

## The Houses of Levittown in the Context of Postwar American Culture

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World War II entered history with almost unanimous agreement among Americans that it was if not the only good war, then it was certainly the last of them. Coincidentally, it was also the war in which the majority of the veterans were given economic and social benefits on their return from action.<sup>1</sup> These facts are not unrelated. The treatment of the veteran, particularly in the area of homeownership, secured the loyalty of the working class in the years of demobilization and retained it through most of the decades that followed.

The most significant and widely noted benefit of World War II, the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, or GI Bill, took effect in 1944. Two major provisions of the Bill provided access to housing and education.<sup>2</sup> Through the institutionalization of a formerly radical approach to the politics of housing in America--government underwriting of mortgages for Americans who had no capital--the GI Bill set in motion a dramatic transition in American society. The houses the Bill funded reinforced the nuclear family, not only through economic incentives but also through the very design of the housing it promoted. As a result, the years immediately following World War II were years in which the working class of America, at least those who had served in the military, experienced an upsurge not only in the level of their expectations, but in the realization of those expectations. By expanding the homeownership class, the postwar housing policies served to preserve the established order in what might have been a period of risk.

For the past half-century, the entry-level housing that resulted from the GI Bill has been viewed by most Americans as the opening salvo in the suburban revolution in which government policy enabled the working class of America to become members of the home-owning--or middle--class. This process has received mixed reviews: critics on the left have lamented what they view as an erosion of the class consciousness of American labor, while those with a conservative view have applauded the expansion of the middle class as a natural outcome of American capitalism. In either case, however, the housing innovation of the postwar period--the privately owned, single-family dwelling, financed by banks whose risk was underwritten by the federal government--has become the accepted norm for working Americans.

The domestic architecture of the houses funded by the GI Bill is typified by the four-room "Cape Cod" cottages built at Levittown on Long Island, New York. The houses were small, four to four-and-a-half rooms, and generally followed the traditional form of two bays across the front and two across the back with a bathroom inserted behind the kitchen to economize on plumbing. Their design encoded the American belief system in their topography, and reinforced--if not imposed--its concomitant way of life through their geography. The houses provide a document that reveals the power of the postwar housing policies to generate a major social transformation and merit the attention of those who would preserve the recent past.

The 1950 census reflected the efforts of legislators, builders, and bankers, as the population of the suburbs exceeded that of both urban and rural areas. In addition to resolving the housing shortage, the GI Bill turned millions of urban dwelling tenants into suburban-dwelling homeowners. By making a house and land accessible to lower-income Americans, the postwar housing policies increased the numbers of those who, according to traditional Republican theory, could be expected to have a stake in society, and by extension, to uphold its institutions. By returning Rosie the Riveter to the kitchen and GI Joe to the front yard, the houses served to domesticate the American workers. Moreover, by making the "American Home"--the quintessential symbol of the American dream--available to people whose prewar economic level would have precluded homeownership, these policies resulted in a wider diffusion of American middle-class values. The symbolic relationship between private property and membership in the middle class was reversed; what had once been necessary now became sufficient. Home ownership no longer signified middle-class status, it conferred it. The provision of so many middle-class benefits to the working class reduced the potential for disruption and secured the loyalty of the American worker for decades to come.

By the end of the 1940s, the American labor movement had lost the militancy it had exhibited in the 1930s. The workers had become consumers--haves, rather than have-nots--with houses, cars, appliances, and even money in the bank.<sup>3</sup> In effect, the affluence of the postwar years had reduced the class-consciousness of the worker, undermined the unions, and expanded the middle class. This was not an unanticipated outcome. As the war came to a close, business and political leaders had been concerned with the need to foster a smooth transition to a peacetime economy. Underlying their concern was the possibility of a postwar American version of the Socialist revolutions that had plagued so much of Europe after World War I. Widespread resentment on the part of the veterans could result in major social upheaval. The "boys" might be led to consider themselves short-changed in the postwar conversion economy and seek solutions outside the system.

This fear was expressed by the national commander of the American Veterans of World War II, Jack Hardy, who urged government action, warning, "It is likely that a desperation born of unmerited privation, inexcusable in this country, may create an acute and dangerous rift between veterans and the political management that makes such conditions possible."<sup>4</sup> Left unresolved, these issues could produce a genuine threat to the peace; a threat that had to be addressed. It was generally agreed that low-cost housing was among the most pressing of their needs. How that housing was to be provided was still under debate.

Although the housing constructed for defense workers and military families during the war had set a precedent for direct federal involvement in residential construction, there was strong ideological opposition to direct federal aid to the individual, even homeless veterans. Advocates on both sides of the housing issue advanced their particular position under a banner of patriotism: direct federal aid to the individual was tantamount to overthrowing the social and economic system; not to provide housing for those who had fought to preserve the American Way was tantamount to treason.

When the debate was over, the direction of the housing programs was clear. Veterans' housing regulated by the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) and funded through the Veterans' Administration, would be built in the traditional form of the American dream: a vine-covered cottage set on a small plot in a suburban setting.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the war, the home, the symbol of the dream, had been a stock pictorial element in public service advertising.<sup>6</sup> By late 1943, images of uniformed sons in cozy kitchens with aproned mothers and steaming pots suggested that reconversion was just a matter of time.

An ad for the Lee Rubber and Tire Company in 1943 presented the "typical" family of the era: father, mother, and two children facing a small white Cape Cod house.<sup>7</sup> Above the house floated a school, a church, and a factory with the title, "THESE ARE FUNDAMENTAL." The text outlined the position of the company on American labor:

*Homes and families; practical efficient schools; a church leadership that makes devotion to religion a spiritual inspiration; elimination of class hatred and resumption of confidence and mutual interest in each other; employment for all who want it and independence for everyone who will work for it: these are fundamental for normal and continued prosperity.*

*Helicopters, ultra-streamlined motor cars, household conveniences akin to magic ... may be highly desirable ... many of them are doubtless attainable ... but the pursuit of that happiness which is guaranteed to every citizen by our constitution rests on simpler, more fundamental things.*

*Republic Rubber and LEE of Conshohocken Tires are conscious of these fundamentals. At Youngstown [Ohio] and Conshohocken [Pennsylvania] our objectives have already been plotted ... objectives in the direct line of march toward a happier, a greater and a permanently prosperous America.<sup>8</sup>*

The subliminal message in the ad was clear: America is not like Europe; here, the workers are part of the dream, and the dream is attainable by all, without political upheaval.

A major result of the housing policy discussions was to intensify the ideological link between the privately owned single-family house in the suburbs and the fulfillment of the American dream; between the nuclear family and the social order. America was looking ahead to the future, and the home would be an integral

ingredient of the “happier, greater, permanently prosperous” America to which it looked. Included in the formula were the school, the church, and the factory. These “simpler, fundamental things” at least, were promised to the working American. He, in his turn, need only promise his continued fealty to the American system. The appeal of the privately owned single family house grew even stronger in the closing months of the war.

The social concern with the unmarried young man as a potential source of disruption is as old as industrialization and the rise of wage laborers.<sup>9</sup> Newly constructed as “masterless” men, the unaffiliated male workers of the early modern period were viewed as threats to society. Nineteenth-century reformers cast the home and family as substitutes for the stabilizing influence of the master. By the twentieth century, this concern had solidified around the threat of a growing labor movement. Just before the Depression, Herbert Hoover called for a movement to increase the percentage of homeowners because:

*... the present large proportion of families that own their own homes is both the foundation of a sound economic and social system and a guarantee that our society will continue to develop rationally as changing conditions demand.*<sup>10</sup>

The link between Americanism and home owning took on greater force in the 1930s as the deepening depression increased worker dissatisfaction with the economy. A number of housing advocates in that period articulated the position that homeownership--as opposed to good housing--was also a protection against the various forms of collective activities that were being advocated not only by unions, but by radical political reformers.

Socialists and communists had made major inroads into the labor movement in the 1930s, and they were perceived as one of the major threats to the established order. Proponents of housing used this threat in advocating the expansion of proprietary housing.

*Ownership of homes is the best guarantee against communism and socialism and the various bad “isms” of life. I do not say that it is an infallible guarantee, but I do say that owners of homes usually are more interested in the safeguarding of our national history than are renters and tenants.*<sup>11</sup>

*Socialism and communism do not take root in the ranks of those who have their feet firmly embedded in the sod of America through home ownership.*<sup>12</sup>

Franklin Roosevelt rephrased the sentiment in the middle of World War II when he declared that, “... a nation of home-owners, of people who own a real share in their own land is unconquerable.”<sup>13</sup>

By 1945, home-owning, even for those with little capital, had become the ideal for working Americans. The twentieth-century version echoed a century of Jeffersonian philosophy in equating home-ownership with a strong social order: housing in general, and home ownership in particular, were the cure or prevention of a variety of social ills.<sup>14</sup>

In the years after the war, the nuclear family was advocated as the ideal state, particularly for the young in the working class, and a subtle pressure to marry and settle down made its appearance in the popular culture. Nat King Cole’s hit song, “Too Young,” told the story of teenage lovers who were in fact not too young for marriage. Films such as “Every Girl Should Be Married” urged young men to tame the working woman and return her to domestic bliss. However, marriage alone did not suffice; the proper setting was also critical. In the 1940s and 1950s, that setting was the single-family Cape Cod style cottage in the suburbs. Ads for everything from car wax to tools and paint featured young couples with one or two small children in tow, happily posed in front of a small Cape Cod in a suburban setting. Basal readers discovered the Cape Cod, replacing the urban/ rural dichotomy of the 1930s with the suburban icon.

The relationship between home-owning and good citizenship was expressed in the popular culture as well. In Frank Capra’s 1946 film, *It’s a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey’s father assured America, as well as the villainous Mr. Potter, that home owning was an essential part of the American way of life and that the denial of that basic right to the workers of Bedford Falls would lead to political as well as social tragedy.<sup>15</sup>

Domesticity in a small house was promoted at the political level as well. While the thrust of their rhetoric celebrated the housing policies as the fulfillment of the dream, the language of the policy makers of the 1940s reiterated their confidence in domesticity as a form of social control.<sup>16</sup> The postwar expansion of policies promoting homeownership was presented as a form of insurance against the political subversion of those who were less likely to be committed to the Republican ideology, and by extension, more susceptible to subversive rhetoric--young men who owned no property. In 1945, William Levitt, the builder of Levittown, argued in support of government involvement in the production of low-cost private houses with the promise that "no man who owns a house and lot can be a Communist, he has too much to do."<sup>17</sup>

These samplings of the public stance on home-ownership suggest that the housing programs were intended as much to defuse the potential for political subversion as to house the veterans and that there was as much a political as an economic agenda in the decision to provide the veterans with low-cost housing. In both cases, it was successful. The postwar housing experience is, therefore, a lesson in process; in its attempts to smooth the transition to a peacetime economy, the United States government created a means by which the worker could realize the basic elements of the American dream and in so doing, assume the values and mores so long associated with it.

Government specifications on the houses and floor plans of the FHA were based on traditional middle-class housing forms. It was not the three-room tenement, nor the two-bay dog-trot, nor the one-room log cabin, which were the traditional forms of housing for the working classes. Rather, the Cape Cod of the postwar era was a reduction of the suburban villa to an affordable minimum; its four rooms and bath allowed for the essentials of middle-class life, while its reduced size and scale remained within the financial reach of the worker. It was suited to both its time and its function. In the intervening decades, it has become as much of an icon as the earlier forms of worker housing. Nevertheless, it is important to note that its design was a conscious choice at the time by those who created the policies that funded their construction.

The physical arrangement of domestic space begins as a tacit statement of the values and lifestyles of those for whom it was designed and built. When an architect designs a house for a client, there is an interrelationship between the needs and desires of the residents and the various elements of the floor plan. When houses are constructed for a mass market, the structural elements are tailored instead to the needs and desires of a "typical"--or composite--client as they are interpreted by the deliverers: the architect, the builder, and the lending agencies that fund the construction. Thus, as with the other house forms mentioned above, the houses of the postwar period were intended to function in a particular way.

When the state intervenes in the funding of residential architecture, the government becomes both client and architect. It is therefore important to examine the products of that intervention as well as the cultural values imposed on the residents by the design.

For over a decade, the FHA produced planning bulletins that "suggested" not only construction standards but design and environmental standards as well. In addition, ceilings were placed on the cost of the dwellings that could be produced, thus locking the construction programs into the market of those earning between fifty and sixty dollars per week.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the houses funded by the FHA and the GI Bill were almost exclusively low-cost single-family dwellings in suburban settings. Most had no more than four to five rooms and were marketed to young male veterans in the second economic quintile.

From October of 1947 until the Spring of 1949, the Cape Cod was the only house offered at Levittown on Long Island. Modeled after the recommended patterns of the FHA, the houses were deliverer-designed, traditional in structure and style, and imposed upon a population of young workers desperately needing housing.<sup>19</sup> Their design fostered and reinforced the dominant values of the American middle class, and, despite the traditional association of women and children with house and home, they were marketed primarily to men.

The houses themselves were interchangeable; the interiors, exactly the same. This distinction between identical interiors and variations in exterior design reflects an important difference between the social orientations of men and women toward their houses in the 1940s. For men the house was primarily a place to which to come, whereas for women it was a place in which to be. This difference is directly related to the cultural gender roles vis-a-vis the home; men left it to go to work, women worked within it. Men returned to the house to get away from their work, women left the house to get away from theirs. Men were the

house-providers; how well they provided was largely determined by the size, construction, and aesthetic ornamentation of the dwelling.

Men judged houses by these external standards, the public image of the house, and in turn they were judged by these aspects of their homes. Women, on the other hand, were the homemakers. They were judged by the interior aspects of their houses: its cleanliness and its decorative appeal.

This distinction between gender-related design perspectives is readily apparent in contemporary architectural commentary on the Levittown construction. In the trade journals, there were repeated references to Levitt's "five models" and to the variety of exterior colors and window arrangements. Little notice was taken in either the Levitt generated articles or those written by architectural and housing critics of the fact that the interiors, as delivered, were literally interchangeable: the floor tile in every house, through 1951, was black asphalt "Kentile"; the cabinets and appliances, white enameled steel. Even the candle motif in the stair-rail and over the kitchen cabinets was unvaried from one house to the other. Yet, even within the mass-produced organization of Levittown, some variation in interior scheme could have been achieved, at less cost than the exterior variations the firm provided. The mere rotation of the house-plan on its axis would have offered some variation in interior space. None was provided; the emphasis was entirely on the external appearances.

The design variations were far more concerned with differences in facade design, site orientation, and landscaping as marketing strategies than with differences in room design, floor plan, and the articulation of interior space. This was not an accidental aspect of the housing programs. These houses, after all, were built for "Mr. Kilroy."

In contrast, the community facilities provided by the builder were focused on the assumed needs of women and children; "village greens" provided shopping areas with playgrounds, pools, and--later--schools. These facilities, predicated on the recommendations of the FHA, were oriented toward the needs of a nuclear family.<sup>20</sup> By shaping the available recreation, they served to limit large-group activities in Levittown to those that were essentially domestic, that is, child- and family-centered.

There were few of the traditional male meeting places in early Levittown, and the weekend activities of home maintenance limited the free time of the young residents--particularly during the early years when Levitt could dictate the tasks.<sup>21</sup> The individualization of the dwellings served to keep the nuclear unit intact, while limiting the opportunity for collective activity among the young men.

This emphasis on the nuclear family had been atypical among young families of both the lower-middle and working classes in the years preceding the war, among whom it was more common for the men to gather in male-oriented locations such as bars, firehouses, gas stations, or ball fields.<sup>22</sup> In its early years, Levittown lacked these staples of male bonding and no provision was made for them either by the developer or in the suggestions of the FHA.

Instead, the environment imposed a value that was gaining popularity among the social experts of the popular press as "togetherness."<sup>23</sup> Various defined by such slogans as "the family that prays together, stays together," or "the family that plays together stays together," the emphasis in the 1940s and 1950s was on the family, domesticity, and the single-family dwelling.

For Levittowners in the early years, togetherness was inherent in their houses. Combined with the lack of external gathering places for the men, the size of the house all but forced the young couple to spend most of their recreational time together. The design of the house contained the essentials of suburban living. The footprint of the house was 750 square feet, in which were a 12 foot by 16 foot living room, two bedrooms (12 feet by 12 feet and eight feet by ten feet) and a small kitchen (ten feet by ten feet). The unfinished attic provided the potential for two additional rooms.

Despite the reduction in its interior space, each house was set on a minimum of six thousand square feet of land; fifty percent more than the four thousand square foot minimum required by the building code.<sup>24</sup> The apparent contradiction in adding an extra two thousand square feet of land while omitting non-essential elements in the house is related to the intrinsic value of the Arcadian setting in American ideology. The

lawn and garden represent a twentieth-century version of male domesticity, which is rooted in the nineteenth-century myth of the yeoman farmer.

Levitt reinforced this aspect of the myth by landscaping the plots and including four fruit trees as part of the landscape for each house, and then including in the tenants' agreement the obligation to maintain the landscape.<sup>25</sup> Unlike the cliff-dwelling Ralph Kramden, who was free to spend his evenings at the lodge with his brothers, the young men of Levittown had lawns to mow, bushes to trim, and furniture to refinish.<sup>26</sup>

The size of the houses encouraged a second form of male domesticity. This was the promotion of household production. Due in part to the shortage of labor induced by the postwar building boom, manufacturers had instituted a marketing strategy to move such materials as paint, flooring, plumbing fixtures, and appliances that encouraged the homeowner to "do it yourself!" Magazines supported their advertisers with articles telling their readers "how-to" and suggesting additional projects for them to do, "together." The original size of the Levittown houses virtually demanded that they be enlarged in order to correspond to the customary middle class homes of the period. In addition, the combination of larger plots and smaller houses served as a spur to the construction of ells and outbuildings as the young families outgrew the basic house.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the standardized products that had enabled Levitt to mass produce the houses at Levittown also enabled a handy young man to take on the job of remodeling the house without too much training.

Although the basic Levitt Cape Cod was a clear invitation to home remodeling through addition, no practical space was provided in which to do the work. There was no ancillary space--no garage, no basement, no shed--to provide the workshop for the household. The unfinished attic, which could have served, and indeed, in many cases did serve, in this capacity, was not fit for such use in its original state, having no flooring other than a service catwalk.<sup>28</sup> Thus, there was little opportunity for it to become a male workshop or refuge.

Rather than supporting "do-it-yourself" as a form of recreation, the Levittown Cape Cod, through its lack of amenities, virtually demanded it. Similarly, the lack of separate male space in both the houses and the community reinforced the emphasis on togetherness. There was simply no place else to go.

Despite the limitations, the men of Levittown rebuilt the houses, adding dormers, wings, and garages. They created lush lawns with abundant shrubbery, and they took to their domestic life with great fervor. Today, the residents of Levittown are good, solid, patriotic Americans who ask little more from their government than that it leave them alone. They see themselves as middle class, despite their many years on the assembly line at defense plants such as Republic and Grumman or working as postal workers, truck drivers, police or firemen. They are not on the dole; they do not seek or accept welfare. Indeed, they disdain those who do.

Yet, fifty years ago, they were the beneficiaries of a massive program of government intervention and subsidy. With no cash investment, they walked into houses that the government had regulated, designed, and underwritten. Through the policies of the FHA and the GI Bill, the United States government had not only guaranteed that the lender and the builder would take no risk in handing the veteran the key, it had ensured that the working class would remain loyal to the government that provided the house.

Through the GI Bill, the United States government created a means by which the worker could realize the basic elements of the American dream and in so doing, assume the values and mores so long associated with it. The veterans of World War II are among the most conservative of today's Americans. In Levittown in the Spring of 1991, yellow ribbons and flags were flying in support of the troops in the Persian Gulf and of the president who sent them there. Similarly, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the postwar suburbs remained apart from the civil unrest taking place in the cities and universities.

The postwar housing experience is a lesson in process. The houses were designed for and produced a commonly shared goal of postwar Americans--the promotion and reinforcement of the nuclear family. In other words, the houses fostered the family values that have for so long been associated with the "American Way of Life." One may disagree with the merits of the goal and of the uneven distribution of the means of

obtaining it, but the ability of the GI Bill to secure the loyalty of the worker should not be lost in the evaluation.

Shelter for the original veterans in Levittown consumed twenty-five percent of monthly income. Their mortgages represented a commitment of from two-and-one-half to three years' income, with a single wage earner. A typical young couple in their middle to late twenties with one or two small children and a single paycheck could expect to purchase a house with little or no down payment. The wife could expect to remain at home to raise the children and keep the house, while the husband earned the income. Thus the terms of the housing bills helped to ensure not only that these young people would become members of the homeownership class, but that their homes would foster a traditional way of life.

The single-family home is becoming increasingly difficult to acquire. Among the middle class, young couples have postponed the purchase of a house as costs have risen and down payments have escalated. Older couples are increasingly unable to retain the houses they already own as their income is reduced due to retirement and/ or "downsizing" in the workplace. The number of homeless people has risen steadily, while doubling and tripling up within households has obscured even those numbers.

A wide variety of worker housing forms have already been deemed worthy of preservation, from the tenement of the urban immigrant, to the wood-framed cabin of the slave, or the sod hut and log cabin of the pioneer. It is time to include the postwar Cape Cod, the house form that for over half a century has been the home of the American worker.

For many Americans, the privately-owned, entry-level house and lot, typified by those at Levittown, has become unreachable. Even for those veterans who still qualify, the GI Bill has a one hundred thousand dollar ceiling. With houses routinely selling for more than that, the concept of no-down-payment financing has become meaningless, since the buyer will have to cover the difference between the ceiling and the actual cost of the house. Moreover, a one hundred thousand dollar mortgage represents as much as four years' income for a typical two-income family, and, with real estate taxes, can consume as much as fifty percent of monthly income.

It begins to appear that the postwar American affluence, and the way of life it fostered, was not the permanent revolution it appeared, but rather an aberration. The dispersion of proprietary housing throughout a society as diverse as this one, even though it lasted only a short time, was a noble experiment, the first steps toward decent housing for all Americans. It is a period well worth commemorating.

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#### Notes

1 Richard Severo and Lewis Nfilford, *The Wages of War* (New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989). Davis R.B. Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses; Politics and Veterans During World War II* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

2 In combination with the Federal Housing Administration's postwar revisions of the 1934 Housing Act, the GI Bill made it possible for veterans to become the owners of homes with no capital investment and for banks and other investors to underwrite their mortgages with little risk. Virtually all risk to the private lender would be insured by the federal government under the FHA or the GI Bill and in the case of most veterans, by both. From 1944 to 1948, the down payment was gradually reduced from a minimum of fifty percent on a \$2,000 FHA mortgage, to zero percent on a GI mortgage of \$7,500. Typically, the FHA insured the bulk of the mortgage--eighty percent (later, ninety percent)--while the GI Bill underwrote the balance of the risk.

3 James T. Patterson, *America in the Twentieth Century: A History* (New York, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1989), 304.

4 Hardy to Harry S Truman, 7 September 1945 (OF 63, Truman Papers, HSTL). Cited in Davis R.B. Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses*.

5 For the persistence of the single-family privately owned dwelling as the symbol of the American Dream, see the writings of Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850; reprint edition, New York, New York: Dover Publications, 1969); Gervase Wheeler, *Homes for the People in Suburb and Country* (New York New York. Charles Scribner, 1855); Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home* (1869; reprint, Hartford, Connecticut: Stowe-Day Foundation, 1975), for the nineteenth century; Gustav Stickley, *Craftsman Homes* (New York, New York: Craftsman Publishing Co., 1909).

For the twentieth century see in particular such house and home magazines as *Ladies Home Journal*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Woman's Home Companion*, all of which regularly produced "recommended" house plans for the modern family. See also the reports from Herbert Hoover's Congressional Hearings on Housing for the twentieth century.

For a twentieth century view that is less sanguine, albeit more resigned to the single-family proprietary house at any cost, see John Keats, *The Crack in the Picture Window* (New York, New York: Ballantine Books, 1957); Marilyn French, *The Women's Room* (New York, New York: Harcourt, Brace, jovanovich, 1977); and Gene Horowitz, *The Ladies of Levittown* (New York, New York: Richard Marek Publishers, 1980).

6 With their production redirected to the war effort, many companies used public service ads to ensure name recognition in the postwar economy.

7 It is important to note that in all of this rhetoric and symbolism, the typical American family was invariably white. Minority groups were omitted not only from the advantages of most of the policies, but also from consideration under them.

8 *Fortune* 30 (August 1944).

9 Christopher Hill examines the rise of the unattached worker in seventeenth century England in *The World Turned Upside Down* (New York, New York: The Viking Press, 1972). Studies of the early industrialization period in America show a like concern for the disruptive tendencies of young men, especially the unmarried, itinerant, day laborer.

10 Foreword in John M. Gries and James S. Taylor, *How To Own Your Own Home* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1925).

11 W.W. Jennings, "The Value of Home Owning as Exemplified in American History," *Social Science* (January 1938): 13, cited in John P. Dean, *Homeownership; Is It Sound?* (New York, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945): 4.

12 A. S. Freed, "Home Building by Private Enterprise," address before the Cambridge, Massachusetts, League of Women Voters (26 February 1936): mimeograph, 3. Cited in Dean, *Home Ownership*, 4.

13 Quoted in Cleo Fitzsimmons, *The Management of Family Resources* (San Francisco, California: W. H. Freeman & Co., 1950), 38, 39.

14 Dean, *Home Ownership*, 3.

15 Frank Capra, *It's a Wonderful Life* (RKO/ Liberty Films, 1946). Capra's film presents the character of George Bailey as the American "Everyman." The plot is set against a matrix in which homeownership through the beleaguered Bailey Building and Loan Company is the honorable albeit humble institution, while tenancy under the malevolent banker/landlord Mr. Potter represents the evils of a failed society.

16 For an examination of the political philosophy surrounding the postwar American housing policies, see J. Paul Mitchell, editor, *Federal Housing Policy and Program: Past and Present* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1985); Davis R.B. Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses*, (New York, New York:

Columbia University Press, 1969); and Richard O. Davies, *Housing Reform During the Truman Administration* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri, 1966).

17 Eric Larrabee, "The Six Thousand Houses That Levitt Built" *Harper's* (September 1948): 84.

18 Marc A. Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Joseph B. Mason, *The History of Housing in the U.S., 1930-1980* (Houston, Texas: Gulf Publishing Company, 1982). See also the FHA Land Planning Bulletins for this period: No. 1, "Successful Subdivisions, Planned as Neighborhoods for Profitable Investment and Appeal to Homeowners" (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940); and No. 4, "Neighborhoods Built for Rental Housing" (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1947).

19 Given the ubiquity of the single-family house, it is often overlooked that many veterans had expressed a strong desire for rental property in urban settings, rather than proprietary housing in suburban subdivision.

20 *Successful Subdivisions*, 28.

21 See, for example, the Bethpage Realty lease that demanded the tenant's time and labor, and limited his outdoor activities to those approved by the landlord.

22 For an examination of the social life of blue-collar workers see David Halle, *America's Working Man, Work, Home, and Politics among Blue Collar Property Owners* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1984); Mirra Kornarovsky, *Blue Collar Marriage* (New York, New York: Vintage Books, 1967); and Bennett Berger, *Working-Class Suburb: A Study of Auto Workers in Suburbia* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1968).

See also Dobriner, *Class in Suburbia*, for the school, church and front lawn as the suburban social equivalent of these older establishments.

23 Avodah K. Offit, MD. "The New Togetherness," *McCall's* (March 1986): 20.

24 The investment in land accounted for at least twenty percent of the cost of each house. Thus, by adhering to the building code, Levitt could have saved approximately seven percent on each unit. Moreover, he would have been able to produce an additional six thousand units without investing in any further property.

25 In bold type, Regulation 11 stated, "The tenant agrees to cut the lawn and remove tall growing weeds at least once a week between April fifteenth and November fifteenth." Bethpage Realty Corporation, "Bethpage Renewal 2 8149."

26 Levitt enforced the lawn-mowing among his tenants by inspecting the properties and sending his own landscape crews to mow those lawns that he deemed overgrown. He would then bill the tenant for this service. By 1949, when he had completed the sale of the properties, the Levittown Property Owners Association took over his role as guardian of the community's appearance through their "community appearance committee." See their handbooks under the section "Community Appearance," *Our Town Levittown* (Levittown: Levittown Property Owners Association, 1952, second edition), 11.

27 The pressure to add on to the basic structure was not simply from within the family unit. The Levitt organization began releasing suggested improvements for the homes almost as soon as they were occupied. In November of 1947, Levitt announced the possibility of erecting garages: "The Eagle has also learned that permission might be granted to tenants who desire to build garages in Island Trees. The style, construction, placement and other conditions must be approved by the corporation." *Island Trees Eagle* (27 November 1947): 1.

28 The use of the original attic, in any event, had been strongly discouraged by the third of the bold-type regulations, which imposed a fine for any damage done. *Bethpage Realty Lease*, 1.

In December, Levitt announced the possibility of their finishing the attics, "You May Finish Attics--  
Levitt," Eagle (18 December 1947): 1.