

Suburbanization of Long Island

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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.

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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.

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Suburbanization

- The suburbanization of LI actually began in 1823 when Hezekiah Pierport bought land in Brooklyn Hts. and advertised its sale 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.)

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Recap of Settlement

- Historically Long Island has been a magnet for settlement.
- Originally it housed numerous small villages, many dating from the 1700s.
- In the late 1800s, wealthy NYC industrialists began building manors and estates along the North Shore and brought in workers.
- In the 1920s upper middle class urbanites moved to South Shore areas to avoid NYC congestion and live in private houses.

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Recap of Settlement

- After WWII, mainly white, urban working class families moved to Nassau Co.
- In the 1960s/70s, black families seeking peaceful, integrated communities moved from NYC.
- In the 1970s/80s, the traditional bedroom community begins to disappear. Self sufficiency occurs.
- In the 1990s, new immigrants moved directly into Nassau and Suffolk towns without acculturating in NYC.

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Fathers of LI Suburbia

- Robert Moses, visionary, planner and road builder but did not support mass transit: LI parks and parkways.
- William Levitt, master builder of affordable, assembly-line housing: Levittown.
- 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.

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North Shore vs. 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.

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North Shore vs. South Shore

- Robert Moses 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 I.
- The route of the Northern St, which would have passed through estates, was bitterly fought.
- The compromise gives NSP the looping route it has today, especially at Old Westbury.

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Suburbia

- Product of free time, steady income, the automobile and electrification.
- 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.

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LI Suburbia in the late 1940s: The Perfect Setting

1. Unused land (potato worm blight).
2. Farmers ready to sell (low cost land).
3. Proximity to NYC and the defense industry (jobs).
4. Pools of experienced construction workers (labor).
5. New highways and the LIRR (access).
6. Families with wartime savings ready to buy (customers).
7. Newlyweds seeking their first home (ditto).

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Face of Suburbia

Suburban sprawl



The shopping mall



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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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The New Immigrants

- They became the invisible neglected segment of society who existed under the worst conditions:
 - have little or no money (highest poverty rates)
 - do not speak 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.

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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

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Catalysts for Development: Reassessment

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

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