his family back to the days of William Penn, Snipes was a proud supporter of the Concord Park interracial development. As a lawyer with knowledge of home financing, and with a strong desire to implement his Quaker beliefs, Snipes, at Milgrim’s request, prepared second mortgages for many white families. Black families in this development, Snipes explained, had little need for this type of support.

Sam Snipes counted himself among many other “liberal persons,” who, as he said in an interview, “were concerned about [the] exclusionary housing policy of Levitt [and Sons].” In 1957, at 37 years of age, Snipes was very much aware of the changes taking shape around him, altering, perhaps forever, the rural landscape that served his family and community well for generations. Interestingly, many decades later, the Snipes’ family farm would be only one of two original farms still intact in Lower Bucks County.

Unlike many others in the community, Snipes believed that the proposed Levittown project would be good for the area. Although, as he would later recall, “there

were plenty of people that grumbled about it” (S. Snipes, personal communication, January 16, 2003). To these rural, small town residents, Levittown represented everything bad they associated with the city: trash, crime, drugs, and the Negro. Yet Snipes had somewhat of a different perspective. Knowing that development of the area was inevitable, he saw Levittown as a modern, progressive way to build communities. “It was a planned community,” he said. “It made good sense to me.” At the time, Snipes had been concerned about the over population facing cities following the Second World War. He believed that “people should get out in the country.” A move “out of the inner-city and into the suburbs...,” said Snipes in a newspaper interview years later, “[was] sociologically a good thing...” (“As a Longtime Falls Resident,” 1999, A4).

His reasoning, however, was two-fold. Not only did he care for individual lives, those who were immersed in crowded and over-priced urban apartments, he also thought about what his community lacked, namely, a diverse perspective on the social world.

...If you go into a remote farming community, anywhere [said Snipes], you’ll find people rather conservative in their attitudes. They’re not interested in the world’s problems...[Levittown] brought in a lot of people, particularly from New York, who livened up the Lower Bucks community in many, many ways...it was a great benefit to our community (S. Snipes, personal communication, January 16, 2003).

More educated, more liberal, and thus more likely to accept disadvantaged persons as equals, new residents in Levittown found an outlet for their beliefs in the Society of Friends, a group who had centuries before escaped religious persecution, sailing west across the Atlantic in search of their own freedom. Once on shore they fought to abolish slavery in the middle to late nineteenth century, worked for civil rights in the middle to late twentieth century, and developed programs aimed at leveling social classes, all the while fighting for social justice. As a matter of faith they rejected any

form of authority not led by the spirit. Everyone, they believed, was “equal in the sight of God” (Schneider, 1999, p. 276). In courtrooms of years past, for example, they often refused to take off their hats as a show of dissent, a rejection of conventional state and federal authority. This determined philosophy-of-life led them to be called “the quiet rebels” (Bacon, 2000).

But now, centuries later, outside of their own front doors, they were confronted with yet another form of racial discrimination. And like Quaker generations before them, they, too, felt obligated to fight for social justice. “Once [Levitt] came in,” Snipes said, “it was an immediate discussion.” He and a group of other “liberal persons” quickly approached Bill Levitt and requested that black families be part of his community plan. Paul Blanshard of the Friends Service Association even drove Pearl S. Buck, the internationally known social rights activist, winner of both the Pulitzer and Nobel Peace Prize, to meet with Levitt. The intention was to use Buck’s influence in order to persuade Levitt toward integrating his community. Yet Buck was of little help. “[Bill] said ‘No,’ he wouldn’t, Paul Blanshard’s wife, Perscilla, recalled years later in an interview (P. Blanshard, personal communication, June 18, 2003). “[He] didn’t feel the community was ready.”

What other words were shared at that meeting is not known. It is quite possible, though, that Bill Levitt repeated a variant of what he had told the world that same year, in an edition of the *Saturday Evening Post*. “The Negroes in America,” he said, “are trying to do in four hundred years what the Jews in the world have not wholly accomplished in six thousand” (Thompson, 1954, p. 72).

Regardless of what was said, Pearl Buck found Levitt's response utterly disagreeable. Her temper soared. "She got so mad that she walked out," Blandshard's wife remembered. And in doing so, she walked away from her only ride back home. After the meeting, Paul Blandshard found Pearl Buck, as he later told his wife, "sitting in the hall like a little school girl" (P. Blanshard, personal communication, June 18, 2003). Levitt did not budge.

Yet if Levitt and Sons would not integrate this community, those "liberal persons" of whom Snipes was a member, would have to do it for him. Levitt's policy of racial exclusion ran against the grain of their time-tested beliefs. To do nothing would be to admit defeat. Snipes and others alike knew very well that once the title of a home passed from the builder to the buyer, the homeowner was free to sell to whomever they wished, even a black family. By then, 125 Levittown homes had been resold, but only to whites. This passing of the title, many believed, was the only way to achieve a true democratic community. And they made no efforts to hide their beliefs or their predictions. Indeed, in 1954, Paul Blanshard, in the *Saturday Evening Post*, confidently declared, "a day will come when a Negro family will move into Levittown" (Thompson, 1954, p. 72).

By 1957, conditions in the Levittown real-estate market had changed dramatically. Levitt and Sons continued to release new house designs as their building project moved eagerly forward. Each new home was often a step above previous models, either in the type and amount of appliances, or in the overall price of the home. Levitt values continued to get better and better. In fact, it was common for some residents to move up through the series of homes and neighborhoods as time passed, eventually landing the largest of them all, the Country Clubber. The Rancher debuted in June of

1954 for \$8,990. The Jubilee, a design used to commemorate Levitt and Sons' 25th anniversary, was unveiled three months later. With an expandable attic space and enclosed garage, it sold for \$10,990. Newer designs were always thought to be superior. Under these conditions, those wishing to sell their home for a profit often found the market quite difficult. "A buyer," *House and Home* explained, "can have a brand new and frequently more up-to-date model right off the assembly line for the same price" ("Is Levittown Only the Start," 1957, p. 57).

Irvin Mandel, a resident of Levittown now for four years, found himself suffering from this Levitt induced real-estate market. He bought his Levittowner style home in 1953 for \$12,000. It was a slightly larger lot at the corner of Deep Green and Daffodil Lane in the Dogwood Hollow section. Since purchasing the property, he had made significant improvements, adding another bedroom and closing in the carport for a garage (Eugene & Marqusee, 1963, p. 250). Why he wanted to move from Levittown he never did make clear. But by 1955, he had put the house up for sale and moved away to nearby Philadelphia. It rented for one year and sat vacant for another. Mandel grew impatient.

What began as an "innocent remark" between friendly neighbors, sparked an event that would forever cement the story of this community in the history of American race relations.

Breaking the Whiteness

Yours will be a community utterly uninhibited by the bad politics of other areas, free from the smells of grime, of industry, and the hates and jealousies of minority groups...(*Town and Village*, 1952, June 26, p. 1).

William and Daisy Myers, a black couple from York, Pennsylvania, who lived on the outer edge of Levittown in what was described as a black ghetto of middle class homes--Bloomsdale Gardens--had been, for the first six months of 1957, regularly attending Quaker meetings in nearby Fallsington. What attracted the Myers to the Society of Friends has not yet been made clear. But it is certainly possible to assume that the openness of such a group to black persons at this time seemed like a warm, welcoming invitation.

Meetings concerning the integration of Levittown had reached a peak in July of that summer. Those present at these meetings, most notably Sam Snipes, Paul Blanshard, and Irvin Mandel's neighbors from Dogwood Hollow, Lew and Bea Wechsler, strongly believed that "in Levittown, equal opportunity in housing was both inevitable and desirable" (Vinnacombe, 1973, p. 79). Before Long, this interracial group of liberal persons began searching for a black family, a family, Snipes said, "who would like to break the whiteness of Levittown."

Meanwhile, Mandel still could not find a buyer for his home. His investment was sliding away. Frustrated and worried, and growing ever more desperate as the months elapsed, he turned to his neighbor, Lew Wechsler, and admitted that he would even consider selling his home to a Negro, if his neighbors did not object. Yet Mandel was cautious. His father-in-law, for whom he had worked, had little regard for Negroes. And while such a sale would surely make all of the papers, Mandel feared for the loss of his job once his father-in-law caught wind of the transaction. He wanted a sense of security from those who supported him. Weschsler, representing the other group members, put Mandel's fears to rest.

His liberal friends assured [Mandel] he wouldn't be fired, [that] there would be no trouble [wrote Vinnacombe, who interviewed Lew Wechsler in 1973], and that, if he did lose his job, they would, of course, help get him a new one (1973, p. 81).

With the support of his friends, what did Mandel have to lose?

Snipes understood Lew and Bea Wechsler to be "two of the core people who were very much concerned" about Levitt's policy on race (S. Snipes, personal communication, January 16, 2003). Described by Vinnacombe as a "liberal progressive social worker," Lew Wechsler most certainly found Levitt's promotional slogan for Levittown, "The Most Perfectly Planned Community in America," somewhat lacking in the area of perfection (1973, p. 174; Levitt Sales Brochure, 1952). This slogan and the company's policies of racial exclusion were, according to Wechsler, contradictory. Like the Levitts, Lew Wechsler was Jewish. He had no room in his heart or mind for racial prejudice. But unlike the Levitts, he did not have a business to run. His actions were rooted firmly in his personal beliefs. Indeed, as soon as he moved into the community, he remembered thinking to himself, as Vinnacombe recounts, "...that, if [I] ever had the chance to get blacks into Levittown, [I] would" (1973, p. 82).

William and Daisy Myers, having already met the Wechslers and other members of the interracial, interfaith group months earlier--perhaps sometime in January or February of 1957--were approached and asked if they would consider moving into Levittown. The Myers had two sons: William, then four years old, and his younger brother by one year, Stephen. By mid summer the Myers were expecting yet another addition to their family--a daughter to be named Lynda. "I was expecting another baby," Daisy Myers recalled many decades later, "and we just didn't have enough bedroom space--we only had two bedrooms" (Smith, 2002). They wanted Linda to have her own

bedroom, one separate from the boys. "We needed more space," Daisy said simply. Irvin Mandel's home in Levittown was ideal.

But the Myers, Vinnacombe (1973) noted, were "reluctant to make this move" (p. 81). Reasons behind this reluctance have never, as of this writing, been recorded. What is known, however, is that the Myers could not afford Mandel's home. By not going through Levitt and Sons, the Myers could not take advantage of the special features that FHA/VA mortgages offered veterans, of which William Myers was one. Acting alone, the Myers would never have had the opportunity to become Levittown residents. They required help, and there were some who were very willing to provide it.

After several private meetings with the interracial, interfaith group, the arrangements were made, papers were drawn, monies collected, and before long, the Myers were busy at work cleaning their new Levittown home, number 43, Deepgreen Lane. "We thought there might be some neighborly objections," Daisy Myers wrote years later, "but the challenge was there and we decided to accept it" (Smith, 2002).

Exactly how much money the group collected, or to what degree, if at all, the Myers contributed to this fund, is not known. The only published record to be found claimed that "Mandel and Myers settled at \$12,150 with Myers paying \$3,150 in cash and taking over Mandel's mortgage (Rachlis and Marqusee, 1963, p. 251). From these figures one is left to believe that Mandel profited only \$150. Yet it is certain that the improvements he made to the home over a period of four years, in addition to the expected appreciation in value, amounted to much more than this.

Irving Mandel's story tells of an even deeper loss, less the economic value of his home and more the social costs associated with his decision to support the strong beliefs

of his Jewish neighbor, and perhaps, those of his own. As predicted, his father-in-law fired him. But cashing in on the assurances of alternative employment promised to him by these liberal friends--a requirement made by Mandel before selling the home--proved to be of little value. Those promise makers failed him. Now jobless and disillusioned, sacrificing much and gaining very little in return, Mandel retired to his Philadelphia home. There, in late August, he sat inside his home as a round-the-clock police team sat outside. He feared for his own safety. The police were his only protection.

Within a year's time, Mandel, who had been described by Lew Wechsler as a "very bitter and broken man," suffered a heat attack and died (Vinnacombe, 1973, p. 82).

A Dry Hot Summer

Word that a Negro family had moved into Levittown did not make the front page of the *Levittown Times* until Tuesday, August 13. By now, with 15,500 occupied homes, the *Times* had grown from a weekly paper to a daily. And with news of this magnitude, the "Myers Incident," as it would later be called, claimed the headlines for many weeks.

Yet while the 13th would be chiseled into the history of Levittown as another first for the record books, the Myers had been visiting their home the entire week before. Their presence, surprisingly, had never raised an alarm. But what Levittown residents saw, they thought, were not homeowners. Many believed that the Myers were black maids, cleaning staff for an incoming white family. It was quite common at this time, Sam Snipes explained, for prosperous junior business executives to have black women as maids for their homes or nannies for their children. "So it was not unusual to have black

hired cleaning women coming and working Levittown” (S. Snipes, personal communication, January 16, 2003).

As a Quaker, Snipes welcomed any opportunity to assist in integrating the community of Levittown. To this end he saw it only proper that he prepare the deeds and legal transactions for the Myers' move to their new home. He remembered sending a certified letter to Bristol Township Police Chief, John R. Stewart, and a copy to the Myers at their new address in Levittown. “I was told they customarily did [this] in Philadelphia when a block was busted,” Snipes said. With such a letter “you should notify the police and let them know that the person is coming and encourage them to use every measure of precaution to be sure all went well.”

The letter was delivered on Tuesday, the 13th of August. It was a hot and humid day. The summer had been unbearably warm; nights, too, were uncomfortable. Pictures later taken of the Myers home, and of the events that followed, show grass and plantings that were, as Daisy described them, “dried by a midsummer drought” (Myers and Shopes, 2002, p. 8). Temperatures loomed in the middle to upper 90s.

It is the end of June [wrote Alan Ehrenhalt] and in much of America it is hotter than anyone can remember this early in the summer. The Good Humor Company is swamped: every truck it can find has been sent on the road, yet still it cannot keep up with the demand...More Tartan sun lotion has been sold in the first six months of 1957 than in the whole summer of 1956 (1995, p. 60).

The mail carrier, performing the daily ritual, arrived at the Myers home in the early morning hours. With Snipe's certified letter in his hand, he knocked on the metal screen door. A black woman answered. "Are Mr. or Mrs. Myers home,?" he asked. "I am Mrs. Myers," Daisy responded (S. Snipes, personal communication, January 16, 2003). And so the drama began.

“The postman was surprised and shocked,” Snipes recalled, “and he went down the street as he was delivering the rest of his mail and said, ‘Its happened, its happened, a black person has moved into Levittown’.” For those non-believers, the mail carrier flashed Daisy’s signed receipt for the certified letter (Vinnacombe, 1973, p. 84).

The story of Levittown’s first black family was quickly picked up and documented in newspapers ranging from the *Levittown Times* to the *New York Times*, *The London Times*, *The Manchester Gaurdian*, even a Russian daily, *Pravda*. Periodicals such as *Look* magazine, *Life*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report* carried the Myers story with titles like “Integration Troubles Beset Northern Town,” “Segregation: A Family Moves In,” and “Race Trouble in the North: When a Negro Family Moved into a White Community” (as cited in Birkner, 2002, p. 330).

Southern papers, such as *The Atlanta Constitution*, had a two week long field day at the expense of Levittown, Pennsylvania (S. Snipes, personal communication, January 16, 2003). For many decades the north had been telling the south to liberate black Americans, to treat them fairly, equally, and with respect. But here in Levittown—the most typical of all northern postwar suburbs—violence and chaos against the Myers and their supporters paraded freely about the curvy streets without resistance from authority. One police officer stated: “[I] was not permitted to enforce the laws as they were written...I only acted as a traffic officer” (Bressler, 1960, p. 139). And for southerners still opposed to black rights, Snipes declared, “this was [all] grist for their mill.”

Small crowds began to form outside the Myers’ home soon after people picked up the evening edition of the *Levittown Times*, which, interestingly, included the home address of the new black family. Before long an estimated 200 to 600 persons—men,

women, and children of all ages—gathered in the streets and along the sidewalks in front of the Myers' home. They pointed and gestured. Some shouted. Others threw lighted cigarettes on the home's lawn, an act that was, under these dry conditions, the most potentially serious form of violence yet to occur.

Wechsler, Snipes and other members of the interracial group stood about the crowds, in smaller groups, and engaged in dialogue with them. But it was of little use. Soon, Snipes recalled, "these little groups sort of melted together. The arguments were getting particularly heated" (S. Snipes, personal communication, January 16, 2003). Unable to budge the building resistance, everyone, except for Snipes, returned to Wechsler's home next door. By this time the Myers, fearing further violence, returned to their old home a short distance away. Yet this was something the milling crowds did not know.

As Snipes remembered, someone from the crowd shouted, 'Let's do something to the house!' On hearing this, Snipes moved up to the Myers' front lawn, turned around, and faced the crowd. "[I] let them shout at me," he said. "And as a target there, they could let their anger on me, so I just let them talk."

My concern [he said in an interview 46 years later] was that if anything did happen to the house, would I be able to remember any of these faces. So I just kept trying to scan the crowd and look at faces...I remember one or two persons I had pretty well impressed in my mind who were most prolific (S. Snipes, personal communication, January 16, 2003).

The crowd shouted "incessantly" for 30 to 40 minutes. Among these cries Snipes heard the repeated phrase "30 pieces of silver...Judas Iscariot sold out Jesus of Nazareth for 30 pieces of silver!" He knew immediately what they were referring to. It was the biblical tale found in Matthew Chapter 26, "the conspiracy against Jesus" (The New

American Bible, 1986: 1054-1058). In what would later be recorded by Gallop Public Opinion Polls as the most religious year of the twentieth century, 1957, it is not surprising that such an analogy would be made in Levittown under these conditions, particularly in this ill-tempered social context. As the connotation would go, Snipes, and other Myers supporters, played the role of Judas. Levittown symbolized Jesus. In this sense, Snipes and the others sold out Levittown for 30 pieces of silver, or so they believed.

True or not, this religious analogy served a purpose, for it promoted the notion held by many at the time--“even among the virtuous,” as one resident and academician put it—that the Myers move to Levittown was part of a conspiracy (M. Bressler, personal communication, April 1, 2002). The Myers family was not viewed as “innocent wander[s],” wrote Bressler in 1960, a family who “just happened to come across an attractive vacant house in Levittown at a time when [their] own home had become inadequate for [their] needs” (p. 132). Many believed, early on, that there was much more to the story yet untold (Details of this event would not be revealed for years, and even then, they were never made public knowledge).

After Snipes left his post that evening the crowds again swelled. Rocks were thrown, shattering the Myers’ kitchen-side, six-pane picture window. The County Sheriff quickly arrived followed by 15 township police officers. Five persons were arrested. The Sheriff, fearing further violence, and in need of assistance, wired the Pennsylvania State Police. “...The citizens of Levittown,” he declared, “are out of control” (“Nine Summer Days,” 1995, p. B2).

During the day the Good Humor man peddled an ice cream cart through the swarming crowds, still numbering in the hundreds. And with the extreme heat and excitement there is little doubt that this business was anything but good. Most people were curious onlookers, taking in all of the excitement. It had been estimated that some 1,000 cars paraded by the Myers home. Many, the papers reported, had out-of-state license plates ("Nine Summer Days," 1995, p. B2).

...Automobiles [wrote Daisy Myers in her diary] crept bumper to bumper by our house...Brakes screeched frightfully as drivers stopped suddenly to stare and jammed traffic behind them (Myers and Shopes, 2002, p. 8).

The Myers resistance, meanwhile, began to organize themselves in more formal and official ways. Five hundred or so "disgruntled citizens," under the leadership of a Durham, North Carolina native turned Levittown transplant, James E. Newell, formed the Levittown Betterment Committee ("Nine Summer Days," 1995, p. B2). The origins of such groups have deep and dark roots that stem far beyond life in the postwar period. Both the name and the agenda of Levittown's Betterment Committee were not too far removed from that of the Race Betterment Foundation, formed in 1906 under the auspices of the American Eugenics Movement, a social engineering program supported by the nation's top scientists. Its goal: to breed better human beings by eliminating the defectives through castration and sterilization (see Keules, 1985).

The goal of the Levittown Betterment Committee, clearly, was not as drastic, for they only sought to eliminate the Myers from their community, not from the human race. But the committee's reliance on science as a legitimate source of knowledge, particularly its claims regarding racial inferiority, lay more in the Eugenics Movement than not.

It is well-known in all communities who have Negroes [wrote a group of Levittown residents in the local paper] that they are a child-like race with

a very low intelligence quotient, the majority of them with a range well under 80. This means that they are handicapped by nature...it is more just and merciful to segregate them and keep them with their kind where they are often very happy and content (as cited in Bressler, 1960, p. 130).

The Betterment Committee was founded three days following the Myers' move to Levittown, on Thursday August 15th. Later that evening, Mr. Newell, a tall thick-bodied man who spoke with a loud southern draw, led hundreds of new committee members toward the Myers' home. It was here where he took center stage. He held a megaphone in one hand. A few pieces of paper were gripped tight in the other. And while what Newell said that evening has never been fully recorded, it is likely that he expressed himself much like he had in a later publication.

I don't want to live in a neighborhood with Negroes [Newell admitted to *Look* magazine]. I work with them...I don't mind eating with them. I wouldn't mind if my children went to school with them...The Myers may be good people...but Levittown was set up as a white community. Integration of housing can't be jammed down anyone's throat; it's going to take time (Bittan, 1958, p. 84).

The pace of integration had been a sticking point for Americans for many years. In May of 1956, Gallop Polls asked the nation whether integration should proceed gradually, immediately, or not at all. Seventy-one percent thought it should proceed gradually; almost a fifth (18 percent) wanted to see immediate integration (the remaining 11 percent had no opinion on the matter) (Gallop, 1972a, p. 1420). In Levittown, however, the Myers and their supporters were tired of waiting. What Newell considered "jammed down one's throat" was, for many others, much too slow.

In response to Newell and his Better Committee's propaganda machine, local community groups, such as the Levittown Civic Association, the Jewish Community Council, the Council of Churches of Lower Bucks County, and the Friends Service

Association joined forces at the well-used William Penn Center and formed the Citizen's Committee for Levittown. In their "declaration of purpose," the committee outlined their views regarding the "protest against the arrival of the William Myers' family to our community" ("Declaration of Purpose," 1957). They urged the community not to condone "violence" and "mob gatherings," but instead to uphold "human decency," "law and order," and "religious morality." "Demonstrations of racial and religious bigotry," they wrote, "have no place in our community" ("Declaration of Purpose," 1957).

But the Myers found the Citizens Committee's message still wanting. The committee lacked a direct message regarding race. As they called for law and order and moral decency, they did not, as Daisy would later write, "forthrightly support [our] right to live in Levittown" (Myers and Shopes, 2002: 9). Their message, while one of concern, spoke around the issue of race, particularly integration. The committee talked of the responsibility that Levittown now had toward "our state, our nation, and our world" ("Declaration of Purpose," 1957). Put simply, they were more interested in covering up an embarrassing situation than fighting for racial justice in housing. Even members of the interracial group were surprisingly quite on the issue. "No responsible leader spoke out for integration," Daisy Myers wrote in her journal (2002), "and a policy of silence seemed to prevail. This silence gave consent to the bigots" (p. 9).

Indeed, as Daisy remembers (2002), supporters of interracial housing in Levittown were in disagreement about "...the timing of the move, the best way to ensure its success, the need to prepare the community, and [other] small details" (p. 9). What support Daisy and her husband did get, she believed, was disorganized; it lacked a level of leadership and organization found only in their opponents, the Levittown Betterment

Committee. Perhaps like the now jobless and fearful Irvin Mandel, Daisy, too, felt a bit disillusioned with the entire move. Having been told things would be taken care of, that a level of support would be there when needed, yet only to find out that neither of the promises would be followed through, was surely disappointing. Some who had pledged their support failed to act. Yet the Myers still could not do it alone. "We depended upon the small group of friends who stood faithfully by," she wrote in her journal (Myers and Shopes, 2002, p. 10).

Snipes acted when others would not. And almost fifty years later, he still receives a distant Christmas card from his friend, Mrs. Daisy Myers.

The National Climate

Elsewhere in the nation, dramatic events were taking shape quickly. On Monday September 2, 1957, three weeks after the Myers family made the headlines in Levittown, Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas, in response to the integration of schools in Little Rock, made a radio speech claiming that razor-toting blacks intended to attack white persons. To maintain order, he chose to close the schools and bring in the state militia (Miller and Nowak, 1977, p. 189). While the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in May of 1954, in *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal, and therefore unconstitutional (thus making the integration of schools the law), there were no formal mechanisms in place to deflect the negative consequences associated with compliance with the court's ruling (Chafe, 1986, p. 152). This, alone, discouraged many from moving forward with integration. Even President Eisenhower

“waffled” and stated, “I don’t believe you can change the hearts of men with laws or decisions” (Chafe, 1986, p. 154).

It was within this social context that Governor Faubus acted, choosing instead to inflame hostilities rather than to comply with law. By doing so he fueled the racist cause. It was not until Eisenhower reluctantly sent in federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas in late September that order resumed. Integration had finally happened. Even still, Faubus closed down all schools in Little Rock for an entire year, 1958-1959. He believed it was the right thing to do.

Meanwhile, in Levittown, Pennsylvania, inaction by the local authority had also become commonplace. That the President of the United States would be later criticized for not enforcing the law of integration, which indirectly led segregationists to believe that they could resist—without interference—the ruling of the highest court in the land, was only more reason to believe that opposing the Myers with mobs and threats was acceptable, or at least not unreasonable given the climate of the nation. Throughout this entire period of protest, Daisy noted, “politicians sat on the fence. [They] talked positive to positive people and negative to negative people” (Myers and Shopes, 2002, p. 11).

In such a young community with an ever-fluctuating population with varying perspectives, leaders chose not to go too far in either direction, fearing the consequence and its effect on the status of their positions, which were still too new to be stable. Even the leading newspaper serving the area, *The Levittown Times*, failed to take an editorial stance, choosing instead to report the events, if at all, in an objective manner, as if they did not have an opinion. The success of their business was also at stake .

The first and only person to rise to a position of leadership for the Myers was Reverend Raymond L. Harwick of the local Evangelical Reformed Church. Remembered as a “new kind of Reverend, loose [and] funny,” Harwick took on the daunting tasks of chairing the newly formed Citizens Committee. “It took courage,” explained Marvin Bressler almost fifty years later (M. Bressler, personal communication, April 1, 2003). “He didn’t necessarily have a liberal congregation.” In 1957, Bressler was both a Levittown resident and a Professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania.

“I heard the hate forces talk,” Harwick said in an earlier interview, “and it was very frightening.”

There was so much hate [he continued], there was no question that somebody had to do something. I couldn’t look the other way. I had to stand up for what my church believes is right (Bittan, 1958, p. 84).

At first Harwick and other integration supporters were fearful of pushing too hard too fast. Like with other integrationists of this period, there was little encouragement from above to move forward, even though these values were now entrenched in law.

Bristol Township Police Department, all of whom lived in and worked for that township, were similarly reluctant to exert control over their friends and neighbors, many of whom were in the crowds. Others were overtly racist and chose simply not to help those they did not like, the Myers. One officer was overheard as saying “he had once lost a finger because of a ‘Nigger’ and he was not gong to do anything to help keep the Myers in the community” (Vinnacombe, 1973, p. 88). Under these conditions, the Citizens Committee acted with caution.

On the evening of August 20th, however, the protest against the Myers family had gone too far. Someone from the crowd threw a baseball-sized stone, hitting Bristol Township police officer Sergeant Thomas Stewart in the head. He lay on the ground, unconscious. The events of this evening, Daisy observed (2002), “seemed to mark a turning point. This was the climax,” she wrote. “A resident of the community, a law enforcement officer, and a thirty-year-old father of four had been felled by the violence of his neighbors” (pp. 10-11).

The state and local police with nightsticks in hand, pushed the crowds away from the Myers home and forced them to stand outside Dogwood Hollow. There they stood, along Haines Road, between the sections of Dogwood and Farmbrook, chanting and yelling. In an act of defiance, or an odd flavor of patriotism, they broke into song, ‘America tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, for thee I sing.’

“We had turmoil right in our back yard,” Joann Clark remembered, recalling the very night Sergeant Stewart fell to the ground. “I was so scared.” Joann had been in the hospital delivering her son when the Myers moved in. She kept aware of the unfolding drama through the local newspapers, as did everyone else. But now, with her husband Frank away at work for the evening, she sat home alone with her children. The Myers home was only a few hundred feet away. The displaced crowds, however, now stood at the edge of her property. Even her children, while laying in bed, windows open, and trying to sleep, asked “what is all that noise out there?” “Suddenly,” Joann recalled, “there was this loud roar and people started running through my property...I thought they were going to come through the house,” she said. “I was so scared, terrified” (J. Clark, personal communication, February 11, 2002).

According to Joann and Frank, the Myers move and the community's response was "one of the dark periods for Levittown."

A weeklong stream of disruptive acts followed: people blew car horns at all hours of the night, beat drums, and repeatedly slammed the mailbox located on the corner of the Myers' property. One man chased a dog around yelling its name, 'here Nigger, Nigger...here little Nigger.' And despite around-the-clock surveillance, someone managed to spray-paint KKK in large red letters on one side of Lew and Bea Wechsler's house.

One early morning, a strange odor caught Daisy's attention. Quickly, she called for her husband, Bill, to investigate.

The early morning was foggy...[she wrote in her journal]. I could see nothing...[Bill] jumped up, threw on his robe, and searched the house but found nothing. He looked around outside and saw nothing. Then the telephone rang. It was Lewis Wechsler...he said he had found a five-foot cross burning on his lawn (Myers and Shopes, 2002, p. 11).

Until September 23, 1957, the state had been hesitant to override the authority of the local police. By now, though, with conditions worsening, members of the Citizens Committee—Snipes, the Myers, and Reverend Harwick—chose to meet with State Attorney General Thomas McBride. Thomas McBride had been a well-respected Philadelphia lawyer before becoming the Attorney General in December of 1956. Almost half a decade later, Snipes would refer to him warmly as "one of the finest Attorney Generals we've ever had" (S. Snipes, personal communication, January 16, 2003). After reviewing the police reports, and talking with the Citizens Committee, McBride agreed—something had to be done, quickly.

What troubled McBride the most was the report submitted by Bristol Township's Police Chief, John R. Stewart. In this document, Stewart had labeled all supporters of the Myers, including the Myers themselves, communists. Snipes remembered this moment very well. It was, he believed, a sad day for the township. Yet as a Quaker, he grew use to this line of thinking, for it had become almost commonplace to label any form of radicalism with such a term. "Everybody," he explained, "was always thinking [that] anything new or coming in was communist."

But not everyone took this label lightly. "I know [Reverend] Ray Harwick nearly fainted when he saw himself named as a Communist," Snipes said laughingly.

Communism in Context

By 1957, America had still not yet outgrown its fear of what communism was said to represent. Indeed, years later, academics would claim that our culture still possessed remnants of a history rooted in the Cold War era, namely, in our thinking towards censorship and the American fear of other world powers. Indeed, under the climate of fear that exists as of this writing, in 2003, one could suggest that the Cold War era has never formally ended.

If we view the cold war as the build up of military might in response to a perceived threat (i.e., the communist menace of the Soviet Union), we should talk less about beginnings and endings and more about how this climate of fear, and our responses to it, have fluctuated since the Second World War. The Soviet Union that once threatened Americans disintegrated in 1989 with the introduction of a new leader, Mikhail Gorbachev (Zinn, 1995, p. 579). Yet in response to this diminished threat, which

should have put an end to the Cold War as it had been defined and realized, the United States lessened its military budget by only a fraction; they did so despite a public opinion poll suggesting that 59 percent of the American public wanted a 50 percent cut in defense spending over the next five years (Zinn, 1995, p. 572). Both Republicans and Democrats, Zinn writes (1995), "...continued to ignore the public they were supposed to represent" (p. 572). Noam Chomsky explains the Cold War as a "fear of 'independent nationalism'" - emerging world powers that would threaten American economic interests at home and abroad (as cited in Zinn, 1995, p. 580). The war in Panama and Bush's war in Iraq put the need for a strong military defense back into the public's consciousness. Today, with our second war in Iraq, and the larger war on terrorism, our fears have once again been heightened--we now have color codes that remind us how fearful we should be. We are once again thrust into arming ourselves against powers that threaten us.

Some scholars suggest that "it is impossible to understand United States history since World War II without comprehending the pervasive nature of the anti-communist phobia" (Miller and Nowak, 1977, p. 39). Following the Second World War, particularly under the Truman doctrine which pushed the nation into the Cold War, Americans were socialized by political leaders and news media to believe that communism was antithetic to the American democratic ethos, namely individualism, godliness, and free enterprise (Miller and Nowak, 1997, p. 24). On television, and in the papers, Americans witnessed a witch-hunt of sorts whereby the federal government sought out and punished disloyal Americans, ranging from government employees to Hollywood film stars. Between 1946 and 1954, with some of the fury falling under the fists of Senator Joseph McCarthy, thousands of people lost their jobs, hundreds more were jailed or deported, and two

persons executed—all in the name of ridding America of communism (Patterson, 1996, p. 204). Any questioning of American values, virtues, any progressive or radical idea that crossed the grain of the status quo, has always been the subject of great scorn. It was the idea, itself, that many feared. Prior to 1917, Miller and Nowak write (1977), witches, Masons, Catholics, abolitionists, anarchists, and Jews were the nations' scapegoats. But since then, "America's conspiratorial phobia has centered on communists" (p. 24). By 2003, terrorists would take center stage as the nation's most ominous threat.

America's search for security in the postwar period, viewed by some as a response to unprecedented economic and political changes, can also be understood in social terms, as a way to cope with the instabilities found in the American ideal of freedom. Indeed, the Cold War brought real fears to Americans. The Soviet Union, with its nuclear weapon, posed a real threat to America's sense of global dominance. And with high levels of inflation and joblessness following the war and on into the early 1950s, many Americans were looking beyond market capitalism to fulfill their needs. Yet there were many others who furiously believed in the American dream--to achieve, to reach beyond the stations of their parents. "The quests for personal security and domestic security," wrote historian James Paterson (1996), "became inextricably interrelated" (p. 181).

...Americans who were trying to get ahead [Patterson wrote]—going to college, raising families, moving to suburbs, acquiring consumer goods—were all the more ready to believe fervently that the United States was a free and mobile society and that communism, which took away private property, was not only totalitarian but also a threat to their social and economic futures (1996, p. 180).

If the American way of life grew insecure, what would happen to those goals and objectives? Fearing a loss of value in their personal sacrifice, many Americans refused to

let the reputation of the nation be threatened by those persons and nations holding communist beliefs. Many, in turn, grouped themselves strongly behind such ideologues as McCarthy. A tarnished reputation would only jeopardize future expectations that they had envisioned for themselves and their families.

That communism was equally detested by Americans regardless of race would be a statement made in error. "The Negro," wrote historian and social critic Howard Zinn (1995), "was not as anti-communist as the white population. He could not afford to be, his friends were so few... (p. 439). But to view the Communist Party as a respected ally of black Americans during the 1930s and early 1940s would also be somewhat misguided, for it remained clear to all, black and white alike, that the communists exploited issues of racial equality for their own purposes, mainly, to draw more people into their fold. Indeed, the communist party was a multicultural group with a mono-interest agenda, and some blacks found it difficult to have "white allies who were [so] pure in motive" (Zinn, 1995, p. 438). Yet despite some black resistance, such notables as lawyer Benjamin Davis, singer/actor Paul Robeson, and scholars W.E.B Dubois were vocal supporters of the communist movement (Zinn, 1995, p. 439).

Blacks were visible targets during the witch-hunt for communist sympathizers. That the Myers and other supporters of integration were labeled communists, under these conditions, did not surprise Sam Snipes in the least. Black skin projected a sense of differentness. For eager conservative whites, this type of differentness was enough to associate them with a radical movement. They were a troubling factor, not only for those in white suburbs, but also for those whites remaining in decaying urban areas following the Second World War.

In Levittown, New York, two years before Levitt and Sons traveled to Pennsylvania, the issues of race and communism were surely on the minds of these new residents. John Liell, a graduate student at Yale University in the early 1950s, who had been conducting field research in the community for his dissertation, approached the house of an elderly woman he described as being “extremely suspicious.” She questioned him about the study’s questionnaire. Did it have anything to do with “getting niggers into Levittown?,” she asked. “Because I don’t want anything to do with that” (Liell, 1952, p. 259). That, she told Liell, was what “a lot of communists” in town were trying to do, and she was strongly opposed to it. Whether there were residents who openly identified themselves as communists with the intention of integrating the community, Liell never did say. He did note, however, that another elderly woman, who believed her neighbor was a communist, persecuted him so terribly (i.e., spreading rumors about him, opening his mail, etc.), that he packed up and moved out.

The State Steps In

With Police Chief Stewart’s report in hand, Attorney General Thomas McBride delivered his opinion to the officials of Bristol Township. He said simply, “...your police force did not do all that could have been expected of it” (Bressler, 1960, p. 139). What else McBride may have wanted to share was not put into the official report. As it stood, though, his opinion certainly was a damaging and disgraceful blow to Bristol Township, one that many believed was both warranted and expected. But in his private conversation with Snipes and Reverend Harwick, off the printed page, McBride shared a bit of his own experiences, using them to reflect on the Myers’ situation.

McBride admitted to Snipes and Harwick that he, too, had been the victim of prejudice and discrimination, and so had his wife. He told us, Snipes recalled, “he had been persecuted as a Catholic when he did National Guard duty in Harrisburg.” His wife, also a Catholic, while teaching school in 1920s Lower Bucks County, “had a cross burned on the lawn...when she opposed the Ku Klux Klan” (S. Snipes, personal communication, January 16, 2003).

These experiences enabled McBride to better empathize with the Myers and their supporters. He had seen a side of life that most of the members of the Betterment Committee, if not all of them, had not. And now, as Attorney General of the state of Pennsylvania, he would not let mob violence go unpunished. Yet to reveal in print what he discussed in private would have been political suicide, for there was still great momentum in the anti-communist crusades in 1957. Having a man like McBride on our side, Snipes said, “gave [us] good support at the Harrisburg level.” “Ultimately,” he said, “things got stabilized.”

On October 23, 1957, McBride issued a preliminary decree, which soon become permanent, prohibiting all persons from infringing on the rights of the Myers or any other black family to live in Levittown. There was also an injunction filed against eight members of the Betterment Committee—Newell was on the list. At last, after almost two months of harassment, help had come from above. State law now protected integration. No longer would social change rely on the “moral persuasion[s]” of man alone (Bressler, 1960, p. 139).

When taking this new social context into question, the evolution of Reverend Harwick’s perspective on the matter becomes particularly revealing. Like other members

of the Citizen's Committee, he spoke less to the issue of racial equality or equality in housing, and more to the evils of violence and hatred—a safer platform upon which to stand, especially when standing within a socially and politically immature community. It would be reasonable to conclude that three a.m. telephone calls, printed threats signed KKK, and the stream of criticism pouring from his congregation—all of this and more—wore on him like nothing he had ever before experienced (Bittan, 1958, p. 86). But with state law at his side, his middle-of-the-road position had lost its need. Those who were once cautious of the consequences associated with integration had less to fear.

Now I am a strong integrationist [Harwick declared, one month after McBride stepped in]...For six and a half years I never preached a sermon on brotherhood. But if I am to live up to my duties as a minister I must take a strong stand on integration (Bressler, 1960, p. 139).

Following McBride's court order, life in Levittown for the Myers family changed dramatically. No longer did swells of cars pass by their home in the dead of night, music blaring, horns honking—sounds and sights that to Daisy reminded her of her family's "fishbowl existence" (Myers and Shope, 2002, p. 9). Now, Daisy wrote in her journal, "we could...notice the beautiful roses blooming at the side of the garage, water the lawn, and admire the beauty of our new home" (Myers and Shope, 2002, p. 12). And even though some harassment persisted—a few phone calls, a letter or two, or a wandering curious sightseer—most of what first troubled the Myers had been reduced to a tolerable presence (Vinnacombe, 1973, p. 96). But this, too, faded with time.

Conspiracy Theory

As the story went, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the communists, the Quakers, and the Jews were all thought to have

orchestrated the Myers move-in. By this time, many residents within the community were familiar with the many Quaker sponsored lectures, seminars, and workshops geared toward democratic living, particularly, racial integration. The Quaker message was clear and often repeated: "Equal opportunity in housing was both inevitable and desirable" (Vinnacombe, 1973, p. 79). Concord Park, with its Quaker support, had been in the news for two years. It is not surprising, then, that under these conditions, the Quakers would be blamed for this event. Even *House and Home* magazine pointed fingers in their direction. "The groups that got Myers in," they wrote, "is located in the Quaker headquarters of Fallsington" ("Is Levittown Only the Start," 1957, p. 57). Yet the Quakers were not alone. The NAACP, many believed, had financed the sale of the Myers home. And so a conspiracy was hatched.

But was there an organized group behind the Myers? How much credit or blame should be given to the interracial committee, that very group who found the house, the family, and, as Lew Wechsler revealed in an earlier interview, who "help[ed] the Myers raise the funds to purchase the home" (Vinnacombe, 1973, p. 82). History, Miller and Nowark (1977) write, shows that "afflictions" and "adversity" are often explained away in "conspiratorial terms" (p. 24). Did Levittown, Pennsylvania, represent yet another example of this trend?

That Quakers, Jews, and other liberal persons were more or less involved in the Myers move to Levittown "was known at the time," admitted Marvin Bressler (M. Bressler, personal communication, April 1, 2003). As a concerned resident and scholar, Bressler put his thoughts on the Myers' case to paper in an essay later published in the *Journal of Social Problems*. While not widely subscribed to by the typical Levittown

resident, the ideas Bressler outlined most certainly made their way back to the community. Put simply, Levittowners did not believe in the idea that the Myers were “innocent wanderers,” which some, through silence and inaction, had implied; rather, they found the conspiracy theory more attractive, that “someone used Myers as a pawn for purposes of block busting, race mixture, or subversion” (Bressler, 1960, p. 132). Yet residents were hard put to find evidence in support of their beliefs. This, in part, was due to the silence of those who supported the Myers, particularly Sam Snipes and Lew Wechsler. “It wasn’t conceded by anyone,” Bressler explained, “and it wasn’t demonstrable, but it was assumed. It was assumed even among the virtuous” (M. Bressler, personal communication, April 1, 2003).

What held the community in suspense in 1957, and indeed what has continued to hold them in a clouded state for almost 50 years, is the fact that no one group or person has yet to come forward publicly about their involvement in the Myers move. The question of responsibility has still, as of this writing, been left unanswered. “...Even when the Myers arrival was greeted by violence,” wrote the Citizens Committee in their formal report on the matter, “no organized help was available to them” (Bressler, 1960, p. 132). The committee concluded, to the best of their knowledge, that there was not an organized group behind the Myers. The five-year-old Levittown Civic Association also looked into the matter. They, too, found the allegations unsubstantiated (Bittan, 1958, p. 86). Daisy Myers herself weighed in on the issue in her journal: “Rumor had it that we were sponsored by this or that group,” she wrote. “It’s not true” (Smith 2002; see also Myers and Shope, 2002).

As Snipes and others reveal, though, the Myers did receive an enormous amount of help, both before and after their move to Levittown. Support came in the form of telephone calls, handwritten letters, bags of groceries, cakes, cookies, candy, and toys for the children. Flowers were often a frequent gift (Myers and Shope, 2002, p. 10). On one particular day a physician's wife arrived and proceeded to clean the Myers' home (Myers, 2001). One Quaker couple without children of their own, subsidized much of the Myers' lifestyle, from buying furniture to paying their bills (S. Snipes, personal communication, January 16, 2003). Pearl S. Buck, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Leon Sullivan, representatives of the local NAACP, and the first black family from Levittown, New York also came to call on the Myers, offering them both praise and words of advice.

Years later, in the year 2002, in their review of the Daisy Myers' exhibit at the State Museum in Harrisburg, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* referred to Daisy as "an accidental crusader" ("Family Seeking a Quiet Home," 2002, p. A1; see also Smith, 2002; and Birkner, 2002). Yet, it is sure, the revolutionary role played by the Myers was no accident. Indeed, the voices of key players in this event tell that it was much more than that. Liberal persons, as Snipes called them, those who associated themselves with the Myers early on, did not need to be housed within an organization to act in organized and meaningful ways.

The Myers family called Levittown their home for another six years. In 1963, they moved west across the state to York, Pennsylvania. Their exit would mark an end to an important chapter in the community's history—another first for the record books. By 1972, 99 more black families claimed Levittown their home. But years later, as the community celebrated their 50th anniversary with parades, time capsule ceremonies, and a

black tie gala ball, the only black person present at any of these events (those that this author has attended or has been made aware of) was the honored guest, Mrs. Daisy Myers. Levittown, Pennsylvania was still 98 percent white in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau).

And It All Falls Down

As it was a pivotal year in Levittown's history, 1957 also proved to be a high watermark for twentieth-century America. Church attendance, which had reached an unprecedented peak with 51 percent of Americans attending at least once a week in 1957, began to steadily decline each year thereafter, at a rate of almost one percent a year (Gallup, 1972a, p. 1480). Twelve years later only 42 percent of Americans were attending church weekly (Gallup, 1972b, p. 2229).

And their change in beliefs were even more telling. The majority of those polled in 1957 (69 percent) believed that the influence of religion on American life was increasing. At the end of thirteen years, the opposite was true: three-quarters (75 percent) now believed that religion was losing such an influence (Gallup, 1972a, p. 1482; Gallup, 1972b, p. 2242). Morals and honesty, ideals perceived in daily living, also slipped from their position this same year—the overwhelming majority by 1968 believed that both of these qualities had worsened (Gallup, 1972b, p. 2153). Put simply, a moral shift had taken place within the fabric of American life. What had once pulled people together in prayer or in other church related social events, no longer yielded such an influence.

Never before had the majority of Americans considered civil rights, integration or any other racial issue the most important problem facing the nation. The first shift in

perspective came in September of 1956 when 18 percent of Americans thought civil rights was the nation's most important problem, second only to the threat of war and foreign policy issues (Gallup, 1972a, p. 1447). But by November of 1957, not long after Levittown welcomed the Myers and Governor Faubus ignited racial tensions in Little Rock, changes in opinion had reached dramatic levels. For the first time in the history of Gallup Polling, more people (29 percent) considered "integration" or "racial problems" more important than any other issue (Gallup, 1972a, p. 1523). But what made 1957 the magic year for a rise in racial consciousness? For the next six years, only 10 percent would share this belief. How can one understand the rise and subsequent fall of race as an important social variable?

There is little doubt that what transpired in Levittown, Pennsylvania in August, and in Little Rock, Arkansas a month later—both of which made international news for weeks on end—had an effect on how Americans judged the current social climate of their country. The mob-like crowds swirling around the streets in Levittown, and the armed national guards forcing peace outside Little Rock elementary schools did not just play out in the newspapers or on the radio. Racially charged scenes like these were also fodder for cameramen and film crews. Millions of Americans watched it all unfold on television from the comfort of their own living rooms. In 1955, three-fourths of all households (32 million) had at least one television set. By 1960, only 10 percent of the nation lacked such a luxury—bars and restaurants, however, with televisions of their own, faithfully fed the balance (Patterson, 1996, p. 348). The world's eyes were on Levittown, Pennsylvania. What would come of this newly integrated community? Would house

values plummet as many predicted? Would white residents move out? These were the issues of great public interest.

As an increased number of Americans drew attention to escalating racial tensions in November of 1957, an even greater concern arose one month before, following the successful launch of the satellite Sputnik by the communist Soviet Union. This event excited and refueled anti-Communist feelings, and further clouded the importance of social problems on the domestic home front. The United States, it seemed, had been outpaced in rocketry (Patterson, 1996, p. 418). Thoughts of a weakening nation began to take hold and weighed heavily on the minds of Americans. And despite President Eisenhower's efforts to show otherwise, many Americans believed that a missile gap did in fact exist between these two great nations.

As time passed, relations between the United States and other nations worsened. In May of 1960, the Soviets shot down an American U-2 spy plane that had been photographing their missile program and other military developments. Nikita Khrushchev used this event to humiliate Eisenhower, and by doing so, claimed a propaganda victory (Patterson, 1996, p. 426). The United States was embarrassed.

Fidel Castro, a man who despised the United States, and who had recently taken over Cuba in January of 1959 with intentions of forming a communist nation, further tarnished the United States at the Bay of Pigs. America's attempt to overthrow Castro on this day in 1961 had failed. This, Americans believed, was yet another communist victory.

Another communist threat was found in Ho Chi Minh, leader of North Vietnam. His power alone threatened other non-communist governments in Southeast Asia. If left

unchecked, many feared that communism would spread. President Eisenhower responded by initially backing South Vietnam. A few years later, in 1964, President Johnson marched America into another war. But this one we would not win.

Taken together, these communist leaders shook the foundation of American security at a time when it was most vulnerable, for life on the home front had also been on shaky ground. No one person knew exactly how the relations between these great super powers would play out. Not surprising, then, from October of 1958 to April of 1963, no other issue concerned the majority of Americans more than foreign relations. More than ever, Americans wanted to "keep the peace" (Gallup, 1972a, p. 1570; Gallup, 1972b, pp. 1595, 1632, 1656, 1764, and 1812). Racial issues had taken a back seat to these perceived threats.

As early as 1960, 71 percent of Americans favored the building of public bomb shelters--21 percent gave thought to building a shelter at home (Gallup, 1972b, p. 1656). Visitors to the Levittown Shopping Center during these years found bomb shelter kits for sale. Gas masks, too, were on display in store windows. And many residents took advantage of these precautionary measures. Years later, while digging around in the yard, many new residents found underground rooms that they knew nothing about, additions that their Cold War owners forgot to include on the bill of sale.

Yet as troubles brewed abroad, tensions at home were also rising. Bus boycotts, sit-ins, freedom rides, and other protest marches--many of which were broadcast on televisions across the country--forced many Americans to acknowledge the oppressive conditions of their own neighborhoods and communities. Indeed, many viewers saw on TV for the first time a part of their culture they never knew existed. "It was the 1960s,"

writes historian James Patterson (1996), "that TV came into its own as a major force in American life, promoting more national culture while at the same time casting its eye on profound interracial divisions" (pp. 446-447).

The printed word, too, had an impact on people's perceptions of their world. Michael Harrington's The Other America, published in 1965, brought into focus for the first time the oppressive conditions of poverty that affected one-third of the nation's population. Galbraith's title The Affluent Society was not, in fact, a blanket statement for the times, as many misunderstood it to be.

...Tens of millions of Americans [Harrington wrote] are, at this very moment, maimed in body and spirit, existing at levels beneath those necessary for human decency... This poverty twists and deforms the spirit. The American poor are pessimistic and defeated, and they are victimized by mental suffering to a degree unknown in Suburbia. [They]...are the unskilled workers, the migrant farm workers, the aged, the minorities, and all the others who live in the economic underworld of American life (1965, p. 9-10).

The first civil rights demonstration broadcast nation-wide was the Birmingham struggle in April of 1963. People watched from the comforts of their own homes as women and children were gunned down with powerful water hoses, their heads cracking off cement sidewalks, their bodies slamming against the outside walls of churches--their churches. Most alarming of all was that the Public Safety Commissioner of Birmingham, Alabama not only directed this violence, but he became an active participant in it. Pictures of police dogs lashing out against women flashed around the world. Even President Kennedy, watching the events unfold along with millions of other Americans, worried about the nation's image as it was projected through this new medium of communication (Patterson, 1996, p. 408-481).

Later that same year, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led a march on Washington alongside some 200,000 other protesters. In just three months, 1,412 other racial justice demonstrations were recorded in 1963 (Zinn, 1995, p. 447). The conditions of black Americans could no longer be ignored. They had indeed captured the nation's attention.

From 1963 to 1966, racial problems were again back on top of the nation's list of the most serious problems (Gallup, 1972b, pp. 1842, 1894, and 1934). It seemed that as time passed, relations between blacks and whites only worsened. Yet while the growing variety of racial protests and demonstrations were making news, not everyone understood them in the same terms, nor did they assess the notion of progress equally. Over half of the non-whites polled in 1964 (55 percent) believed that civil rights demonstrations were helping the Negro cause--only 10 percent of whites held such an opinion (Gallup 1972b, p. 1885). Clearly, both whites and blacks saw this struggle for racial justice differently.

By 1966 the Vietnam War had entered its second year, and as a result of the massive news coverage of this event, racial issues at home once again lost steam as the nation's top concern. In addition to the war, the national economy also began to sputter and slow down. The industrial strength of America in the global market was no longer something to be taken for granted. By 1967, 60 percent of Americans considered the high cost of living a serious problem, more serious than any other political or social issue--a concern that would become even greater in the coming decade (Gallup, 1972b, p. 2086).

Never again in the 20th century would the majority of Americans consider race their most important problem.

The End of the Postwar Era

That a postwar period existed following the Second World War, one that produced social, political, and economic conditions unlike any other period in history, is a statement that few sociological historians would deny. The very existence of places like Levittown, New York, Levittown, Pennsylvania, and later Levittown, New Jersey, and the dramatic success stories of companies like Levitt and Sons, Inc., stand as testimonials to what was possible.

Yet as we have seen, the very conditions that seemed to unify this period also began to unravel in the mid-1960s and on throughout the decade of the 1970s. Television, for example, made social change--and the need for such change--more visible. For many, it seemed that the innocence and security that framed the years immediately following the war were coming apart at the seams. Could this postwar period be coming to an end? Or, rather, was it just another step in the evolution of the American story?

Several scholars have addressed these years as a special period in history, one that had a more visible beginning than it did an end. That the postwar period ended at all, however, is not questioned. Yet there are several interpretations as to when exactly this shift in culture occurred, and under what conditions it took place. Of the perspectives offered by scholars, no one understanding should be looked at as being more or less correct. Each idea contributes equally well to the broader understanding of such a complex period in our nation's history.

Architectural historian and social critic Thomas Hine developed the concept "Populuxe" to describe and make real the decade between 1954 and 1964 (1987). The

initial postwar period, as he suggests, lasted from 1946 to 1954. By the early 1950s more of those in the middle began to benefit from any number of progresses made, whether it was in home construction or the mass-production of once more costly luxuries (i.e., radios, televisions, automobiles, etc.). Yet as time passed, Americans generally grew overly comfortable with the extraordinary conditions that defined the period. The newness of it all had, through the years, lost its luster. Fantasies had long been fulfilled. Sitting in front of their televisions, Americans now grew more aware of the limited realities of others. That the rising tide did not float all boats was, for many, new information.

By 1964, the future promised to Americans by advertisers, as Hine writes (1987), "...had been around too long" (p. 168). Slogans such as "never before" and "unprecedented" rang like hollow promises. Even suburbia, which had once inflamed the pens of critics and the hopes of the working class, had, by this time, "...ceased to be either a utopia or a scandal" (Hine, 1987, p. 170). What Hines observes is an end of something unique to the American culture.

In The American Dream and the Popular Novel, Elizabeth Long treats the popular novel as a cultural artifact, and sets out to determine how a selection of novelists over a 30 year period, 1945 to 1975, have written about the American Dream (1985). Most telling about the evolution of this dream are the three categories she imposes on her collection of cultural artifacts, namely novels written between 1945-1955, 1956-1968, and 1969-1975. By seeing novels as "stories of individual lives," Long organizes life histories. She does this by drawing on and making real the unique social characteristics that generally defined the historical climate in which these life histories are rooted.

For example, Long claims that novels written between 1945-1955 spoke of the nation's affluence, its unprecedented prosperity, and to the general idea that individuals shared a collective purpose in achieving overall social progress. Between 1956-1968, however, Long describes novels in an entirely different light. Rather than seeing success as a collective effort, it is now justified and defined through self-fulfillment (1985, p. 91).

Yet in as much as these two earlier historical periods show changes in a maturing culture, no other period, Long argues, has reflected such a dramatic shift than those novels written between 1969-1975.

The bestsellers of 1969-1975 [Long writes] show a world-view in crisis. Not only has economic or vocational success lost congruence with personal happiness or moral worth in the world of bestsellers, but other definitions of personal fulfillment are also perceived as deeply problematic (1985: 118).

For Long, novels written during this period reflected a confused culture, one unsure of itself, of their future. She labels this period as the "failure of success" (1985, p. 118).

However, Long is not alone in her thinking. Historian James Gilbert (1981), in his book entitled Another Chance, brings the postwar period to a tragic end in 1968. Like Long, Gilbert acknowledges the dramatic shifts in culture, many of which reached a peak in the middle to late 1960s.

Common to Hine, Long, and Gilbert is the notion that the social climate toward the end of the 1960s no longer resembled the climate following the war—a climate characterized best by optimism, grand expectations, and a collective success story that many relished in. By this time Americans were confronted nightly with the many thousands who were prohibited from taking part in the American dream. They watched as friends and family fought and died in the jungles of the Vietnam War. The perceived

stability of the postwar period had now ceased to exist. The scales had been upset, or at least existing inequalities had become more widely visible. Protests were framed in a chaotic tone regardless of whether they addressed civil rights or the Vietnam War. For Hine, Long, and Gilbert, America had indeed entered a new historical epoch.

Historians Nicholas Lemann and James Patterson, however, see the ending of the postwar period differently than did Hine, Long, or Gilbert. Rather than highlight the social tensions of the mid to late 1960s, both Lemann and Patterson point an implicating finger toward one memorable event in the early 1970s, the OPEC embargo of 1973-1974, then again in 1979. This, they argue, ended it all.

Prior to the fall of 1973, automobile-owning Americans everywhere had taken cheap oil for granted. It propelled their mass-produced automobiles and heated their homes. Indeed, as many have argued (see Jackson, 1985; and Lewis, 1997), cheap gasoline, federally subsidized highways, and the affordability of the automobile made suburbs like Levittown, Pennsylvania possible. Without these ripe conditions, communities like Levittown would not have existed. By the early 1970s, more Americans called suburbs their home than ever before. It is not surprising, then, that an energy crisis such as this--an "epochal event" that Lemann referred to as an "era in its own right"--would give a nation dependent on oil so much reason for concern (1991, pp. 39-46). As Lemann (1991) puts it, "...it changed everything" (1991, pp. 39-46).

The downturn of the economy in 1973 and 1974 could not have come at a worse time. Indeed, in terms of social, economic, and political problems, America, it seemed, had too much on its proverbial plate. Protest movements of various kinds were still commonplace. The Vietnam War was still America's most important problem. But now,

on top of these and other social problems, a poor economic climate began to weigh heavily on the minds of Americans. By 1970 over half of the nation (55 percent) believed that the unemployment outlook would go up in the next six months (Gallup, 1972c, p. 2254). A year later, almost three-quarters of Americans (73 percent) believed that the U.S. economy faced great difficulties (Gallup, 1972c, p. 2279). "All of the structural problems that economists had warned about," Patterson wrote, "coalesced after 1973-1974 to jolt American life."

These included [Patterson continued] sagging productivity, declining competitiveness in world markets, accelerating inflation, rising unemployment, especially among minorities and the millions of baby boomers now seeking work, and a slowing down in the creation of good-paying, career-enhancing jobs outside of the increasingly dominant service sector (1996, p. 783).

Lemann describes this period in American history as a "pivotal moment," one that would reverberate in the nation's soul for many more years, and would dramatically shape the futures of most people (1991, pp. 39-46). The perception of upward mobility, moving forward collectively, with children achieving more than their parents—once the defining characteristic of life in the postwar period—no longer seemed possible under this new social and economic climate.

And yet for most Americans, these changes came in personalized packages; they could only be seen and felt at home, in the workplace, or on empty store shelves. Larger public issues like world trade, the ability of American industries to compete at a global level, and foreign relations--particularly the Arab's resentment of America for supporting Israel in the Yom Kippur War--manifested themselves as personal troubles in the rising price of gas (almost four times more per gallon), fluctuating job security in an ever increasing environment of unemployment, and the rising price of other necessary

household goods (i.e., toilet paper). Public issues transformed themselves and became recognized as personal troubles (Mills, 1959, pp. 8-9).

Even as a poster-child for postwar prosperity, Levittown, Pennsylvania, could not escape the effects of these larger structural changes taking shape in society. For example, earlier that decade, in 1971 and 1972—as a result of federal government controls over essential resources (i.e., meat, electricity, gas, etc.), and labor/management struggles elsewhere—toilet paper and other paper products were in short supply. Levittown, like many other communities, reacted by overbuying, essentially creating a run on toilet paper, much like people do with bread and milk when a storm threatens mobility for more than one calendar day. But by 1973, residents were well versed in the language of resource conservation. Many followed the President's request and turned down the heat in their homes. Even Christmas in Levittown, with its colored bulbs glowing from rooftop to rooftop, looked different under these conditions. "Christmas 1973," wrote the *Bucks County Courier Times*, "was a season of darkness..." ("Sound of the '70s," 1999, p. A7). Yet conditions only seemed to get worse.

The second surge in oil prices occurred in the spring of 1979. This time, motorists and homeowners alike found themselves reaching much deeper into their pockets than they did six years earlier. The timing of this increase, however, only produced more problems. Summer was about to begin, and many families planned to hit the highways for annual vacations. No one knew how expensive gas would become. There were even talks of gas shortages—something that had not been a part of the American story for over 30 years, an entire generation past.

The social context of this period is most revealing, especially when considering the context of young adult lives in the 1970s. Young drivers in 1979 had access to cheap gasoline for their entire lives. Cheap gas, many believed, verged on being a social right. Any change in this stream of confidence would most certainly be cause for alarm, even panic.

What unfolded during this crisis elevated Levittown once again as a topic for world news. "The summer of 1979," wrote Lemann (1991), "was the only time I can remember when, at the level of ordinary life as opposed to public affairs, things seemed to be out of control" (pp. 39-46). Levittown, Pennsylvania, would most certainly not be an exception.

No Gas, My Ass!

It started on Saturday, June 23, 1979. Independent truck drivers were hit especially hard by the rising costs of fuel. Unlike others who used fuel for commuting or recreational purposes, the livelihood of a truck driver depended on an abundant supply of diesel at a reasonable price. Waiting in long lines and paying more for diesel than was built into their traveling costs was not good for business. Responding to this situation, many drivers organized an afternoon meeting in the Fallsington Library, at the edge of Levittown, to discuss the nature of their problem. Beyond meeting and talking with each other, nothing else occupied the day's agenda.

Meanwhile, a wife of a truck driver who had just days before heard Bobby Butler's gasoline protest song on the radio, "Cheaper Crude or No More Food," hatched the idea to hold a small protest at an intersection in Levittown commonly referred to as

"five points." The intersection chosen was a symbolic one; there were four gasoline stations within an arm's reach of each other. In Bucks County at that time, three out of every four gas stations were closed, lines ran long at the others, and throughout the nation prices had reached levels never before seen ("Sound of the '70s," 1999, p. A7). It had reached a point in Levittown where people, hungry for gas, would siphon it from parked cars under the darkness of night. Locking gas caps, which had originally sold for \$3.00 prior to this crisis, now sold for \$15.00.

Following the truck drivers' meeting, many men drove their trucks to five points so as to check on the progress of their wives in protest. They drove through the intersection slowly, announcing their presence by pulling the chains and ropes of their air horns. Some trucks flew American flags from their rooftops. "It was a warm, sunny afternoon, and the smell of burning charcoal was in the air," wrote one newspaper the following year, recounting the early hours of this sunny summer day.

Entire families came out of their yards to wave at the trucks [the paper continued]... There were men in undershirts, cans of beer held high, women in shorts, children in wet bathing suits, and teenagers standing on cars. The atmosphere was festive, with the truck driver well on his way to being the new American hero ("Two Nights of Terror," 1980, p.3).

Crowds of people lined the streets; it was as if the Fourth of July parade came a week early. In a matter of a few hours there were approximately 500 people encircling the five points intersection. Many adamantly supported the truckers' cause, which was, in turn, the cause shared by many others who had grown impatient and disillusioned with the conditions at the gas pump. Still, there were others who gathered simply for the sake of curiosity.

In which direction would this protest go? How much larger would it get, and how would it end? The answers to these questions, nobody knew.

"I'm here to protest," said one Levittown resident to a nearby reporter on the scene. "I'm frustrated by it all, like everybody. We want to get gas without waiting in line" ("Truck Protest Turns Sour," 1979, p. A1). Many hoped that their protest would somehow accomplish something. Exactly what this something looked like, though, they had not yet imagined. But for the moment, everybody was riding the thrill and noise emanating from this spot in Levittown. As one truck driver put it: this demonstration was "the greatest thing to happen in Levittown since they put in street lights" ("Truck Protest Turns Sour," 1979, p. A1).

Indeed, the community had not come together like this since the summer of 1957, almost 22 years ago. Certainly many in the crowd were too young to even recall this part of their shared history. But for those who remembered the events surrounding the Myers move in, this protest would be unlike anything they had ever before witnessed.

At 6:30 p.m., Saturday evening, after many hours of peaceful demonstration, the protest turned sour. One driver moved his truck into the middle of the intersection and parked. By now, local police and other outside police services had swarmed the scene. They ordered the trucker to move. As expected, he refused. The crowd went wild. "The driver played to the crowd," reported one newspaper. "He shook his head, he extended his palms, and finally, in one bold move, he leaped to the top of his truck cab and raised his arms high in the air. [The crowd] loved it" ("Truck Protest Turns Sour," 1979, p. A1).

As Saturday came to a close, 69 demonstrators found themselves under police arrest. Yet what began on this day only boiled over into the next. By early evening on

Sunday, the scene had worsened—a full-blown riot had now ensued. Police from 34 surrounding communities, including both the County Sheriff and State Police, swarmed the intersection wearing all types of riot gear. Philadelphia's K-9 unit was also on hand. And while there were some 300 police officers present, the authorities were still outnumbered, for by nightfall, 2,000 people had gathered at this symbolic intersection.

Violence poured in from both sides. Police lashed out against the crowds with nightsticks. Dogs snapped and bit the uncontrollable. A gun fired into the night air. Even a news reporter, camera in hand, had been struck across the chest by a weapon-toting officer of the law. The crowd returned the force by throwing rocks and bottles. They tossed M-80 firecrackers into the crowds of police, smashed nearby store windows, and vandalized gas pumps by slashing their hoses. Some pulled a van and a car into the intersection and set them ablaze. Firefighters responding to the fire were also attacked.

One truck driver, after having his cab battered by police nightsticks, responded by driving his rig through police lines, "sending them diving for cover" ("Ten Years Ago," 1979, p. A8). The crowd chanted, "No Gas, My Ass!" Signs were displayed with similar gasoline protest themes. By Monday morning, June 25, the Board of Commissioners of Bristol Township declared a state of emergency ("Rioting Follows Protests," 1979, p. C8). An additional 127 persons were arrested, and only one man was imprisoned—he drove his rig over the hand of a police officer.

Like the sensationalism surrounding the Myers incident, word of Levittown's riot over gasoline shortages and escalating prices made international news almost overnight. The community was once again framed as one suffering from the unfortunate circumstances of change. *The New York Times* carried a photograph of a shirtless,

longhaired, young adult male fueling the flames of an upside-down car—a wall in the distance had been spray painted with the slogan “More Gas” (“Rioting Follows Protests,” 1979, p. C8). Other pictures depicted men resisting police arrest. It was an event made for the papers.

The uprising over gas was similar to the mobs that gathered outside of the Myers’ home years past. In this incident, the Myers were the outsider, a family stigmatized by the pigmentation of their skin. Acting on behalf of the dominant culture, the white crowds attributed and therefore acted on the social meanings given to the natural differences of skin color. Local police, too, adopted these ideas of racial inferiority and chose not to act when their duty called. That the police disliked the Myers because of the color of their skin, and therefore chose not to protect them, was, however, only part of a much larger explanation. It should also be noted that a tension existed between local police and those they were asked to control, namely, their friends, family and neighbors.

Twenty-two years later, in the middle of the five points intersection, this tension had changed very little. “It’s hard to charge into a crowd with riot gear on and your nightstick flying when you think it could be your neighbor out there,” one police officer admitted to a news reporter (“Two Nights of Terror,” 1980, p. 3). Another observed, “I saw guys I went to school with throwing bottles at me” (“Two Nights of Terror,” 1980, p. 3). Yet in this situation the relationship between authority and members of the crowd was entirely different from the social dynamics that encircled the Myers in the summer of 1957. Put simply, there was no common enemy, an outsider everyone could see, point to, then reject. The oil companies of OPEC were the obvious targets, but they were distant, far removed from the fears and violence of Levittown residents. The police, however,

were much closer. They were real. During this heightened climate of social and economic instability, "...the police," one newspaper reported, "...had become synonymous with the oil companies" ("Truck Protest Turns Sour," 1979, p. A1).

The conditions were ripe. The protest, which had been inflamed by police violence, simply turned the crowd on; it enlivened them. There was now a purpose to their protest, or so many wanted to believe.

"Social disorder in Levittown?," *Newsweek* asked two weeks later. "The postwar era really has ended" ("Levittown Revisited," 1979, p. 84).

Levittown: The Symbol of Everything Middle-Class

The concept of Levittown came to represent what was culturally possible for postwar America. Widespread homeownership was just one of the many progresses made in a forward moving, confident cultural climate. What occurred at the intersection of five points in June of 1979, however, had brought this symbolic community full circle. Certainly, Levittown had seen better days. But now, under these oppressive conditions of history, the community, like many others, stumbled and fell. "That [Levittown] could go up in flames over gas," wrote Lenny Steinhorn, Professor of American Studies at American University, "meant that all was not well with the middle-class dream" (L. Steinhorn, personal communication, January 30, 2002).

The evolution of Levittown can be viewed sociologically as an evolution of the American middle-class. It is a postwar story of becoming—men, women, families, many with limited social and financial resources, hungry for a home of their own, striving for their interpretation of the American dream. They took a risk and gathered on 22 square

miles of rolling dirt fields, many far from friends and family and without the convenience of a telephone. They believed in the myth of success—the American dream as it was presented to them within the context of the Great Depression (Hearn, 1977).

It is also a story of change and adaptation. As residents gained greater resources, they either added on to their existing homes, moved on to larger Levittown homes, or moved away from the community all together. Yet there was always a fresh supply of new homeowners, families starting with dreams of their own. Over time, Levittown began to look more alike socially than it had ever been before. And like the American middle-class, the social mobility of Levittown residents, the speed at which they moved up the economic ladder, began to slow during the 1970s. For some, it is sure, the ascent stopped all together.

If ever there was a question as to when the postwar period ended in Levittown, Patterson and Lemann would surely agree that the gas riot of 1979 was the beginning of the end. For Steinhorn, Levittown's riot "...symbolize[d] the change from an era of middle-class aspirations to the age of middle-class fears" (L. Steinhorn, personal communication, January 30, 2002).

Still, many found it hard to believe that members of their own community would react so harshly to the conditions under which much of the nation now found itself. "This is not something that happens here in Levittown, U.S.A.," a police officer stated in a newspaper interview, one year following the riot. "It's something that happens in far-off places" ("Two Nights of Terror," 1980, p. 5). Indeed, Levittown was much closer to the majority, more connected to the now fragile American middle-class, than many chose to believe.

Damn it, where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio? [asked *Newsweek* magazine following the Levittown gas riot]. Whatever happened to the fun in our future? What happened to 1945's sense of a fresh start? What happened to Levittown's tranquility? ("Levittown Revisited," 1979, p. 84).

President Carter's Crisis of Confidence

As if he was speaking directly to the rioting crowds at Levittown's five points, President Carter, a few weeks later, on July 15, 1979, addressed the nation in a speech that would from then on be referred to as the "Malaise Speech." There is no doubting that the energy crisis sweeping the country at the time was a grave concern for Carter. Yet something "more serious" bothered him; it was something that he believed posed a "fundamental threat to American democracy" (Carter, 1979, p. 643).

The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways [Carter explained]. It is a *crisis of confidence* [italics added]. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation. The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America...Restoring that faith and that confidence to America is now the most important task we face (Carter, 1979, p. 643).

Levittown residents, along with millions of other Americans, were all too familiar with the social landscape the President was describing. The unrelenting belief in limitless resources had indeed finally reached its end. And confidence in the future, America's most precious resource, was in short supply. There was little need to be reminded.

But the President's message went much further—too far, some believed--than simply raising the public's consciousness about this crisis. His speech, Lemann observed (1991), displayed a "spectacular political ineptitude" (pp. 39-46). "...Too many of us," the President scolded, "tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human

identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns” (Carter, 1979, p. 643). The President was not shy. His remarks clearly expressed his growing frustration with America's unquestioning reliance on material things.

Whether Carter had in mind the recent Levittown riot as he gave his speech, it is not known for sure. Although it would be reasonable to assume that someone had informed him of the event. Levittown was one of many other American communities dependent on oil, and he reminded them to be cautious of this relationship.

Our excessive dependence on OPEC [he said] has already taken a tremendous toll on our economy and *our people*. This is the direct cause of the *long lines* which have made millions of you spend *aggravating hours* [italics added] waiting for gasoline. It's a cause of the increased inflation and unemployment that we now face. This intolerable dependence on foreign oil threatens our economic independence and the very security of our Nation.

The energy crisis is real. It is world wide. It is a clear and present danger...(Carter, 1979, p. 644;).

When Industry Falls

Following the Second World War it was the forward-looking progressive culture that soaked in and became increasingly used to the widespread availability of such resources. Jobs, too, were in great supply as a direct result of affordable gasoline. In communities like Levittown, where industry serviced the employment needs of most people, good economic times fostered more smiles than fears. Indeed, few others in Lower Bucks County held more confidence in their jobs than did steelworkers at Fairless Steel Works. Their jobs were secure. Salaries paid off mortgages and sent children to college. “This is a plant that will go on for 50 or perhaps 100 years to come,” Benjamin Fairless declared at the opening ceremonies of Fairless Steel Works, “pouring steel into

the ribs of our nation and wealth into its economic veins" ("The American Dream," 1992, p. A1). It was a belief shared by the thousands.

Between 1951 and 1968, Fairless Steel Works maintained a steady employment rate of 6,000 to 7,000 employees. By 1973, there were almost 10,000 workers producing some 4 million tons of steel a year. Together with other area industries (i.e., Rohm and Hass, and Minnesota Manufacturing and Mining [3M]), Fairless Steel collectively employed 30 percent of Levittown residents (Popenoe, 1997). At no other time in history had more people worked for either of these companies. And yet, despite previous set backs at Fairless Steel, such as the labor strikes of 1956 and 1959—the latter lasting a record 115 days—workers continued to believe in the durability of steel. It was a product, an industry, a livelihood.

For Levittown families like Mary and Jack Remis, steel was a way of life, a family emblem, an important part of their self-identity. Culturally, the mill brought people together where many formed life-long friendships, even marriages. They picnicked together, played cards together, and celebrated birthdays at each other's homes. The commonalties of their lives were what bonded them.

So to imagine a world without an unquenchable thirst for American steel, where the open-hearth furnaces at Fairless Steel Works did not burn seven days a week, 24 hours a day, was, for some, a very difficult thing to do. "I had myself convinced that the United States of America would have to absolutely collapse before U.S. Steel would shut the Fairless Works," said an ex-steelworker in a newspaper interview years later ("The American Dream," 1992, p. A1). "We thought the steel mill would be here forever," claimed the wife of another steelworker ("Steel Forges Fall' Identity," 1999, p. A1).

Yet changes taking shape in the economic climate should not have taken the nation entirely by surprise. Not even the steel produced at Fairless Works could withstand the forces of change that motored through the global economy in the early 1970s. The OPEC oil crisis, the most visible sign of change, transformed the market for steel. In the 1970s, smaller, more efficient automobiles became a way of life—a market that Japanese imports had a head start in. By 1977, area car dealerships in Levittown were selling AMC Gremlins with Levi's seat covers for \$2,645, Datsun Honeybees for \$2,929, and, of course, the car that would later come to symbolize the sacrifice of safety in the name of competition, the Ford Pinto—2,000 pounds for \$2,000 ("Sound of the '70s," 1999, p. A7). Under these new conditions the demand for steel had weakened.

Built in 1951 as the largest integrated steel mill in the world, with a price tag of approximately \$400,000,000, Fairless Steel Works began to crumble under the pressures of change in 1975, the very year in which employment levels had reached an all-time-high. Signs of trouble came with the first major layoff of 2,300 employees. Five years later, the electric furnaces were permanently shut down. By 1982, 3,500 more employees were dismissed; those who remained accepted an hourly wage cut the following year. The mill continued this decline for years, and by 1991, with the loss of another 2,100 employees, only 800 or so people manned what was left of this once great mill. By 2002, only a skeletal crew remained ("USS Distrusted," 1991; "USX Shutdown," 1991; "Bare Metal," 2001, p. B1; "Where Have All the Steel Workers Gone?," 2001, p. B1; and "The End of an Era," 2001, p. A1). Within one year after this, the doors of this great mill were forever closed.

We Were the Lucky Ones

The story of the rise and fall of Fairless Steel Works is indeed the story of the American middle-class in the postwar period. Steelworkers wanted to believe that the mill had a life of its own. The sheer scale of their work, and the importance given to their finished product, helped convince many that their industry was unshakable. But their impressions were aided by yet another powerful force: themselves. "They wanted to be convinced," Dale Russakoff argued in his 1992 *Washington Post* article entitled "The American Dream: Fired up and Melted Down" ("The American Dream," 1992, p. A1). Steelworkers wanted to feel secure, and there were reinforcements all around them—a life history of an industry that transformed the nation, indeed the world, and a mill praised as the most technologically advanced for its time. Overtime, Russakoff claims, "they became complacent" ("The American Dream," 1992, p. A1).

For that first generation of the postwar period, those original owners of homes in places like Levittown, the prosperity of the period and the dominance of the mill played an integral role in shaping and strengthening the levels of confidence they had in the future. Many were able to share and enjoy these good times at the peaks of their careers. Fortunately, retirement for this cohort of workers came before or just at the beginning of this period of national decline.

Mary Remis' husband, Jack, who had worked for U.S. Steel in Pittsburgh before transferring to Fairless Steel Works in 1952, took an early retirement in the early 1970s. A decade later, after many years of health problems, he died. But before his death, he took notice of many of the changes taking shape at the mill--layoffs, rumors of shutting particular sections of the mill, and much more. Yet his faith in the mill went untarnished.

“It’s a shame the mill went down,” Mary lamented in an interview in 2002. “If [Jack] would know that, he would turn over in his grave...He would always say, ‘This is it, this is a great thing.’ It’s a shame [that] it had to turn out that way” (M. Remis, personal communication, April 7, 2002).

Second generation residents of the area, those sons and daughters of postwar parents, were also able to benefit early in their lives from good economic times. The mill, for many, was a guaranteed job with a good salary. However, that the mill would not offer the same long-term comforts as it did for the previous generation, had been, for the most part, well known. The warning signs were all around them. Plants around the country were closing their doors. But young men still flocked to Fairless Steel for work.

Many workers chose not to digest messages of decline, for they ran contradictory not only to the very dream their parents had achieved--that of a good stable job with a reasonable salary--but also to their own dreams of upward mobility. The next generation was always supposed to do better than the one before it. This was the American success story. A change in such a pattern would undermine the very goals and objectives people were socialized to pursue. The years that followed the mill’s 1975 decline, however, brought a new reality to that preconceived American ideal. For the first time since the Great Depression, the futures of many Americans, particularly white middle-class citizens, were now clouded with uncertainty.

Where Did the Dream Go?

One month into the new year of 1996, *Washington Post* staff writer Paul Taylor compared Levittown to a broader context of community life in America. “Levittown,”

Taylor wrote, "...has gotten busier, older, more mobile and more suspicious, a pretty good description of how the entire American middle class has changed over the last generation" ("Fading American Dream," 1996, p. A10). What Taylor was describing was a community that had evolved under the deteriorating conditions of the 1970s and 1980s, and now, in the 1990s, was still trying to get back on its feet, both socially and economically. A "fear of falling" from one's position within the system had become a pronounced reality. Upward mobility had been redefined. Now, families rejoiced in the smallest of all achievements (see Ehrenreich, 1989; Skolnick, 1991; and Newman, 1993 and 1988).

Postwar Americans were troubled by the prevailing social landscape, particularly those original Levittown residents. They remembered an all-together different way of life. What ever happened to the future they had envisioned for their children and grandchildren? What happened to the American dream? How could they have let it slip away?

Today [Taylor wrote], as so many Americans seem gripped by a shapeless anxiety, the members of this "long civic generation" are feeling less all-mastering than they once did. In the dusk of their lives, they're suspended half-way between contentment and melancholy. Their own dreams came true. But they're haunted by the perfect future that didn't, the one they never managed to invent for their children ("Fading American Dream," 1996, p. A1).

Had they put too much confidence in the future? Were tomorrow's expectations set too high? As President Carter alluded to years earlier, in 1979, it might just have been the nation's "intolerable dependence on oil," in addition to their insatiable appetite for all things material, that led them into such a vulnerable position (Carter, 1979, p. 644). Put

simply, Americans had become too dependent on favorable conditions, so much so as to refuse to envision a time when they would not exist.

Much of what troubled those young adults of the postwar period, those who were now of middle-age, was a direct result of the structural changes taking shape in society. To understand, at a fundamental level, the origins of these changes, and the impact they had on individuals and their communities, it is necessary to explore change from a socio-historical perspective.

During Roosevelt's New Deal, and stretching for some 30 years, the distribution of pay had been more equally distributed than at any other time in American history. Paul Krugman, in his *New York Times Magazine* article entitled "The End of Middle-Class America," argues that this equal distribution in pay resulted more from social norms than any other factor (i.e., globalization, skill-based technological changes, etc.) (Krugman, 2002). One is led to believe that these social norms reflected the rules and expectations set forth by FDR in the New Deal, particularly in the G.I. Bill of Rights. Even the corporate culture remained in check with executive salaries far lower during the postwar period than at any other time in the twentieth century. Yet to conceive that social norms alone narrowed the gaps between the rich and the poor would be to over-romanticize the moral strengths of Roosevelt's policy.

The "Great Compression," as Claudia Goldin and Robert Margo (1992) call it, was more the result of "various forces" acting simultaneously in history than any one meaningful policy initiative (p. 25). Government programs like the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), the National War Labor Board (NWLB), and the Stabilization Act (also known as the Price Control Act), among others, helped reengineer the wage

structure of the 1930s and 1940s. The Great Compression, wrote Goldin and Margo (1992),

...was primarily the result of a particular confluence of short-run events affecting the demand for labor and of institutional changes brought about by the war and the command economy that accompanied it...The relative demand for less-educated workers increased during the 1940s and 1950s, and a rising minimum wage continued to pull up the bottom of the wage distribution. The American labor movement was never stronger than in the 1950s; and unions, it has been claimed, were strongly in favor of a compressed wage structure...and perhaps of most importance, increases in the supply of educated labor served to depress the prices of skilled labor and retained, for some time, the egalitarian impact of the Great Compression (p. 32).

This leveling process affected politics, too. "From World War II until the 1970s," Krugman wrote in 2002, "...political partisanship was much more muted than it is today" (2002, p. 76). With the wealth being distributed more equally (as a direct result of government controls of wages), politicians had little to gain by choosing sides over conflictive issues, especially those concerning the new middle-class. Indeed, with economic inequality between the majority of Americans at an all time low, conflict among competing groups had been minimized, but certainly not erased. That the socially and economically oppressed had weak political voices only aided this silent political context.

All of this, however, quickly changed with the introduction of Ronald Reagan as President in the early 1980s. Reagan swept the liberal agenda of the New Deal under the rug, and by doing so, forever changed the way the public felt about the role of big government in their lives. "Government is not the solution to our problems," he declared in his inaugural address, "Government is the problem" (Walton and Rockoff, 2002, p. 583). Yet, under the direction of President Roosevelt, big government was the force that

narrowed the economic gaps between Americans, bringing them closer together socially, politically, and economically than ever before. All of this changed.

Starting in the early 1970s, the gap between rich and poor began to widen. The social norms holding executive salaries in check, particularly the fear of public outrage over enormous paychecks, weakened and eventually disappeared. Good economic times had hummed the middle-class to sleep. Social norms had become replaced by an "anything goes" corporate attitude. For example, between 1970 and 1999, the average real annual compensation of the top 100 CEOs increased dramatically, from \$1.3 million (39 times the pay of the average worker) to \$37.5 million (over 1,000 times the pay of the average worker) (Krugman, 2002, p. 64). By 1998, the top 0.01 percent of taxpayers (some 13,000 families) received three percent of the nation's income. Today, writes Krugman (2002), "...we are...back to the days of 'The Great Gatsby'" (p. 64). Another Gilded Age had returned.

From this perspective the middle-class, as it existed for 30 years following the Second World War, can be viewed as an artificial creation, one that had become historically sandwiched between two Gilded Ages in the 20th century. For original Levittown residents, the timing of their young adult lives, it seemed, could not have ripened at a better time during any other period in history. "We were the lucky ones," Martin Soobey, an original Levittown resident, declared in a newspaper interview. "We hit the seam just right... We didn't have uncertainty" ("Fading American Dream" 1996, p. A10).

Second-generation Levittown residents, however--children of the baby boom generation--did have uncertainty. The glorious seams of coal promised them years earlier had already been mined. They, in fact, were the residents rioting in the streets.

Deindustrialization as a Defined Socio-historical Event

The decline of U.S. Steel's Fairless Steel Works in 1975, and the gas riots that followed in the summer of 1979, while both significant historical events, tell only a small part of the overall story of decline in American history. In Levittown, these events clearly marked the end of the postwar period. But what happened in Levittown was not entirely unique. Many other communities were equally affected by such forces of change, however varied they might have been.

The most visible and broadly experienced change occurring in the 1970s and early 1980s was the decline in manufacturing. Industries like steel, for example, suffered from a process which scholars have called deindustrialization. In The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment and the Dismantling of Basic Industry, Bluestone and Harrison define this process as a "widespread systematic disinvestment in the nation's basic productive capacity" (1982, p. 6). They point toward high unemployment rates, a sluggish growth in the domestic economy, and the country's inability to compete successfully in the global market as essential markers underlying this process of decline (see also Bluestone, Harrison, and Baker, 1981; and Dandaneau, 1996).

Deindustrialization, as a concept, brings into perspective the widespread closing of manufacturing/industrial plants throughout the nation, something Bluestone, Harrison,

and Baker call "corporate flight" (1981). The departure of an industry from a community may come quickly, with workers being locked out the very next day, or it may occur over a longer period of time, with the laying off employees gradually through the years.

Regardless of the pace of deindustrialization, job loss is the most common outcome, one that affects both the individual and their community. In the 1970s alone, 38 million people lost their jobs. Of these, 13,000 were employees of U.S. Steel (Bluestone, et. al., 1981).

Since the concept of deindustrialization was first introduced as an object of study in the early 1980s, researchers have approached it from a variety of ways. But scholars all agree, the social costs associated with deindustrialization are the most devastating. Representative of this literature are studies that examine plant closings and capital disinvestments from a macro or structural perspective (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982; Bluestone, et. al., 1981; Rothstein, 1986; and Dandaneau, 1996), others that explore the impacts made across regions and within specific communities (Rodwin & Sazanami, 1989; Raines et. al., 1982; Dudley, 1994; Jacobson et. al., 1993; Buss & Redburn, 1983; Hibbard, 1986; Gaventa et. al., 1992; and Rabrenovic, 1995), and some that document, through a case study method, the impact upon individual lives (O'Neil, 1995; and Wallace & Rothschild, 1988).

Hibbard (1986) explored the social and economic changes that were the result of deindustrialization in the small lumber mill town of Oakridge, Oregon. Since 1979, the Oakridge Mill had lost over two hundred of its employees, down from a peak of 500. The number of weeks in which the mill ran in full operation had also steadily declined during this period. From this decay stemmed other changes: the population of the town

began to shrink, stores closed, the library shut its doors, and government services were streamlined, drastically reducing, among many other services, police protection. Yet despite of all these changes, the town of Oakridge still clung to, and continued to depend upon, its deteriorating industry. They, too, refused to envision a future without this economic force.

In their extensive review of empirical evidence documenting deindustrialization, Wallace and Rothschild (1988) identified the impacts of this process on a variety of outcomes ranging from the geographic distribution of employment, the distribution of earnings within a region, to the destructive effects upon individuals and their communities. They suggest that loss of income, due to short-term or prolonged unemployment, represents only one dimension of the changes brought on by industrial decline.

For example, a primary outcome of pressures brought on by job loss may be a reversal of family roles, whereas non-working family members may need to enter the labor market in order to maintain family finances. These new conditions, as Wallace and Rothschild suggest, may spawn other effects, such as in a child's poor school performance or increased marital conflict.

Rabrenovic (1995), by building a case study of the Hamilton Hill community in Schenectady, New York, extended previous research on how deindustrialization impacts the fabric of community life. Once a stable working class neighborhood, Hamilton Hill had now become a fragmented urban community. Rabrenovic pointed a blaming finger at industry giants like General Electric (GE) who closed plants throughout the community or reduced employment to levels never seen before. GE's disinvestment in Hamilton Hill

dramatically affected the local economy. Lost city revenues forced the town to cut back on public services such as police protection, education, and maintenance of its local infrastructure. As a result of these and other changes, Hamilton Hill had become less certain of its future--expectations that residents had for their community were diminished. A new social climate prevailed.

As we have seen, deindustrialization and its effects can take many forms. Scholars refer to the diminished realities stemming from capital disinvestment as "social violence" (Bluestone, et. al., 1981, p. 24). It is a type of violence that retards individual life chances which thereby fractures and weakens the overall fabric of community, particularly its growth potential and its overall level of health. Social violence, however, is seldom measured or documented; it is most often hidden within Gross National Product figures or masked beneath inflated unemployment rates. The realities that these changes bring are too often overlooked, or at best, misunderstood. Indeed, unmasking social violence is as difficult as uncovering the very forces at play in the process of deindustrialization itself.

The most common forms of social violence stem from plant closings or decreases in plant productivity. The most direct effect of this disinvestment process is job loss leading to long-term unemployment (Bluestone et. al., 1981; and Bluestone & Harrison, 1982). Unlike other forms of unemployment in which short-term or frictional employment may be a possibility, the closing of a plant can drastically reduce the amount of work available in a given community, especially during periods of recession. Still, for those individuals fortunate enough to regain employment, the loss of seniority produces

an even more vulnerable environment compared to the one that they had before experienced.

Also of concern is the quality and salary level of new jobs when displaced workers return to the work force. Research suggests that three-fifths of displaced workers experience a decline in the status level of their new jobs (Bluestone, et. al., 1981). Jacobson, LaLonde, and Sullivan (1993), who compared the earnings of dislocated workers to their colleagues who maintained employment, found that workers in all industries suffer a loss in earnings two years after job loss. Those employed in the steel industry, for example--like those at Fairless Steel Works--suffered a greater than 40 percent loss in earnings (Jacobson, et. al., 1993). Indeed, of those 2,000 employees of Fairless Steel laid off in 1992, almost 80 percent remained unemployed one-year later ("The American Dream," 1992, p. A1).

A legitimate but lesser known effect of capital disinvestment and job loss is a decline in personal health. Many people, as scholars have suggested, suffer both mental and physical problems in response to the social and economic changes shaping their lives (Bluestone et. al., 1981; Wallace & Rothschild, 1988; Dudley, 1994; and O'Neil, 1995). With the expiration of health benefits, many families are only a single illness away from depleting family resources (Wallace & Rothschild, 1988). Further, previous research suggests that those who do grow ill, often suffer from increased blood pressure, ulcers, respiratory diseases, and stomach troubles, just to name a few (Bluestone et. al., 1981). Less physical but equally harmful effects such as loss of self-esteem and increased levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and anger can also burden the unemployed worker and his/her family in unforeseen ways.

In 1992, after Fairless Steel Works laid off all but 800 employees (down from 10,000 two decades before), the need for psychological counseling at a dislocated workers center--staffed by former steel workers themselves--had never been greater. Many felt unable to control their anger. They feared hurting someone, perhaps someone they loved. Many did. "Every week," wrote the *Washington Post* of the Fairless steel situation, "another marriage dissolves, another house is sold for unpaid taxes" ("The American Dream," 1992, p. A1). One worker, unable to face his family after a year of unemployment, hitched up his beach trailer and drove off, alone, to Florida. "In the last year," he was quoted as saying, "we have gone straight backwards as a family. Not stepping. Flying" ("The American Dream," 1992, p. A1). Another former steelworker, turned janitor, found himself often exploding with rage over his inability to afford even the smallest of essential needs. His wife and young daughter were too often his targets. Indeed, an earlier study on the social trauma attributed to unemployment found that a "one percent increase in the aggregate unemployment rate sustained over a period of six years was associated with 37,000 deaths, 920 suicides, 650 homicides, 4,000 state mental hospital admissions, and 3,300 state prison admissions" (Breener, 1976, as cited in Bluestone et. al., 1981, p. 29; and Bluestone and Harrison, 1982, p. 65). The effects of economic decline were real.

Change Does Not Exist in a Vacuum

The above review brings into perspective the complexity and severity of deindustrialization. However, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that deindustrialization affects only unemployed, dislocated workers, their families, or the

immediate communities in which they live. It has been well documented that this social violence has a ripple effect; that it impacts those close to, and far from, the center of capital disinvestment. Like a large stone thrown into the center of a motionless mirror-like body of water, deindustrialization--like the waves that systematically escape outward in predictable rings--directly and indirectly affect the wider social environment.

Wallace & Rothschild's study of Norwood, Ohio, in the wake of the 1987 closing of a General Motors (GM) assembly plant, affords a view of the rippling effects that such change can bring. The primary effects of this plant closing occurred at the individual level with an elimination of salaries, wages, and pensions. This directly impacted GM employees and their families.

To understand its secondary effects, one must focus on the local economy. Businesses in Norwood relied heavily on income generated from sales to the GM workers. As one local businessperson put it: "GM was the difference for us between good prosperity and breaking even" (Wallace and Rothschild, 1988, p. 25). The tertiary effects of GM's plant closing lie in the regional economy surrounding Norwood. The closing of GM and other nearby industries reduced drastically the amount of employment for the entire region, jobs that were once dependent upon GM for parts, services, etc. In turn, the city of Norwood suffered a loss of \$2.6 million per year in taxable earnings from GM workers, which had accounted for 29 percent of the city's budget. As a consequence of this plant closing, Norwood cut back 29 percent of city services including fire and police protection, street maintenance, and public utilities, as well as a 30 percent reduction in revenue for the public school system. While some of these effects may weaken and dissolve overtime, many others become further embedded within the local

and regional fabric. "What begins as a behind-closed doors company decision," Bluestone and Harrison write (1982), "...ends up affecting literally everyone in town, including the butcher, the baker, and the candle stick maker" (p. 67).

Levittown and the Deflated American Dream

C. Wright Mills' (1959) discussion of "personal troubles" and "public issues" enables one to better understand the effects associated with deindustrialization as a defined historical event. (p. 8-9). Personal troubles, according to Mills, relate specifically to the character of the individual, their immediate relations with others, and to their social environment. Public issues, on the other hand, transcend the individual in time and space. "They have to do with the organization of many such milieux into the institutions of an historical society as a whole, with the ways in which various milieux overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life" (Mills, 1959, p. 8). Unlike troubles, issues are public matters that arise when once cherished values of the public are threatened. By using this Millsian logic, one can attempt to understand deindustrialization in sociological terms, as both a personal trouble and a public issue.

Rabrenovic's (1995) case study of Hamilton Hill, New York, Hibbard's (1986) research on Oakridge, Oregon, as well as Wallace and Rothschild's (1988) discussion of Norwood, Ohio--each in their own unique way--exemplify the interplay between personal troubles and those larger, more structural public issues. Each study highlighted deindustrialization's primary effects upon workers and their families (i.e., wage/salary loss, long-term unemployment, and depletion of family finances). They also discussed some of the secondary and tertiary effects impacting both local and regional economies

(i.e., loss of city revenue, decreased local services, etc.). The history of Levittown, Pennsylvania, too, has mirrored the paths taken by these other communities, those overshadowed by industries in decline. Personal troubles arise when the conditions of life upon which one has depended are either slowly or quickly changed. If they are not replaced with conditions equal to or greater than what once existed, the quality of life previously maintained will diminish, leaving one with a sense of loss and a fragile sense of security for the future. These are the conditions under which Levittown has evolved.

It should be made clear that what affects the individual or family is not the end result of some isolated event, for it has its roots in the fluctuations of society's social, political, and economic history. Life in the postwar period, which was an outcome of historical events and decisions grounded in the cultural climate of the New Deal, changed dramatically with the social and political chaos of the mid to late 1960s. It changed even further with the recession of the 1970s. On a national or global level, changes in the historical landscape can be understood as public issues, but when they begin to trickle into the lives of individuals (i.e., gas riots of 1979), they often become digested and understood as personal troubles, for they are personally experienced and are most visible. Yet this process of digestion is not a prerequisite for understanding. A resident of Levittown angry at gas prices and long lines need not make such troubles their own in order to take notice to larger structural problems. For many it was a national problem, one that sat high above and far away from the centers of their own lives.

Original Levittown residents experienced the history of their community through these many fluctuations. Many believed, as was the thinking of the day, that the conditions of life would only get better; that the lives of their children would be less

difficult as a result of their sacrifices in war and in work. Indeed, many residents grew up believing in this story of forward progress. This, indeed, is the interplay between biography and history (Mills, 1959). What else were they to believe in, if not the future?

Even Dreams are Stratified

By January 1996, Levittown was once again in the news. However, unlike years past, where the daily newspaper reported on record breaking construction projects, news of this community now emphasized their ability to weather the storms of economic decline. Parts of Levittown, it seemed, had hit rock bottom.

Described by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* as "one fiscal nightmare," Bristol Township had certainly seen better days ("Bristol Twp.: A Long Slide," 1996, p. B1). It now suffered from a \$1.8 million deficit (20 percent of the overall budget), one that was estimated to increase another \$650,000 by the end of 1996. But the overall decline of Bristol Township was not a sudden event. Like other communities affected by deindustrialization (and a variety of other structural changes), Bristol Township began its steady descent in the early 1980s. Since 1981, the township cut its ranks drastically, eliminating many police and fire inspectors, and cutting more than \$100,000 in recreational programs for children. Between 1990 and 1996, 43 employees were dismissed. "We've lost the revenues and we've had to cut back," said Mayor Tony Cipullo in a 1996 newspaper interview. "Our only resource is cutting" ("Bristol Twp.: A Long Slide," 1996, p. B2).

That the Mayor would reach out to the federal government for help under these conditions, was not at all surprising. Such a request would declare Bristol Township a

"financially distressed community," thus making it, as the *Philadelphia Inquirer* put it, one of the "most bankrupt and down-at-the-heels communities in the state" ("Bristol Twp.: A Long Slide," 1996, p. B1). Damn it, where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio? ("Levittown Revisited," 1979, p. 84).

Joseph and Virginia Dibert, both original Levittown residents residing in Bristol Township in 1996, were saddened by the declining health of their government ("Bristol Twp.: A Long Slide," 1996). Joseph questioned whether his town will ever hold the same opportunities it did for him 40 years ago. In 1952, after losing his job at one steel mill, he quickly traveled to Lower Bucks County, Pennsylvania and joined the ranks of thousands of others at Fairless Steel Works. And like thousands of others, he, too, bought a home in Levittown and lived out his definition of the American dream, that of owning a home and raising a family.

But by 1996, Joseph Dibert lived in an entirely different community. "He wouldn't recommend anyone make the move he did 40 years ago," the newspaper wrote. "It's a move he [now] regrets" ("Bristol Twp.: A Long Slide," 1996, p. B2).

Other residents see more of the social impact that these forces of change have had on their community. "There are a lot of 'I've got miners' around here now," stated one man in a newspaper interview ("Fading American Dream," 1996, p. A1). "There's not nearly as much community activity as there use to be. Everybody's working; everybody's busy."

Another resident understood these changes in more serious terms. His major concern: carjackings.

...People are scared [he said]. My wife has got a gun...She's never had a gun before...Every time she goes out, I tell her, 'keep the car door locked.

If somebody comes up to you and asks for directions, shoot'em dead'
("Fading American Dream," 1996, p. A10).

To be fair, the history of Bristol Township has not always been one of budget surpluses and widespread prosperity. Not only did it have the largest number of poor families prior to Levittown, but since Levittown, it has consistently had the highest real-estate tax rate of the four governments, the highest percentage of families with relatively low incomes, and the lowest median house value (Popenoe, 1977: 129; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). For example, in 2000, Bristol Township residents had a median annual income of \$51,406 and a median house value of \$106,220, whereas Middletown Township's medians were \$60,406 and \$140,533 respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In addition, residents of Bristol Township as of 2002 pay approximately \$1,000 more in property and educational taxes yearly than do residents with an expanded Levittown home in Falls Township, for example. Already overburdened, Bristol Township residents also pay a \$10 'head tax' to live in the township. Those fortunate enough to be employed, are also taxed an additional .5 percent of their annual income. Yet Bristol Township remains the poorest of them all.

In recent years the number of strip-bars, pawnshops, check-cashing services, and massage parlors, has increased dramatically in Bristol Township. Indeed, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that no other municipality in all of Bucks County resembles Bristol Township in its level of social blight. Yet there are some in the township who are trying desperately to reverse some of these poor trends. One such group is the Fenton team--a team of democrats made up of Mayor Samuel Fenton and three other administrators--who, in early 2000, began a "clean up Bristol Township" campaign (Committee to elect democrats that care, 2000). Their mail flyers boasted previous

achievements, such as ordinances brought against pawnshops and strip-bars, and against residences with unsightly properties. "The Fenton Team," read one flyer, "acted when club Diamonds disrupted our township as a front for drug dealers and organized crime. They shut down the club and brought peace to the neighborhood."

By 2002, well after the Fenton Team had won the previous election, residents of the township who chose not to clean up their properties were met with Fenton's "get-tough-on-litter law" and faced either a stiff \$1,000 fine or 30 days in jail ("Hey, You Can't Park There," 2002, p. C2).

Check-cashing outlets, services that the academic literature refers to as "fringe banking," are yet another consequence of deteriorating social and economic conditions (Caskey, 1994; Manning, 2000, pp. 195-225). Pawnshops and check-cashing outlets began to emerge in the 1970s and boomed during the fragile 1980s. "One of the more important factors contributing to this growth," argues Caskey (1994) in his book on the subject, "was a marked increase in the number of households without bank accounts" (p. 84). For many low-wage earners, or unemployed persons, saving resources during these poor economic times was difficult to do--even maintaining small balances so as to avoid banking penalties was troublesome. Fringe banking companies have fed on the diminished realities of many residents of Lower Bucks County, particularly those who owned or rented homes in Levittown. That a Red Cross Homeless Shelter would open in Levittown's Bristol Township in 1989 is not at all surprising, given the conditions of history and ill-health plaguing the township (As of 2003, the shelter operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and serves about 400 people a year, in Levittown) ("Economy Taking Toll on Shelter, 2003, p. A1; and "Bike Path," 2002, p. A1).

But why did all of this blight fall within the political boundaries of Bristol Township? Why not Falls or Middletown Townships, or the small 19th century borough of Tullytown?

Bristol's woes, it should be said, while deep-rooted, are not entirely of their own making. Indeed, Levitt and Sons only exacerbated the township's troubles through their building plans. When planning Levittown, PA, Levitt and Sons placed their cheapest homes (approximately 8,000 Levittowners) in Bristol Township and their more expensive and larger model, the Country Clubber, in Middletown Township. At first, these differences meant very little in places like Bristol Township where doctors and lawyers lived beside steelworkers and other blue-collar laborers. Yet, as wages, and therefore status, simultaneously increased, those with more resources moved up to larger homes in Levittown or moved away from the community all together, some opting for an older farmhouse with land in upper Bucks County. Those who replaced the socially mobile original residents began, over time, to produce a community who resembled each other more in economic terms than it had ever been before. No longer did the manual laborer live next to the doctor or lawyer, as they did in years past.

As early as 1972, one resident and journalist commented on the erosion of diversity in occupations. "The people who live in [particular neighborhoods]," Bittan (1972) said, "are now as homogeneous as their homes" (p. 81). A comparison of Bristol Township's Red Cedar Hill section with its \$9,000 Ranchers and Middletown Township's Red Rose Gate section with its \$17,500 Country Clubbers highlights this Levitt-induced social stratification system.

Red Cedarites [wrote David Bittan], for the most part, are blue collar types who work at U.S. Steel or in skilled or semi-skilled trades. The Red

Roser, on the other hand, most likely is a college graduate (one survey showed 84% had degrees) holding a relatively high-paying professional job. The name 'Levittown' and the curved streets are about the only things Red Cedar and Red Rose have in common (1972, p. 81).

Today in Levittown, in the year 2003, commonality still primarily rests in the community name itself. The municipalities that make up Levittown are more different, and the sections within each of them are more alike, perhaps, than they have ever been before. Homogeneity reins! Indeed, to say that the image of Levittown is the same for all residents within its conceptual walls would be to overlook the obvious. Real differences have become manifested in home values and in other facets of perceived quality.

"Bristol Township," states Paul Brown of Coldwell Banker Real estate in Levittown, is still very much "a blue-collar area" (P. Brown, personal communication, June 20, 2003). And this, Brown surmises, has had real effects in the life of this community. "It's a matter of perceptions, emotions," he said. "People think that one township offers better education," which in turn drives the value of real estate.

Other real estate professionals agree. A representative from Robin Kenmerer Associates in Levittown put it in simple terms: "The main difference between the disparities [of municipalities that make up Levittown]," she claimed, "are the school districts" (personal communication, June 20, 2003). For example, a remodeled Jubilee style Levittown house in Middletown Township could reasonably bring as much as \$226,000, whereas an identical home in Bristol Township could bring no more than \$169,000 (personal communication, June 20, 2003). In some instances, only a street separates Falls Township residents, for example, from those in Bristol Township. And with identical houses on either side of the same street, those falling within Falls

Township consistently sell for \$20,000 more than those on Bristol Township's side of the street. "There is no question," Paul Brown explains, "school districts are very attractive."

To Levittown residents, these community separations are real. Stigmas and stereotypes do take on tangible qualities.

A Changed Environment

"You are living in bad times," Jack Rosen warned in the midst of Levittown's 50th anniversary (J. Rosen, personal communication, February 11, 2003). "People are very nervous these days." As a new Levittown resident in the early 1950s, Jack developed a business by walking door to door with his 35-millimeter camera, snapping pictures of small children. He would offer parents a free 5x7 in hopes that friends and family would buy more. He worked in homes of people he had never met before. They invited him in. "You couldn't do that today," he explains. "They don't trust you." Nobody trusts nobody anymore, Jack would say, sadly.

Jack, and the many others of his generation who were brought up under the social, political, and economic times of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, experienced a different cultural world. "We were idealistic," Jack pointed. "We went though the 50s, fought against the war in the 60s. We marched, and we had spirit and love and peace." "That," he explained, "is all gone [today]."

While Jack still believes in "the goodness of man," he does find it to be an increasingly difficult thing to do. "It is very hard to live in this world and believe in that because every other person is doing something bad to you, or trying to," he said. Yet Jack is still, as he put it, "...stupid enough to believe" (J. Rosen, personal

communication, February 11, 2003). This very quality, persistence, is a trait common to those of Jack's generation.

Jack pointed to what he called the "basic things of humanity"--survival and greed--as the very forces that have hidden or erased the "goodness" that once prevailed. He sees them as basic social features, for they have always been a part of social life. At certain times in history, though, they become more or less pronounced. Postwar conditions produced a climate of equality in pay and in opportunity for the majority of white Americans that had never before existed. Survival and greed were maintained and kept in check by such a productive and lucrative environment. Deleterious conditions, such that the nation faced in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, enabled these forces to take on realities of their own. Conditions such as these can be seen as enabling factors; they bring out, pronounce, and make real that which had already existed.

Thus, for Jack, survival and greed "never changes," they only become more visible at different moments in history. But now, Jack sees these qualities of life as detrimental to the overall goodness of man. It is a transformation that Jack finds hard to accept. His socialist upbringing fostered a want to change the world. But time has hardened his previous beliefs. "I'm ready to give up on the human race," he stated in a newspaper interview ("Focused on Society," 2002, p. 2A).

Now 80 years old, Jack sits in his New Hope borough home, a few miles north of Levittown, where he has lived for some 30 years. He finds change difficult. Indeed, he still dials Windsor 6, the local telephone exchange from years past, on his black rotary style telephone. The number still works.

Unlike Jack Rosen, Arlene Olsen, on the other hand, is very accepting of change. "You do better in this world right now if you do," she advised (A. Olsen, personal communication, December 26, 2001 and February 7, 2002).

As an original Levittown resident still living in the same home she and her husband, Steve, bought in 1954, Arlene has had to face many changes. Seven years after moving into their home, Steve passed away, leaving Arlene, alone, with two small daughters. "I had to survive myself," she remembered. And she did. "I learned to accept things, like the Serenity Prayer. Things that you cannot change."

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change that things I can, and wisdom to know the difference (Patterson, 1977, p. 20).

"There are people who live in the past," Arlene explained. "They don't like changes. They don't know whether they're good or bad. I use to say, 'try it.'"

Arlene and Steve never envisioned a long stay in Levittown. Like many others, they saw it as a stepping stone, something they could afford until they achieved greater financial strength. But with Steve's death came a new realization--now she would have to get a job and make due for her family. She never did remarry.

Also, for Mary Remis, an original Levittown resident living in the same home she and her husband Jack purchased in 1953, a similar life change occurred 31 years after she moved in. Jack passed away in 1984, leaving Mary home alone. Her two children were grown and had families of their own. Like Arlene and Steve, Mary and Jack did not plan to stay in Levittown either. Jack dreamed of a bigger home, with lots of land. It was a wish that only Jack's children, many years later, would make come true.

The Graying of Levittown

In 1972, Levittown resident and journalist David Bittan estimated that original residents made up 30 percent of the overall population, then totaling some 75,000 people. Today, however, such an estimate would be harder to believe. In 2000, residents aged 65 and older, which would include all original residents living in Levittown, made up 15 percent of Levittown's overall population, up four percent in ten years. And according to Fitzpatrick and Logan's community age classification system (i.e., very low, less than 5 percent 65 or older; low, 5 to 9.9 percent; middle, 10 to 14.9 percent; high, 15 to 19.9 percent; and very high, 20 percent and above), Levittown falls within the high category. "It is the middle and high categories which typify suburbs with a disproportionate senior population" (Fitzpatrick & Logan, 1985, p. 111). They call them "elderly suburbs."

It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that 15 percent of Levittown is made up of original residents. Many, in fact, have moved on. However, a great many others aged 65 and older, having never been a Levittown resident before, have chosen to make the community home, taking advantage of reasonably priced, single-level living.

Regardless, though, the trend is clear--Levittown is graying. With the Levittown population under age 10 decreasing from 1960, 1970, 1990 to 2000--37, 23, 16, and 14 respectively--and with the overall population of Levittown decreasing from 75,071 in 1970 to 53,966 in 2000, it may very well be concluded, as David Popenoe has in the past, that Levittown "may become something of a retirement community" (U.S. Census Bureau; Popenoe, 1977, p. 126). Indeed, it would not be surprising to see residents over 65 years of age representing one-fifth of the population of Levittown by the year 2010.

Changes such as these will continue to produce a different Levittown, one with great differences in age. For original residents of the early 1950s, one's age defined community. Fifty years later, age is still a fundamental variable, yet as the variation of age takes on new qualities, community, too, must change. Age, original residents today believe, determines it all.

"All of a sudden it came to us," Arlene Olson remarked with a glitter of surprise, "[Levittown] is older than we realize. The population grew older without us realizing it" (A. Olsen, personal communication, December 26, 2001 and February 7, 2002). She was too busy surviving to take much notice to these demographic changes, for she, too, had aged along with everyone else. "You live with age," Arlene explained, almost philosophically. And before long, there exists an entirely different social landscape to absorb and to understand.

When Levittown was new, everything was new. Its residents were young, and as Jack Rosen put it, very "adventurous." They were taking a great risk, and there was a degree of fun and excitement involved, of moving into a home and supporting a concept of community that was the most modern for the time. It was, as a *Time* magazine cover called it in July of 1950, the selling of a "New Way of Life."

New residents shared tools. Some, unknowingly, shared wives and husbands. But this, too, was all part of being young and living apart from those strong family bonds that defined neighborhoods and streets of the past. They were a community of young people, many of whom had never had much money in their pockets. Now they had a home. Much like college freshman living in dorms, away from parents, experiencing

freedom and independence, they bonded more as neighbors than would any future generation of residents in the community's history.

In early Levittown, as Dr. James Austin recalled, "everybody on the street used to have weekend parties and get-togethers. Everybody took turns."

Neighbors were very neighborly [he continued]. If you did something, everybody helped you and you helped everybody else. If you wanted to pour a sidewalk...you bought a couple cases of beer or soda and your friends came and helped, and you did the same for them.

Indeed, friendships were formed almost without effort. "But that doesn't happen anymore," Dr. Austin said. "It used to be a lot more neighborly than what it is now...things are not as personal as they used to be." As Dr. Austin observed, "there is more variety of age. The young kids and older people don't see eye to eye..." (J. Austin, personal communication, February 19, 2003).

Dr. Austin and Arlene were not alone in their observations. "The associations are different," explained Betty and Donald Peart, referring to how the social interaction among neighbors has all but dried up in today's Levittown (B. and D. Peart, personal communication, February 11, 2002). New residents matured together. They raised families along side each other--many of the children were of the same age, too. It was "a friendly place," the Pearts summarized. "The people who lived in those houses were so close and so friendly because they were all from somewhere else." Betty, herself a transplant from a small New England town, found the commonality in strangers comforting. Everyone was from somewhere else.

The Pearts never made the amount of money they thought was needed to move to a bigger house. "We had ties," they explained. "We just didn't want to move." Now, though, with friends lost to old age or relocation, the Pearts rely on family, their church,

and a few trustworthy neighbors for support and companionship. But the community is not what it used to be. Few are even aware of its history. Indeed, one would be hard put to find anyone living on Timber Lane today who has any memory of the life of 15-year-old Marta Gibbons, or an illiterate man named George Capps. The Pearts still remember, though. She was their babysitter; he was their friend.

For older people, especially for original Levittown residents, associations with others are extremely important. As they age, they become less mobile; many will suffer from serious health problems. Under these conditions, the day to day maintenance of a home, even obtaining necessary prescription drugs and food items, can become somewhat of a challenge. Arlene Olsen, now 85 years old, explains, "...you can be independent, but you have to depend on others...you are dependent in a way on somebody" (A. Olsen, personal communication, December 26, 2001 and February 7, 2002). This dependent relationship makes many older residents uncomfortable. That they are burdening others with problems that are no longer common to all residents is somewhat troubling to them. Years earlier, problems associated with the common struggle of community life (i.e., dust, mud, limited telephone service, etc.) were what brought neighbors together. Today, that quality of community no longer exists.

"The thing you do have to be wary of when you are older," Joann Clark said, "is that you don't try to depend on the young people around you." At 79 years of age, Joann now cares for her husband, Frank, whose health is not as good as it used to be. "You have to maintain your own independence."

You can't have any expectations from [your neighbors] [she continued]. Mostly there are young people here and a few old people like us on the street, and that is different from when you are all around the same age. You have more needs when you are older. So I try to be wary of that...[I]

take care of my own trashcans... When we were younger, I can remember being sick and in the hospital and neighbors were bringing food over for [Frank] and taking the children for dinner... It was very common for people to do that then, but things are different now (J. Clark, personal communication, February 11, 2002).

Joann and Frank had considered moving to a larger house, but Frank hesitated. The economy, he believed at the time, was not good. So they stayed. Through the years they added on to their modest Levittown home. And today they say they are glad they did. "We have no steps here," Joann explained, "and you can go out front, out back, and everywhere without having to climb steps. It is ideal," she continued, "because [Frank] has had very serious health problems. First he was in a wheel chair, then he was walking with a walker, and then with a cane." Having a one-level house, "cuts down on the aggravations."

But neighborliness, many original Levittown residents today complain, is gone. Joann Clark points to women in the workforce. They are no longer at home during the day. Arlene, on the other hand, takes a wider focus. "The social pattern is different," she says, then and goes on to describe Levittown's early years as "simpler times." In short, the conditions of history have fluctuated so as to enable a fundamentally different cultural story to emerge, one that resembles little the social climate and community fabric of years past. And it is this fluctuation that affects one's perception of community.

Life in Levittown today is one of tall wooden fences, diminished job opportunities, rising real-estate values and mixed resident ages. Organizations and associations, what few exist, have long been established. The excitement once associated with them, as in the Levittown Civic Association of 1952, is indeed a rarity today. Women and children, who once picketed in mud and rain for more classroom space,

today write letters to the editor in response to proposed school closings. The 20 million-dollar modern shopping center of 1954, with its state of the art community center and movie theater, is today a rat invested pile of rumble next to a newly built 94,987 square foot Home Depot--a community does not exist. All but one of the original five Levitt built Olympic-sized swimming pools have been filled in and black-topped over. The private pool, it seems, is the norm. And Theresa Dunn, Levittown's first baby, now has cancer ("Benefit Aids Levittown's First Baby," 2001, pp. C1, C4). Her brother, Tom, and other siblings organized a beef-and-beer fundraiser to pay medical bills. These are the conditions of life in Levittown, Pennsylvania, today. And neighborliness, many residents believe, has now become "neighborliness only when necessary."

In June of 2003, four months shy of her 50th anniversary as a Levittown resident, Mrs. Mary Remis drove away from her home, and watched from the cab of her moving truck, as a new family entered the front door. But at 83 years of age, with her family far away and with only a few neighbors to depend on, she grew afraid of living alone. Her health, too, had changed, and fear had set in. Her taxes, as a Bristol Township resident living in a 2,000 square foot Levittowner, were almost \$4,000 a year. And on a fixed income, she felt like there was no other alternative but to sell her house and move in with her son hundreds of miles way.

The story of Levittown is the story of the first generation Levittown resident. Indeed, there is a cycle of life present here--what is old becomes new again. But a day will come when those of the first generation will cease to exist. Their voices, their history, if not captured, will be forever lost.

"I find now that there's a younger generation moving into the area," Mary remarked before she pulled away. "I think it is a good thing. It's fun to watch" (M. Remis, personal communication, April 7, 2002).

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In the December 2003 issue of *Levittimes*, the official newsletter of the Levittown Historical Society of Levittown, New York, Vice President Paul Manton commented on Levittown's unique placement in our nation's history. "Levittown's history," Manton (2003) wrote, "oftentimes cuts into issues generally associated with larger, more comprehensive, and more philosophical historical scholarship."

A walk through the Levittown Historical Society museum [he continued] will demonstrate the fact that Levittown was founded at an extraordinary period in history. Caught on the cusp of America's transition from the rural to the suburban, from traditional culture to popular culture, from radio to TV, the artifacts of our museum have a certain dynamic quality about them that contradicts the stereotype about the deadness of museum exhibits. That's because our museum, our historical society, and our community are about *bigger issues* [italics added] (p. 1).

Indeed, the purpose of this project has been to do just that: to put the story of my community, Levittown, Pennsylvania, into a broader social, political and economic context, one that gives as much attention to the individual voice as it does to those larger, structural, "dynamic qualities" that intersect with the history of Levittown specifically, and the nation, generally. As a sociologist dedicated to preserving history, I made an effort not only to tell the story of my community, but to share with the reader my observations on the interplay between the original Levittown resident and the historical context within which they live their lives.

As C. Wright Mills (1959) reminds us, "Each epoch, when properly defined, is an intelligible field of study that reveals mechanics of history-making peculiar to it" (p. 152). Yet, as individuals, we do not live our lives in complete isolation, apart from

others, separated from and the changes that take shape around us. We are not "...an isolated biological creature," "...a bundle of reflexes or a set of instincts," wrote Mills. We are not "...a system in and of itself" (1959, p. 158). We interact with our history, and in doing so, we make it and are remade by it.

Levittown, New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, or any other community for that matter, are about "bigger issues" (Manton, 2003, p.1). Their histories intersect with changes on many levels (i.e., local, state, national, global). From communist fears to an unwillingness to include African-Americans as equal members of society; from a depressed nation in need of housing to an economic and political superpower able to transform the business of building homes into a global industry; and from an urban world to a suburban nation, Levittown, as both a concept and a community, reflects the dynamics of what was possible and wanted in American history.

A Brief Summary

Life in Lower Bucks County, Pennsylvania, before Levittown, was one dominated by an agricultural story more than three centuries old. Yet the conditions of life following the Second World War in the middle of the 20th century dramatically changed the realities of this agrarian lifestyle. Demands of the postwar period took center stage. And housing, the most pressing concern of them all, captured the attention of the federal government in such a way that had never been seen before. Before long new home construction on the peripheries of major urban centers had reached unprecedented levels, which, when taken together, amounted to what one historian called a "human ecological revolution" (Lebegern, 1975, p. 36). Many who had before only dreamed of owning a

home, welcomed the opportunity to purchase an affordable mass-produced home in communities like Levittown.

Yet the story of Levittown's existence is not as straightforward as it may seem. As Mills (1959) warns, let us not explore birth as an object of study, and exclude from our attention the process of motherhood (p. 147). Indeed, there are no simple explanations for Levittown's existence. It is, rather, a consequence of a coalescence of many ripe social forces, both old and new, intermixing during the years proceeding and following the Second World War. A renewed faith in the free market system--a system heavily aided by the federal government--fueled the rise of the home building industry. Private companies, like Levitt and Sons, were encouraged through government subsidies and public desires to fulfill the demand for housing that had become pent up during the war. Lending institutions, too, were eager to serve. Affordable automobiles and cemented highways provided the needed escape. And the GI Bill of Rights, along with the FHA and VA, supplied veterans and their families with bundles of opportunities. "The dice were loaded," Bill Levitt explained to *Times* magazine in 1950. "...How could we lose?" ("Up From the Potato Fields, 1950, p. 70).

It should be noted, moreover, that while the Levitts had some insight into the climate within which they conducted their business, no one person knew for sure which direction history would take. This inability to foresee the future makes the history of the company and the communities they built even more telling of the climate of opportunities that existed in the postwar period.

Levittown, Pennsylvania is as much a story of change and adaptation as is Levitt and Sons. In 1951, Bill Levitt knew nothing of Bucks County, Pennsylvania. The plan

of Levitt and Sons was to further develop Long Island, New York by building a smaller community named Landia. This, however, would not be. America embarked on a War in Korea, and the war economy again began bracing itself with material supplies.

Levittown, Pennsylvania was Levitt and Sons' response to social change—a company, a family, interacting with the fluctuating currents of history.

The boom that followed the Second World War, finding yet more fuel in another war, brought into LBC ideas and lifestyles that were far removed from what had been heretofore established. The city, many believed, was inching its way into the countryside. Some locals, like Quaker Sam Snipes, thought this new cultural infusion was a good change for his community. The Doughertys, the Clarks, the Remises, the Olsons, the Pearts, the Rosens, and the Franklins, together with every other original Levittown family, would help make a new community, building relationships in a defined new space called Levittown.

Yet these residents, too, were responding to social change. As children of the Great Depression, they were socialized in a climate of great need and want. Fear and hunger were familiar contexts of life for many Americans during this historical epoch. The Second World War, while it revived an unhealthy economy, also, generally, asked Americans to ration luxuries and to delay material gratification. This context is important in understanding the impressions that residents had of their new homes. Only when the context of this life is taken into consideration, for example, can I even begin to understand the deep love that Al DiGiovanni had had for both his home and his community. “Within the broad limits of the glandular and nervous apparatus,” wrote Mills (1959), “the emotions of fear and hatred and love and rage, in all their varieties,

must be understood in close and continual reference to the social biography and the social context in which they are *experienced* and *expressed* [italics added]" (p. 161).

FDR's New Deal instilled in the nation a level of optimism regarding the future, and by doing so, implanted the notion of rights for individuals, particularly veterans, in a free and modern world. Wants created demands, and affordable goods, at the hands of mass-production, fueled what Lizabeth Cohen (2004) has recently called A Consumers' Republic, "...an economy, culture, and politics built around the promises of mass consumption, both in terms of material life and the more idealistic goals of greater freedom, democracy, and equality" (p. 7). As new members of the American middle-class, Levittown residents bought what Levitt and Sons sold, a new way of life. It was something unlike anything they had ever had before. For some, it was just one step on the ladder of social mobility, the movement from one social position to another. For others, however, Levittown was everything they dreamed of, and they would never think to leave.

But for the moment, few knew how to navigate this unfamiliar level of the class structure. They were young married couples, parents with small children. For many residents, the Levittown Civic Association was their first taste of politics at the local level, of democracy in action. The stories of Paul Beckert and Norvin Nathin show us the awkward and informal origins of this once mighty civic machine. "What idealists we were then," wrote first generation Levittown resident Muriel Gray Foley, in a recent letter. "Politicians, Not!" (M. Foley, personal communication, February 3, 2002).

The Nation, quoting the Philadelphia Housing Authority in 1952, saw Levittown, PA as an "outstanding opportunity" in the "...growth of a strong but adolescently fearful

American democracy" (Allen, 1952, p. 525). Similarly, Thomas Hine (1986) referred to the decade between 1954 and 1964 as a period of "cultural adolescence" (p. 178). The inexperience of the new middle-class in managing public affairs, though, proved to be a breath of fresh, crisp air. Their cautiousness, however, also fueled and thereby perpetuated the ideas of generations past. In retrospect, this newness proved to inhibit progressive social change. In the letter quoted above, Foley, who was a Republican candidate for the Bristol Township School Board in 1957, wrote of her delight in finally meeting Daisy Myers, Levittown's first black family, in 2001. "I was so glad to meet Mrs. Myers last year when she visited the area," she wrote, "and to belatedly [44 years later] explain to her why I didn't rush to their defense. *I did not think it would help the school issues* [italics added]" (M. Foley, personal communication, February 3, 2002).

The story of Levittown is the story of young adults growing up together in a new community. Like first generation college students living the dorm life as freshman, Levittown residents were experiencing a way of life that was all-together different from that of their parents. They were a "community of strangers," who, by default of location, had to build a semblance of communality from scratch. Like Levitt and Sons, they, too, were responding to social change within an unfamiliar social, political and economic climate. As young parents, many of whom were separated from familiar neighborhoods, friends and family, they quickly formed support groups and organized baby-sitting cooperatives. For some, relationships between neighbors were facilitated through the process of sharing the tools of home ownership. "We all shared in the ownership of our first rotary lawn mower," Foley wrote years later.

As concerned citizens with a strong sense of civic duty, some eagerly dove into new political roles, positions that would have been difficult to obtain in the crowded cities and towns from which they came. And as employees in a growing and prosperous economy, many—mostly white men—enjoyed a level of job security and financial bliss that would have been out of reach for members of their family a generation ago.

Community, in this sense, was an achievement; it was something they did together.

Adolescence as a class and a community defined both their levels of preparedness and their enthusiasm to get the job done. As historical actors, their lives were a response to the climate of the day. "Those early days of Levittown were wonderful times," wrote Foley in her letter. "We were all growing up as marital partners, professionally, and as parents. We were idealistic and matured as we clashed with the realities of politics and economics" (M. Foley, personal communication, February 3, 2002).

To "mature" as one "clash[es] with the realities of politics and economics," as Foley suggests, is to evolve as an individual biography under the forces and pressures of history. To understand this interplay between biography and history in society is to practice what C. Wright Mills has called the sociological imagination. Indeed, this is the very perspective through which I have attempted to filter the history of Levittown, Pennsylvania. "Each epoch, when properly defined," wrote Mills (1959), "is an intelligible field of study that reveals mechanics of history-making peculiar to it" (p. 152).

The goal of this project has been to understand the original Levittown resident and the community of Levittown in relation to the larger story within which it exists, that of the American culture and its evolution since the Second World War. As we have seen,

the evolution of this culture has passed through a few well-defined historical periods (or epochs) in the last 50 years. And as we have also seen, Levittown residents have not been immune to the changes taking place on national and global levels. The context of race in the 1950s and throughout the 1960s, for example, particularly the meanings associated with black skin, left an indelible mark on Levittown's history. The Myers family came to symbolize a moment of great social change, for both Levittown and for the nation. Yet the Myers were responded to in a way that paralleled the larger cultural fears of most white Americans.

The crisis of confidence that President Carter referred to in July of 1979 had played out three weeks earlier at the intersection of five points in Levittown; it would be the nation's first gas riot. Indeed, Levittown had come to symbolize everything that was middle class, including, but certainly not limited to, its wants as well as its fears. And as American Studies Professor Lenny Steinhorn reminds us, "that [Levittown] could go up in flames over gas meant that all was not well with the middle-class dream" (L. Steinhorn, personal communication, January 30, 2002).

Economic transformations at the global level affected Levittown in real and meaningful ways. Public issues revealed themselves as personal troubles as residents fought against and adapted to the declining climate of the 1970s. While the gas riot proved to be the turning point in the history of this maturing community, the decline of Fairless Steel Works, in 1975, marked the beginning of this overall downward trend. In time, other local industries would follow. In the wake of this decay, original Levittown residents were left wondering, "where did the dream go?" I believe this question still

lingers. Members of this generation had hit the seam just right. They, Martin Sooby would note, were the lucky ones.

I wanted the reader to hear Levittown's story through the voices of its first generation residents. I also made a strong attempt to draw on other important voices, like that of Sam Snipes. He, like so many others, played a noteworthy role in Levittown's formative years. And as a sociologist, my aim was to make real the intersection between history (i.e., racial segregation, energy crisis and deindustrialization, etc.) and biography, those residents exposed to the climate of their community (i.e., Myers family, gas riot, and the declining Fairless Steel Works, etc.). My extensive use of other primary sources of information, such as newspapers, journals and magazine articles, as well as film and photographs, gave this project a degree of authenticity that, I believe, would have been lost if not included. Toward this end, I believe this project has satisfied the objectives outlined above. The voices in this history, though, are this project's greatest strength.

Like those I interviewed, I, too, am a Levittown resident, yet I am of the third generation; my grandmother, now deceased, and my mother, called Levittown their home as well. As a member of this community from birth, my access to sources of information, particularly the life stories of residents themselves—often told within the comforts of their own homes—was made easier, for they quickly realized that I had a genuine interest in knowing more about the history of my family's community. My position was yet another strength in this research project.

However, this project is not without its weaknesses. The narrative offered in previous chapters clearly suffered from a racially skewed selection of participants. Even though I used the voice of Daisy Myers as it was found in primary documents (i.e.,

newspapers, magazine articles and a tapped museum exhibit interview), I never did formally interview her for this project, nor did I speak with any other non-white Levittown resident. Finding such residents proved to be quite difficult (see Appendix A).

Secondly, the story offered here would have benefited greatly from the voices of subsequent generations of Levittown residents. This would have provided yet another layer of understanding, one that most likely would have differed from those of the first generation. A project with such a focus is strongly needed.

Thirdly, I presented the story of Levittown only. I did not, directly, contrast and compare the history of Levittown with the histories of other planned postwar communities, either in America or abroad. Doing so may have given the reader a greater appreciation for communities of this type. Indeed, Levitt and Sons did not make up the only building firm in the industry.

Lastly, the details and events that I have chosen to explore here are the experiences that I believe best define the history of Levittown, Pennsylvania. This is not to say, though, that another resident, young or old, would have made the same decisions. As a resident and scholar, I had the liberty of selecting those moments in time that worked best in the context of this project. My use of resident voices, too, cannot escape this process of selection. I fully acknowledge my subjectivity and the role it played in this research process as well as in the writing of this paper. Taken together, the above statements represent the strengths and weaknesses that I acknowledge in this project. Future researchers would do well in addressing these concerns.

In August of 1952, two months after the first Levittown family, John and Philomena Dougherty moved into their home, the *Trenton Evening Times* developed what they called "...a recipe for building a mid-twentieth century city":

Take 5,200 acres of rolling farmland in one of the nation's fastest growing industrial areas [they wrote].

Fold in 177 miles of paved streets, plus sidewalks and drainage, water and sewage systems.

Sprinkle with 16,000 homes—each equipped with a real fireplace, washing machine, refrigerator, automatic radiant heat and thermopane insulate picture windows.

Provide complete landscaping, garnishing each plot with a lawn, more than a dozen trees—including peach, pear and apple—and 43 assorted bushes, vines and shrubs.

Spice with built-in community facilities—swimming pools, ball fields, playgrounds, shipping center, churches, a neighborhood type school system planned so that no child will have to cross a main street to get to school.

Add the planning skill and building know-how of the fabulous firm of Levitt and Sons, Inc., bring to boiling point and let simmer...

That's the formula for Levittown [PA], the nation's biggest pre-planned city since Piere L'Enfant laid out Washington ("Lower Bucks County Getting a City in a Hurry," 1952, p. 2).

Levittown has now been simmering for slightly more than 50 years. Some of the features of this community that original residents deeply cherished have long since evaporated. Most noteworthy is the loss of good neighbors, "...the network of relationships," writes Kai Erikson (1976), "that make up [one's] general human surround." Neighbors are, he continued, "...those with whom one shares bonds of intimacy and a feeling of mutual concern" (pp. 187-188).

As one original resident, commenting on today's Levittown, put it:

...They're younger people now. We just don't see [our neighbors] and talk to them. In the beginning we were really friendly. [But] it's not that way any more...I'm in this house and that's it now (Silverman, 1994).

Regardless of the changes that have reshaped their community, original Levittown residents are still the proudest residents of all, for they remember what used to be. "Mr. Levitt," wrote Foley in her letter, "gave us the opportunity to have a comfortable home, living, breathing and playing space, and to learn responsibly for ourselves and our neighbors."

And I think that current result speaks well of the thousands of GIs and their dreams...I will always appreciate the days when Bill Levitt gave our generation opportunities for a better life. Perhaps this is a remembrance Mr. Chad Kimmel will find of value (M. Foley, personal communication, February 3, 2002).

I believe the history of Levittown is nothing but a collection of shared remembrances, and I value them most of all. Levittown is my home, yet it will always remain someone else's house.

Appendix A

Methods

Previous research suggests that "individual lives are uniquely shaped by the timing and sequencing of life events" (Scott & Alwin, 1998, p. 99; as cited in Elder & O'Rand, 1995; and Mills, 1959). Proponents of this notion emphasize the influences of sociohistorical events on individual lives and the "interconnection of the various strands of individual life trajectories such as those concerning schooling, employment, military service, marriage, family, wealth, and health" (Scott & Alwin, 1998, p. 99). In order to understand the processes by which events shape and change individual lives, many researchers have utilized the life course historical perspective (Scott & Alwin, 1998; see also Giele & Elder, 1998). This method uses life histories as the subject of measurement. Elder (1992), a researcher most widely noted for his use of the life course historical perspective, defines a "life history" as a "lifetime chronology of events and activities that typically and variably combine data records on education, work life, family, and residence" (p. 1122; as cited in Scott & Alwin, 1998). This study adopts the life course history perspective as a way to examine the impact that events in history have upon the biographies of first generation Levittown residents specifically and the community of Levittown in general.

The unit of analysis for this study is the individual. Specifically, this study will examine the life histories of individuals residing in Levittown, Pennsylvania. In order to obtain this information, this study will use qualitative interviewing as a research methodology. Life histories, as the subject of measurement, require a longitudinal ordering of information. Thus, the most appropriate method for collecting life history data is prospective data collection. This involves interviewing and reinterviewing individuals at different points overtime in order to build a data set of information that can

be used to compare one historical moment to another (Scott & Alwin, 1998).

Unfortunately, it is not possible to retrieve such information about the past unless it is reconstructed in the present. This said, the alternative method for retrieving such information, and the method chosen for this study, is "retrospective data collection"--a method of "relying on people's present recollections about the past (Scott & Alwin, 1998).

When a researcher relies on a respondent's reconstruction of past events, one question is immediately raised regarding the quality and/or the reliability of the data. Scott and Alwin (1998) address this issue and compare the advantages and disadvantages of both retrospective and prospective designs. They note three disadvantages in retrospective designs. First, the use of this design only allows the researcher to interview those individuals who are still alive. This represents an obvious limitation of this study, but it is one that cannot be avoided. Secondly, the reliability of the recall period is threatened. In this sense, individual memory may be subject to forgetfulness and/or confusion. Kai Erikson (1976), however, puts this limitation differently. "...The past," he suggests, "always seems to take on a more golden glow as it recedes in the distance" (p. 203). Lastly, Scott and Alwin suggest that recent experiences may bias past recollections. However, even though peoples' recollections are influenced by present circumstances, peoples' own perceptions of their past histories are precisely the information that I am interested in retrieving. Moreover, the retrospective design's advantage over its counterpart stems from both its ability to cover longer periods of time while capturing more information at one time, and its minimal financial cost. In short,

even with noted disadvantages, the retrospective design is the most appropriate data collection method for this study.

In this study, I used a semi-structured interview scheme. Interviews ranged between one hour and 5 hours in length. It should be made clear that most of the interviews took place in the resident's home. While talking with them our discussions often traveled beyond the project. And with food and drink present, it was quite easy to talk more than 60 minutes, especially since many residents wanted to know more about me and my research.

It was my goal to collect a history of past events for each resident. This collection included the timing, duration, and sequence in which each event occurred, covering multiple domains such as residential, marital, fertility, employment, job/occupation, and schooling histories. I also obtained basic demographic information (i.e., subject's name, age, race/ethnicity, marital status, presence of children or grandchildren, employment, hobbies, etc.). I gave special emphasis to one's family structure before coming to Levittown and their interaction between friends and neighbors. Further, I obtained information regarding the participant's level of education (i.e., last year of school completed, degrees obtained, etc.).

I also collected information regarding the resident's current experiences and status as a resident of Levittown. In order to put their experience in the context of their lives and their social setting, I asked each resident to talk about their relationships with neighbors, friends, family and the wider community of Levittown.

All interviews for this study were tape recorded, unless a resident indicated otherwise or if the context of the situation (i.e., telephone call) did not permit. Previous

qualitative researchers have suggested that the primary method of creating text from interviews is through tape recording and transcription (Seidman, 1998). Transforming verbalized language into written form, however, also transforms an individual's thoughts and consciousness into emotionless words and sentences (Seidman, 1998). It is important to note three benefits of tape-recorded interviews. First, by preserving the tapes, the researcher has the opportunity to revisit an interview if an issue is unclear. Second, by having the interview on tape, one could study their techniques in order to better future interviews. Lastly, as Seidman (1998) writes, "participants can be assured that their exact words are available for interpretation rather than a summary or note taken by the interviewer" (p. 98).

The "purpose," Seidman (1998) writes, "of an in-depth interview study is to understand the experience of those who are interviewed, not to predict or to control that experience" (p. 44). Thus, the issue of generalizability is not a factor in this form of research. What is important, however, is the researchers' ability to "present the experience of the people he or she interviews in compelling enough detail and in sufficient depth that those who read the study can connect to that experience" (Seidman, 1998, p. 44). The intention of this study then is to go beyond representativeness and generalizability and to uncover the compelling intricacies of an individual's experience.

This study will employ a "snowball" sampling procedure to locate original Levittown residents. This procedure is defined as "a type of nonprobability sampling characterized by a few cases of the type one wishes to study leading to more cases, which, in turn, lead to still more cases until a sufficient sample is achieved" (Monette, Sullivan & DeJong, 1998, p. 494). In order to make contact with a sample of Levittown

residents, I will develop a "chain of referrals"--individuals who know of and can introduce me to other Levittown residents (Wright and Decker, 1997, p. 17). Fortunately, my mother and I were both raised in Levittown, Pennsylvania; therefore, I have extensive access to original Levittown homeowners. I have identified and have received cooperation from three residents that are original homeowners in this community. These residents will act as the study's primary sample, and will in turn provide the study with additional residents, thereby initiating a chain of referrals that will be used to obtain even more residents.

The purpose of interviewing original Levittown residents still living in their homes stems from the longitudinal and historical character of this study. The objective of this study is to identify the ways in which history has intersected with the lives of residents that are a part of the community of Levittown. Original homeowners then are the first mothers and fathers of Levittown's history. They are the essential players in Levittown's biography as a community of people. While interviewing second, third and even fourth generation Levittown residents would make for an interesting and telling project, this study's goal is to explore the foundation upon which the present generations are built.

Although a snowball sampling process can produce a variety of participants, Levittown's population has been historically, racially homogenous (Gans, 1967; Popenoe, 1977; and Kimmel, 2001). And while I tried to find non-white original Levittown residents, my attempts were unsuccessful. The only non-white voice present in this project is that of Mrs. Daisy Myers and her family. These words were drawn from

primary documents including newspapers and magazines and a tapped interview played at the State Museum of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg, PA.

The stories offered here of Levittown, PA, and that of Levitt and Sons, Inc. were formed through the voices found in newspapers, journals, magazines, books, dissertations and theses, films, letters and personal interviews over the last 50 years. I interviewed approximately 31 individuals for the history of Levittown, 16 of whom were original Levittown residents still living in their homes. I interviewed 12 more individuals for the story of Levitt and Sons, many of which were former Levittown residents. Not all of these voices, however, found their way into this project. Indeed, for this project, I have leaned heavily on the voices of 12 residents. Where other quotes are used I explain in detail and reference the sources from which they were drawn.

Appendix B

Protocol Clearance From the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: November 26, 2001

To: Thomas Van Valey, Principal Investigator
Chad Kimmel, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair



Re: HSIRB Project Number: 01-11-02

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Revisiting Levittown, Pennsylvania: A Life History Analysis" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: November 26, 2002

REFERENCES

- A real \$ value in small homes. (1947, June). Practical Builder, 8-9.
- A united front for the industry for the long pull of rearmament. (1950, September 30). Architectural Forum (Special Issue), 1-16.
- Advice. (1952, July 24). The Levittown Times, p. 8.
- Advice for new residents. (1952, August 8). The Levittown Times, p. 8.
- After hours. (1958, February). Harper's, 80-81.
- Allen, C. R. Jr. (1952, May 31). Levittown in Bucks County. The Nation, 524-525.
- Another step forward in the Delaware Valley. (1953, September 29). Delaware Valley U.S.A., pp. 3-4, 29-33.
- Arnold, T. (1947, April 1). Why we have a housing mess. Look, 11(7), 21-25.
- Around town. (1952a, June 26). The Levittown Times, p. 2.
- Around town. (1952b, August 21). The Levittown Times, p. 9.
- Around town. (1952c, July 17). The Levittown Times, p. 9.
- As a longtime Falls resident, Sam Snipes Cherishes past, relishes future. (1999, March 14). Bucks County Courier Times, p. A4.
- Bacon, M. H. (2000). The quiet rebels: The story of the Quakers in America. New York: Pendle Hill Publishing.
- Baltz, M. (1952, August 14). Dear editor. [Letter to the editor]. The Levittown Times, p. 4.
- Baltzell, D. E. (1954, July). Urbanization and Governmental Administration in Lower Bucks County. Social Problems pp. 38-47.
- Bare metal. (2001, August 15). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. B1, B6.
- Baxandall, R., & Ewen, E. (2000). Picture windows: How the suburbs happened. New York: Basic Books.

Benefit aids Levittown's first baby. (2001, January 18). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. C1, C4.

Bernard, T. (1948, April) New homes for \$60 a month. American Magazine, 46-47, 104-107.

Biggest homebuilders of 1953. (1954, January). House and Home, 40-41.

Biggest homebuilders of 1954. (1955, January). House and Home, 40-41.

Biggest homebuilders of 1955. (1956, February). House and Home, 152-157.

Biggest new city in the US. (1952, December). House and Home, 81-93.

Bike path eases minds of parents, staff. (2002, September 3). Bucks County Courier Times, p. A1.

Birkner, M. (2002, November). Much to like about Levittown. Journal of Planning History, 325-330.

Bernhardt, M. (1952, July 31). Dear editor. [Letter to editor]. The Levittown Times, p. 4.

Birth of a City. (1952, December). The Readers Digest, 73-76.

Bittan, D. B. (1958, August 19). Ordeal in Levittown. Look, 84-86.

Bloch, M. (1961). Feudal society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bluestone, B., & Harrison, B. (1982). The Deindustrialization of America: Plant closings, community abandonment, and the dismantling of basic industry. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Bluestone, B., Harrison, B., & Baker, L. (1981). Corporate flight: The causes and consequences of economic dislocation. Washington, D.C.: Progressive Alliance Publishing.

Bratt, R. G., Hartman, C., & Myerson, A. (Eds.). (1986). Critical perspectives on housing. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Brenner, H. M. (1976). Estimating the social costs of national economic policy: Implications for mental and physical health and clinical aggression. Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Bressler, M., & Westoff, C. (1954, March). Leadership and social change: The reactions of a special group to industrialization and population influx. Social Forces, 32, 235-243.

Bressler, M. (1960, Fall). The Myers' case: An instance of successful racial invasion. Social Problems, 8, 126-142.

Brinkley, A. (1996). World War II and American Liberalism. In L. A. Erenberg, & S. E. Hirsch (Eds.), The war in American culture: Society and consciousness during World War II (pp. 313-327). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Bristol office provides wide mail service. (1952, August 10). Trenton Sunday Times Advisor, p. 4.

Bristol Twp.: A long slide into fiscal desperation. (1996, January 14). Philadelphia Inquirer, pp. B1, B2.

Bristol Township board informed by county sup't of the problems which will be encountered this year in Levittown area; Figures gained through questionnaires. (1952, March 7). Bristol Courier, pp. 1, 6.

Bucks County gets interracial housing. (1954, November 21). The New York Times, p. 86.

Bucks Co. teacher shortage raises pay in grade schools. (1952, November 11). Philadelphia Bulletin (evening), p. 4.

Buhite, R. D., & Levy, D. W. (1992). FDR's fireside chats. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Buss, T. F., & Redburn, S. F. (1983). Shutdown at Youngstown: Public Policy for Mass Unemployment. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Carter, J. (1979, August 15). Energy problems: The erosion of confidence. Vital Speeches of the Day, 642-645.

Chafe, W. H. (1986). The unfinished journey: America since World War II. New York: Oxford University Press.

Checkoway, B. N. (1977). Suburbanization and community: Growth and planning in postwar Lower Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Chicago suburb fights inter-racial tract. (1960, January). House and Home, 70,75.

Clausen, J. A. (1998). Life Reviews and Life Stories. In J. Z. Giele, & G. H. Elder, Jr., (Eds.), Methods of life course research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (pp.189-213). California: Sage Publications.

Coal towns fueled growth. (2002, September 29). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. A1, A3

Cohen, L. (2004). A consumers' republic: The politics of mass consumption in postwar America. New York: Vintage Books.

Dandaneau, S. P. (1996). A town abandoned: Flint, Michigan confronts deindustrialization. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Davenport, R. W. (1949, January 31). A Life round table on housing. Life, 72-86.

Davis, W. W. H. (1975a). History of Bucks County, Pennsylvania: From the discovery of the Delaware to the present time (Vol. I). Pipersville, P.A.: A. E. Lear Inc. Publishers.

Davis, W. W. H. (1975b). History of Bucks County, Pennsylvania: From the discovery of the Delaware to the present time (Vol. II). Pipersville, PA: A. E. Lear Inc. Publishers.

Davis, W. W. H. (1975c). History of Bucks County, Pennsylvania: From the discovery of the Delaware to the present time (Vol. III). Pipersville, P.A.: A. E. Lear Inc. Publishers

Dean, J. (1945). Home ownership, is it sound? New York: Harper & Brothers.

Declaration of purpose. (1957, August 18). The Levittown Times, p. [page not available].

Direction Associates, Inc. Planning Consultants. (1986, December). Bristol Township Bucks County, Pennsylvania Comprehensive Plan 1986-2006.

Discuss problems created in county. (1952, January 16). Bristol Courier, pp. 1, 5.

Don't say it's not worthwhile to plant a tree. (1967, November). Home Garden, 38-39.

Drenching downpour halts Levittown women pickets. (1954, May 21). Trenton Evening Times, p. 14.

Dudley, K. M. (1994). The end of the line: Lost jobs, new lives in postindustrial America. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Dusting your doorstep. (1952, July 3). The Levittown Times, p. 4.

Dunns win twenty prizes as baby contest winners. (1952, July 17). The Levittown Times, p. 1.

Economy taking toll on shelter. (2003, May 13). Bucks County Courier Times, p. A1.

Ehrenreich, B. (1989). Fear of falling: The inner life of the middle class. New York: Pantheon Books.

Elder, G. H., Jr., Conger, R. D., Foster, E. M., & Ardel, M. (1992). Families under economic pressure. Journal of Family Issues, 13, 5-37.

Elder, G. H., & Pellerin, L. A. (1998). Linking history and human lives. In J. Z. Giele, & G. H. Elder, Jr. (Eds.), Methods of life course research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (pp. 264-295). California: Sage Publications.

Erenhalt, A. (1995). The lost city: The forgotten virtues of community in America. New York: Basic Books.

Erikson, K. T. (1976). Everything in its path: Destruction of community in the Buffalo Creek flood. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Fading American dream haunts W.W.II generation. (1996, February 1). The Washington Post, pp. A1, A10, and A11.

Fairless Steel Works. (1952, October n.d.). Delaware Valley U.S.A., p. 25.

Fame joined Doughertys when they purchased home. (1977, June 23). The Bucks County Courier Times, p. 2.

Family seeking a quiet home was a target, then a symbol. (2002, January 21). Philadelphia Inquirer, p. A1.

Farm production in county high during year 1950. (1952, January 18). Bristol Courier, p. 1.

Financial Basis of Expansion. (1952, October 13). Delaware Valley U.S.A., pp. 78-80.

First residents amazed at changes in one year. (1953, June 25). The Levittown Times, pp. 1, 28.

Fisher, D. A. (1951). Steel serves the nation 1901-1951: The fifty year story of United States Steel. United States Steel Corporation.

Fishman, R. (1987). Bourgeois utopias: The rise and fall of suburbia. New York: Basic Books.

Focused on society. (2002, July 8). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. A1, A2.

For women only. (1952a, January 31). The Levittown Times, p. 3.

For women only. (1952b, July 10). The Levittown Times, p. 6

For women only. (1952c, August 7). The Levittown Times, p. 6.

Fox, A. J. (1952, December 4). Levittown, Pa....A city from scratch. Engineering News-Record, 34-37.

Friends Service Association to complete reorganization. (1953, April 24). Trenton Evening Times, p. 13.

Freidel, F. (1990). Franklin D. Roosevelt: A rendezvous with destiny. New York: Bay Back Books.

Galbraith, J. K. (1958). The affluent society. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Gallup, G. H. (1972a). The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, (Volume I, 1949-1958). New York: Random House.

Gallup, G. H. (1972b). The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, (Volume II, 1959-1971). New York: Random House.

Gans, H. J. (1967). The Levittowners: Ways of life and politics in a new suburban community. New York: Pantheon Books.

Gaventa, J., Lewis, H., & Williams, S. (1992). Disposable communities: Picking up the pieces after the company leaves town. Dollars & Sense, 174, 12-14.

Gervasi, F. (1946, February 16). No Place to Live. Collier's, 20-21, 78-81.

Giant steel mills displace farmers. (1951, January 31). New York Times, pp. 27, 31.

Giele, J. Z., & Elder, G., H. Jr. (1998). Methods of life course research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches. California: Sage Publications.

Gilbert, J. (1981). Another chance: Postwar America 1945-1968. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Goldin, C., & Margo, R. A. (1992). The great compression: The wage structure in the United States at mid-century. The Quarterly Journal of Economics, Vol. CVII, February, No. 1, 1-34.

Guilfoyle, J. M. & Cooper, J. S. (1948, March 6). No new house for you. Saturday Evening Post, 32-33, 48, 50, 53.

Guilfoyle, J. M. & Rutledge, J. H. (1948, September). Levitt licks the housing shortage. Coronet, 112-116.

Hager, Don, J. (1954, July). Trailer towns and community conflict in Lower Bucks County. Social Problems, 33-38

Halberstam, D. (1993). The fifties. New York: Fawcett Combine.

Harrington, M. (1965). The other America: Poverty in the United States. Baltimore: Penguin Books.

Has 'Big Steel' Hurt Our Country?. (1953, November). Bucks County Traveler, pp. 12-13.

Hearn, C. R. (1977). The American dream in the Great Depression. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Henderson, H. (1953a, November). The mass-produced suburbs: Part I. Harper's, 25-32.

Henderson, Harry. (1953b, December). The mass-produced suburbs: Part II. Harper's, 80-86.

Herberg, W. (1955). Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An essay in American religious sociology. New York: Double Day.

Hey, you can't park there. (2002, September 30). Bucks County Courier Times, p. C2.

Hibbard, M. (1986). Community beliefs and the failure of community economic development. Social Service Review, 60, 183-200.

Hine, T. (1986). Populuxe. New York: Random House.

Houses: The line at Levitt's. (1949, March 21). Newsweek, 66, 71.

Housing and Home Finance Agency: Office of the Administrator. (1952, March). Guide to Federal Aids for Housing and Community Facilities for Critical Defense Housing Areas.

Housing: Land Rush. (1949, January 31). Time, 60, 62.

Housing: Levittown, Pa. (1951, September 3). Time, 98.

Housing: Up from the potato fields. (1950, July 3). Time, 67-72.

How do we get housed? (1947, June 9). Life, 36.

How Lower Bucks County answers sociological question anxiously awaited. (1954, March 30). Trenton Evening Times, p. 4.

How they lived. (1982, March). Housing, 80-85.

Howell, S. (1952, July 10). Dear editor. [Letter to the editor]. The Levittown Times, p. 4.

I can't get it wholesale. (1947, November). Architectural Forum, 10.

Integration troubles beset northern town. (1957, September 2). Life, 43, 43-46.

Is Levittown only the start of builders' race troubles? (1957, October). House and Home, 57.

It happened here! (1954, January 28). The Levittown Times, p. 4.

It was a big day as first of Levittowners moved in. (1952, June 24). Trenton Evening Times, p. 3.

Jackson, K. T. (1980). Race, ethnicity, and real estate appraisal: The Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration. Journal of Urban History, 6(4), 419-452.

Jackson, K. T. (1985). Crabgrass frontier: The suburbanization of the United States. New York: Oxford University Press.

Jacobs, J. (1992). The death and life of great American cities. New York: Vintage Books.

Jacobson, L., LaLonde, R., & Sullivan, D. (1993). The costs of worker dislocation. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

- Jeffries, J. W. (1996). Wartime America: The World War II home front. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.
- Johns, M. (2003). Moment of grace: The American city in the 1950s. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kaledin, E. (2000). Daily life in the United States, 1940-1959: Shifting worlds. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Kamb, L. (1998, October 18). Businesses Line Up to Locate in Falls. Philadelphia Inquirer, October 18, pp. BC1, BC2.
- Kanigel, R. (1997). The one best way: Frederick Winslow Taylor and the enigma of efficiency. New York: Penguin Books.
- Katzander, H. (Script Writer). (1954). A city is born: Levittown, PA (J. Tannenbaum, Director). In W. Van Horris (Producer), March of time. Released on Columbia TV Network.
- Keats, J. 1957. The crack in the picture window. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Kelly, B. M. (1993). Expanding the American dream: Building and rebuilding Levittown. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Kennedy, D. M. (1999). Freedom from fear: The American People in depression and war, 1929-1945. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Keules, D. J. (1985). In the name of Eugenics: Genetics and the uses of human heredity. New York: Knopf.
- Kiddies' Kolumn. (1952, August 21). The Levittown Times, p. 5.
- Kimmel, C. (2001, Fall). Revisiting Levittown, Pennsylvania: Changes within a postwar planned community. Proteus: A Journal of Ideas, 18 (2), 89-96.
- King, K. C. (1974). Prairie dogs and postulates: An autobiography. Trenton, N.J.: Parker Printing Co..
- Krawiec, T. Levittown, Pennsylvania. May 10, 2003. <http://www.geocities.com/levittownhomepage/>
- Krugman, P. (2002, October 20). The end of middle-class America. The New York Times Magazine, 62-67, 76-77, 141.
- Kyvig, D. E. (2002). Daily life in the United States, 1920-1939: Decades of promise and pain. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Landia. (1951, February). Architectural Forum, 139-146.

Larrabee, E. (1948, September). The six thousand houses that Levitt built. Harpers, 79-88.

Lebegern, G. F. (1975). Episodes in Bucks County history: A bicentennial tribute 1776-1976. Fallsington, PA: Bucks County Historical-Tourist Commission.

Lemon, J. T. (1972). The best poor man's country: A geographical study of early southeastern Pennsylvania. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.

Lest we forget. (1952, July 3). The Levittown Times, p. 4.

Let's have ourselves a housing industry. (1947, September). Fortune, 2-4.

Let's rebuild our building codes. (1947, November 15). Collier's, 14-15, 108-109.

Levine, L. W. & Levine, C. R. (2002). The people and the president: America's conversation with FDR. Boston: Beacon Press.

Levitt, A. (1950, January). Fruit is fine for little gardens. The American Home, 72-73.

Levitt adds 1950 model to his line. (1950, May 22). Life, 141-147.

Levitt, A. A. (1951). A community builder looks at community planning. Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 17, 80-88.

Levitt, Carrier sign a giant contract, predict air conditioning 'breakthrough' in '56. (1956, February). Home and Home, 46.

Levitt encouraged spirituality. (2002, July 21). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. C1, C2.

Levitt Sales Brochure. (1952). The most perfectly planned community in America. [Brochure].

Levitt warns of slums and trailer camps if Bucks isn't declared a critical area. (1951, August 23). Trenton Evening Times, p. 1.

Levitt, W. J. (1948, June). More houses and better values. Journal of the American Institute of Architects, 253-256.

Levitt, W. J. (1950, November 15). Lets build up--not tear down. Vital Speeches of the Day, 70-71.

Levitt, W. J. (1964). A house is not enough: The story of America's first community builder. In Furst, Sidney, & Milton Sherman (Eds.), Business decisions that changed our lives (pp. 58-71). New York: Random House.

Levitt, W. J. (1968). Revolutionizing an industry. In Nation's Business (Ed.), Lessons of leadership: 21 top executives speak out on creating, developing and managing success (pp. 57-69). New York: Doubleday & Company.

Levittown garbage men specialize in courtesy and service. (1952, July 24). The Levittown Times, p. 4.

Levittown has matured in 25 years. (1977, June 23). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. 1-2.

Levittown home sales total 3,500. (1952, February 27). Trenton Evening Times, p. 3.

Levittown newcomers to be greeted by goodwill group. (1952, July 3). The Levittown Times, p. 1.

Levittown, Pa., on the assembly line. (1952, February 16). Business Week, 26-27.

Levittown revisited. (1979, July 9). Newsweek, 84.

Levittown still young and strong. (2002, January 6). Bucks County Courier Times, p. A1.

Levittown street lighting. (1952, October 28). Trenton Evening Times, p. 5.

Levittown two years old. (1954, June 23). Trenton Evening Times, p. 11.

Levittown's 'baby doctor' dead at 76. (1994, December 1). Levittown Express, pp. 1, 5.

Levittown's school needs discussed at conference. (1952, November 11). Trenton Evening Times, p. 5.

Levitt's progress. (1952, October). Fortune, 155-168.

Levitt's 12th floor apartment. (1952, January 13). Philadelphia Bulletin, p. 3.

- Levitt's 1950 house. (1950, April). Architectural Forum, 136-137.
- Lewis, T. (1997). Divided Highways. New York: Penguin Books.
- Liell, J. T. (1952). Levittown: A study in community planning and development. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University.
- Lighting that new city of Levittown, PA. (1953, September). The American City, 141.
- Long, E. (1985). The American dream and the popular novel. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Lower Bucks County getting a city in a hurry. (1952, August 31). Trenton Sunday Times Advisor, p. 2.
- MacLeish, A. (1943, June). The unimagined America. The Atlantic Monthly, 59-63.
- Martinez, R. (n.d.). Factory renewal. Bucks County Courier Times, pp. 1B, 2B.
- Mason, J. B. (1982). History of housing in the U.S. 1930-1980. Houston: Gulf Publishing Company.
- Matarese, L. (1997). The History of Levittown, New York. B&T Printers.
- May I add these stories to your Levittown lore? (personal communication, October 5, 2002). Written for The Levittown Memories program of the Levittown Public Library, Levittown, Pennsylvania.
- McDonald, J. (1985). Plant closing research: What's going on here? Humanity and Society, 9, 108-122.
- McNealy, T. A. (1970). A history of Bucks County Pennsylvania: Part 1. Fallsington, PA: Bucks County Historical-Tourist Commission.
- Milgram built houses to tear down walls. (1997, August 4). USA Today, p. D8.
- Miller, A. F. (1958, April). Levittown U.S.A. The Phylon Quarterly, 108-112.
- Miller, D. T. & Nowak, M. (1977). The fifties: The way we really were. New York: Doubleday & Company.
- Millions to be spent on Levittown churches. (1953, April 15). Trenton Evening Times, p. 1.

Mills, C. W. (1959). The sociological imagination. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mills, G. T., & Rockoff, H. (Eds.). (1993). The sinews of war: Essays on the economic history of World War II. Iowa: Iowa State University Press.

Miner, C. (Curator). (2002, May 4 - 2003, January 5). Levittown Pa: Building the suburban dream. The State Museum of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, PA.

Mitchell, R. B., & Breese, G. (1951). [Accelerated urban growth in a metropolitan area: A study of urbanization, suburbanization and the impact of the Fairless Works Steel Plant in Lower Bucks County, Pennsylvania (critical defense housing area)]. Unpublished raw data in scrapbook form. (Available at the Spruance Library within The Mercer Museum, Bucks County Historical Society, 84 South Pine Street, Doylestown, PA 18901, record MSC volumes 612-621).

Mitchell, R. B., & Breese, G. (1954). Accelerated urban growth in a metropolitan area: A study of urbanization, suburbanization and the impact of the Fairless Works Steel Plant in Lower Bucks County, Pennsylvania (critical defense housing area) (Vols. I & II). Philadelphia: The Institute for Urban Studies, University of Pennsylvania.

Modern pioneers. (1952, January 31). The Levittown Times (preview edition), p. 1.

Monette, D. R., Sullivan, T. J., & DeJong, C. R. (1998). Applied Social Research: Tool for the Human Services. Philadelphia: Harcourt Brace.

More than \$7 million to be expended for church building at Levittown. (1954, December 10). Trenton Evening Times, p. 23.

Mortgages totaling over \$96,000,000 on Levittown, Fairless Hills housing. (1953, November 12). Trenton Evening Times, p. 17.

Move-in day. (1952, June 26). The Levittown Times, p. 1.

Mr. and Mrs. Levittown. (1952, January 18). Bristol Courier, p. 4.

Mr. Wyatt's shortage. (1946, April) Fortune, 33(4), 105-110, 252, 252, 256, & 259.

Mumford, L. (1961). The city in history: Its origins, its transformations, and its prospects. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World.

Myers, D. D. (personal communication, December 19, 2001). I remember Levittown. Written for The Levittown Memories program of the Levittown Public Library, Levittown, Pennsylvania.

Myers, D. & Shopes, L. (2002, Summer). Breaking down barriers. Pennsylvania Heritage, 6-13.

Nash, G. D. (1998). The crucial era: The great depression and World War II, 1929- 1945 (2nd ed.). Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc.

Nation's biggest housebuilder. (1948, August 23). Life, 75-78.

Neighbor, 22, confesses to baby-sitter slaying. (1954, January 28). The Levittown Times, pp. 1, 3.

Newman, K. S. (1993). Declining fortunes: The withering of the American dream. New York: Basic Books.

Manton, P. (2003, December). Vice President's message: Little boxes. (Newsletter for the Levittown Historical Society of Levittown, New York). Levittimes, 1-4.

Name Paul Blanshard to head Friends Service Association. (1953, April 29). Trenton Evening Times, p. 42.

Negro, white neighbors settle down in Bucks Co. 'open occupancy' homes. (1954, November 15). Trenton Evening Times, pp. 1, 6.

New Levitt houses break all records. (1952, February). House and Home, 98-105.

New towns. (1951, November). Architectural Forum, 136-142.

Newman, K. S. (1988). Falling from grace: The experience of downward mobility in the American middle class. New York: Free Press.

News: building and controls. (1950, November). Architectural Forum, 9-16.

News: housing crisis. (1945, December). Architectural Forum, 5-8.

Nine summer days in Levittown that rocked the world. (1993, September 3). Bucks County Courier Times, p. B2.

No school this fall? (1952, July 10). The Levittown Times, p. 4.

O'Connell, Brian, J. (1989). The federal role in the suburban boom. In B. M. Kelly (Ed.), Suburbia re-examined, (pp. 183-192). New York: Greenwood Press.

O'Neill, A. (1995, March). Unemployment and social identity." Presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.

One plus one equals one. (1952, July 31). The Levittown Times, p. 4.

3. Opening of the John Fitch pool. (1953, January 28). Trenton Evening Times, p.

Over 19,000 of them. (1955, April). House and Home, 197.

PB reveals Levitt's building methods. (1959, August). Practical Builder, 80-91.

'Perfect planning' at Levittown, Pa. (1954, January 27). Trenton Evening Times, pp. 1, 31.

Peto, Mr. (1952, July 3). What is your biggest problem? [Letter to the editor]. The Levittown Times, p. 4.

Philadelphia Council of Churches Survey (1953).

Planning the postwar house: Part I. (1944, January). Architectural Forum, 75-80.

74. Planning the postwar house: Part II. (1944, February). Architectural Forum, 69-

86. Planning the postwar house: Part III. (1944, March). Architectural Forum, 79-

Popenoe, D. (1977). The suburban environment: Sweden and the United States. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rabrenovic, G. (1995). Deindustrialization and urban poverty: Struggle for survival of a low income neighborhood. Research in Community Sociology, 5, 183-200.

Race trouble in the north: When a Negro family moved into a white community. (1958, August 30). U.S. News & World Report, 45, 1.

Rachlis, E., & Marqusee, J. E. (1963). The landlords. New York: Random House.

Rain interrupts mother-child 'school strike' in Levittown. (1954, May 20). Trenton Evening Times, p. 4.

Raines, J., Berson, L. E., & Gracie, D. (Eds.) (1982). Community and capital in conflict: Plant closings and job loss. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Rioting follows protests by truckers in Levittown, Pa. (1979, June 26). The New York Times, p. C8.

Rockoff, H. (1984). Drastic measures: A history of wage and price controls in the United States. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Rodwin, L., & Sazanami, H. (1989). Deindustrialization and regional economic transformation: The experience of the United States. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Ross, D. R. B. (1969). Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and veterans during World War II. New York: Columbia University Press.

Rothstein, L. E. (Ed.). (1996). Plant Closings: Power, Politics, and Workers. Massachusetts: Auburn House.

Ruhr Valley of America. (1952, February 29). U.S. News and World Report, 26.

Rumple, Mrs. (1952, July 3). What is your biggest problem? [Letter to the editor]. The Levittown Times, p. 4.

Schneider, J. A. (1999, September). Trusting that of God in everyone: Three examples of Quaker-based social service in disadvantaged communities. Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 28(3), 269-295.

Scott, J., & Alwin, D. (1998). Retrospective versus prospective measurement of life histories in longitudinal research. In J. Z. Giele & G. H. Elder, Jr. (Eds.), Methods of life course research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (pp.98-128). California: Sage Publications.

Seeks members for new bridge club. (1952, July 10). The Levittown Times, p. 2.

Segregation: A family moves in. (1957, August 26). Newsweek, 50, 27.

Seidman, I. (1998). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Signs of neighborliness. (1952, July 31). The Levittown Times, p. 5.

Silverman, A. (Producer). (1994, January 29). Levittown, Pennsylvania revisited. National Public Radio [Broadcast].

Sklar, R. (1994). Movie-made America: A cultural history of American movies. New York: Vintage Books.

Skocpol, T. (1996, September - October). Delivering for young families. The American Prospect, 66-72.

Skolnick, A. S. (1991). Embattled paradise: The American family in the age of uncertainty. New York: Basic Books.

Smith, E. L. (Curator). (2002, January 19 - March 3). Daisy Myers. Exhibit honoring the Myers family, The State Museum of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, PA.

Sobel, R. (2000). The great boom 1950-2000: How a generation of Americans created the world's most prosperous society. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Sokol, S. (1952, July 31). Dear editor. [Letter to the editor]. The Levittown Times, p. 4.

Soule, G. (1942, July). The post-war depression. The New Republic, 74-76.

Sound of the '70s: Whump, bang, bang, whump. (1999, September 26). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. A1, A6, A7.

Sparkes, B. (1944, October 28). They'll build neighborhoods, not houses. The Saturday Evening Post, 11, 43-44, & 46.

Spinach having a rough time: Crop being crowded out by Levitt's builders as project goes forward. (1951, November 20). Bristol Courier, pp. 1, 7.

Staudohar, P. D., & Brown, H. E. (1987). Deindustrialization and plant closure. Massachusetts: Lexington Books.

Steel forges Falls' identity. (1999, March 14). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. A1, A3.

Steiner, E. (1952, August 14). Dear editor. [Letter to the editor]. The Levittown Times, p. 4.

Survey shows non-church members are few in booming Bucks area. (1954, March 22). Trenton Evening Times, p. 3.

Take the case of this Levittown child--It's typical of many in Bucks schools. (1954, March 8). Trenton Evening Times, p. 5.

Taylor, I. (1952, July 10). Dear editor. [Letter to the editor]. The Levittown Times, p. 4.

Taylor, F. W. (1998). The principles of scientific management. New York: Dover Publications.

Tells Conference of Impact U.S. Steel Plant Has Upon Economy of the Philadelphia Area. (1952, January 16). Bristol Courier, p. 1, 6.

Ten years ago, Five Points riot more than gas clash. (1989, June 25). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. A1, A8.

Text of Governor Fine's greeting. (1952, January 31). The Levittown Times (preview edition), p. 4.

The American dream: Fired up and melted down. (1992, April 12). The Washington Post, p. A1.

The Cape Cod Cottage: Part I. (1949, February). Architectural Forum, 89-94.

The Cape Cod Cottage: Part II. (1949, March). Architectural Forum, 101-106.

The economics of trees. (1953, April). House and Home, 130-135.

The end of an era. (2001, August 16). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. A1, A2.

The fastest-selling houses in the USA. (1953, August). House and Home, 126-129.

The Fortune survey. (1946, April). Fortune, 33(4), 266, 268, 270, 272, & 275.

The history of Falls Township: 1692 - 1969. (1st ed.). (1969). Falls Township, PA: Falls Township.

The history of Falls Township: 1692 - 1992. (3rd ed.). (2001). Falls Township, PA: Falls Township.

The housing mess. (1947, January). Fortune, 81-85, 216, 219-221.

The industry capitalism forgot. (1947, August). Fortune, 36(2), 61-67, 167-170.

The most house for the money. (1952, October). Fortune, 150-154.

The most popular builder's house. (1950, April). Architectural Forum, 134-135.

The new American bible: For Catholics. (1986). South Bend, IN: Greenlawn Press.

The promise of the shortage. (1946, April). Fortune, 33(4), 101-103.

The school boom is over in Levittown. (1977, June 23). Bucks County Courier Times, p. 4.

Thompson, C. (1954, August 7). Growing pains of a brand-new city. Saturday Evening Post, 26-27, 71-72.

'Tis the first rose of Levittown. (1952, August 21). The Levittown Times, p. 2.

Trees. (1957, January). House and Home, 161-163.

Tribute to Dr. King. (1968, April 10). The New York Times, p. 262.

Truck protest turns sour. (1979, June 24). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. A1, A11.

Two nights of terror. (1980, June 22). Accent Magazine (Bucks County Courier Times), pp. 3-5.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. (1810, 1910-1970, 1990-2000). Census of Population and Housing. Washington, D.C. <http://www.census.gov/>.

USS distrusted, but strike doubts surface. (1991, January 31). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. A1, A7.

USX shutdown idles 2,100. (1991, February 5). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. A1, A2.

Vinnacombe, R. J. (1973). Integration in the planned suburban community: A comparison of Levittown, Pennsylvania and Willingboro, New Jersey. Unpublished master's thesis, Glassboro State College.

Wallace, M., & Rothschild, J. (1988). Plant closings, capital flight, and worker dislocation: The long shadow of deindustrialization. Research in Politics and Society, 3, 1-35.

Walton, G. M., & Rockoff, H. (2002). History of the American economy (9th ed.). Canada: Thomson Learning.

Wattel, H. (1981). Levitt, Abraham. In Garraty, John, A. (Ed.), Dictionary of American Biography (Suppl. 7), (pp. 469-470). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Welcome Levittown. (1952, June 26). Town and Village, p. 1.

Welcome wagon. (1952, June 19). The Levittown Times, p. 2.

Weldon, D. (1952, November). Ready-made city will house 70,000. Popular Science, 114-117, 258-262.

What is Levitt up to now? (1957, January). House and Home, 154-157.

Where have all the steel workers gone? (2001, September 3). Bucks County Courier Times, pp. B1, B2.

Whyte, W. H., Jr. (1956). The organization man. Garden City, NY: Double Day.

William Penn Center in Fallsington hub of Lower Bucks civic activity. (1954, March 31). Trenton Evening Times, p. 14.

Wright, G. (1983). Building the dream: A social history of housing in America. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

You can't fool the public. (1954, February). House and Home, 34.

You're wonderful. (1952, June 26). The Levittown Times, p. 3.

Zinn, H. (1995). A people's history of the United States, 1942- present. New York: Harper Perennial.

Zweig, E. (1952, July 10). Dear editor. [Letter to the editor]. The Levittown Times, p. 4.

4,000 houses per year. (1949, April). Architectural Forum, 84-93.