The Built Environment, Utopia, and the American Dream: Suburban Development in the United States in the 19th and 20th Centuries

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The Built Environment, Utopia, and the American Dream: Suburban Development in the United States in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Nicole Schwartz
Senior Thesis
Professor Triff
Spring 2015
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Abstract

This project explores the development and evolution of the suburban built environment in the United States, from the nineteenth century in the wake of the Industrial Revolution into present day. Philosophical movements and the advent of urban planning as a recognized academic discipline at the beginning of the twentieth century contributed to a focus on urban design and development as a way to combat problems within society. Architects and planners were employed to not simply build homes in residential districts, but to increase social capital and foster healthy growth. By constructing a physically perfect model of society, a utopia, planners like Ebenezer Howard believed they could engineer a perfect population. The architecture and urban layout of planned suburbs was meant to facilitate this overall goal for a philosophically united group of people. Embracing modern materials and engineering methods, these planned new towns took on forms that suited the designer’s utopian ideal, which I am defining in this paper as the ‘American Dream’. This dream is rooted in socio-economic factors, most importantly home ownership, which has had a profound effect on the built environment of suburbia. I am looking specifically at three movements from the twentieth century: the Garden City Movement as exemplified by the community of Forest Hills Gardens, New York; the post-World War II single use zoned suburbs inspired by Levittown, New York; and the New Urbanism movement of the 1980’s and 90’s as seen at Seaside and Celebration, Florida. These three movements demonstrated similar American ideals of independence and community, yet have disparate physical landscapes. I am focusing more of my attention at each town’s
plan rather than the architectural style of the buildings, because more thought and 
energy was put into the urban design than the appearance of residential structures. 
A reliance on visual image is part the overall goal to support what was really a 
spatial and ideological shift in urban design sensibility. Ultimately, I am opposing 
the sprawling suburbia that began in the latter half of the twentieth century, which 
has done little to increase social capital and instead has created several problems 
for society. Instead, I am advocating for the construction of planned suburban 
towns that were designed to reduce the emphasis on automobile use, with 
designated public spaces and minimal use of restrictive zoning, similar to the 
Garden Cities or more recent New Urbanist towns, that I believe do more to foster a 
healthy community.
Introduction

No single factor has contributed more to the growth and development of Western cities than the Industrial Revolution. The rise in manufacturing that began in Great Britain around 1760, spreading to the rest of Western Europe and the United States within the next few decades, attracted rural laborers and foreign settlers to cities with the promise of employment in factories.\(^1\) This caused urban populations in industrializing areas like the northeastern United States to reach previously inconceivable levels.\(^2\) At the same time innovations like the skyscraper allowed cities to achieve new levels of density that, when combined with the rising rates of immigration, resulted in excessive congestion and an overall lack of sufficient housing. This sparked movements to regulate and reorganize urban areas, or simply leave the cities altogether, with many people choosing to immigrate to the suburbs. Suburbia, a term that comes from Latin meaning a place “under the city,” refers to the residential districts adjacent to and economically dependent on a large city.\(^3\) Urban historian Kenneth Jackson characterizes suburbs as places that have a primarily residential function and exhibit low density in their spatial form, are

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\(^1\) The Industrial Revolution is separated into two periods, the first phase from 1760 to 1840 and the second phase from 1850 until World War I; see Peter Stearns, *Industrial Revolution in World History* (2013); and Charles More, *Understanding the Industrial Revolution* (2000).

\(^2\) Early industrialization in the United States was limited to New England and the rest of the Northeast, which had fast-moving rivers that could power the mills; see Stuart Blumin, “Driven to the City: Urbanization and Industrialization in the Nineteenth Century.” (May, 2006); for statistics of urban growth, see Adna Ferrin Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century* (1899).

located a substantial distance from workplaces and house residents of middle to upper class status. Suburban growth occurred at a phenomenal rate during the twentieth century, with the suburban population in the United States expanding from 12% in 1910 to over 52% by 2000.

There have been aspects of comprehensive urban planning extant since ancient times, such as those that provide public facilities or regulate private building, but the unregulated growth occurring in industrializing Western cities brought a “new scale and complexity” to urban development. The simple forms of government appropriate for an agrarian-based economy could not keep up with the overwhelming demands of a manufacturing-based society, and the laissez-faire method of urban management that had persisted for centuries had evidently become impractical. This was especially true in countries like the United Kingdom and United States, that had become immensely wealthy, but whose urban working class was living “in the midst of… grimy misery.” During the beginning of the twentieth century urban planning became an organized profession in order to overcome the undesirable features of city life.

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4 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 6-8.
5 U.S. Census Bureau (2000).
8 In his study of the working class in Victorian England, Friedrich Engels describes the living situation in Manchester’s urban slums; see The Condition of the Working Class in England (London, 1887).
9 For more on the origins of the urban planning field, see John Reps, Urban Planning, 1794-1918: An Anthology of Articles, Conference Papers, and Reports (2002); Charles Robinson, The Improvement of Towns and Cities (1901); and Nigel Taylor, Urban Planning Theory since 1945 (London, 2007).
theoretical designs for cities that proposed to provide a better environment for the workers that were the driving force of the booming economy. Planners developed town models based on the belief that if they could create a well designed built environment—the buildings, streets, and public spaces—utilizing modern technology and enlightened ideas of social justice, they could engineer a better society.

Ebenezer Howard, whose book *Garden Cities of To-morrow* accomplished, as sociologist Lewis Mumford acknowledged, “more than any single book to guide the modern town planning movement and...alter its objectives,” was one of the most influential theorists of the early urban planning field. Maintaining that old cities had “done their work,” Howard believed that if mankind was to attain a higher level of civilization there needed to be an extensive transformation of the urban environment. An ardent cooperative socialist, his ideal city for the twentieth century was inspired by earlier planned company towns, such as Cadbury’s Bournville, which emphasized separation between the factory and city center to provide workers with healthy living quarters. Howard wanted to “lure people away from swollen cities like London” and build completely new communities where small-scale cooperation and direct democracy could flourish in the unspoiled countryside. The garden cities would be limited in size to 30,000 inhabitants and


surrounded by a greenbelt of land, so that they could remain both efficient and beautiful. Garden cities became a reality as Howard directly helped found two towns in the English countryside, Letchworth in 1903 and Welwyn in 1920. These towns inspired a greater interest and focus in the design and construction of new suburban communities during the twentieth century, which were becoming increasingly popular among the middle class population.

The idea of the garden city expanded beyond Howard's activities, with his principles being applied to the construction of city suburbs and inspiring official planning legislature. One of the first of these official considerations was the Hampstead Garden Suburb Act, which included provisions that there should not be less than fifty feet between houses on opposite sides of the road, and that houses should be limited to eight per acre. The Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909 went further, making it illegal to build the unhealthy 'back-to-back' housing that had been popular with Victorian developers and compelled local authorities to introduce coherent systems of planning using the principle of the 'garden city'. Immediately following the publication of the Act, urban planning emerged as a scholarly discipline. In Great Britain, the first academic course on the urban planning was offered at the University of Liverpool beginning in 1909. The first university course in America began at Harvard in 1924, proving how popular the English model had

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14 Raymond Unwin, the chief architect of Letchworth, drafted the Hampstead Garden Suburb Act, which was endorsed by Parliament in 1906.

become in the United States.\textsuperscript{16} There is no concrete reason for the lag of academic urban planning across the Atlantic, but one could speculate it was because of a more established tradition of planning in Europe. Basing their work on the model of Howard and his contemporaries, urban planners began designing suburban new towns as an expression of physical and ideological perfection: a utopia.

The concept of utopia, a perfect society, has been dreamed of since the dawn of civilization. The word \textit{utopia} comes from Greek meaning “no place,” which is noticeably similar to the word \textit{eutopia}—Greek for “a good place”—so it is ironic, a good place is no place, and yet throughout time man has not stopped trying to create perfection on earth.\textsuperscript{17} Whether it is the Garden of Eden or Shangri-La, idealizations of paradise have had many expressions over time, based on the civilization proposing them and typically rooted in religious and philosophical convictions. One of the first written descriptions of utopia in the physical landscape was Plato's \textit{Republic}, from 380 BCE.\textsuperscript{18} In it, Plato proposes the foundation of a new class structure that could create a peaceful society. In this society, the new class of philosopher-kings trained from a young age in the virtues of justice and wisdom would rule a proposed city called Kallipolis, “beautiful city”, which would in effect be utopian because of its perfect government structure. In other works \textit{Timaeus} and

\begin{footnotes}

\item[17] The first use of the term “utopia” was by Thomas More, \textit{Utopia} (1516). For more literature on utopia, see Francis Bacon, \textit{New Atlantis} (1627); Edward Bellamy, \textit{Looking Backward} (1888); and H.G. Wells, \textit{A Modern Utopia} (1905).

\end{footnotes}
Critias, Plato described the legendary city of Atlantis, a pseudo-historic embodiment of his ideal state of Kallipolis. The rectangular plan of Atlantis would have contained a mount encircled by five zones of land and water and then divided into sixty thousand plots, each of which was a square (Figure 1). During the Renaissance, philosophers looking back to Plato began to go further into conceptions of utopia, developing new physical interpretations of perfection, like Thomas More's island society illustrated in Utopia. In the book he describes an imaginary island containing fifty-four city-states, with each city limited in size to six thousand families, built up of three-story row houses "so uniform, that a whole side of a street looks like one house." More also suggested that offensive uses be relegated to the countryside and kept away from the city proper.

Literature describing ideal cities inspired by Plato began to appear throughout the next centuries describing ideal cities, and directly influenced the actual construction of urban projects. While under the employment of the Duke of Milan Francesco Sforza, Italian architect Filarete designed a visionary city in the fifteenth century with utopian features. The town, called Sforzinda, had the basic layout of an eight-pointed star with radial avenues and surrounded by a large circular moat (Figure 2). A tower topped each point of the star and the interior

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19 Plato, Timaeus and Critias, from Plato in Twelve Volumes translated by W.R.M Lamb (Cambridge, 1925); see also Warmen Welliver, Character, Plot and Thought in Plato's Timaeus and Critias (1977); and Christopher Gill, Plato: The Atlantis Story (1980).
20 More, Thomas. Utopia (1516).
22 For more on Sforzinda, see Filarete's Treatise on Architecture (Milan, c. 1460); see also Helen Rosenau, The Ideal City: Its Architectural Evolution in Europe (1983): 46-50.
would have a fully-developed town center with three squares to separate the three main functions of the city: one for the prince’s palace, one for the cathedral, and one for the market. One particularly fantastical building that appears in Filarete’s treatise is the House of Virtue and Vice, a ten-story building with a brothel on the bottom and an academy on the top, meant to separate and control the virtues and vices. 24 Concentric city models like Sforzinda exemplified Renaissance ideal planning in their perfect geometric shape, the opposite of the congested and uncontrollable cities of the medieval period, as way to promote harmony and beauty in the landscape. Although Sforzinda was never built, the Italian commune of Palmanova, built by the Venetians in 1593, used the design as a direct influence for construction of their idealistic military stronghold (Figure 3). 25 The contribution of the Renaissance utopian writers helped stimulate thinking about the function of cities and how their planning could make new ways of ordering society possible, which would several centuries later influence the creation of urban planning as a profession.

Like these theoretical utopian cities which were consciously designed, towns in the United States were laid out in a deliberate way centuries before urban planning became an organized academic field, mirroring religious ideals and legal traditions while maintaining features that date back to European models. 26 One such model is the grid plan, invented in Ancient Greece by Hippodamus of Miletus in

24 Rosenau, *The Ideal City*, 46.
26 In his study of Urban America, John Reps identifies several European planning forms that were adapted in the building of American cities; see the first chapter of *The Making of Urban America*, “European City Planning on the Eve of American Colonization” (Princeton, 1965).
the second century BCE. Although driven more by practical than ideological motivations, the grid plan was implemented by the Romans in all their provinces and makes up the backbone of many Western cities (Figure 4). The Hippodamian “gridiron” plan is comprised of straight and parallel streets that can be superimposed on any environment, which was ideal in the New World because it simplified problems of surveying and standardized lot sizes. Land was separated into public, private, and sacred, with public space—shrines, theaters, government buildings, market space, and the agora—clustered at the center of the city so it could be differentiated from the residential blocks, known as ‘insulae’. The agora, the main community space during the time of Hippodamus, is of unparalleled importance, as it served as a physical representation of the role that civic and religious institutions played in community life and how a population views their society. In New England, the Puritans occasionally used the block system to address civil and religious requirements for land distribution, as seen in the 1641 plan of New Haven, Connecticut (Figure 5). New Haven, while not typical for all Puritan towns but nonetheless important, was laid out as nine square blocks with a religious meetinghouse on the central green, so that God’s house was the heart of the community. This goes back to the philosophy of John Winthrop, one of the leading founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who proclaimed that they “shall be a city

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28 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 74.
29 Reps, The Making of Urban America, 128-130; see also Edward Atwater, History of the Colony of New Haven (1902).
upon a hill...[where] the eyes of all people are upon us,” and that their city needed to be a symbolic Mount Zion that inspires unity and community.\textsuperscript{30}

There has been a different trend of development outside of proper towns, in the suburbs. Historically, suburbs formed as places beyond the gates of walled cities where people, usually marginalized populations, would reside outside of municipal protection, living on the “fringe”—both physically and socially.\textsuperscript{31} The outskirts of dense cities were relegated to those who could not afford to live in town, or to large-scale and often noxious industries that required large amounts of land, like slaughterhouses or tanneries. Communities in the periphery were essentially informal shantytowns where prostitution and other unsavory activities took place, nothing like contemporary ideals of suburbia. It was not until later that planned residential suburbs emerged in the countryside, the first being outside of London, which later inspired the garden cities.\textsuperscript{32} Beginning in the eighteenth century, aristocratic members of society began to convert their summer villas in agricultural villages outside of London into their permanent homes in order to increase the physical separation from the “immorality” and “riotousness” of the urban poor, who were seen as more threatening than the suburban residents.\textsuperscript{33}

The proliferation of the current form of low-density American suburbia dates back to the period of Western industrialization when early methods of improved transportation, like the ferry and railroad, allowed residents to commute to work,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{31} Fishman, Bourgeois Utopias, 23.
\textsuperscript{32} Chen, 12.
\end{flushright}
which provided the opportunity to build completely new communities outside of the city. Like their counterparts in London mentioned above, the first suburban “pioneers” were the wealthy industrialists who could afford the expense of traveling by train on a daily basis, and it soon became a status symbol to be able to afford to live in one of the luxurious and exclusive new communities like Tuxedo Park, New York—the gated community from which the term “Tuxedo” originated (Figure 6).

Town like those were essentially groups of mansions, akin to villas outside Rome and Florence or the country estates of the English aristocracy, but surrounding a country club that served as the central public space. There was little or no attention to the creation of a civic or religious center or uniformity in terms of street layout or architectural design. Early suburbs were meant to be a picturesque escape, with the overall effect of living in a large park with sprawling curved roads and ample amounts of nature; the direct opposite of a cramped metropolis.

Beyond being merely a collection of residential buildings, the built environment of suburban communities expresses values deeply embedded in the middle-class bourgeois culture that inhabited it, and although only very few people lived in the early elite ‘country-club suburbs’ like Tuxedo Park, their association with success and a life of leisure helped elevate suburban living to a cultural ideal. The middle class in England and the United States sought isolation from the urban-industrial world in private homes with backyards and ample open space, so the suburbs became increasingly desirable places to reside. The national ethos present

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34 Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 87.
in the American consciousness, the belief that all have the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” as proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, comes into play in many aspects of the country’s suburban built environment. The United States is idealized as a utopia or meritocracy where success is possible for anyone who works hard enough and while different things can constitute success, the ownership of one’s own home has been a perennial status symbol that differentiates between the classes.37 “Nothing makes for security and advancement,” insisted President Hoover when discussing solutions for the rising rates of homelessness during the Great Depression, “than devotion to the upbuilding of home life,” showing that this national preference has not wavered, even in the most extreme moments of debt.38 Owning a private home, then, is a physical representation of the idealistic concept of the American Dream. The private home appeals to the belief that a healthy family thrives best when free of corruption and outside influence, a belief rooted in Protestant beliefs that have been a cornerstone of American culture for centuries.

In the Christian tradition prevalent in the culture of the United States, the family has always occupied an “exalted station,” representing the chosen instrument of God for the reproduction of the species and the propagation of moral principles. Historically life was inescapably public, as households doubled as businesses and city populations were arrayed around production rather than biological units—even

the word home referred to the town rather than a particular dwelling.\textsuperscript{39} However, as ideals of morality were expanded during the Industrial Revolution, the private family zone began to expand in importance.\textsuperscript{40} Demand was made for personal rooms, as the social and psychological concept of privacy insisted upon distinct ‘zones’ for different activities within the home.\textsuperscript{41} In the United States, especially in the suburbs where separate homes were more prevalent, intricate floor plans were developed to allow for such functions like a formal social spaces and private sleeping areas. Magazines and theorists, like prominent nineteenth century urban planner Andrew Jackson Downing, proscribed very specific models for how the house should look and feel on the inside and outside, insisting that their design would encourage an ideal family life. “A dwelling-house for a civilized man,” must go beyond pure functionality Downing insists, as a means of “promoting public virtue and the general good” through a taste for the beautiful and appropriate.\textsuperscript{42} He preached a belief in good design as a means of teaching morality, and this emphasis on design and behavior as a way to instill perfection is based in the same utopian beliefs that influenced the movement of urban planning.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 47.

\textsuperscript{40} In the United States a Protestant revival movement known as the Second Great Awakening began during the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, partially in reaction to the rise of industrialization. See Sydney Ahlstrom, \textit{A Religious History of the American People} (1972); and Richard Carwardine, “The Second Great Awakening in the Urban Centers.” \textit{Journal of American History} (1972).


\textsuperscript{42} Downing, Andrew Jackson. “On the Moral Influence of Good Houses.” \textit{The Horticulturalist} 2, no. 8 (February 1848): 345-47. For more on Downing, see his \textit{Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening} (1841); and David Schuyler, \textit{Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852} (1999).
Suburban town planning has an emphasis on the single-family detached home, because the separate nature of private homes is the direct antithesis of dense urban living. There is something “archetypally American” about the suburban experience, a result of economic, social, and cultural factors distinct to the United States.\(^{43}\) Cheap lots, inexpensive construction methods, and improved methods of transportation all contributed to the prevalence of low-density suburbia in America, distinguishing it from other regions. The United Kingdom, which experienced similar trends of industrialization for example, does not have the same suburban form, despite the fact that suburbia in the United States “differed in no essential respect,” as urban historian Robert Fishman describes it, from the first suburbs that existed outside London during the mid-nineteenth century.\(^{44}\) Economic depression caused by two devastating World Wars and a series of government policies that restricted peripheral development effectively stalled English suburban development; while on this side of the Atlantic there was culture of post-war prosperity.

The explosive growth of the American economy at the beginning of the twentieth century gave it a quantitative edge in new suburban development, and eventually resulted in American suburbia’s evolution into “bedroom communities,” residential districts consisting solely of privately owned single family homes without any sort of commercial or social activity.\(^{45}\) Subsequently, high levels of home ownership distinguished American culture, with an estimated two-thirds of

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\(^{43}\) Fishman, “American Suburbs/English Suburbs,” 237.

\(^{44}\) Ibid, 238.

Americans owning their own dwelling at the dawn of the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{46} Suburbia is described by Lewis Mumford as “a collective effort to live a private life”, part of a cultural ideal that qualifies individual success in terms of wealth.\textsuperscript{47} Living in a private home is an image as “American as apple pie” and the development of suburban communities in the United States reflects the utopian belief in the American Dream of unlimited prosperity.

\textsuperscript{46} Jackson, \textit{Crabgrass Frontier}, 7; most recent U.S. Census Bureau statistics list American home ownership at 64.5\% in 2014 (Feb. 2015).

\textsuperscript{47} Quoted in Lewis Mumford, \textit{The Culture of Cities} (1938).
Chapter I: Industrialism, Growth, and the Garden City

As countries industrialized in the nineteenth century, metropolitan areas—particularly those in the United States and United Kingdom—began to grow rapidly outwards, instigating an “exodus that would turn cities inside out.”\textsuperscript{48} In his essay titled \textit{La Ville Bourgeoisie}, architect and urban theorist Robert Stern identified four clear-cut factors brought about by the rise of industrialization that contributed to the development of the suburbs.\textsuperscript{49} First off, a new class of \textit{nouveau riches} was created by the increased wealth and prosperity that followed industrialization and with their boundless resources came more opportunities to build and live outside of the city. Secondly, better public transportation networks meant factory workers had more freedom of choice when it came to where they lived. Steam locomotives provided the wealthy with the option of living in the open countryside—in what became known as “railroad suburbs”—while closer to the city center, the invention of trolleys and street cars allowed middle class residents to move away from the city center to the emerging outskirt communities. Thirdly, the technological developments of the time came with significant disruptions to the urban core, with unprecedented environmental consequences. Cities were black with smoke and packed with people, which caused outbreaks of disease that made urban life exceedingly unattractive. The fourth factor that drove suburbanization was the perception that living in the urban center was “immoral” and damaging to family and spiritual life. Religious leaders like American Congregationalist minister Horace Bushnell, who gained popularity with his sermons about the rise of industrialization

\textsuperscript{48} Jackson, \textit{Crabgrass Frontier}, 20.
and the changes it brought to domestic life, mourned the loss of the simple ‘homespun’ life. “The spirit of the house is an atmosphere which passes into all and pervades all as naturally as the air we breathe,” he believed, and by ‘spirit of the house’ he meant not only the influence of the parents on their children, but also the impact of the physical surroundings.50 Bushnell and his followers set the theological framework for “home religion,” with a greater emphasis on family unity in pleasant surroundings.51 To them home life in a single-family residence where children had room to play, as opposed to living in a crowded urban apartment, was seen as the most virtuous way to raise a family.

One of the methods proposed to promote morality in the physical environment, on a large scale, was the creation of model industrial villages. During the nineteenth century, factory workers in the northeastern corridor and beyond lived in overcrowded, polluted and poorly built slums. Seeing this, some employers began to go out of their way to provide sanitary living conditions for their workers, either as a way to promote efficiency or because of a sense of moral and religious duty. The first incarnation of this type of town came about during the early nineteenth century in the Northeastern United States, in mill towns like Lowell, Massachusetts.52 To provide decent accommodations for the workers, mostly females who had moved to the sparsely populated areas that had sufficient

51 Ibid, 11; see also the writings of Andrew Jackson Downing, an early urban planner and mentor of Frederick Law Olmsted, “On the Moral Influence of Good Houses.” The Horticulturalist 2, no. 8 (February 1848): 345-47.
52 Reps, Making of Urban America, 414-20; see also Stephen Mrozowski, Living on the Boott: Historical Archaeology at the Boott Mills Boardinghouses (1996): 4-14.
waterpower to operate the mills, companies such as Boott Mills built a series of model boardinghouses, which were built adjacent to the factory complex around a “shady quadrangle” resembling an Ivy League college campus (Figure 7).\textsuperscript{53} As factory employment by women was seen as immoral and degrading, mill owners made church attendance compulsory and required the boardinghouses to be overseen by matrons of “impeccable reputation” to reduce the stigma. The overall physical plan was simple and functional, easily repeated with only minor topographical variations throughout New England for most of the nineteenth century, visible in places like Holyoke, Massachusetts or Manchester, New Hampshire.\textsuperscript{54} These sorts of projects, while practical in the short term, were built with “limited purpose” and lacked “any attention to general convenience, or to beauty,” eventually exhausting most of their functionality over time as water-powered mills were replaced by steam.\textsuperscript{55}

The Civil War stimulated large-scale industry that allowed development to expand with alarming speed, but new accommodations needed to be made for the changing social climate. In the early stages of the Industrial Revolution during the first half of the nineteenth century, labor was just seen as a commodity, one of the many raw materials that could be bought and sold, and very often exploited.\textsuperscript{56} With the foundation of the first national labor organization in 1878, the Knights of Labor,

\textsuperscript{55} Stern, “La Ville Bourgeoise,” 8.
\textsuperscript{56} Reps, \textit{Making of Urban America}, 420.
workers began to see their interests represented in an effective way.\footnote{Organized labor existed before the Knights of Labor, but it was not until the late nineteenth century that it was truly effective; see Melvyn Dubofsky and Foster Rhea Dulles, \textit{Labor in America: A History} (2010); and Harold Livesay, \textit{Samuel Gompers and Organized Labor in America} (1993).} The labor class was beginning to become empowered by the organization of unions, threatening the absolute power of industry owners with the possibility of strikes, which were the most extreme manifestations of labor’s desire to achieve some degree of parity. Fearing this, some companies responded by constructing model towns meant to be conscious idealizations of pre-industrial villages, so that employees were dependent on their employer for housing, shopping, facilities, and credit. New towns were built away from the city center with the goal of fostering a healthy environment, part of a romantic belief that the processes of the industrial age were controllable, as well as to further the distance between factory workers and organized labor politics.

Railroad-car baron George Pullman built his eponymous town in 1880, on the west shore of Lake Calumet “several miles...[from] the busy chimneys of Chicago.”\footnote{Quoted from Henry Demarest Lloyd, “Pullman,” \textit{Harper’s Magazine} (November 1881): 1.} The town was part of Pullman’s idealistic and opportunistic belief that a well-designed industrial complex would provide a healthy family environment, which would in turn benefit the company, as well as to isolate his workers from the anarchists and other “trouble-makers” stirring unrest in nearby Chicago slums.\footnote{Reps, \textit{Making of Urban America}, 421; see also William Morgan, “The Pullman Experiment in Review,” \textit{Journal of the American Institute of Planners} (1954): 27-30; and Stanley Buder, \textit{Pullman: An Experiment in Industrial Order and Community planning, 1880-1930} (1967): 28-37.} The first of example of a romantic industrial village in the United States, Pullman
was a complete town conceived as a unit by a team of architects and landscape designers embodying the most up-to-date theories of urban planning, where individual buildings received as much attention as the layout of streets and parks (Figure 8). The ideological underpinning was that Pullman would demonstrate how industrialization could have mutual benefit to employer and employee. Built on a grid plan with a greenbelt of open land to buffer the community from the factory, the town is noted for its sophisticated infrastructure and pioneering mass-production techniques of house construction (Figure 9). Homes contained amenities unusual for worker’s housing, such as indoor plumbing, gas, and sewers, and while relatively unremarkable in style, the redbrick and limestone homes in Pullman were solidly built with a variety of types to suit the needs to the diverse population of workers. Care was put into the design of the residence’s interiors and exteriors, such as the Romanesque arched windows that reflected the architecture of the Pullman factory. Housing even included private backyards, which were connected by rear service alleys, for residents to allow for fresh air and space for children to play. Pullman in effect was played the role of landlord as well as employer, reminiscent of a feudal lord hiring serfs to maintain the fields of his manor.

Despite the capitalist motivation underlying Pullman’s intentions of making workers dependent on the factory for housing, it resulted in a trend of building projects that would be imitated for decades to come. In England, the Lever

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61 Papadakis, 52.
Brothers’ Port Sunlight from 1888 and Cadbury’s Bournville from 1895 were built with the same capitalist motivation and emphasis on “romantic industrialism”. Instead of turning their backs on the urban-industrial world to which they were connected, which was present in Pullman, these English companies wanted to create a utopia in the countryside where factories could exist alongside farms. With the desire of “alleviating the evils” that had arisen from the unsanitary conditions of the working class, both companies sought to create villages for their employees that were both beautiful and fiscally sustainable.63 Inspired by the model of Pullman, which Lever had visited, William Lever built Port Sunlight with a similarly comprehensive plan, making sure to give more attention to the design of the homes themselves—a mistake he believed Pullman made in its row houses.64 Similarly, homes in Bournville shared this sense of stylistic eclecticism, with cottages built by resident architect William Alexander Harvey. Harvey facilitated the construction of hundreds of cottages in Bournville built with the architectural “honesty” dictated by the Arts and Crafts movement, looking back to the medieval era for aesthetic precedents which he believed suited the bucolic countryside (Figure 10).65 The physical landscape was given consideration as well, based in the belief that one’s surroundings have the ability to impact one’s happiness, with fresh air and exercise made readily available through ample amounts of garden and park space (Figure 11). The town became known as the ‘Factory in the Garden’ because of the

63 Papadakis, 56; quote from Lord Leverhulme in Bournville Village Trust (Bournville, 1907): 3.
64 Ibid, 54.
emphasis Cadbury put on the therapeutic value of the garden, even establishing restrictive covenants for the company’s standards of maintenance for the front, side, and rear gardens of the town’s homes.

Inspired by the industrial villages such as Bournville and Port Sunlight that were being constructed in the English countryside, British urban planner Ebenezer Howard published *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* in 1898, his treatise for the future development of cities free of slums.\(^{66}\) He proposed a plan to “organize a migratory movement of population from...overcrowded centers to sparsely-settled rural districts” in a single well-planned movement: a modern utopia in the country.\(^{67}\) Howard emphasized living in the suburban ‘Town-Country’ so that people could enjoy the opportunities of culture and wealth found in the ‘Town’ while taking advantage of the beauty and fresh-air of the ‘Country’—as illustrated through the “Three Magnets” diagram (Figure 12). The two magnets that would have drawn people in the past, the Town and the Country, were to be synthesized so that “human society and the beauty of nature...[could be] enjoyed together” in the garden city. This way the “free gifts of Nature” such as fresh air, sunlight, breathing room and playing room “shall be retained in all needed abundance.”\(^{68}\)

In Howard’s model, clusters of new towns were to be constructed throughout the countryside, contained by agricultural greenbelts to both limit their size and form a barrier between the new towns and encroaching sprawl. Once a garden city reached the optimum population of about thirty thousand, expansion would cease

\(^{67}\) Howard, *Tomorrow*, 122.
\(^{68}\) Ibid, 113.
and a new city could be built as needed. Howard believed these suburban garden cities would attract residents eager to escape the older over-crowded areas, because they still contained the cultural and economic benefits of urban society without all the unhealthy side effects. Overall, the garden cities were not meant to be anti-urban enclaves of suburban homes, but politically, socially and economically self-sufficient districts. He did not want to develop some nostalgic view of pre-industrial agrarian life, either, but forward-thinking emblems of modernity. Conceptual designs show the communities built up of concentric circles that radiated out of a central space containing important public buildings, shops and restaurants (Figure 13). The circular central space would be laid out like a garden and each city would be connected to other garden cities and older city centers by rapid transit. The concentric model is clearly reminiscent of earlier Renaissance plans for utopia, like Sforzinda, with their circular plan focused on the public space (Figure 2). It is important to note, however, that what Howard was proposing, while similar in concept to the early industrial suburbs like Bournville and Pullman that separated the workplace from the home, had quite the opposite effect. Factory owners built company towns on undeveloped land with the intent to reduce the distance between home and work. The garden cities, and all subsequent forms of suburbia, wanted instead to create distance, relying on transportation to bring employees to the central business district.69

The ideas put forward by Howard proved to be very influential, but they only existed as theoretical concepts, and noted that the schematics of each city would be

69 Chen, 6.
designed as site-specific. In 1903, just a year after the book was published, the First Garden City Limited was formed and purchased four thousand acres of agricultural land near the village of Letchworth with the intention of building a town following principles laid out by Howard.  

The English architects and urban planners Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker gave the garden city its visual identity at Letchworth, England, which appealed greatly to the Arts and Crafts aesthetic (Figure 14). This was considerably counter-intuitive: Howard’s garden city was meant to be the future of urban development, yet the Arts and Crafts movement whose forms Unwin and Parker advocated were rooted in the physical forms of traditional English villages. Modest cottages were built with references to the Gothic era, like steeply pitched roofs and turret-like towers (Figure 15). Use of local building materials in harmonious, attractive groups of homes was another defining characteristic of the movement, which Unwin insisted gave the feeling of “being an organic whole... community” and not just an agglomeration of buildings.  

This way, Parker and Unwin fused the reformist proposals for worker housing and comprehensive design with England’s architectural heritage in a sophisticated and nostalgic amalgam of planning. Letchworth was built with many of Howard’s specifications in mind: a 4500-acre town with an intended population of 30,000 surrounded by a greenbelt of agricultural land. Cottages were built in the English vernacular style popular at the time, which became characteristic of the model villages and garden cities being built at the time.

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70 Papadakis, 58.
71 Unwin, Raymond and Barry Parker. *The Art of Building a Home* (London: Green, 1901), 93.
The construction of Letchworth, a completely new town built on the utopian ideas of one man, influenced the creation of a codified field of urban planning in both the U.K. and in the United States. Frederick Law Olmsted, the famed architect of Central Park and disciple of Andrew Jackson Downing, was one of the early leaders in the field in the United States who optimistically believed in the ability of a planned landscape to influence civilized behavior, rejecting the piecemeal approach of nineteenth century planning. One of Olmsted’s most influential projects in terms of suburban development was the romantic suburb of Riverside outside Chicago, designed in 1869, arguably one of the first completely planned towns in the United States (Figure 16). Olmsted saw the suburbs not as an escape, but a “delicate synthesis of town and wilderness,” where detached dwellings with pleasant surroundings were still supplied with urban conveniences, insisting, “No great town can long exist without great suburbs.”

At Riverside, he and Calvert Vaux created a plan complete with generous home plots and several hundred acres set aside for public parkland in order to create “rural attractiveness” in the town. The roadways were curved to suggest “tranquility” and “openness”, as opposed to the grid, which Olmsted saw as too “stiff and formal” for use in the model suburb. Riverside was unfortunately financially unsuccessful as a result of the devastating Chicago Fire of 1871, but Olmsted’s conception of a proper residential district would be adapted into the designs of his son, Frederick Law ‘Rick’ Olmstead Jr.

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72 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 79; see also Laura Wood Roper, FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted (Baltimore, 1973); and S.B. Sutton, Civilizing American Cities: A Selection of Frederick Law Olmsted’s Writings on City Landscape (Cambridge, 1971).
73 Ibid, 80-81; see also Olmsted, Vaux and Company, Preliminary Report of the Proposed Village of Riverside, Near Chicago (New York, 1868).
Olmsted Jr., who was marked as the “heir apparent” to the family firm at a young age, had assisted on several projects for his father, who in his old age had become ill and unable to work, and soon became a formal partner of his father’s firm in 1895, then joint owner with his brother John.\textsuperscript{74} He soon found himself in the “vanguard of the new discipline of urban planning” that relied on collaboration between a full team of architects and landscape architects to complete an overall city plan. One major project that exemplified the government’s new confidence in urban planning was the 1901 McMillan Plan for Washington D.C., a commission which put Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. at the forefront. The McMillan plan restored Pierre L’Enfant’s original vision for the capital city, which had dulled over the years, giving Americans “little occasion for civic pride.” Olmsted Jr. reassembled his father’s team for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, namely Daniel Burnham and Charles McKim, to construct a comprehensively planned landscape graced with classical architecture, statues, and parks (Figure 17).\textsuperscript{75} The plan was part of the overall movement known as the ‘City Beautiful Movement,’ which believed in reforming cities to reflect monumental grandeur in order to promote a harmonious social order.\textsuperscript{76} Precedents for the City Beautiful movement existed for centuries in the plans such as those for Sixtus V’s Rome and Haussmann’s Paris, which were adapted into the modern plan of Washington. Architects relied heavily

\textsuperscript{74} Klaus, Susan L. \textit{A Modern Arcadia: Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and the Plan for Forest Hills Gardens} (Amherst, 2002): 17.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 26.

on aesthetics, focusing on civic buildings that were predominantly in a neoclassical style, to be united by a network of radiating avenues.\textsuperscript{77}

The highly publicized City Beautiful plans, with their grand boulevards and adorned monuments, were quick to be criticized for being too focused on aesthetics over the practical needs of the population, citing them as “too idealized” to be implemented elsewhere.\textsuperscript{78} There was a demand for a more institutionalized and permanent approach to planning in order to accommodate growing urban populations, to be carried out by trained professionals as a regular function of city government. Olmsted Jr. had become the face of the developing planning movement and he in turn looked to “progressive European cities” as examples for controlling suburban growth in the United States. Beginning in November 1908, he spent the next three months on a study trip of the planned communities and company towns in Europe, focusing on the model villages of Bournville and Port Sunlight and the “celebrated Garden City” of Letchworth. Coincidentally, it was during this trip that Olmsted received the request from Robert de Forest to take part in his new venture of suburban development: bringing the garden city to the United States at Forest Hills Gardens.\textsuperscript{79}

As the example of Forest Hills demonstrates, garden cities were known in America and were quickly imitated as a model for suburban development. Located in the New York City borough of Queens, Forest Hills Gardens is a clear example of


\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 246.

\textsuperscript{79} Klaus, \textit{Modern Arcadia}, 29; see also the chapter on the planned residential community of Forest Hills Gardens in John Stilgoe, \textit{Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb} (1988): 225-238.
Howard’s ideas being brought stateside: the “garden city for America.” Money for
the project came from the Russell Sage Foundation, a philanthropic institution
established by Olivia Sage in 1907. Dedicated to supporting social research and
action, the foundation’s core mission was “for the improvement of social and living
conditions in the United States”. Exposés like Jacob Riis’ *How the Other Half Lives*
revealed the squalid and unsanitary conditions endured by New York’s lower class,
inspiring a wave of reform known as the Progressive movement. Appalled by the
poverty in their own backyard, several wealthy New York families made it their
mission to ameliorate the living situations of laborers. Instead of just donating
money, though, many of the charities were dedicating to “helping the poor help
themselves” through education and by example. They emphasized ideals of self-
reliance and moral responsibility, introducing what they believed to be traditional
American values to a class of working poor overwhelmingly made up of foreign
immigrants.

Mrs. Sage brought in Robert W. de Forest to help provide possible
suggestions for the newly founded Sage Foundation. De Forest was an extremely
wealthy businessman and prominent member of New York society known for his
leadership role in many major charitable organizations, which earned him the

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80 Ibid, 7.
Introduction,” in *The Russell Sage Foundation: Social Research and Social Action in America,
82 Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (New York, 1890); see also Lewis Gould, *America in
83 Glenn, John M., Lillian Brandt, and F. Emerson Andrews. *The Russell Sage Foundation,
1907-1947* (1947)
nickname “First Citizen of New York.”

His philanthropic activities focused on causes that confronted the array of social problems plaguing the increasingly urban American environment, with a particular interest in housing reform. He served as New York City’s first Tenement Housing Commissioner, and was responsible for the establishment of minimum standards for light and ventilation in tenement houses. “Houses are quite as much needed to make good citizens as to make good men,” he asserted, reflecting the importance he saw of home ownership, specifically single-family dwellings. Apartment housing where multiple families could be crammed into such close quarters was looked down upon because of the ability to easily come into contact with what he saw as “immoral influences”. For the Sage Foundation, de Forest proposed the development of model “tenements,” an ideal suburban community built specifically for the working class made up of private single-family homes.

This social endeavor became the first major goal of the foundation. In 1909, a tract of land was purchased in Queens on which their garden city would be built, only a sixteen-minute ride by train to Pennsylvania Station, adjacent to an area known as Forest Park. De Forest hired the architects Grosvenor Atterbury and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. as consultants for the project. Both men came from privileged backgrounds and prominent families, and had expressed interest in social change and architecture. Olmsted had already achieved significant fame as an urban

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84 Klaus, Modern Arcadia, 38; see de Forest’s obituary in New York Times, 7 May 1931.
86 Klaus, Modern Arcadia, 10.
planner, as noted earlier, and he effectively became the figurehead who shaped most of the design of the Forest Hills Project.

Much can be said of Grosvenor Atterbury’s contribution as well. Although he had trained at the École des Beaux-Arts and was known for the stately mansions he designed for wealthy clients on Long Island such as de Forest’s country house in Cold Spring Harbor, his true passion was in housing reform. He served on the New York Tenement Housing Commission, creating designs that looked beyond individual buildings so that aspects like air circulation and natural light were considered for entire city blocks. Atterbury held the firm belief that working-class housing should be as attractive as it was sanitary. This belief led to Atterbury’s interest in developing new methods of construction that could make building working-class housing more affordable and durable. The Sage Foundation had been funding Atterbury’s experiments in prefabricated construction methods since 1907, which came into play at Forest Hills Gardens. He invented a way for houses to be built from concrete panels that were cast off-site, incorporating an internal sleeve so that the molds could be “broken” before the concrete had completely set. The panels could then be moved to the construction site and assembled by crane. This method of prefabrication would later inspire movements in modern architecture and be translated in the assembly line construction model associated with Levittown.

87 Ibid, 49-50.
88 Ibid, 77-78; see also Frederick Squires, “Houses at Forest Hills Gardens—Pre-Cast Hollow Concrete Floor, Wall and Roof Units and Exposed Aggregates,” Concrete-Cement Age 6 (February 1915): 3-8.
With Olmsted overseeing the city’s layout and Atterbury in charge of architectural design, the pair went to work creating the town. Since the Forest Hills site was devoid of many topographical limitations or existing development, the architects had a chance to design a completely original community. When developing the architectural language of Forest Hills, Atterbury and Olmsted looked to the two reigning design movements at the time, the City Beautiful and Arts and Crafts movements, and adapted them to suit the needs of Forest Hills Gardens. Seemingly disparate in terms of style, the two approaches share many fundamental similarities. Both developed in response to the Industrial Revolution, supporting the belief that a comprehensively and intelligently designed landscape could improve the lives of a community as a whole. They also emphasized the use of historical forms and elements adapted for the modern age, harking back to past styles to inspire morality in the population. The architecture in Forest Hills takes much of its physical appearance from the Art and Crafts movement, a clear reference to the British garden cities designed by Raymond Unwin that they were emulating, but the formality of Olmsted’s City Beautiful background is also evident in the community’s layout (Figure 18).

The city plan of Forest Hills is a clear demonstration of collaboration between the two ideologies, a result of long deliberations between Olmsted, Atterbury, and their team of architects. Olmsted chose not to copy the curvilinear road structure of the romantic nineteenth century suburbs, popularized by his father’s plan for Riverside, which was meant to create a park-like atmosphere in the city. Instead, streets were laid out in a way that was meant to seem accidental, as if
they had been built organically over time. The grid was designed precisely to have a sort of “picturesque irregularity based on medieval examples,” combining straight streets with slight bends and subtle variations in width.\textsuperscript{89} Though not a very original idea, the creation of an irregular plan corresponded with the Arts and Crafts aesthetic of the houses and buildings, giving the town the look of having grown organically over many years. This in part was inspired by the work of Camillo Sitte, the Austrian architect whose book, \textit{City Planning in According to Artistic Principles}, influenced the design of Forest Hills Gardens.\textsuperscript{90} In it, Sitte emphasized the creation of an irregular urban structure that included spacious plazas enhanced by monuments and other aesthetic elements, as opposed to hygienic planning that characterized Haussmann’s Paris, with its symmetrically, monumental scale, and fashionable wide boulevards.

In his own plan, Olmstead focused his attention on designing quiet attractive residential streets, discouraging the construction of large thoroughfares like the wind-swept boulevards of New York City, so that each self-contained gardenlike neighborhood would have its own distinctive character (Figure 19).\textsuperscript{91} At this time Queens was not incorporated in New York City, but two roads existed that had been laid out in order to be incorporated into the community by a previous developer before the property was purchased. Olmsted devised a system of roadways based on a hierarchical circulation system, with the two existing avenues, Ascan and

\textsuperscript{89} Klaus, \textit{Modern Arcadia}, 61.
\textsuperscript{90} Sitte, Camillo. \textit{City Planning According to Artistic Principles} (1889); see also George Collins’ book on Sitte, \textit{The Birth of Modern City Planning} (2006).
\textsuperscript{91} Olmsted, Frederick L. “A Suburban Town Built on Business Principles.” \textit{New Boston} (January 1911): 396.
Continental, radiating from Station Square on direct but gently curving lines, and
two other avenues—Burns, which ran parallel to the railroad tracks, and Puritan,
curving through the rear of the property—to carry the through traffic. Each of these
roads would be between sixty to seventy feet wide. The neighborhood streets
would be narrower, averaging forty feet, both to discourage through-traffic and to
provide additional space for planting. These streets, while not “fantastically
crooked,” are not perfectly straight for extended stretches, which allows for
pleasantly framed vistas and gives the town a “cozy, domestic character.” Olmsted
believed that the local streets were one of the suburb’s most attractive qualities so
he designed Forest Hills to a pedestrian scale, assuming residents would use the
convenient local transportation while still accommodating the automobile without
giving it primacy.

The importance of the railroad in daily life was unequivocal, as evidenced by
the prominence of Station Square as one of the main focal points of the town and a
critical part of the overall plan (Figure 20). Olmsted and Atterbury wanted it to set
the architectural tone for the whole development, so the square, one of the most
public spaces in Forest Hills Gardens, deserved an appropriately detailed design.
Bordered on one side by the Forest Hills stop of the Long Island Railroad, the red
brick-paved plaza was meant to look like no mere suburban commuter station, but
rather “an important gateway for the people of the city to a great park.” Atterbury
designed the complex with arcades complete with pointed terra-cotta roofs and

92 Klaus, Modern Arcadia, 70-72.
93 May, Charles C. “Forest Hills Gardens from the Town Planning Viewpoint,” Architecture 34
94 Klaus, Modern Arcadia, 69.

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elegant wrought-iron signposts, providing a marked contrast to the Queens streetscape just across the railroad tracks. He also designed the Forest Hills Inn for the Square, which has a nine-story tower that became a town landmark (Figure 21). The fifteen-room hotel functioned as the community’s social center in its early years, complete with a restaurant, billiard room, and squash and tennis courts that could be used by hotel guests and community residents alike. The Inn also offered a number of “non-housekeeping” apartments, rental units designed for young single men and women who would be commuting to work in the city. Three- and four-story mixed-use buildings containing shops, apartments and offices linked the Inn to pedestrian bridges at the second story level. Formal City Beautiful planning devices such as the incorporation of vistas between public spaces and monuments were adapted by Olmsted to create interesting street scenes at Station Square to avoid any sort of “deadly monotony” in the commercial hub of Forest Hills.  

Passing through the arches of Station Square, a visitor would then face the principal social gathering center, the Village Green (Figure 22). The space consists of a small mall and a green of about three and a half acres bounded by the Greenways North and South, two roads that loop through the central section of the development. Town greens have historically served as the primary cultural and commercial space within a city, comparable to the beating heart of a community. Atterbury planned clusters of terrace housing on either side of the Greenways, to complement and continue the urban quality of the neighboring Station Square complex. Middlemay Circle, a roundabout, punctuates the left side of the green and

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95 Ibid, 73-76.
a prominent housing group bounded by Bow Street terminates the vista to the right. Olmsted then placed a school and playground on a prominent site in this central area, to conclude the entry axis, as was typical in traditional Beaux-Arts planning. The rest of Forest Hills Gardens was planned this way, with quiet tree-lined residential streets of single-family homes and gardens, interspersed with parks and other public spaces. Overall, Olmsted combined his father's principles of design with his own twentieth-century expertise and technology, going beyond a romantic conception of a suburban villa to create a more practical domestic enclave suited for the modern era.

Homes were semi-prefabricated and built in sections, making it possible to work on several houses at once efficiently. Using the construction methods developed by Atterbury, such as 'Nailcrete,' a type of concrete into which nails could be driven into as easily as wood, houses could be built in a little as nine days. Atterbury revealed the artistic potential of concrete in his work, exploiting its ability to be molded, colored, and textured. Under his guidance the cold, hard medium came to life with the addition of crushed roof tiles, bright pebbles, and bits of mica and quartz that gave color and sparkle to the houses. Cast-concrete balconies, railings, grilles, pierced chimney tops, signage panels, and light-poles were all created using covered wooden molds (Figure 23). He also was able to simulate half-timbering by inserting stucco-covered terra-cotta blocks and brick-veneer panels into hollow sections of precast concrete. Stylistically, the architectural and landscape design created by Atterbury and Olmsted was inspired by the Arts and
Crafts Movement, which they described to the press as "the English type." Atterbury’s designs incorporated an extensive mix of architectural styles and features—Tudor half-timbering, arched entryways, prominent chimneys, second-story overhangs—evoking associations with medieval European cathedral and university towns and country villages in feudal England. Although this style was not unusual at the time, Atterbury’s use of bright colors was certainly striking. From the warm reddish-brown terra-cotta tile that covers most of the town’s roofs to the rich peacock blue chosen for features such as the lamp-posts and wrought-iron signs, the subtle variety of color helped create the illusion that Forest Hills Gardens had evolved over a period of many years.

Olmsted and Atterbury also created a formal system of organization for building construction. Buildings were separated into different groups, classified by size and function. Residences were primarily single-family houses with four to twelve rooms, but they also included some rows of semi-detached two-family houses. Group one included the Station Square complex and the area just beyond, where Atterbury placed blocks of attached and semidetached houses, reminiscent of English row houses (Figure 24). A common roofline gave the appearance of a single dwelling, while distinctive arched doorways defined individual entries, which would have been stylishly embellished with turrets, brushed concrete grilles, and decorative brick panels. In contrast, group two consists of fourteen small four-room houses.

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97 Klaus, Modern Arcadia, 85.
attached units clustered around a semicircular drive, offering some of the least expensive housing in the community (Figure 25). Dormer windows, conical towers with rounded bays, and slender concrete chimneys with simple facades broke up the large roofs of these buildings. Ten more housing groups designed by other architects invited by the foundation to contribute plans echo the style of these first groups, but had much simpler features, although Atterbury’s attention to detail is still visible in their well-crafted brick and concrete façades. Atterbury’s buildings exhibited a “harmony only conceivable where there is a fundamental architectural principle” underlying the whole, just as Olmsted’s landscape plan harmoniously interwove public and private areas so that common spaces flowed up to individual gardens.99

Housing prices were a major source of debate in the development of Forest Hills Gardens. In July 1909, the executive committee decided on the types and costs of the houses the Sage Home Company would build in the community’s first stage of development. The least expensive house would have five or six rooms, offered at $3,000 and could be rented for $25 a month. At the other end of the scale was the three-story single-family home with thirteen to fifteen rooms, not to exceed a construction cost of $8000.100 Homes in the community were to be targeted at the middle class, causing many critics to point out that the most needy would not directly benefit and that the project was “a fairy tale too good to be true.”101 De Forest repeated the fact that Forest Hills Gardens was not intended for the “laboring

99 Ibid, 447.
100 Klaus, Modern Arcadia, 65.
101 Ibid, 7; Quoted in article in New York Tribune (December 1, 1910).
man, whose wages are small” as land costs were too high to permit purchase by this class of worker, clarifying that while the project was a philanthropic endeavor, it was not “managed as a charity.”

De Forest and Olmsted insisted that the community was meant to be a paradigm of growth “with an idea of future development,” focused on setting a standard for suburban design. The Sage Foundation was taking a gamble on developing the land because they wanted to show that it was possible to make money on an attractive well-built suburb, the intention being that their successful experiment in modern town planning would be widely imitated. That way, they hoped Forest Hills Gardens would become an “example to the growing suburban districts of New York” and eventually be the norm throughout the United States.

Many people looked at Forest Hills as the example of how successful the movement towards planned suburbia would be. Clarence Perry who, along with his physician wife, was one of the first fifty families to move to Forest Hills Gardens, used the town to illustrate the new type of residential community, identifying six elements that defined a planned neighborhood unit: size, boundaries, open spaces, institutional sites, local commercial area, and internal street system. He used these elements to determine the success of a planned community. The shortcomings he saw at Forest Hills he believed to be due to unforeseeable

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104 Klaus, Modern Arcadia, 12.
105 Perry, Clarence Arthur. “Forest Hills Gardens as a Neighborhood Community,” in Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs 7 (1929); see also Clarence Arthur Perry, Housing for the Machine Age (New York, 1939).
conditions, and overall he believed that the planner’s efforts created a rich communal life. Despite intense scrutiny, the general consensus is that Forest Hills Gardens was a milestone in the history of the American suburb, serving as an example for generations of planners. Architect and historian Robert Stern hailed its unique combination of city planning and architecture, calling it “the most important suburb built in New York.”

Olmsted and Atterbury’s response to the boom in urban development in the early 1900s can be judged as a success on different levels. Purely as a business investment, de Forest admitted it was not profitable, as the Sage foundation lost $360,800 on its investment in the project. However, in terms of “planning, restrictions, maintenance charge, basis of sales, investigation of prospective purchasers,” de Forest claimed, “it has been entirely successful” in accomplishing what the foundation intended to achieve. The Sage Foundation went into the field of suburban real estate development hoping to further the state of the art, and demonstrated how a carefully planned town could be created that would be imitated.

In the decades that followed, increasingly radical experiments in suburban development began to appear in the manner of Forest Hills, the most notable being Radburn, in Bergen County, New Jersey (Figure 26). Heralded as “a garden city for the motor age,” Radburn attempted to accommodate the automobile without giving it priority over all other concerns, showing the rising importance of automobile-
Based transportation in daily life. Designed by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, the town separated vehicular and pedestrian traffic, with all facilities accessible to residents on foot using pedestrian over- and under-passes (Figure 27). The town was encircled by a main beltway meant to divert traffic around the community, based on the developer’s ambivalence to allow automobile traffic into their town. Stein and Wright, like Olmsted and Atterbury, believed in the benefits of modern technology, but were still hesitant to let it rule their plan. While still maintaining the planning features for which Forest Hills was known for, Radburn displays a pragmatic reaction towards the automobile age in American society. Cars would become a ubiquitous feature of suburbia in the second half of the twentieth century, and while planned suburbs like Forest Hills Gardens and Radburn tried to keep it out of their communities; its presence and power were undeniable.

Forest Hills Gardens is representative of the first steps in the direction of a ‘Brave New World’ of contemporary urban planning at the turn of the century, bridging the tradition of historic architectural forms with the most modern construction techniques and machinery. At once modern and classic, seemingly timeless, it was part of a time when the population was still learning to cope with the massive amounts of information and new inventions being introduced in quick succession. There is both an ambivalence and an excitement towards this modernity visible, as the world was learning to adapt to a new culture of convenience and reliance on technology while to a degree still holding on to the time-honored traditions of past.

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Ibid, 156; see also Eugenie L. Birch, “Radburn and the American Planning Movement” (1980).
Chapter II: Sprawl in the Automobile Age

When Daniel Burnham and Frederick Law Olmstead were designing the 'White City' for the 1908 Chicago's World Fair, they envisioned an America of classical forms engineered with modern techniques. Three decades later, the 1939 New York World’s Fair ushered in a new era: the age of the automobile. Sponsored by General Motors, the massive Futurama exhibition at the fair—proclaimed the "world of tomorrow"—prophesized the ubiquity of the car in America.110 Futurama was a utopia forged in urban planning, and focused on modern technology as the means of delivering the American Dream. The exhibit was a dramatized visualization of the year 1960, introducing a solution to the “planless, suicidal mess” facing American drivers.111 Norman Bel Geddes designed a streamlined network of cities connected by a series of efficient motorways that dominated the landscape, years before any sort of interstate highway system (Figure 28). Visitors flew over miniatures of carefully organized modern cities, segregated by function for “greater efficiency and...convenience,” and over suspension bridges that expanded into picturesque suburbs.112 Metropolitan areas were designed to be dense, with most of the urban population living in skyscrapers topped with helicopter pads, and the surrounding scenery reserved for decentralized planned communities and farmland. A vast circular airport with an adjustable hangar is also included, in accordance with the imaginative and fantastical vision Futurama presented. At the

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end of the ride visitors received a button reading ‘I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE,’ and what an optimistic future it was.

For better or worse, Bel Geddes predicted just where the country was headed, though his vision would take a few years to be realized. While the fair was going on in New York, tensions were coming to a boil overseas and it was clear that war was imminent. It was not until after the Second World War that a significant boom of suburban development could occur, a result of a marked rise in wealth, industrial production, and a boom in population. Amid the Great Depression and the war American cities had been experiencing a major housing shortage, and between the years 1928 and 1933, residential construction had fallen by ninety-five percent, with thousands of families losing their property due to foreclosure. The Federal Housing Administration was created in 1934 to combat this issue, based on President Roosevelt’s desire for a program that could stimulate building by regulating the rate of interest and terms of mortgage, increasing the amount of people who could afford a down payment on a house and thus the demand for single-family homes. It was one of the many government projects sponsored as part of his New Deal Administration that also included the Works Progress Administration, which stimulated the construction of public highways. The FHA

115 The New Deal was a series of domestic programs enacted during the 1930s as part of Roosevelt’s response to the Great Depression. This included the WPA, the largest and most ambitious of these programs, that employed millions of unskilled workers to carry out public works projects, including the building of roads and public buildings; see Jason Scott Smith, A Concise History of the New Deal (2014); and Donald Howard, The WPA and Federal Relief Policy (1943).
was designed in order to meet Roosevelt’s demands for a project that relied on private enterprise over government spending, created to “encourage improvement of housing standards...[and] exert a stabilizing influence on the mortgage market.” That way, building could commence and unemployment, which stood at a quarter of the workforce that year, would be alleviated.

The FHA was later supplemented by the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill, which effectively created the Veterans Administration and led to a significant increase in construction.117 Designed to help soldiers returning from World War II purchase a home, the bill insured long-term mortgage loans made by private lenders for home construction. The government was thereby encouraging those lenders who had money to invest it in residential mortgages, effectively helping thousands of vets to acquire low-cost mortgages and purchase their own home. Soon it was exponentially cheaper for families to buy a new home in the suburbs than to rent an apartment in the city. It was extremely successful: in the years between 1934 and 1972, the amount of Americans living in owner-occupied dwellings rose from forty-four to a whopping sixty-three percent.118 This meant that the government was assisting millions of families live the American Dream of owning their own home, further perpetuating the idea in the country’s psyche. The middle-class suburban family with a new house and a long-

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116 National Housing Act of 1934; see also Albert Monroe, How the Federal Housing Administration Affects Homeownership (Cambridge, 2001).
117 Servicemen’s Readjustment Bill of 1944; see also Kathleen Frydl, The G.I. Bill (New York, 2009); and Edward Humes, Over Here: How the G.I. Bill Transformed the American Dream (2006).
term, fixed-rate, FHA-insured mortgage soon became a symbol of the American way of life.\textsuperscript{119}

In addition to providing the financial means for residential construction, the FHA also set very precise standards for what could be built and where, assigning factors of desirability to certain types of neighborhoods. Eight criteria were established and given a percentage weight, in order to teach underwriters how to measure a residential area's quality. In that model the two most significant factors, “Relative Economic Stability” and “Protection from Adverse Influences”, counted for sixty percent alone, more than the other six factors, like “Adequacy of Civic, Social, and Commercial Centers” which only counted for five percent, combined.\textsuperscript{120} This was interpreted as prejudicial against heterogeneous environments, like traditional mixed-use and multi-family projects, that were characteristically denser than suburban towns. According to the 1938 Underwriting Manual distributed by the association, older crowded neighborhoods contained features, like smoke and odor, which were considered “undesirable” and could lessen appeal.\textsuperscript{121} Building new communities in the suburbs, instead of renovating older inner-city neighborhoods, would then sidestep all these issues and make a community more fit for government investment.

Another detractor to an area’s value, consistent with racism and segregation-based legislation from the time, was having “inharmonious racial or nationality

\textsuperscript{119} Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 206.
\textsuperscript{120} FHA Underwriting Manual (Washington, 1938); quotes taken from sections 1303-1316. Two editions were published, one in 1938 and the second in 1947. In 1958, the first two categories were renamed “Physical and Social Attractiveness” and “Protection Against Inharmonious Land Uses.”
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, 1310.
groups” living together in a neighborhood. No concern was given by the administration to equal opportunity housing during this time, with race only considered to the extent of how a changing neighborhood composition would affect land values. The FHA insisted a community would lose its value if it contained a diverse mix of social or racial classes, leading to the inclusion of restrictive covenants in many administration-sponsored suburban neighborhoods. Such racially based covenants, although not specifically endorsed in either of the 1938 or 1947 Underwriting Manuals, were implied by context, and there is little doubt such practices were deemed desirable by FHA appraisers. Even when the Supreme Court deemed it illegal in the 1948 ruling on Shelley vs. Kraemer to enforce covenants that prevented black occupancy, as they were “unenforceable as law and contrary to public policy”, the practice of suburban segregation continued.

In reality, the Supreme Court ruling only warned speculative builders that had not filed covenants of their right to do so, giving them “convenient respite” in which to file. This left the blighted inner cities, like Detroit’s infamously divided black enclave adjacent to Eight Mile Road, as one of the only areas where minority groups could live, having been banned from new communities in the periphery. Suburban paradise as proscribed by the federal government was meant to be a homogeneous haven for white citizens, excluding minorities from the convenience and comfort of the suburban American Dream. The term ‘white flight’ was used to describe the trend of

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122 Ibid, 980-82.
124 Straus, 222.
large-scale migration of whites of all different European ancestries from racially
diverse urban areas to largely homogenous suburban areas, which was supported
by government practices of redlining and mortgage discrimination. This resulted in
an overcrowding and physical deterioration of inner city neighborhoods where
minorities congregated.¹²⁵

In 1939, plans of six “typical American houses” were distributed to each of
the FHA’s fifty regional offices to show the types of homes they wanted
underwriters to fund. These homes, mostly bungalows or colonials on large lots
with driveways and garages, were all in line with the standards enforced by the
government for new construction. Minimum requirements were set by the FHA to
enforce lot sizes, setbacks from the street, separation from adjacent structures, and
width of the house itself, which eliminated whole categories of homes, such as the
traditional sixteen-foot-wide row houses found in Baltimore, from being built. Even
apartment owners were encouraged to look into suburbia, which was amounting to
a “privately owned and privately controlled park area.”¹²⁶ A practice of restrictive
zoning was enforced in suburbs, so that any single-family residence could not be
converted into a store or office, as was the tradition in older towns where families
would typically live in an apartment above their shop. The separation of functions
and use-based zoning is also known as Euclidean zoning, stemming from a 1926
Supreme Court decision that upheld the town of Euclid, Ohio’s right to segregate
various functions across the community and place limits on individual’s property

¹²⁵ See Thomas Sugrue, The Origins of Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit
(2005).
¹²⁶ Quoted in Federal Housing Administration, Rental Housing as Investment (Washington,
1938): 30.
rights, which soon became a widely accepted practice for government city planners. There has been a historical tradition of using urban planning as a way to designate uses for land, dating back to precedents like the ancient Hippodamian plan that used a grid to separate public, private and sacred space. As industrialism began to have unwanted effects on city environments, there was intervention on the part of the government to set aside land, usually in the suburbs, for undesirable functions like smoke-producing factories. This had a different effect in the suburbs financed by the FHA. Zoning codes were developed in a way that left huge areas of land restricted for residential use only and consolidating all commercial activity to an entirely separate zone. This would result in a reliance on the automobile, because it became impractical to walk or use public transportation within a subdivision.

When Henry Ford first debuted his assembly line construction technique in December 1913, Americans were still reliant on public transportation methods—trains, most likely—to get to work. This meant a reliance on a central business district, because that was where tracks “radiated” out of “like spokes.” Early suburban communities were reliant on being in close proximity to a train station if they wanted to attract families, like the emphasized Station Square in Forest Hills Gardens. The ratifying of the Federal Aid Highway Act in 1956, popularly known as the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act, allocated thirty billion dollars for

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129 Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 113-114.
the construction of some 41,000 miles of interstate highways, which highlighted the shift in the American consciousness from mass transit to personal automobile use.\footnote{Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956; for more see Dan McNichol, \textit{The Roads that Built America: The Incredible Story of the U.S. Interstate System} (New York, 2006).} Well-maintained roads could connect the suburban workers with their urban offices with speed and ease, making driving more convenient than taking public transport. This facilitated the growth of suburban areas, opening the possibility of developing land further without a dependence of public transportation networks. By the time of the 1960 census, which was the first to include questions specifically about commuting, an overwhelming majority of Americans used a private automobile to get around.\footnote{U.S. Census Bureau, 1960.} The number, which stood at forty-one million that year, has been continuously increasing over the decades, with an estimated 254.4 million registered passenger vehicles as of 2007 survey completed by the Bureau of Transportation.\footnote{Bureau of Transportation, 2007.} Not coincidentally by 1960, seventy-nine percent of Americans owned at least one car.\footnote{Davis, Stacy, Susan Diegel, and Robert Boundy. \textit{Transportation Energy Data Book}. Rep. 30th ed. U.S. Department of Energy (2011).} During this period an estimated one in seven Americans was employed in the automobile industry, either directly or indirectly. This “dream” of home ownership had now extended to, and was in turn based upon, car ownership. Postwar America truly was a nation of drivers, just like Futurama had predicted, and it was this ubiquity of the automobile that facilitated an escalation of outward sprawl.

A possible underlying reason behind the government’s insistence on such low-density, mono-functional city planning and automobile reliance were the fears
and paranoia associated with the Cold War.\textsuperscript{134} Although there was an obvious need for housing in the years following World War II some theorists, like political scientist Barry Checkoway, call into question the sudden escalation in this specific form of suburbanization? He credits the "decisions of large operators and powerful economic institutions" supported by the federal government, not the public who had "little real choice" in the matter, for the continued expansion of suburbia.\textsuperscript{135} There was a belief that if the Russians were going to develop a nuclear weapon, which was a major fear in 1950s America, by decentralizing the country's urban population significant damage and death could be prevented. The United States was aware of the vulnerability of densely populated cities as targets of atomic attack, and therefore advised measures be taken to disperse urban populations—at the very least the white population.\textsuperscript{136} The legislative process that shaped the Interstate Highway Act of 1956 highlighted the perceived need for a road network that could facilitate evacuation in the event of an atomic attack, as part of a system of 'defense through decentralization'.\textsuperscript{137}

Seeing the opportunity presented by the political climate of pro-suburban legislation, the building firm Levitt and Sons purchased undeveloped potato fields in the village of Hempstead on Long Island, New York, and set about planning the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{134}] For a history of the Cold War, see Walter LeFeber, \textit{America, Russia, and the Cold War: 1945-2002} (2002); see also Elaine May, \textit{Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War} (1988).
\item[\textsuperscript{137}] May, \textit{Homeward Bound}, 169.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The biggest private housing project in American history.\textsuperscript{138} The building firm, founded by Abraham Levitt in 1921, existed before World War II as a builder of custom-homes for upper middle-class communities on Long Island. Private commissions carried Levitt until 1941, when the firm, then run by his sons William and Alfred, received a government contract for sixteen thousand war worker’s homes in Norfolk, Virginia. The project allowed the brothers the opportunity to learn how to lay dozens of concrete foundations in a single day and preassemble walls and roofs. This, combined with William Levitt’s repurposing of Fordist mass production techniques for building military housing that he had learned in the Navy, gave the firm a new role as the nation’s largest home builders. They returned to Long Island after the war and began the process of acquiring four thousand acres of land, upon which they would build the town for which they would become infamously known. Embracing such utilitarian systems of construction to build the town, which was named in their honor, homes were built with an emphasis put on speed, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness.\textsuperscript{139}

The construction process for Levittown was very simple and efficient, divided into twenty-seven distinct steps so, just as in the assembly-line factories developed by Henry Ford; crews were trained to do one job each. First, land would be bulldozed and trees removed, leaving it completely flat and bare. From there, trucks would drop off building materials at precise sixty-foot intervals, marking each housing plot. Homes were built without a cellar on top of a concrete slab with

\textsuperscript{138} For a complete history of Levittown, see Lynn Matarrese, \textit{History of Levittown, New York} (Levittown, 1997); see also Margaret Ferrer, \textit{Levittown: The First 50 Years} (1997).

floors made of asphalt and walls of composition rock-board (Figure 29). Every possible part, especially the most difficult ones, would be preassembled in the central Levitt factory in Rosslyn so they could be interchangeable, inexpensive and uniform, which enabled entire neighborhoods to be built with efficiency and ease. By using central shops, the Levitt’s reduced the skilled component to less than forty percent. They defied unions and union work rules, insisting subcontractors only work for them. This sort of vertical integration also meant the firm would make its own concrete, grow its own timber, and cut its own lumber. For example, lumber came from Levitt-owned Grizzly Park Lumber Company in Blue Lake, California, where it would be loaded into freight cars to go directly into a cutting yard. From there men would cut parts, each completing for ten houses a day, so it all arrived at the building site ready to be assembled. The firm also bought all its appliances from wholly owned subsidiaries.\textsuperscript{140} New power hand tools like saws, routers, and nailers also helped increase worker efficiency, which was at more than thirty houses a day at their most productive.

Alfred Levitt, an architect, designed the development’s first housing model seen at Levittown, the Cape Codder (Figure 30). The typical Cape Cod was down-to-earth and unpretentious, not meant to stir up the imagination, but to provide the best shelter at the lowest price. Each house was about seven hundred and fifty square feet and included a twelve-by-sixteen foot living room with a fireplace, one bath, and two bedrooms with possibilities made for expansion upstairs into the unfinished attic or outward into the yard (Figure 31). Basic in style, the Cape Cod

\textsuperscript{140} The process of prefabricated development is described in Burnham Kelly, \textit{The Prefabrication of Houses} (New York, 1951): 59-68.
resembled a pseudo-colonial design that was very popular in the Northeast. The floor plan was practical, with the kitchen moved to the front of the house near the entrance so mothers could watch their children playing in the street from kitchen windows. Living rooms were placed in the rear with a picture window overlooking the back yard, which would be an important social space in the culture of the 1950s. The earliest Cape Cods went for $6,990, which would have been very affordable for the first residents of Levittown with a FHA mortgage. Levitt houses became a symbol of the American home of the future, coming complete with modern technology like up-to-date appliances and a carport. A Bendix washer included in every purchase price, as well as an eight-inch television, then a brand new piece of equipment.

The Cape Cod designed remained popular in the post World War II years, when it was featured as a bargain for veterans, but it fell out of fashion in the following years as new housing models were introduced, with one trend becoming popular after the next. In particular the ranch house, introduced in 1953, found lasting status, as it was evocative of the expansive mood of the time and the disappearance of regional style (Figure 32). Just as popular in Westchester County as it was in the suburbs of Los Angeles, the ranch derives much of its style from the prairie houses of Frank Lloyd Wright, with their low-pitched roofs, deep eaves, and pronounced horizontal lines. Although the typical ranch houses were no larger than the average home of a generation earlier, the minimal use of interior and exterior decoration of the one-level ranch suggested spacious living and a

relationship with the outdoors. In contrast with its previous predecessors from the turn of the century, the house had no hall, no parlor, no stairs, and no porch, and the portion of the structure that projected farthest toward the street was the garage.\textsuperscript{142} The inclusion of the garage in house designs highlights the importance of the automobile for the development of Levittown, which would pave the way for car culture to drive mono-functional sprawl to grow around American cities. As Paul Goldberger, the \textit{New York Times}' architecture critic noted, houses in Levittown were "social creations more than architectural ones...[turning] the detached, single-family house from a distant dream to a real possibility for thousands of middle-class American families."\textsuperscript{143}

In design, Levittown was not built with an emphasized formal plan like Forest Hills Gardens, but there aspects of planning visible (Figure 33). Streets, invariably called “roads” or “lanes”, were curvilinear to suggest a park-like atmosphere, as was the tradition of Olmsted’s Riverside. Through traffic was diverted to peripheral thoroughfares, or “collector” or “feeder” roads.\textsuperscript{144} Open space was essential, with all houses completely detached and surrounded on every side by their own plots, which were on average one-fifth of an acre. Levittown was settled at a density of 10,500 people per square mile, which became about average for postwar suburbs.\textsuperscript{145} This design was built on the assumption that residents would have

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{142} McAlester, Virginia and Lee. \textit{A Field Guide to American Houses} (New York, 1997): 479-80; see also Alan Hess, \textit{The Ranch House} (New York, 2005).
\item \textsuperscript{145} Lansing, John B., \textit{Automobile Ownership and Residential Density} (June 1967).
\end{itemize}
automobiles, and those without cars faced severe limitations in access to jobs and shopping facilities. Commercial activity was separated into distinct zones, usually not within walking distance of the homes themselves.

Social life in Levittown, and postwar suburbs in general, was indefinitely shaped by the design. Community facilities in the “village greens” built by Levitt focused on the assumed needs of women and children, providing features such as playgrounds, swimming pools, and baseball diamonds. By determining the available recreation, activities in Levittown were limited to the child- and family-centered and served to limit large group activities. Traditional male gathering places that existed before the war, such as bars and gas stations, were not made available by both the developer and the suggestions of the FHA. In addition to the lack of external gathering spaces for men, the size of the house all but forced the young couples to spend most of their time together. This value of familial togetherness was imposed on the social environment, so that the emphasis was clearly on the perceived needs of the nuclear family. Variously defined by slogans such as “the family that plays together stays together,” shows that the emphasis in Levittown was on the family, domesticity, and the single-family dwelling.

Initially limited to veterans, Levittown was twenty-five miles east of Manhattan making it particularly attractive to new baby-boomer families. Within two days of the community being announced on May 7, 1947, over half of the

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original two thousand properties had been rented. Months before the first three
hundred Levitt houses were occupied, customers had stood in line to rent one of the
units, initially offered at sixty dollars per month. The first eighteen hundred houses
were only available for rental, with the option to buy after one year of residence.
The total for mortgage, interest, principal, and taxes would have been less than
rental, so virtually every family bought their home. So many of these purchasers
were young families, that the community newspaper Island Trees noted, “most...are
within the same age bracket, in similar income groups, live in identical homes and
have common problems,” which effectively held the community together.
Ultimately containing more than 17,400 separate houses and 82,000 residents,
Levittown was the largest housing development in history ever put up by a single
builder.

Soon Levitt and Sons began to develop similar Levittown communities in
Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Puerto Rico, so that the ‘white picket fence’ detached-
home suburban dream become a reality for thousands of American families. Even
though Levitt did not actually pioneer many of the mass-production techniques,
such as the use of plywood, his developments were so widely publicized that the
firm because the iconic face of post-war suburbia. In its design and development,
Levittown represents a ‘type’ of suburban form that became prevalent across the
United States during the mid-to-late twentieth century. Typology refers to the

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(September 1948): 79-88.
149 Quoted from the Island Trees community bulletin titled Thousand Lands, 1 (November
150 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 235.

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taxonomic classification of physical characteristics commonly found in urban places and buildings that are associated with a specific category, such as intensity of development or school of thought. Individual characteristics form patterns, which in turn determine a type. For example, a cruciform-shaped building that includes two bell towers at the front entrance can be easily identified as a church, because of its historic associations with European cathedrals.\textsuperscript{151} In the case of Levittown, the low-density form where single-family homes sit on large lots well set back from the street surrounded by mowed lawns and ornamental landscaping, has become associated typologically with suburbia in the United States. Levittown, New York is significant for mass-producing this type of urbanism, with thousands of virtually identical towns surrounding every major American city by the end of the twentieth century. The Levitt house was a basic component of post World War II suburban development, just as the “Model T had been to the automobile,” because the actual design features were less important than the fact that they were mass-produced and therefore priced within reach of the middle class.\textsuperscript{152}

\begin{quote}
\textquotedblleft First they built the road, then they built the town/That\'s why we\'re still driving around and around.\textquotedblright
- \textit{“Wasted Hours”}, Arcade Fire\textsuperscript{153}
\end{quote}

This lyric, from the album \textit{The Suburbs} by the band Arcade Fire, in a way encapsulates the situation beginning to occur in American suburbs and the documented detrimental effects it has had on the population. Levittown-like cities

\textsuperscript{152} Jackson, \textit{Crabgrass Frontier}, 236.
were built en masse along the highways, contributing to stretches of residential districts in what is known as suburban sprawl.\textsuperscript{154} Historically, urban growth tended to occur in places where trade can be facilitated, traditionally along rivers or other waterways, later shifting to different types of modern transportation hubs like canals. There was also a trend of development in earlier decades that went along railroad tracks, responding to the economic opportunity of passing travelers.\textsuperscript{155} The diminishing importance of the railroad in favor of the personal automobile resulted in a corresponding shrinking of the overall urban central business district. With the enactment of the Federal Highway Act and the escalation of suburbia, the way Americans did business changed, with roads becoming the economic backbone of society. Trade routes now depend on petroleum and pavement, not boats or steam engines. The rise of the trucking industry, which before had been overshadowed by the railroad in the domestic shipping market, as well as the expansion of roadside businesses like motels, amusement parks, and fast-food restaurants are direct examples of this changing economic climate.\textsuperscript{156}

The incessant building along highways has resulted in the formation of a chain of metropolitan areas that have effectively sprawled into one another, in what is described by urban theorists as a “megalopolis.”\textsuperscript{157} Developers have continuously built outward along the highway, so that one city swallows another to become an

\textsuperscript{155}Lewis Mumford, “Ancestral Forms and Patterns” from \textit{The City in History} (New York, 1961): 55-93.
\textsuperscript{156}See the chapter in Kenneth Jackson, “The Drive-in Culture of Contemporary America,” \textit{Crabgrass Frontier}: 246-271.
uninterrupted flow of identical Levittown-like tract housing. This has created several lasting consequences for the environment and the general American public.\textsuperscript{158} Although traditional cities still to a degree remain the centers of business and culture, the ability for wealthy workers to commute out of the city to their residences in the suburbs both reflects and promotes a significant disparity in wealth between cities and their suburbs. Suburban communities in general have better quality of public facilities, such as schools and safety infrastructure. At the same time, high-paying jobs, such as banking, remain in the central business district while unskilled jobs, like retail or food service, have been moved out to the suburbs. This leaves the unskilled and uneducated urban poor, overwhelmingly made up of the minority groups excluded from suburban development, removed from available jobs thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty.\textsuperscript{159}

The middle class population’s mass migration to homogenous communities of tract houses created, as Lewis Mumford describes, a “treeless communal waste” of uniformity where “escape is impossible.”\textsuperscript{160} These sentiments were echoed in aspects of popular culture, such as Ira Levin’s satirical thriller novel \textit{The Stepford Wives}, which challenged the idealized perfection of suburbia, as well as the role expected of women as submissive, domestic housewives.\textsuperscript{161} In its standardization,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{158} For more on the effects of sprawl and suburbanization, see Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, \textit{Suburban Nation} (2010); Jane Jacobs, \textit{Death and Life of Great American Cities} (1961); and Joel Garreau, \textit{Edge City: Life on the New Frontier} (1991).
\textsuperscript{159} This phenomenon is described in Part Three, “Forces of Decline and Regeneration” of Jane Jacobs, \textit{Death and Life of Great American Cities} (1961): 241-320.
\textsuperscript{160} Mumford, Lewis. \textit{The City in History} (1961): 486.
\textsuperscript{161} Levin, Ira. \textit{The Stepford Wives} (New York, 1972); see also the film adaptation of the same name from 1975. The feminist movement was critical of suburbia; see Betty Friedan, \textit{The Feminine Mystique} (1968).
\end{flushleft}
the American suburb came to be regarded by some as a cultural, economic, and emotional wasteland.

In social and economic terms, the mass suburbanization of the United States that began in the 1950’s is a Pandora’s box. On one hand, the uncontrollable growth of market-driven, low-density residential development has resulted in an indeterminable list of negative consequences. Despite this, a house in the suburbs has been, and to a degree still is, venerated as the American Dream. Nowhere in Europe was there the land, the money, or the tradition of single-family home construction, making the Levittown type of suburbia a solely American construct. Levitt’s model served the important purpose of providing affordable options for single-family homes in a time when they were desperately needed. What he presented was a new form of American life, joining the idealized bourgeoisie culture that existed in prewar suburban communities with the democratized life of this younger, primarily urban-raised class of GIs and their families.
Chapter III: New Urbanism and Contemporary American Suburbia

The trends of modernism in postwar suburbia are a reflection of the artistic mode of the time. During the 1950s and 60s, progressive modernists like Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe, who had fled Europe during the Second World War, were the most influential architects and urban theorists in the United States. Their avant-garde, International style teachings defined the foremost American architecture schools like Harvard and Yale, where they taught students to focus on constructing buildings and cities that put monumental design before practicality, as was the tradition at places like the Bauhaus. Le Corbusier’s model “City for Three Million” became the ideal for urban development (Figure 34).\(^\text{162}\) The plan is developed around single-use zoned high-rise skyscrapers, which dominate the landscape in the city, and the automobile, which Corbusier predicted would replace the pedestrian as the primary method of transportation, in a high-density community. This type of design would influence urban residential projects in the next decades, like Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, Missouri (Figure 35). Completed in 1956, the complex quickly fell into decline and was demolished in the mid-1970s, in what has become an icon of the failure of urban renewal projects and modernism as a whole.\(^\text{163}\)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the United States was becoming progressively more decentralized in the decades following World War II, with many

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American cities experiencing a rapid decline in terms of wealth, specifically those in areas that were once dominated by factories like New England and the Rust Belt. The culture of conformity produced by suburban communities was seen as worrisome to many social critics, particularly the architect, philosopher and social theorist Léon Krier. Like Camilo Sitte in his *City Planning According to Artistic Principles*, Krier advocated for traditional urbanism, as demonstrated by the European city model, and was vehemently opposed to the functional zoning model that became the mainstay in the twentieth century suburbs. As Krier put it, architectural and urbanist modernism is not just “ugly... it—like communism—belongs in a class of errors from which there is nothing to gain intellectually.” In his writings Krier posits that in its fundamental error, modernism turns its back on established solutions for urban issues, replacing and excluding any notion of traditionalism.

A major failure of modernism, Krier asserts in *Architecture of Community*, is its rejection of the classical forms that are the result of centuries of convention, in attempt to “mythologize” itself as the only innovative revolutionary force in architecture. Classical forms have a natural understanding among the population—a church is recognizable as a church because of its design typology, and

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164 In the years 1950-1970, cities such as Detroit saw a significant shift in wealth, as factories were shut down leaving the unskilled inner city poor unemployed. See Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961).
165 For more on Léon Krier, see Ian Latham’s profile in *Architectural Design*, vol. 57 (1987); see also his selected works, *Architecture: Choice or Fate* (1998); *Drawings for Architecture* (2009); and *Houses, Palaces, Cities* from *Architectural Design* (1984).
166 Sitte, Camillo. *City Planning According to Artistic Principles* (1889)
so on—as opposed to the forms of modern architecture that are “nameless” in design, relying on signage or a kitschy façade to express their use (Figure 36). He rejects the notion that tradition and progress are separate entities, believing they can coexist. As he sees it, modern buildings “derive no human significance from their materials that compose them, from the labor that produced them, or from the function they fulfill,” essentially faking the monumental quality they so desperately tried to achieve. Similarly, American architects Robert Venturi and his wife Denise Scott Brown were leading figures in the post-modern movement in architecture. The couple challenged the purely functionalist, “less is more” ideology espoused by the likes of Corbusier and van der Rohe, insisting on a more exploratory design that both draws on tradition and the everyday American context. In their seminal work *Learning from Las Vegas*, they coined the terms “Duck” and “Decorated Shed,” as descriptions of the predominant ways architects insert iconography in their buildings. A “duck” refers to a duck-shaped drive-in on Long Island illustrated in their book, which was representative of architectural systems where program, space and structure are distorted by the overall symbolic form, while the “decorated shed” refers to buildings where systems of space and structure are at service to the program, and ornament is applied independently (Figure 37). Venturi and Scott Brown adopted the “decorated shed” method in their

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169 Ibid, 66-70.
buildings, producing formally simple buildings with rich and complex ornamental flourishes.

More than any aspect of modernism, Krier despised the Levitt model of pre-fabrication, seeing the bland undecorated ranch models as the very worst example of domestic architecture.\textsuperscript{172} The ubiquity of the ranch signaled a disappearance of many regional styles, with ranches replacing many of the indigenous residential designs, such as the raised plantation houses in the deep bayou or row houses in Baltimore, which had historically marked areas.\textsuperscript{173} In the years following World War II, ranches were espoused as the American “dream house” in the collective mind of mass housing, which caused the erosion of traditional regionalism. This bothered Krier, who maintained that despite the radical changed in machinery, the role of the house was as hearth of the family. “The traditional notions of home...have not been rendered obsolete” by industrialism, he insists, arguing the mass-produced conformity only represents a system from which escape is “imperative.”\textsuperscript{174}

In spite of the controversy and criticism surrounding his theories, Léon Krier became a very influential figure to a rising class of young architects and planners who had become disillusioned by the trends of modernism being taught at prestigious architecture schools. In particular, he had a powerful impact on the young Andrés Duany. Duany had a background in traditional architecture, studying at the École des Beaux Arts and Yale, where he received his master’s degree in 1974.

\textsuperscript{172} Krier, \textit{Architecture of Community}, 65.  
\textsuperscript{173} Jackson, \textit{Crabgrass Frontier}, 240.  
\textsuperscript{174} Krier, \textit{Architecture of Community}, 65.
In 1977, he co-founded the Miami firm Arquitectonica along with his wife, fellow architect Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. The firm was responsible for many modernist steel-and-glass skyscraper projects such as the famous Atlantis Condominium, featured prominently in the opening credits of *Miami Vice*. However, after hearing a lecture Léon Krier gave on traditional urbanism, Duany profoundly changed the course of his career. Listening to Krier discuss how modern architecture had abandoned traditional models, forsaking a healthy urban effect, Duany was admittedly in crisis. He came to recognize that designing “fashionable tall buildings, which were fascinating visually...didn’t produce any healthy urban effect. They [didn’t] affect society in a positive way.” The prospect of creating towns in the model of traditional urbanism was exciting to Duany, who through Krier saw the beneficial capacity physical design could have on the social life of a community.

This new approach to urban planning inspired Duany and Plater-Zyberk to found the architectural firm of Duany-Plater Zyberk (DPZ) in 1980, and together they helped develop the movement of planning known as New Urbanism. The movement serves as a reaction to the dangers of “conventional suburban development”—the sprawl-oriented dogma that developed after World War II.

The New Urbanist movement seeks to create neighborhoods that provide a high

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176 Quoted in Michael Lykoudis’ introduction at Léon Krier’s reception for the Driehaus Prize for Architecture, Notre Dame (2003).
178 Quoted from the Charter of the Congress of New Urbanism (1993).
quality of life for all residents while still respecting the natural environment. Defining characteristics of this method of planning include an emphasis on pedestrian-friendly and mixed-use urban design that utilizes local building materials in order to support regionally based, context-appropriate architecture that celebrates an area’s local history. Proponents of New Urbanism focus on transit-oriented growth, development based around public transportation, in order to reduce the ecological, economic and social impacts the automobile has on the environment. Urban projects are designed at a more dense scale to include a diverse range of building functions and housing types to increase the supply of affordable housing as well as create a more diverse overall society, all accessible without a car. Most New Urbanist projects have been focused on suburban redevelopment, turning tracts of sprawl into livable, community-oriented neighborhoods. The overall goal of this type of design was to ultimately increase social capital, using the physical environment to make people’s lives better. Citizens would be encouraged to take responsibility in their community, thus strengthening personal and civic bonds.\(^{179}\)

In 1993 the couple, along with a group of fellow architects including Peter Calthorpe, Elizabeth Moule, Stefanos Polyzoides, and Dan Solomon, helped found the Congress of New Urbanism to officially codify the principles behind their previous work. The charter officially presents the goals of the Congress, which stands for the “restoration of existing cities into...communities of real neighborhoods, the

conservation of natural environments, and the preservation of our built legacy.”

They also advocate for restructuring development practices to support diversity and foster community engagement in easily accessible public spaces. Through this development the supporters of New Urbanism believe that by building a strong neighborhood framework they will be able to reduce traffic congestion, provide safer streets, and effectually rein in suburban sprawl. More often than not, New Urbanist design is seen in the form of “retrofit” projects where architects are hired to reclaim existing neighborhoods and redesign it in a way that follows the movement's principles.

It was in the 1980s, however, that the first independent town was begun designed in accordance to the principles that would later make up the Charter of New Urbanism in 1993. Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, along with their team at DPZ, were given the task of building up a plot of scenic beachfront land on the Gulf of Mexico by developer Robert Davis. Having inherited eighty acres of land from his grandfather, Davis and his Daryl set out to build a “livable” resort town in the “Redneck Riviera” of the Florida panhandle. He was dissatisfied with contemporary building practices, envisioned the land as a historic Florida beach town following regional building traditions adapted for a contemporary neighborhood, in order to create a haven for those who missed the communities that were developed when cars were not the dominant form of transportation. The

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180 Quoted from the Charter of the Congress of New Urbanism (1993).
three—Davis, Duany, and Plater-Zyberk—began touring the area in search of inspiration. They studied, measured, and analyzed numerous towns and buildings in the area, selecting their successful features and reassembling them into a “simple but rigorous” building code that both included the essence of New Urbanism and reflected the environment. In 1981, the town of Seaside opened for development with the final plan, a result of many drafts, completed in about 1985. Promoted as “the new town, the old ways,” Seaside would be the first experiment in what Duany and Plater-Zyberk termed Traditional Neighborhood Development, which looked to small-town American as a model for future growth.

Although the plan of Seaside is new, its components are not. They were in part derived from aspects of towns that Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Davis identified in their research and survey of the regional landscape, in accordance with New Urbanist principles of local preservation, so they sought to derive an architectural language from other towns in the South. Towns in Florida built by leading City Beautiful and City Functional planner John Nolen inspired a great deal of the Seaside code. Nolen, who studied landscape architecture under Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. at Harvard and was close friend of Letchworth architect Raymond Unwin, created the design of several new towns, eight of which were proposed for Florida locations in the 1920s. Like other progressive reformers of the era, he had looked to

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European examples for urban and architectural models to structure the rapid urbanization into more efficient and livable form. His small town plans provide a clearly defined formula for translating ideology into architectural order, something the New Urbanists were trying to do as well in their plans.

Nolen used Florida as a testing ground for his theories of garden city planning, and in 1922 he was contracted to create the state’s first comprehensive plan in St. Petersburg, one of the towns that would later inspire Seaside. For the resort city he devised an ambitious plan with the “form and flavor unlike that of other places” that clustered mixed-use neighborhoods around a clearly established civic center, encircled by a greenbelt of parkways that unite the city (Figure 38). He refused to incorporate racial zoning into his plan; instead concentrating government’s powers on an “adequate control of private development” meant to ensure an effective outlay of public facilities. In the end, however, his plans to invest in the squalid “colored section” found little public support, and the desire to make quick profits outweighed his lofty notions of city building. John Nolen was a rather obscure character in the evolution of urban planning, but he made a significant mark on Seaside’s code.

The urban code of Seaside created by DPZ, with consulting from Léon Krier, and provides the backbone for development, to be used as a guiding light for architects of future generations. The plan insists on incremental change and growth to be executed over time, so each new architect could reinterpret it as they see fit in their own context. Duany recognized that for a community to remain sustainable,

one person could not and should not design every structural aspect and detail of the
town and its buildings. Instead it would be collaborative, with buildings able to
grow and evolve over time with input of a variety of designers. He notes, “Urbanism
achieves its resilience and diversity not through scale but through the ‘saddling’ of
time.”\textsuperscript{188} A stable structure of parameters with regard to the scale, placement, and
general form of buildings would, however, be critical in creating a unified
environment that would last over time. To this regard, the town of Seaside created a
municipal position of town architect to supervise and interpret the implementation
of the town code. The Town Architect helps in drafting new cottages in Seaside,
collaborating with other architects on their designs to make sure they will suit the
town’s original vision in years to come.

The eighty-acre Seaside site is oriented with the Gulf of Mexico to the south
and the undeveloped woods to the north, bisected in the southern third of the
property by the pre-existing State Highway 30 that runs east west (Figure 39).
Development is dispersed on either side of the two-lane road, with one third along
the beach and the rest inland, thus incorporating the highway into the town itself.
Duany and Plater-Zyberk imposed a balanced, orderly outline on the site, drawing
upon classical conceptions of rational order to create a modified Hippodamian grid
that centers on a well-established civic center. The town grid was meshed into the
existing development of Seagrove, which borders to the east, uniting the neighbors
through diagonal streets. Connecting the community to traditional, time-honored
urban symbolism affirms the New Urbanist devotion to an observable order found

\textsuperscript{188} Quoted in Duany’s original documents accessed in the Seaside Historical Society; see

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in nature. The Seaside plan divides the town into functional spaces and defines building prototypes for each function, thus establishing a hierarchy of land use in which “public space takes precedence of private, group image over individuality, and harmony over difference.”

The official Seaside code can be broken down into eight sections by lot type, directing the location and scale of yards and porches, outbuildings, parking areas, and building heights (Figure 40). This lends to a diverse visual nature like that of an established town, with a mixed grouping of building functions and elevations. It also makes it possible to restrict certain uses, like the placement of a tattoo parlor next to an elementary school. New Urbanist principles recognize the needs of the economy, and the plan allows for some shifts in building use, such that a house may someday host a bed and breakfast. Seaside is made up of a range of building types and uses, economic levels and residential scales so as to not organize residents by class or income. A high prevalence of segregation based on income was produced as a result of suburbanization, which is something the Seaside code was trying to avoid. The types within the code range in specificity, with residential design being more restricted than public spaces. Individual privacy is strongly reinforced within the code, except when it diminishes a sense of community. In that way picture windows and sliding glass doors are prohibited, but houses must be close to the street and each other.

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189 LaFrank, Seaside, 114
Aspects of American town planning history were infused into the plan, with Duany and Plater-Zyberk looking at traditional American small towns for inspiration. The landscape of a small town, for instance a tree-lined residential street, is largely responsible for creating a public domain against which private statements of property are made.\textsuperscript{192} As one of the fundamental structures of small town urbanism, the residential street illustrates on a small scale the properties of a town as a whole. The New Urbanists saw how sprawl caused vibrant street life in a traditional town to be exchanged for social life within the confines of a private living room. Roots of the idyllic “Elm Street” can be traced back to the Jeffersonian model of the neoclassical pavilion in a romantic landscape, which served as notable model for DPZ.\textsuperscript{193} The interdependence that exists between building and landscape in Jefferson’s urbanism influenced other features of Seaside’s plan, such as the horseshoe-shaped Lyceum (Figure 41). The Lyceum, which was intended as a center for learning and the arts, takes direct design pointers from the University of Virginia. It is one of the highlighted civic institutions within the plan of Seaside, located directly off the village green.

Other models from traditional American urbanism are incorporated into the code, highlighting primarily Southern examples that would be familiar in the landscape of the Florida panhandle. For example Type II of the code, which includes the lots on the small pedestrian square that front the proposed town hall, are rooted in the Vieux Carré in New Orleans (Figure 42). This aspect of the code generates

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid, 53; see also Michael Dennis, “Excursus Americanus,” \textit{Court and Garden: From the French Hotel to the City of Modern Architecture} (1986): 231.
four-story buildings intended to be office space with courtyard and smaller buildings at the rear, with highly specific provisions affecting the arcades and silhouettes at the front. Type VII, which occurs along the east-west streets where no view of the sea is possible, takes precedent from the Charleston single houses (Figure 43).\(^\text{194}\) Since a view corridor is unnecessary in the section of town where this type is designated, front setback from the street is minimal so houses tend to generate private yards to one side.\(^\text{195}\) The Charleston single house, with its narrow gabled end facing the street, was one of the examples of an indigenous residential style that saw a diminishing importance in favor of the ranch house. The models for building types in Seaside are based in the Southern vernacular, with emphasis on classical revival style. However the “Seaside look,” the town’s architectural image, is based on a code that has been interpreted within a housing market that trades on appearance. This is not unlike at Forest Hills Gardens and Letchworth, which carried similar disclaimers that their reliance on visual image was to support what was really a spatial and ideological shift in design sensibility.\(^\text{196}\) It is Duany and Plater-Zyberk’s code that distinguishes Seaside, with the architectural design only being a relative to the current housing market and overall regional style.

As per the code’s mandate, several spaces in the center of Seaside have been restricted for public use. This relates back to New Urbanist notion that these sorts of structures that “support the common good” require a “special treatment” within town planning, thus reserving their sites for future use, even if they won’t be built

\(^{195}\) Easterling, “Public Enterprise,” 53.
\(^{196}\) Ibid, 57.
until much later, which provides a reminder and incentive to develop them. In that way, a great deal of attention is put on the many public spaces of Seaside. Civic institutions and their adjacent areas, plazas and city squares, have traditionally been the most active places in cities and towns. Looking back to the European model, the churches, schools, and town halls have always been considered the cornerstone of urban culture and identifying landmarks. They were given the most accessible locations in town, possibly facing a square or other major gathering place, which typically served as a market. With the advent of suburbanization and use-based Euclidean zoning, however, the creation of new public space and buildings diminished in importance. Town gathering places became isolated, stand-alone structures surrounded by a sea of parking lots. Seaside’s architects strove to re-establish the prominence of community interaction by highlighting these buildings, displaying their symbolic importance. For example, the Seaside post office, placed in the center of the town green, was incorporated as an established civic gathering place, so residents were prompted to interact as part of the daily ritual of collecting their mail (Figure 44). Public buildings are not subject to other rigorous aspects of the urban code, except for the provision that they be painted white to insure public identity and recognition. Type Five of the Seaside code is a special category for large lots meant to house such civic establishments (Figure 45). Unlike other building sets in the code, this type has much fewer directions in regards to form, but it does require the lots to be planned as a coherent group with all designs approved

198 Quoted in Duany’s original documents accessed in the Seaside Historical Society; see Samantha Salden, “The Seaside Code,” *Seaside Research Portal*.
by the municipal authority. The buildings at town center are the largest in size and scale, but the least restricted in design, so to make them stand out from the blocks of residential buildings.\textsuperscript{200}

One of the ‘type five’ civic structures that have already been built is the Seaside Chapel (Figure 46). Designed by architect Scott Merrill, the project began in 1999 and was dedicated in 2001.\textsuperscript{201} Located prominently within the town of Seaside, the Chapel sits on a spot specifically designated for a house of worship that existed since the plan was first created in the 1980s, at the head of the town’s center at Ruskin Square. The Chapel, as stipulated in the guidelines of New Urbanism, utilizes a language of the vernacular region and is built using local materials. The design is rooted in a Carpenter Gothic style native to the Southern United States, with a center aisle configuration and board and batten construction. The building, however, is a non-denominational worship space, so Merrill made sure to avoid iconic language customarily associated with one particular faith, which explains the absence of a crucifix on the façade. It has a steeply pitched roof and bell tower, which rises to a final height of sixty-eight feet, making the Chapel the tallest building in all of Seaside. In this way, it is an obvious beacon for all believers to gather and worship together as a community.\textsuperscript{202}

The provisions of the code as interpreted by many designers would generate private buildings, which may refer to anything from houses and apartments to shops, offices, hotels or workshops. The proportion and dimension of private lots is

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid, 102.


\textsuperscript{202} Ibid, 252.
specifically related to their intended use and building type, with a gradual
downsizing of residential lots towards the center of town to increase density.\textsuperscript{203}
Overall, the urban code sets up interdependency between road width, landscaping,
lot size, and housing type, with its most important function being the spatial
modeling of the street. When a street has a back alley or side yard, for example, it
may have smaller lots and roadways, and a reduced setback. A larger boulevard, on
the other hand, may feature a greater setback, larger lots, and taller buildings, in
order to create a balance in the modeling of the streetscape. When a housing type
requires a larger front lawn, a street section is defined by a wooden fence system,
which would extend to form an entry gate for each shorefront street (Figure 47).
The dimension of the fence system, which would be designed individually for each
house, defines the roadside parking area.\textsuperscript{204} In terms of style, most homes are
classical revival and painted a variety of pastel colors to suit the resort-like nature of
the town.

A major residential aspect of the code is the mandated addition of a front
porch to all homes in Seaside. Porches are a familiar feature in the vernacular
design, as they traditionally serve a practical purpose for ventilation in the hot
humid Southern climate. Beyond that, they also serve as a means of social
interaction within the culture. Duany’s desire to “reform society on the level of
having people meet” is played out in this inclusion of the front porch, which can be

\textsuperscript{204} Easterling, “Public Enterprise,” 55.
seen as an attempt to revitalize the street as a meeting place.\textsuperscript{205} The porch is a pivotal element of the small town, mediating between building and landscape as well as between the public and private realm by extending entry and visual penetration from the street. The porches in Seaside were intended to promote the same function they served in the past, but that has not played out as planned. By all accounts, Seaside is unbearably hot in the summer and, this being the twenty-first century, air-conditioning is standard. Therefore, most of the porches remain more or less empty, meaning they have failed to meet both their functional and social goals as they are neither a cool outdoor room nor are they a catalyst for social interaction.\textsuperscript{206} It can be argued that symbolically the addition of the porch displays the goal of Seaside to combat the post-World War II lack of communal urban space, which caused public life to be pushed into the house. As architect Robert Stern observes, despite it only being a symbolic gesture to the past, “the front porch makes the street a public space.”\textsuperscript{207} He suggests, therefore, that even though no one is actually using the porch, its mere presence signifies the renewal of street life in the community.

The “porch problem” then raises one of the biggest questions about Seaside: can the revival of image alone successfully revitalize a cultural system without the reinforcement of experience?\textsuperscript{208} Nostalgia is a major aspect of the design of Seaside, which has played out both for and against the city. This has resulted in a lot of

\textsuperscript{206} LaFrank, \textit{Seaside}, 120.
\textsuperscript{208} LaFrank, \textit{Seaside}, 120.
disparagement towards Seaside, and the New Urbanist movement as a whole, with critics attacking DPZ’s utopian aspirations. This perfectionist aspect is represented clearly in the 1998 film, *The Truman Show*, which was filmed in Seaside. The movie satirizes the artificiality of the American small town ideal, as Truman, played by Jim Carrey, slowly realizes his “perfect” world is nothing more than a Hollywood back lot. Many critics have been skeptical of the lofty perfectionism of Duany’s plan, which they maintain has not resulted in the sprawl-combatting model DPZ was hoping for. If anything, Seaside has found more success as a resort destination than a residential community, probably given the fact that its location in the rural panhandle does not lend to very many employment opportunities for full-time residents. Of the more than three hundred homes in the town, a majority are vacation rentals.

All in all, the rows of cute, candy-colored cottages of Seaside represent a “perfect memory” of simpler times, before the bad taste of postmodernism destroyed community life. In the uncertain and overdeveloped world of sprawl, it is this hopefulness for a brighter future that seems to be represented in Seaside, and within New Urbanism as a whole. Despite whatever misgivings have been raised by planners and architects, the conception of Seaside represents one of the most “thoroughgoing and integral critiques of the ideology of modern architecture,”

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and its significance is seen in the content defined by the design codes of the town.\textsuperscript{214} It is a devotion to the past that has become the link between the dissatisfaction with the present and what was dreamed for the future. In a way, the architects of Seaside have distilled their memories and expectations about suburban life, extracting their disillusionments and fears. Returning to small town simplicity and reconstructing the optimistic American Dream, as the architects would like to believe it had once existed, has driven the city's design. It is a wistful view of a world that possibly never existed in the first place, representative of this almost ‘Disney-esque’ vision of a golden age of the American small town.

It is ironic, actually, because the Disney Company has developed their version of a New Urbanist community in nearby Celebration, right outside Orlando, Florida. The concept stems from Walt Disney’s visions for the future, some of which were incorporated into the EPCOT theme park at Walt Disney World. Experimental Prototypical Community Of Tomorrow, or EPCOT, was a utopian city conceived by Disney, on which he worked until his death in 1966.\textsuperscript{215} The project was intended as a residential “community of the future,” meant to showcase and test the modern technologies being developed in America as a way to combat the ills of society.\textsuperscript{216} Drawing heavy influence from Ebenezer Howard’s drawings, Disney designed EPCOT to be his own modified Garden City of Tomorrow (Figure 48). Starting from scratch on a virgin plot of land, the plan was based around a transport network that

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid, 241.
\textsuperscript{216} Quoted in the original “EPCOT” film shown by the Disney Company (1966).
radiates out of the hub through four primary spheres of activity: business and commerce at the center, then high-density apartment housing, followed by a broad greenbelt of recreational land, to finally reach the low-density neighborhood residential streets. The plan incorporated some fantastical features, such as a glass dome meant to enclose the fifty acres of city streets in the central district of EPCOT, so that people would enjoy ideal weather conditions year round in a climate-controlled environment. Disney wanted his community to exist where “pedestrian is king,” allowing only electric powered vehicles to travel the streets so people could be free to live “without fear of motorized vehicles.” A transportation center underneath the city, out of view of the population, played a vital role to move people in speed, safety, and comfort, relying on a high-speed monorail for long distance travel and a WEDWAY PeopleMover for shorter distances. Automobiles would not be barred from EPCOT, but traffic would be relegated below the pedestrian level on an underground super-highway, where no stoplight would ever slow the constant flow of movement. In the periphery residential neighborhoods, single-family homes would be located near a conveniently located WEDWAY station and footpaths would be dispersed throughout the area, so people were always completely safe and separated from the automobile.

Although EPCOT was never realized as the residential community Disney planned, it did in part inspire the construction of Celebration, Florida. In the early 1990s, the Disney Development Company (DDC) established the Celebration

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218 See Matthew Arnold, “Walt Disney, EPCOT, the Creation of a Commodified Utopia,” (2002).
Company to command development of approximately forty-nine thousand acres of
land in the southern portion of the Reedy Creek Improvement District, the
governing jurisdiction for the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida. The
master plan was intended to be a culmination of and improvement on all previous
community planning and design, pledged by Disney chairman Michael Eisner to be a
demonstration of a system for developing countries and blessed by architectural
historian Vincent Scully as marking “the return of community.” Eisner took a
keen interest in the new town’s early stages, encouraging the DDC to “make history”
and develop a town worthy of the Disney brand and legacy. An experiment on a
grand scale, the project was given an investment of $2.5 billion to begin the first
stages of construction. Celebration first broke ground in 1994, with a lottery for
the right to purchase one of the town’s initial 359 home sites held on November
18th, 1995.

Celebration’s master plan, produced with input from several architects and
finalized by Robert A. M. Stern and Jacquelin Robertson, diverged from Walt’s
original design, resembling other projects of the contemporary New Urbanist
movement (Figure 49). Like at Seaside, the developers took cues from traditional
Southern Towns that would have been vernacular in Florida. Incorporating the
familiar features of town planning, the plan created a compact community of several
distinct neighborhoods, known as “villages,” including the main village closest to the

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219 Frantz, Douglas and Catherine Collins. Celebration U.S.A.: Living in Disney’s Brave New
Town (1999).
220 Ibid, 8; see also Andrew Ross, The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of
Property Value in Disney’s New Town (1999).
221 Ibid, 23.
222 Quoted from “History of Celebration,” from the Celebration Historical Society.
town center. Downtown is focused on a new lake that overlooks the existing wooded wetlands, as to create an intimate relationship between town and nature. Town center is concentrated on two main streets, Market Street and Front Street, and includes a mixed grouping of restaurants, commercial buildings, apartments, and office space (Figure 50). The district also boasts buildings designed by celebrated architects including Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Michael Graves, and Philip Johnson. The developers of Celebration wanted to showcase the work of America’s most important designers, as part of the overall salute to American ingenuity that is also present in the conception of EPCOT. One of the center’s architectural landmarks is César Pelli’s movie theatre, meant to be an “ode to the time when going to the movies was an event, not just a routine trip to the local mall’s multiplex.” The design of the building is reminiscent of the streamlined Art Deco movie palaces from the early twentieth century, with twin tower signposts that serve as a beacon to moviegoers (Figure 51). The bar adjacent to the theater is not allowed to announce last call until thirty minutes after the last movie gets out, so patrons can grab a drink and socialize after their film. Automobile parking in town center is relegated to the street and lots tucked away in the interiors of the downtown blocks, to reduce car visibility. Shady store-lined walkways connect these parking areas to the surrounding streets. Like in Seaside, the downtown

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223 Ironically, there are no roads named Main Street in Celebration, as a Main Street already existed in Osceola County and street names cannot be duplicated within the county.
224 Quoted in the “Architectural History of Celebration” found at the Celebration Historical Society.
section of Celebration was the most conscientiously designed, in order to reinforce a communal small town feeling.

Residential neighborhoods radiate out from this center, in a warped grid plan that allows for easy visitor orientation and creates picturesque views down curved streets. Streets always terminate in parks, waterways, or in natural woodlands and are intersected with bike trails to encourage pedestrian activity. Residential streets were designed as public places, built around open community spaces such as tennis courts, swimming pools, playgrounds, and gazebos (Figure 52). The emphasis on tree lined streets, parks, and civic buildings are meant to create a strong public realm. Houses and condominiums in Celebration are constructed along these narrow streets without front driveways or garages, serviced instead by alleys in the rear that also used for garbage pickup, in order to keep the look of home fronts and sidewalks pristine. Relegating garages to alleys also allowed for narrower lots, which decreases walking distances. This is similar in conception to Seaside’s mandatory addition of the front porch, as it was meant to return social life to the street, which was meant to instigate more community interaction. By diminishing the prominence of the front garage, the hope was to decrease the importance of the car. Although ninety-one percent of residents who work outside their homes drive to work, most of Celebration’s residents do not drive long distances and there are a prevalent number of low-speed vehicles and smart cars used to travel around the town.226 This is a much lower percentage in comparison to the larger Orlando-

Kissimmee Metropolitan Statistical Area, which is notorious for its automobile dominant sprawling nature.

Celebration was conceived to have a higher residential density and greater diversity of housing options, in order to accommodate the demographic variety typical of real towns, as opposed to the homogeneity of suburban developments. A pattern book established design and planning principles for the community, which would be governed by a set of restrictive covenants administered by the homeowner’s association, which in the early years would be under the control of the Disney Company. Celebration’s “Covenant, Conditions, and Restrictions” stated that when three-quarters of the town’s housing units were sold, residents could than elect three of the five directors of the homeowner’s association, but the company would retain “veto power over all changes in governance” as long as it owns property in Celebration.\textsuperscript{227} After the town’s founding in 1994, the company has followed its plans to divest most of its control of the town, however several Disney businesses continue to occupy the town’s offices and two utility companies operated from Walt Disney World, Smart City Telecom and Reedy Creek Energy Services, provide services to the town. Celebration also remains directly connected to the Walt Disney World resort through one of its primary streets, World Drive, which begins near the Magic Kingdom.\textsuperscript{228}

Certainly no corporation is better at make-believe than the Walt Disney Company, whose theme parks and movies illustrate, to some critics, a defilement of

\textsuperscript{227} Ross, \textit{Celebration Chronicles}, 230.

American culture. The parks are, as described by James Howard Kunstler in his book *The Geography of Nowhere*, “capitals of unreality dedicated to temporary escape from modern life.”\(^{229}\) Much of the condemnation devoted to the Disney parks has been assigned to Celebration and, by extension, all other New Urbanist projects. Just like at Seaside, the development has faced a barrage of negative attention from the start, damned with faint praise for its picture-perfect streetscapes. Critics have condemned both towns as exercises in social engineering, with their aesthetic virtues dismissed as conformist, sentimental, nostalgic, and elitist. The architectural uniformity, down to “plantings and the color of curtains seen from the street,” has been ridiculed.\(^{230}\) Headlines such as “A Mickey Mouse Utopia,” “Trouble at the Happiest School on Earth,” and “Town That Disney Built Hit by First Violent Crime” broadcasted the new community’s confrontation with the realities of everyday life.\(^{231}\) More than anything else, Celebration’s essential association with the Disney Company made it hard to trust, with many suspicious of the town’s perceived “utopian” artificiality.\(^{232}\) By 1997, Disney removed the company name from billboards and literature, in order to put “less emphasis on Disney” and more on Celebration.\(^{233}\)

\(^{233}\) Ross, *Celebration Chronicles*, 104.
Despite the disparaging criticism, little has been written from the perspective of the residents of Celebration, who have been overwhelmingly supportive of the development. The town’s growing population, which stood at 7,427 at the 2010 census, can be seen as representative of Celebration’s success as an alternative to the suburban sprawl that exists everywhere else in the United States.\(^{234}\) Recent accounts of the first years at Celebration attest to its residents’ commitment to building a community and their enjoyment in being pioneers, with many attracted by the chance to participate in the creation of a new town. As quoted by one early resident, “We’re here to try to make right what went wrong with America’s communities and set a standard for solutions. We are figuring out a better way.”\(^{235}\) The movement of New Urbanism has been called as an extreme attempt to develop idealized communities, but in actuality the goals stated by the Congress are not particularly radical or rebellious in the slightest. It is providing a sustainable option to quell the worst of the sprawl eating away at the American landscape, and has provided by most accounts a pretty good place to live. Even the critics admit that Celebration’s public spaces, walkable streets, downscaled housing, and good schools—all within one compact downtown—is far more appealing than the “swampy, sprawling hellscape” that lies beyond the water tower.\(^{236}\) For a majority of New Urbanism’s detractors, the problem with towns like Seaside and Celebration are not their flaws, but the weariness with which the twenty-first century American population perceives the idea of utopia. After centuries of struggling to engineer a

\(^{234}\) U.S. Census Bureau (2011).
\(^{235}\) Quoted in Jackie Flanigan, “City Limits: Can a Planned Community Approach the Utopian Ideal?,” \textit{Washington Post} (7 September 1999).
\(^{236}\) Campbell-Dollaghan, “Celebration.”
perfect society, the planned communities’ greatest enemy has become a suspicious public that sees them as cult-like and creepy.

The aversion of younger generations to planned communities reflects their overall lack of enthusiasm towards low-density, suburban living. A greater proportion of families are moving to and gentrifying dense urban areas, diverging from previous generations of suburban-dwellers.\textsuperscript{237} That being said, the single-family home still remains a symbol of American prosperity, and there is little doubt that will ever truly change. Even with the rise in urban inhabitants, over half of the population resides in suburban communities.\textsuperscript{238} The ideals of individuality and independence inherent in suburbia are deeply embedded in the culture of the United States, which is where New Urbanism comes in. What the movement is presenting is a healthy, responsible take on suburban living, one that is dedicated to development on a human scale with considerations made for the needs of the environment with initiatives made to reduce density and overall car dependency. By recreating aspects of traditional small town life such as front porches, the New Urbanist architects are providing answers to the modern issues of suburbia and community planning, in order to create collaboration between the landscape and established American standards of home ownership, displaying the ability for good suburbs to exist.

\textsuperscript{238} According the 2000 US Census, 52\% of Americans are suburban (U.S. Census, 2000).
Conclusion:

The problems of urbanization and urban development that have arisen since the Industrial Revolution resulted in the mass-production of new towns on the suburban periphery of American cities. Using urban planning, developers and architects have been able to inscribe their vision of perfection in the physical landscape of suburbia, building a utopian reality for millions of people. The three movements of planning studied in this paper are responses to their respective social environments, using the circumstances to create an ideal city for the twentieth century, one that can express the power and beauty of modernity. With each developing movement, architects have reacted to and built upon previous planned communities. Many people dream of designing a better world, but planners like Olmsted, Levitt, and Duany went a step further and made their ideal cities a physical reality.

The innovative designs created by these architects are interpretations of the utopian ideal of the American dream. Certain defining characteristics exist among the planned environments detailed in this paper: they are all relatively low-density communities made up primarily of single-family homes with some mixed-use elements, built using progressive construction methods, with designs influenced by transportation, because residents need to be able to commute to work daily. In Forest Hills Gardens, the transportation hub at Station Square is one of the most prominent areas and is designated as a commercial center, indicating its utmost importance to the population. Historically town centers have been the most significant places in a community, and the buildings on these plazas play an
important role in representing the population. In Forest Hills, transportation and convenient access to New York City helped define and facilitate development, while the lack of a defined city center in Levittown is a metaphor for the overall disjointed nature of suburban sprawl. By creating a separation between work and home, a fragmentation within community life began to occur, something contemporary developers have tried to address by reviving civic spaces. In New Urbanist projects, the revival of traditional town centers with a mixed variety of commercial and public spaces is part of the movement’s goal to create a cohesive urban identity in the physical environment.

When one goes to these planned towns, as I did in my research for this project, one can see how these towns begun to realize their potential, though they still are to a degree incomplete. While promotional posters for places like Celebration make it look more like Disney’s Main Street U.S.A., in reality the town exists as a visibly happy and healthy community just as the developers intended. The historical urbanist trends of place making recreated in New Urbanist towns, as well as in Garden Cities, have a timelessness to them that allows them to grow and change with each subsequent generation. These towns are pleasant places to live, successfully balancing the unwavering American preference for single-family homes with urban design that supports environmentally sustainable development and civic cohesiveness.
Appendix:

Figure 1: Sketch of Atlantis as described by Plato

Figure 2: Filarete, Ideal city of Sforzinda

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Figure 4: Hippodamian Plan for Miletus (2nd century BCE)

Figure 5: Nine-block plan of New Haven, CT (1641)
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Figure 44: Seaside Post Office
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Figure 46: Scott Merrill, Seaside Interfaith Chapel
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Figure 48: Walt Disney, Plan for EPCOT (1966)
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Figure 50: Celebration Town Center
Figure 51: César Pelli, Celebration Movie Theater (1996)

Figure 52: Detail of Public Park in a residential neighborhood in Celebration, FL
Bibliography:


