Growth of Suburbia in the 1950’s

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Growth and Prosperity after WWII

- G.I. Bill helped give higher education and technical skills to the 15 million veterans returning from WWII
- Major economic growth as a result of wartime industrial demand helped bring the US out of the Depression and gave way to an increase in production of civilian goods, like automobiles, consumer products, and real-estate
- Young veterans of WWII started families, which led to the baby boom and the growth of much-needed housing market/suburbia
Suburbs: created to give cheap, low interest homes to the thousands of new families created by the baby boom, whose husbands all worked in the cities nearby.

William Levitt: invented the suburbs.

Focus was on conformity—of around 17,000 homes built by Levitt, only 4 models of houses were available.

Racial discrimination was high in suburbs—realtors would not sell to anyone other than caucasians, for fear that sales would go down amongst white families.
1950’s Culture

- Life in the suburbia was centered around the family and many of the fads and styles of the 1940’s carried over to this decade
- Families and morals were intact and times were much simpler and enjoyable compared to the tumultuous times of the 1960’s
- The amount of prosperity and peace in the years after WWII led to the coining of the term “The American Dream”
Average 1950’s family life

Average 1950’s Family

Levittown - first suburb
Beatnik Culture

- “Beatniks” - non-conformists who disagreed with the illusion of the perfect family and suburbia
- Challenged authority and conformity, and disliked the monotonous lives people lived in the suburbs
- Precursors to the hippies of 1960’s
- They were inspired by poems, music, and European culture
- Many movies were made about the subculture of beatniks, and were seen as strange and often stereotyped by popular culture
Beatniks
