





## *Suburbanization of Long Island*

Geog 202  
Professor Paluzzi


### *Earliest Suburbanization of LI*

- Began in 1823 – Hezekiah Pierport bought land in Brooklyn Heights
  - ✘ Advertised as “a place of residence providing all the advantages of the country with most of the conveniences of the city.”
- In 1869 Alexander Stewart bought 7,000 acres in Nassau and built a rental community: Garden City.
  - ✘ Houses were sold in 1876



### *Suburbanization*

- **Suburb:** an area, usually residential, outside and peripheral to a city.
- **Suburbanization:** the process whereby areas beyond the city develop urban-like characteristics, and are linked by transportation which allows people to move between it and the city.
- **Suburbia:** the social and cultural world of people living in the suburbs.
- With the bridges, subways, tunnels, railroads and roads connecting Long Island in place – suburbanization occurs quickly




### *Long Island Settlement*

- Long Island has a long history of settlement.
  - ✘ Originally it housed numerous small villages, many going back to the 1700s.
  - ✘ late 1800's – wealthy NYC industrialists began building estates and manors along the North Shore.
  - ✘ 1920's upper middle class urbanites moved to South Shore areas
    - ◆ avoiding congestion from the city and to live in private homes.



### *The Fourth Migration*

- **1st Migration:** Westward movement when the pioneers settled the American West.
- **2nd Migration:** Industrialization when the farm population moved to factory towns.
- **3rd Migration:** Urbanization when small town populations moved to the large industrial and financial centers.
- **4th Migration:** Suburbanization when city people moved to areas outside of the city.



### *Long Island Settlement*

- After WWII – mainly white, urban working class families moved to Nassau County
  - ✘ LI Suburbia in the late 1940s – The Perfect Setting
  - ✘ Unused land (potato worm blight).
  - ✘ Farmers ready to sell (low cost land).
  - ✘ Proximity to NYC and the defense industry (jobs).
  - ✘ Pools of experienced construction workers (labor).
  - ✘ New highways and the LIRR (access).
  - ✘ Families with wartime savings ready to buy (customers).
  - ✘ Newlyweds seeking their first home (customers).



### Long Island Settlement

- ❑ 1960's/70's – black families seeking peaceful, integrated communities moved from NYC.
- ❑ 1970's/80's – the traditional bedroom community begins to disappear.
  - ◆ Sleep there – but work elsewhere → self sufficient
- ❑ 1990's – new immigrants moved directly into Nassau and Suffolk towns without acculturating in NYC.



### Fathers of LI Suburbia

- William Levitt, master builder of affordable, assembly-line housing: Levittown.



### Suburbanization

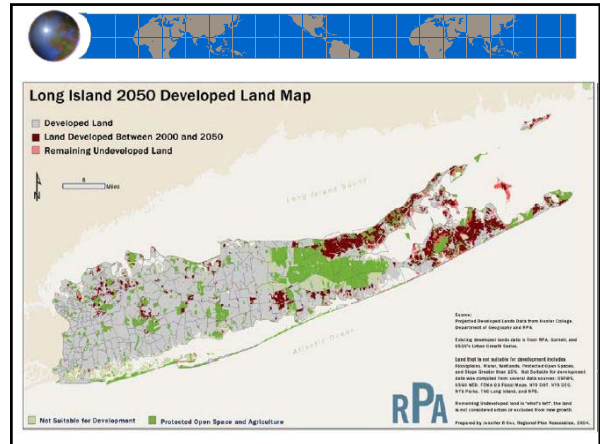
- Robert Moses, visionary, planner and road builder but did not support mass transit: LI parks and parkways. He
  - ❑ Encountered opposition from the wealthy when he proposed opening Long Island to all the people.
  - ❑ He proposed the parallel west-east running Northern State and Southern State parkways.
  - ❑ The route of the Southern State was not contested and was linked to Jones Beach and Fire Island.
  - ❑ The route of the Northern State, which would have passed through estates, was bitterly fought.



### Fathers of LI Suburbia


- Robert Moses:
  - ❑ often called the father of the New York State Parkway System
  - ❑ the Northern State Parkway, the Southern State Parkway and the Wantagh State Parkway
  - ❑ Responsible for the building of the Triborough Bridge, the Brooklyn Battery Bridge, the Throgs Neck, the Bronx-Whitestone, the Henry Hudson, and the Verrazano Narrows bridges.
  - ❑ 1970's – one last bridge – connecting Rye with Oyster Bay
    - ◆ “leaving densely-populated Long Island completely dependent on access through New York City may not have been an optimal policy decision” (Steve Anderson)
  - ❑ Also the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, the Staten Island Expressway, the Cross-Bronx Expressway, the Belt Parkway and the Laurelton Parkway.





### *Fathers of LI Suburbia*

- **William Zeckendorf**, master real estate developer: developed Roosevelt Air Field into Roosevelt Field Mall, the first and largest indoor shopping space in America at its opening.
  - he developed a significant portion of the New York City urban landscape.
    - ◆ Rockefeller Center, Chrysler Building, what is now the U.N.





### *Why the “levittownization” of American cities?*

1. Pent-up demand for housing
2. returning vets
3. economic boom
4. new building technologies
5. much higher rates of automobile ownership
6. building of the freeway network (the I-system, after 1946)
7. the role of the federal government
  - VA/FHA loans
  - Freeway construction



### *The North Shore Versus South Shore*

- The scenic North Shore was the land of the rich and they used their power and money to prevent the “common folk” from living among them.
- The estate staff was housed in South Shore towns and were picked up each morning by a truck or car.
- Areas were zoned to prevent unsightly, noisy or malodorous use, especially along the shore.
- Road improvements were stalled or blocked to prevent access to North Shore communities.



### *Suburbia*

- Product of free time, steady income, the automobile and electrification.
  - ☒ The simple bungalow later the ranch
  - ☒ Suburban life was played up in the movies and the media.
  - ☒ The simple bungalow, later the ranch, replaces the Victorian house.
  - ☒ Standardization of construction and mass production allows for growth.
  - ☒ Federal dollars: Title VI under FHA allowed builders to borrow money.



### *Face of Suburbia*

- The Long Island suburbs have evolved into independent municipal entities where people not only live, but work and play.
  - ☒ Technology-oriented industrial parks, office complexes, malls, shopping centers, medical centers and institutions of learning provide for the daily needs of people.
  - ☒ Residents look local for jobs and life's necessities.



### *Face of Suburbia Today*

- The “non-urban” ideal of the 1950s (open space, low density housing, retail stores out of sight and private cars) comes back to haunt an evolving, aging suburban setting.
  - ☒ Suburban sprawl becomes *suburban crawl*.
  - ☒ Creeping congestion (steady population growth, narrow curved roads, limited carrying capacity, few things are within walking distance).
  - ☒ Lack of mass transit leads to clogged roads at all times of day.



### *The New Immigrants*

- Starting in the 1980s Nassau and Suffolk counties began to experience a wave of immigrants from non-European areas of the world especially Central and South America.
  - ☒ Many were not here legally.
  - ☒ Many were lured by the hope of cheap property, and jobs in agriculture, factories and domestic services.
  - ☒ They were willing to work for low wages in non-union jobs.

### *Face of Suburbia*

- Does LI suburbia have community? (A lattice of human networks and social institutions.)
  - ☒ Has the suburban mall killed “Main Street” as the focus of residents?
  - ☒ Malls have become the new meeting area, the new village green and the new town square.
  - ☒ BUT malls are private property. They have hours of operation and are closed at night.

- They became the invisible neglected segment of society who existed under the worst conditions:
  - ☒ have little or no money (highest poverty rates)
  - ☒ most students in NYS with limited English language
  - ☒ Speak limited English - Nassau/Suffolk has the most students in NYS with limited English language ability
    - ◆ have not acculturated
  - ☒ wait on street corners seeking to be hired
  - ☒ give towns a different night-time persona from the day-time look.



### *Issues Confronting Suburbia*

- ❑ Traffic problems and lack of mass transit
- ❑ Congestion and overcrowding
- ❑ Need to drive
- ❑ Unemployment
- ❑ Crime
- ❑ Sense of community has declined
- ❑ Infrastructure in decay
- ❑ Health issues including an aging population
- ❑ Homelessness
- ❑ Decentralized government



### *Catalysts for Development: Reassessment*

- Quality of life issues
- Changing demographics
- Aging infrastructure
- Preserving open space
- Dealing with urbanization and everything that goes with it.