

Introduction

A Second Suburb

Dianne Harris

Like millions of Americans, on Tuesday evening, November 4, 2008, I sat with my neighbors and eagerly watched televised returns for the election of the forty-fourth president of the United States. As areas of the map turned red and blue, I kept my eye on Pennsylvania. When Bucks County turned blue on the map, I knew I was witnessing an important turning point in American culture and politics. To extrapolate so much from the voting results of a single Pennsylvania county may seem strange, but Bucks County, after all, includes Levittown, a location that had attracted some national attention during the long campaign for at least two reasons: its iconic status as a postwar U.S. suburb and its long history of racial segregation.¹ Would a suburb founded on the premise that its houses were available to whites alone, in which a major race riot occurred in 1957 when the first black family moved in, and that had remained overwhelmingly white in the intervening years vote for a black presidential candidate? As it turned out, the answer was “yes.” The *New York Times* published several articles on Levittown during the campaign, but those authored by Michael Sokolove, who grew up in Levittown, Pennsylvania, most powerfully evoked the suburb’s past, its political and social identity over the past fifty years, and the reasons behind voter transformation. Sokolove recorded the change that took place between his first article that focused on the primary election and election day itself:

I traveled again to Levittown on Election Day to see how people would vote and how they would respond to what looked like an imminent

Obama victory. The contrast from the spring—and, in fact, this new vision of Levittown compared with what I had known in my childhood—was almost breathtaking. “Obama,” said the ironworker, when I asked how he’d be voting. “Obama,” said the plumber. “Obama,” said the chef. And on and on. Military moms. Vietnam veterans. Abortion opponents. College students and retirees. Bank tellers, pipe fitters, office workers, machinists, meat cutters, boilermakers and carpenters.²

Breathtaking indeed. But again, why did the *New York Times* decide to run two lengthy articles on Levittown during the presidential campaign? Many U.S. cities and suburbs, after all, have histories of segregation and economic and social strife. What makes Levittown interesting enough to serve as a subject for such journalistic scrutiny? Why, for that matter, publish a book that focuses on Levittown, Pennsylvania?

In histories of suburbia, Levittown, Long Island, stands as an icon of postwar development. Scholars with expertise in suburban studies know that Levittown, Pennsylvania, came after the New York development and that it was the second of the Levitt family’s eponymous suburbs. Yet many Americans—even scholars who study the built environment—are often surprised to learn that there is more than one Levittown. A significant corpus of publications exists for the Long Island Levittown, and the name has become synonymous with both that location and with an ever-enlarging set of myths, legends, and stereotypes about postwar suburbia in the United States. The Levitts’ second postwar suburb has received far less attention. Indeed, no comprehensive scholarly history of the Pennsylvania site has yet been published.³ This book aims to remedy the relatively common misperception that Levittown is a single location and to fill a gap in suburban studies by focusing on the Levitts’ second suburb of the postwar era. More importantly, it aims to answer a question first raised in 1970 by the architects Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi, who designed for their students a course called “Learning from Levittown.”⁴ Venturi and Scott Brown’s Yale architecture studio course focused primarily on matters related to housing and the architectural profession. But for this volume, I wanted to know how and why Levittown mattered more broadly. What can we learn from Levittown? What, for example, did Levittown mean to some of its original inhabitants? How did it fit within the context of planning history in the United States? What role has Levittown, a community that was initially restricted to white inhabitants, played in the history of fair housing struggles and how might we consider it in terms of the growing body of literature on race and space? What did Levittown houses look like and how did they fit within the architectural

history of the postwar era? How did the creation of a mass housing development affect the surrounding environment? What key events shaped this community? Who lived in Levittown and what impact did this new development have on the construction of identities for those who lived there?

To answer these questions, the book begins with a section containing insider views of Levittown. Most suburban studies to date are produced by outsiders looking in and formulating their analyses based on a range of primary and secondary materials. Examples such as D. J. Waldie's elegiac memoir of his life in Lakewood, California, or David Beers's account of growing up in the aerospace industry suburbs of Palo Alto, California, stand out, but relatively few such published accounts exist and published oral history projects that focus on suburban life are even scarcer.⁵ To supplement what we know about suburban experience, scholars have sometimes turned to fictional depictions of suburbia as captured in novels. Writers as diverse as John Cheever, John Updike, Richard Yates, Grace Metalious, Joan Didion, Alice McDermott, A. M. Homes, Paul Lisicky, and many others have used suburban settings as a foil for narratives of family drama (and frequently of unraveling families), coming-of-age tales, and cultural anomie.⁶ Although their writings are extremely important for the ways they resonate with an afterimage of suburban life, they cannot substitute for actual accounts of lived suburban experience.⁷

Part I aims to recover some aspects of Levittowners' lives by including selected oral histories collected by sociologist Chad Kimmel (himself a native of Levittown); writings by Daisy Myers, who documents the events that unfolded when her family—the first blacks to integrate Levittown—moved into their house; and the cartoon strips created by Bill Griffith for his nationally syndicated “Zippy the Pinhead” series. Griffith grew up in Levittown, Long Island, but his Zippy strips are included here as important indicators for the way some of the children and teenagers of original Levittowners felt about their lives in the development. His strips indicate the discontent and even psychological discomfort experienced by some older children and teens, but they also reveal an intense nostalgia for a place Griffith longed to escape but that he can also never quite leave behind—a theme expanded upon by Peter Fritzsche in his epilogue.

In 2007, at eighty-six years of age, Daisy Myers penned her brief reminiscence for this volume to accompany the reprinted excerpts from her memoir recounting the 1957 riot that ensued when her family moved into Levittown, Pennsylvania. The courageous story, told in her own words, provides important documentation of the personal struggles behind an event that had a dramatic impact on the course of postwar housing policy and seg-

regation. As such, it provides an important backdrop for Thomas Sugrue's analysis of that event provided herein.

Mary Corbin Sies has urged scholars to remember that all middle-class suburbs were not alike and that they do not all fit the stereotypes scholars and critics use to depict them. The oral histories, cartoon strips, memoir excerpts, and photographs in part I elucidate the extent to which Levittown was both unique and similar to many other places of the time. Sies also points out that she remains "unconvinced that most consumers possess the knowledge, time, and economic or cultural wherewithal to exercise free choice in their housing decisions, nor is a wide range of residential alternatives usually available to them."⁸ This situation was certainly familiar to many of the earliest buyers in Levittown, Pennsylvania, but as the essays here indicate, many were also very well informed about the perceived attributes of the development and especially about its restrictive racial policies.

The collection of photographs in part I presents a range of images selected from archives and personal collections, and they reveal aspects of Levittown that simply could not be conveyed through other means. To give a more complete sense of the built environment of Levittown, I have included photographs of places not covered in the various chapters (e.g., parks, churches, and schools) as well as scenes of daily life in neighborhoods and in commercial districts, all of which help convey a stronger sense of everyday life in Levittown's early years. It is my hope that they will also be useful for scholars who intend to pursue future studies on this topic.

The chapters in part II interpret and complement the photographs in part I. They examine Levittown from a range of perspectives (planning history, architectural and landscape history, environmental/ecological history, the intersections of race and metropolitan history, sociological analysis, and so on). Each author provides a different answer to the larger question: what can be learned from Levittown?

The Pennsylvania Levittowners

The lessons this book presents may be more useful if prefaced with a brief description of who lived in Levittown when it was first constructed and who lives there now. Many early residents moved to Levittown because they had jobs at U.S. Steel's Fairless Works, at Kaiser Steel, and at other nearby industrial plants such as Vulcanized Rubber and Plastics, 3M, Thiokol, and at the GM plant in Trenton, New Jersey. Some moved there because it was an easy commute to jobs in Philadelphia, Trenton, or other nearby communities. People also moved to Levittown because they needed or wanted an affordable place to live and raise a family. They also, as Christopher Sellers's chap-

ter indicates, moved to Levittown to be closer to nature and to have greater access to open space. Chad Kimmel's oral histories (chapter 2) indicate that some of the original residents just wanted a house of their own that would afford them a bit of space and privacy from parents, in-laws, and neighbors. Some saw Levittown as a progressive place to live, with homes that appeared "modern" and forward looking, despite the regressive racial politics enforced by the Levitts. And as had so many others across the nation, some Levittowners viewed their home purchase as the acquisition of a middle-class identity and a ticket to participation in the American dream of single-family home ownership.⁹

Census data indicate that Levittown was originally both a blue-collar and a white-collar development, and it was still thus in 1977, when David Popenoe conducted his own analysis of the town's residents. By that time, Popenoe concluded that Levittown was "not as class-homogenous as it is age- and family-homogenous, nor as class-homogenous as suburbs are commonly thought to be. The population is widely distributed among occupational levels, with an almost even split among employed males between middle- and working-class occupations."¹⁰

Using the occupational categories of the U.S. Census, he noted that the 1960 data for all nine Levitt tracts indicated that among gainfully employed males, "20 percent [were] upper middle class (professional, technical, and kindred); 30 percent middle class (managers, officers, and proprietors, 12 percent; clerical and kindred, 8 percent; sales, 10 percent) and 49 percent working class (craftsmen, foremen, and kindred, 24 percent; operatives and kindred, 18 percent; service workers, 3 percent; and laborers, 4 percent)." By 1970, 68 percent of the men were middle class and 32 percent, working class. Because Levitt houses of each type were grouped in neighborhoods, geographic distribution of income levels followed the distribution of house types in neighborhoods. Levittown was likewise ethnically and religiously heterogeneous. In 1953, 41 percent of the residents were Protestant, 39 percent Roman Catholic, 15 percent Jewish, and 5 percent declared no religious affiliation. The 1960 Census showed that 15 percent of the residents were foreign born. It also indicated that 46 percent had moved to Levittown from outside the Philadelphia metropolitan area, 20 to 25 percent were from upstate Pennsylvania's working-class towns, and about 15 percent were from inner-city Philadelphia. By 1977, residents who moved to Levittown came mostly from other suburbs.¹¹

If Levittown was heterogeneous in its social and occupational class structure, it was racially homogenous and remains so today. As mentioned above, all of the earliest residents identified themselves as white, even if some

were “passing.” The 1970 Census showed that blacks made up between 0 and 1.9 percent of the population in Levittown, whereas metropolitan Philadelphia’s population was 17.5 percent black. The 2000 Census indicated that of Levittown’s total population of 53,966 residents (a substantial drop from the more than 70,311 people who lived there when the town was completed in 1958), 94.4 percent were non-Hispanic white, 2.4 percent were black, 1 percent were Asian American, 2.2 percent were Latino/a, and 1.2 percent declared themselves to be of mixed race.¹² It is clear that many of Levittown’s original residents moved there in order to live in an all-white community.¹³

The Census data, however, raise important questions about what “class” and even “race” meant in the postwar United States, especially in suburbs like Levittown. The Census data, and Popenoe’s analysis of that information, suggest that social class and occupation (blue collar versus white collar) are equivalent and correlated to income. These, of course, are measurable forms of data. However, class formation and definitions of class in the postwar United States were far more complex and fluid than these data might suggest. Although occupation, income, and home ownership serve as significant markers of both class and race, neither is made completely legible in the Census because both class and race were and are social constructions forged through a range of complex everyday practices and group relationships, economic structures, and material artifacts that serve as indexes of social status. In the postwar era especially, definitions of what it meant to be “middle class” changed along with a general increase in economic security, an increase in disposable income that led to greater access to material possessions that conveyed social status, and—importantly for this volume—increased access to home ownership.¹⁴ And because so many of these benefits were available primarily to whites, ideas about race became increasingly conflated with constructions of class. As such, several of this book’s chapters include analysis of the complex ways in which class and race were constructed in Levittown.

Lessons from Levittown

Like its predecessor in New York, Levittown, Pennsylvania, is an iconic suburb, but, as I hope the essays in this volume reveal, it teaches us some unexpected things about suburban space and the immediate postwar era. First, in order to understand “Levittown” as an idea, one must examine the string of developments created by this ambitious and complex family of merchant builders. Their story begins just prior to the onset of the Great Depression, and those early years, as Richard Longstreth indicates in his chapter, are essential for gaining an understanding of the family’s ambitions. After

completing their planned community on Long Island in 1951, the Levitts initiated construction of their second eponymous town, in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, that same year. Construction commenced on a third Levittown in New Jersey in 1958, later renamed Willingboro and the subject of Herbert Gans's famed 1967 book, *The Levittowners*. When one considers that the Levitts then exported their brand overseas, creating American-style suburbs outside San Juan, Puerto Rico (1963), and Paris, France (1965–1968), they become positioned among the earliest exporters of a particularized version of American suburbia.¹⁵ Longstreth's chapter provides a richer, more nuanced understanding of the Levitt family's larger project, elucidating the full extent of their ambitions and the situation of their developments within the broader context of midcentury urban planning. He clarifies the ways in which the Levitts truly innovated—the family frequently claimed their developments and designs to be first and best—and just as importantly demonstrates the areas in which they did not. His chapter also demonstrates that scholars who today study the global spread of suburbs based on models in the United States might profitably begin their studies in Levittown.

A second lesson offered by Levittown, Pennsylvania, is that big, ugly, violent, important riots can and do happen in suburbia. Although such events can happen anywhere, historians and urban theorists have focused primarily on riots as an urban phenomenon since they are often associated with tensions that arise from the heterogeneity of urban life. Suburbs, imagined (though sometimes wrongly) as largely homogenous in terms of both class and race, typically lack both the centrally located public spaces in which social uprisings take place and, it has been thought, the incentives for violent forms of civil unrest.¹⁶ Until recently, most of Levittown's histories did not include an account of an event that shook the suburb to its core and, in the process, shaped its identity for many years: the riots that erupted in August 1957, when Daisy and William Myers moved into Levittown with their three children. As with their Long Island development, the Levitts refused to sell homes to anyone identified as nonwhite. Because all applications for home purchases had to be made in person at the Levittown Exhibit Center, which served as a sales office, discrimination in housing sales remained a daily occurrence. It was thus fairly easy to keep Levittown white—until 1957, when the Myers family moved in, assisted by the American Friends Service Committee. As the first black family to purchase a home in the development, the Myers family endured an ordeal that few could have weathered with such dignity, courage, grace, and fortitude. Despite the fact that the riots—as the weeks-long event was called by the international news media, by Daisy Myers in her memoirs, and as it has been subsequently called by scholars—were

internationally publicized and became the focus of a 1957 short documentary film, *Crisis in Levittown*, the Myers riot largely disappeared from accounts of the town until very recently.¹⁷ The event was not mentioned in any anniversary celebrations until the fiftieth-anniversary exhibit at the State Museum in 2003. Children growing up in Levittown did not learn about the event in their history classes. And David Popenoe recorded the conflict in his 1977 publication as merely a “near riot,” when in fact hundreds of people crowded the street in front of the Myers house, violence erupted, property was damaged, and harassment persisted against the family for a period of months.¹⁸ The ordeal made literal and manifest the title of David Keats’s famous suburban critique, *The Crack in the Picture Window*, because rocks thrown at the Myers house shattered the glass panes of their Levittowner model’s picture window. The actual riot lasted for two weeks; the harassment continued for nearly three months. Sugrue’s chapter on this episode, like the event itself, shatters several previously unexamined myths: the social tranquility of postwar suburbs like Levittown and the generally accepted notion that urban public space alone serves as the primary site for protest, riots, and social revolution. Sugrue’s essay shows us not only that suburban spaces can serve as the locus for battles for social justice but also that northern suburbs like Levittown—not just cities in the American South—became important battlegrounds in the fight for civil rights, racial justice, and fair housing.

In 1979, Levittown once again became the subject of international attention when the “Gas Riots” erupted in an intersection known as Five Points. The Gas Riots, the subject of another chapter by Chad Kimmel (chapter 12), dramatically illustrated the extent to which Levittown had become simultaneously a site closely connected to global economic flows and political realities just as it was also deeply embedded in the transcontinental trucking economy of the United States and the commuter economy common to suburbs throughout the nation. Far from an isolated island of planned suburban perfection, Levittown was and is dependent on an elaborate network of metropolitan and global connections and entirely subject to a market economy far beyond the control of its founding planners and residents. The Gas Riots also have come to symbolize the end of the postwar era in Levittown and elsewhere, and the event was a pivotal moment of sociological change for Levittown residents.

It would be easy to dismiss both the Myers riot and the Gas Riots as mere incidents in what is now almost sixty years of the town’s history. Some might argue that highlighting these events privileges the exceptional over the everyday history of Levittown, resulting in a distorted view of an otherwise tranquil community. The Levitts, after all, promoted the suburb as “the

most perfectly planned community in America.”¹⁹ However, the fact that two major riots marked the town’s history within a twenty-year period and numerous smaller protests were recorded in the intervening years (everything from housewives protesting the cost of food at the local markets to so-called “youth riots” that evolved from apparent teen boredom), indicates that the town fell short of its planners’ expectations for a socially perfect environment.²⁰ Although these disruptions are not everyday occurrences, they are nevertheless significant events in Levittown’s history. Their impact rippled out beyond the suburb’s borders, hence their prominence in this book.

Another lesson from Levittown is that—perhaps surprisingly—it is an important site for understanding grassroots environmental movements. To be sure, massive ecological change occurred when the Levitts converted 5,750 acres of Bucks County farmland covering 8 square miles into what would quickly become the tenth-largest community in Pennsylvania, with more than 17,000 houses. But the story of ecological change that Adam Rome has told in *The Bulldozer and the Countryside* is not quite the whole story as it happened in Levittown, Pennsylvania. The Long Island Levittown had been constructed in relative haste and without the benefit of much planning vision. The Levitts set out to correct that in Bucks County. As Christopher Sellers’s chapter in this book demonstrates, the opportunities for experiences with nearby nature afforded to Levittown residents through the Levitt planning and planting strategies, as well as access to natural areas surrounding the town, bolstered the residents’ sense of agency and control of landscape in ways the Levitts certainly never imagined. How residents interacted with the landscape ended up spurring important facets of an environmental movement in Bucks County that had larger, national implications. The dynamic ecology near to and threading through Levittown, coupled with Levittowners’ exposure to air and water pollution from nearby factories, helped make it, and similar communities across the nation, both targets and breeding grounds for an environmental movement that gathered momentum during the 1960s and 1970s. Sellers’s chapter demonstrates that, from about 1965 onward, Levittowners gravitated to increasingly important roles in the politics of nature advocacy and proved instrumental in introducing a new environmental politics into Bucks County, one in which worries about vanishing open space fused with those about pollution of air and water. The residents proposed a defense of the natural areas around their houses where they played and lived and which was increasingly threatened by pollution and sprawl. Indeed, Sellers shows us that Levittown, Pennsylvania, served as one of Bucks County’s most important breeding grounds for a new environmental style of activism.

A fourth lesson to be learned from this work: Levittown houses do not conform to the myth that there was little variation in ordinary housing of this sort or that all of the houses in Levittown looked the same. Instead, these so-called ordinary houses varied significantly in size, price, style, and plan arrangement despite the Levitt construction techniques that demanded uniformity within a specific house type. The Levitts constructed seven different house types in Bucks County, each aimed at a specific market. Because they continued to use assembly line construction techniques, only one type of house typically appeared in any given neighborhood, so the neighborhoods became easily discerned indexes of economic status within the town. But the Levitts made a concerted effort to create neighborhoods that appeared aesthetically varied, and they wanted the mixture of incomes dictated by houses that sold for less than ten thousand dollars and up to twenty thousand dollars in order to avoid the creation of the middle-class ghetto decried by critics like Lewis Mumford. The Levitts designed and built a range of house types with a varied price structure intended to appeal to a somewhat diverse spectrum of working- and middle-class buyers. They grouped each house type in a specific neighborhood and therefore sorted residents of the development by income. This variety of house forms and styles set the Bucks County Levittown apart from not only its New York predecessor but also many similar mass developments of the time. As a result, Levittown residents were especially aware of incremental differences in income, class, and status. Despite the Levitts' insistence that their houses be sold only to whites, neither socioeconomic class status nor racial identity were as clearly defined in Levittown as might be imagined, since early residents came from a range of ethnic backgrounds and classes. Levittown houses therefore played an important role for occupants who carefully calibrated and indexed their own and their neighbors' identities through the primary measure of home possession and also through careful attention to home style, furnishings, and decoration. The various ways in which house form and style played a role in the social construction of racial and class identities for the earliest inhabitants of Levittown are the focus of Dianne Harris's chapter.

Curtis Miner's contribution buttresses some of the themes identified in Harris's chapter through an examination of Levittown kitchens. By charting the careful manipulation of kitchen dimensions, location, and furnishings over the seven-year period of Levittown's construction and by comparing the Pennsylvania kitchens with those on Long Island, Miner indicates the ways in which kitchens served as an index of class and status in the development. As the centerpiece of every Levitt house, the kitchen assumed particular importance as a showcase for the social and economic status of home-

owners. As Miner's detailed analysis reveals, the design of Levittown kitchens constituted a carefully calibrated balance of marketing strategies that encompassed the incorporation of specific modernist design elements, labor-saving efficiencies, the newest technologies that could be included for the price, and a sensitivity to the desires of working- and middle-class women. And unlike some mass developers who spent little time reconfiguring kitchens, the Levitts were especially attentive to their design, continually changing the size, configuration, and fittings for the duration of the construction period in an effort to best accommodate the customers who frequently made the final decision on home purchases: the housewife.

As noted above, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and their Yale architecture students first set out to learn something from Levittown. Jessica Lautin's chapter looks back at that important episode in architectural pedagogy and investigates the significance of the "Learning from Levittown" studio for later architectural education and practice. If Levittown, Pennsylvania, is considered by architectural historians at all today, it is probably because of the Venturi/Scott Brown investigation, the Smithsonian museum exhibition they launched as a result, and the manuscript they intended for publication. Positioned within the historical context of the late 1960s and early 1970s revolution in architectural education, Lautin's chapter clarifies that the Levittown studio, although well-intentioned, fell short of its designers' goals. Nevertheless, the studio and its products served as an important moment in the formation of a sociological approach to architectural design. Lautin's essay also contributes to our understanding of the role played by Venturi and Scott Brown in the development of architectural history and architectural pedagogy after 1965, and it sheds new light on the development of the architects' ideas that followed from the publication of their renowned text, *Learning from Las Vegas*. Seen from this perspective, Levittown emerges as a significant site in the history of midcentury architectural theory and pedagogy.

Peter Fritzsche's epilogue points to Levittown as "an exemplary nostalgic space." As Fritzsche indicates, Levitt-like suburbs have served as the backdrop and sometimes as the silent protagonist in fiction that typically posits such locations as dystopias. The planned perfection of Levittown becomes a foil against which the imperfections of human subjects play out. If Levittown was a place for new beginnings and the locus of postwar dreams predicated on home ownership, Fritzsche's essay points equally to postwar suburbs as "indexes of twentieth-century loss."

This book is thus primarily a multidisciplinary effort to understand facets of a particular place. A central aim has been to shed new light on a town that many think they already know and have perhaps dismissed or over-

looked. It happens also to be a place whose name is virtually synonymous with the word *suburb*. As such, this book necessarily becomes a contribution to the changing field of suburban studies.

Levittown and the “New Suburban History”

Since the 1990s, some urban and planning historians have reevaluated their approach to understanding the areas commonly known as “suburbs.” In a 1995 review essay, James Wunsch admonished that “one must be wary . . . of the simplistic approach to the suburbs which puts them into neat opposition with the city: white-black, rich-poor, car-bus, safety-violence. . . . We must dispense with the cliché which puts city and suburb into opposition, and instead deal with the suburb in a variegated metropolitan context, distinguishing suburb from city by degree rather than in kind.”²¹ Rather than examining cities and suburbs as separate and sometimes opposed entities, practitioners of the so-called “new suburban history” advocate a “metropolitan approach,” urging that the histories of cities and suburbs be examined as intertwined phenomena, using a “metropolitan framework [that] allows race and class to move to the forefront.”²² These scholars carefully examine the demographics of suburban locations (to focus anew on the composition of local governments) and the flow and distribution of governmental and political resources.²³ Practitioners of the new suburban history have tended to examine questions about race, class, public policy, power, land use, taxation, infrastructure, politics, demographic studies, Census data, and the law. They ask for an approach that seeks to forge connections among sites rather than fragmentation and that moves away from accepted myths and stereotypes of suburban space. Their emphasis on understanding race and class derives from a concern with understanding the sources of power that shaped metropolitan frameworks and the desire for a more complete and nuanced understanding of the forces that shaped segregation in some areas, integration in others. However, it is worth noting that many of the leading scholars of suburban history have long examined cities and suburbs together; one might recall, for example, the works of Sam Bass Warner Jr., Kenneth Jackson, and Robert Fishman.²⁴

Despite the fact that some urban historians may now prefer to use the term “metropolitan studies” or “metropolitan history,” the fact remains that the Levitts and Levittown residents called and conceptualized their town as a suburb and their lives as suburban, and this must be held in mind especially when considering the development’s earliest years. Many residents clearly understood that Levittown was deeply connected to the political life, economic structure, and cultural changes wrought in nearby cities such

as Philadelphia and Trenton. They maintained personal and family ties to nearby cities, and their commutes to urban jobs, by automobile or train, daily confirmed those connections, just as their livelihoods often depended on them. Manhattan, too, eventually exerted its force on this town just as it does on the Levitts' Long Island development.²⁵ Still, many original Levittowners seldom left the more immediate area since they were employed in local jobs largely generated by U.S. Steel's Fairless Works and Kaiser Steel's nearby plant. The Fairless Works employed six thousand workers, and Kaiser Metal Products expanded its workforce from fifteen hundred to five thousand in the earliest years of Levittown's development.²⁶ In that sense, Levittown's was a far more self-referential economy than the stereotype of postwar suburbia would have us imagine.

The chapters in this volume demonstrate a concern for some of the same scholarly priorities as those articulated by scholars of the new suburban histories. But a primary goal was to learn from Levittown itself, to create a set of foundational chapters upon which later scholars might build. With no extant Levitt archive and little published scholarship to work from, it seemed especially urgent that aspects of the community itself be documented and analyzed so that we might understand the ways in which a particular suburb both shaped and reflected experience and history in a particular place and time. If this book's scope is not "metropolitan" enough, I leave it to future scholars to correct this deficiency. If it sacrifices detailed analysis of Levittown's connections to Philadelphia and Trenton, for example, it does so in favor of close readings of Levittown's planning history, of the precise form, style, spaces, and technologies of suburban homes and landscapes, and of detailed accounts of some formative episodes in Levittown's history. In common with new approaches, however, the essays in this volume combine a close reading of form with an effort to understand the relationship between space and the dynamics of race and class as they developed at this particular site. They also reveal that Levittown, Pennsylvania, serves as important evidence that, as Kevin Kruse and Tom Sugrue suggest, "Suburbs were battlegrounds over nearly every crucial postwar domestic issue, including civil rights, regulatory politics, environmentalism, the military-industrial complex, and the scope of government."²⁷ And if we are to move away from clichéd notions of suburbia, detailed histories of particular suburbs seem a most effective means of overturning monolithic stereotypes. This was a central goal of *Second Suburb*. Far from contributing to the old suburban clichés, the chapters here, and their lessons from Levittown, demonstrate this suburb's unique position in American cultural history.

What these essays aim to demonstrate is that Levittown deserves its

iconic status and that it aptly served as a barometer for middle- and working-class values during the 2008 presidential election, just as it has served as a social and cultural barometer at various moments in its past history. Levittown embodied both dream and nightmare and the quotidian realm of the in-between. It is both ordinary and exemplary; it was not perfect, despite its planners' claims, but neither did it become the suburban ghetto critics predicted. For many, it was and continues to be simply an affordable place to live. It is more than a footnote in American planning history and more than a mirror image of Levittown, Long Island. It is surely a more complex place than can possibly be portrayed in a single volume. Still, the historical fragments displayed herein illuminate a landscape that was not made from the metaphorical "Fluffo," "Mazola," and "Cheezits" that Zippy the Pinhead considered the essential ingredients for its fabrication. Instead, it was and continues to be made from the struggles, triumphs, and daily routines of people living in a place meant to contain a specific lifestyle in a world of global multiplicities.