

US History
Social & Economic History of the 1950s

5. The Growth of Housing

The Growth of the Suburbs –

Why move to the suburbs?

1. Country like setting with urban advantages –
2. Privacy –
3. Community of like-minded people –

The Growth of the Suburbs –

-William J. Levitt –

-Levittown –

-1946 bought a 1200-acre potato farm on Long Island, 30 miles east of New York City

Style of homes –

- Cape Cod style homes
- 2 bedrooms, kitchen, living room, and a bath

Construction Methods at Levittown –

- A new home was completed every 15 minutes
- 36 homes per day were assembled on site
- By 1951, Levittown, New York contained 17,500 homes

Typical Day of Construction at Levittown –

1. Bulldozers level the land
2. Streets are paved
3. Concrete slabs are poured
4. Sides and roof are built ahead off site
5. Houses are then assembled

“As one historian described the process: ‘Convoys of trucks moved over the hardened pavements, tossing out prefabricated sidings at 8 am, toilets at 9:30 am, sinks and tubs at 10, sheetrock at 10:45, flooring at eleven.’
Within days several hundred identical houses were ready for occupancy.”

Response to Levittown–

Price of a home at Levittown –

- \$7,990 with kitchen and appliances, landscaping and bank charges included
- Whole package less than \$10,000

Certain restrictions placed on homeowners –

- No picket fences
- Lawn had to be cut on a regular basis
- Laundry could dry on the line only on Mondays
- Door signals had to be chimes, no buzzer or bells
- All eventually were lifted
- By 1960 homes were selling for two and three times their original cost, and the community had a varied and attractive look

Conclusions –

Positive –

“The dream included a safe place for children to play, good schools, and friendly neighbors. Levitt and his imitators made it a reality for millions. Their customers did not seem to care that their daily commuting to the city took an hour or so each way, or that lawn care consumed much of their leisure time. The dream was worth it.”

Negative –