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Jarett A. Rovner April 2, 2019

Levittown's Shame:

Suburbanization and the Myers Family's Struggle for Integration in America's Iconic Suburb

by

Jarett A. Rovner

Dr. Joseph Crespino

Adviser

Department of History

Dr. Joseph Crespino

Adviser

Dr. Barbara Ladd

Committee Member

Dr. Allen Tullos

Committee Member

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Abstract

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This thesis generates a holistic, day-by-day account of the experiences of the Myers family, the first black family to move into the all-white, pre-planned community of Levittown, Pennsylvania. In August of 1957, William and Daisy Myers decided to move into Levittown, Pennsylvania, setting off a series of protests from white residents of the community. While the Myers family's story has been largely overlooked by scholars, some contemporary historians have gestured toward the Myers story as an example of massive white resistance in the American North. Historians such as Thomas Sugrue, Matthew Lassiter, and Joseph Crespino have all written about 1957 events in Levittown with the goal of broadening the spatial scope of historical inquiry into white resistance to civil rights initiatives. They seek to draw parallels between the postwar white resistance found in the American South and the American North. This thesis seeks to challenge the notion that Levittown is merely a transplant of white resistance to civil rights in the South found in the North.

In order to accomplish this, this thesis draws upon existing scholarship as well many unutilized or underutilized sources, such as recently published memoirs, newspaper articles, and archival material from the Urban Archives at Temple University and the Bucks County Historical Society Archives. This thesis also places Levittown in the greater context of Bucks County. By analyzing the reactions of protestors, local and state politicians, religious groups, and labor groups in Levittown, this thesis seeks to describe how this incident of white resistance differs from other instances of white resistance to integration in different parts of the country. Unlike in other parts of the country, Levittown politicians and community groups condemned the actions of the white protestors and came to the defense of the Myerses.

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Introduction

On August 13, 1957, William and Daisy Myers moved into their new house at 43 Deepgreen Lane in Levittown, Pennsylvania. In many respects, the Myerses were indistinguishable from their new neighbors. Like many other Levittowners, William Myers was a World War II U.S. Army veteran who received his undergraduate degree after his service thanks to the GI Bill. Myers worked in nearby Trenton, New Jersey as a technician, securing a comfortable middle-class income to support his wife and three young children. The composition of the Myers family was nearly identical to thousands of families living in Levittown. However similar the Myers were to their new neighbors, there was one insurmountable fact that cast them as outsiders: they were black. After the *Levittown Times* reported that the first black family had moved into their white Bucks County town, hundreds of residents gathered near the Myers' single-family home in raucous protest of this integration, only eventually to be forcibly dispersed by the Pennsylvania State Police.[1]

While the story of the Myers family is only one of many examples of massive white resistance to integration efforts in the postwar United States, it has remained conspicuously absent from histories about residential and housing segregation. In the last few decades, many American historians have shifted their focus to the postwar urban North, searching for the discrimination and de facto segregation endemic to many parts of the American South. Historians such as Carolyn Adams, Matthew Countryman, Arnold Hirsh, and Joel Stone have conducted investigations of these patterns of white resistance in places such as Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit, revealing that these trends transcended sectional and geographic

[1] "Both Factions Seek Peaceful Solution." *The Levittown Times,* August 17, 1957.

boundaries.[2] Even more recently, many contemporary historians have shifted their lines of inquiry to account for another spatial element. Historians such as Thomas Sugrue, Kevin Kruse, Andrew Goodman, and Andrew Wiese have all begun to expand the historical focus out of the, deindustrializing northern urban center and move to resistance in the northern suburbs.[3] In 2006, Thomas Sugrue and Kevin Kruse edited a collection authoritatively titled *The New Suburban History*, meant to redefine and investigate the historical impact of the American suburb. Despite the shift in scholarly attention to the suburbs of the American North, the Myers family's battle to remain in America's quintessential suburb has not received much academic attention. The Myerses received no mention in *The New Suburban History*. They have remained largely forgotten by professional historians and American citizens, alike.

There have been two major academic works published that discuss the 1957 protests in Levittown in varying degrees of depth and nuance. In 2008, Thomas J. Sugrue published *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*. In his exhaustive and thorough study of civil rights in the North, Sugrue paid great attention to civil rights struggles in northern suburbs in order to illuminate often forgotten racial struggles outside of the American South. Sugrue devoted part of a chapter of his monograph to the Myers family's experiences in Levittown, but only hastily discussed the harassment, violence, and grassroots resistance that

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[2] For more on the work of these historians, see Carolyn Adams, *Philadelphia: Neighborhoods, Division, and Conflict in a Postindustrial City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Joel Stone, ed. *Detroit 1967: Origins, Impacts, Legacies* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017).

[3] For more on the works of these historians, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008); Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds., *The New Suburban History*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2006); Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004); Thomas J. Sugrue and Andrew P. Goodman, "Plainfield Burning: Black Rebellion in the Suburban North," *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 4 (May 2007). Additionally, see Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds. *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) for additional works of some of the authors listed above.

afflicted the Myerses during their first week. Sugrue is the first to meaningfully draw from two published memoirs by Daisy Myers and Lewis Wechsler, the Myers' next-door neighbor. These memoirs, published in 2005 and 2004, respectively, facilitate the construction of the narrative of what happened to the Myerses by providing details of what exactly happened during the Myers' first days in Levittown. However, Sugrue did not retell the story of the family. Although Sugrue provided a detailed account of how the Myerses came to be the first black family to move to Levittown, he merely picked details of their experience and quickly moved along to a discussion of broader open housing campaigns and other civil rights movements in the northern suburbs. His discussion of Levittown in 1957 spanned no more than seven pages.

In 2009, David Kushner published *Levittown: Two Families, One Tycoon, and the Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb*, which focused solely on Levittown, Pennsylvania and followed both the Levitt and Myers families. While Kushner's book is valuable and he attempted to weave a narrative unlike Sugrue's monograph, he leaves a desire for a more comprehensive, detailed account of what happened to the Myerses. Kushner's book was also more journalistic in nature rather than academic. To Kushner's credit, he drew from personally conducted interviews with the Wechslers that clarify much that Lewis Wechsler had written in his memoirs. Kushner also provided a detailed account of the litigation that followed the Levittown protests. However, the focus of Kushner's book was not solely on the Myerses. Much of Kushner's book was biography of Abraham and William Levitt, the father and son team behind their eponymous real estate development company. There are many more academic works that have discussed the life and actions of the Levitt family than the Myers family. Kushner wrote about Levittown with a wide lens, leaving a need for a more focused investigation

on what specifically happened during the tumultuous first week, August 13 to August 20, 1957, in Levittown, Pennsylvania.

In addition to Sugrue and Kushner's books, in 2010, Joseph Crespino and Matthew Lassiter edited a collection titled *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* that touched upon the events in Levittown. The goal of the collection was to dispel the notion that the American South was unique in its racism, segregation, and violence from the rest of the nation. In the words of the authors, Crespino and Lassiter set out "not to absolve the South but to implicate the nation."[4] To frame their volume, the editors compared the events in Levittown, Pennsylvania in 1957 to the reaction to the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, which took place just about two weeks after the unrest in Bucks County. They conflated the white resistance of the two events and ask "why do Americans remember Little Rock and not Levittown?"[5] Although the events in Levittown did not factor much into their greater volume, they still gestured toward Levittown as a example of the national, not southern, problem of white resistance.

In different ways, these works that have all dealt with the 1957 events in Levittown point to the town as an example of racial problems in the American North. Sugrue, Lassiter, Crespino, and to a lesser extent Kushner, all used the events in Levittown as evidence that postwar white resistance to civil rights and integration transcended sectional boundaries. However, by not delving into the story of Levittown in 1957 with enough detail, they all suffer from the same deficiency: they do not carry the story out far enough. These historians focused on the burning crosses and the mob violence that afflicted the Myerses, but not the peaceful resolution. They

[4] Matthew D Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds. *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.
[5] Ibid., 5.

neglected to mention that the Myers family was not forced out of Levittown. William and Daisy Myers remained in Bucks County for five years after crowds protested outside their home.

There is an important difference between what happened in Little Rock and Levittown. In Little Rock, President Eisenhower had to activate the National Guard to bypass the actions of the Arkansas governor. White Arkansas residents so staunchly opposed integration that they voted to shut down their schools for over a year rather than integrate. Meanwhile, two weeks earlier in Levittown, the Pennsylvania governor condemned the actions of the protesters and advocated for the Myerses' right to live in a white neighborhood. It did not take the National Guard to quell the violence, only a county-level injunction handed down by the court. In both scope and severity, the events in Levittown were demonstrably different than the events in Little Rock.

By piecing together the story of the Myerses time in Levittown and unifying disparate sources recounting their first days in Levittown in 1957, this thesis seeks to complicate the notion that white resistance in the North was similar to that in South. In order to do this, this thesis seeks to compile a day-to-day analysis of what happened to Levittown's first black family and utilize previously unused sources to generate the most complete investigation to date. This thesis is comprised of three chapters. The first places Levittown in the context of broader trends of postwar suburbanization in order to explain how and why the all-white community developed with a white, middle-class demography. Many scholars, including Sugrue and Kushner, have written about the events of Levittown divorced from its Bucks County setting. However, the development of Bucks County and the suburbs of Philadelphia shaped the development of Levittown and the historical actors who lived there in 1957. The second and third chapters reveal the actions, motivations, and desires of those who clashed in Levittown. Utilizing Bucks County archives on Levittown and local newspaper reporting untapped by other scholars, these last two

chapters provide a narrative of what occurred in the town with as much detail as the sources provide.

As more historians analyze massive resistance to integration in the suburban North, the events of Levittown in 1957 complicate, rather than fit, the story of similar patterns of massive white resistance across the United States. By generating a day-by-day analysis in the context of broader trends of suburbanization, much can be learned about what forces shaped these suburban communities and how they reacted to desegregation efforts in their communities.

Chapter 1: Bucks County and Trends of Suburbanization

The end of the Second World War precipitated a housing boom in the United States. Since 1940, when the possibility of American involvement in Europe became increasingly likely, marriage and births rates rose steeply, creating a demographic dilemma in the United States.[6] While housing developers neglected residential construction in order to focus valuable resources and production on government contracts and the war effort, government and media advertisements promised American servicemen idyllic lives and domiciles upon return, isolated from the noise and chaos of the cities.[7] The 16 million US servicemen returning from Europe and the Pacific were ready to settle down with their new wives and, in many cases, their new children who they would be seeing for the first time. But the question of where these solders would settle posed a looming problem to the United States government.

In order to fix this problem, the US government collaborated with private contractors after the war to meet this ravenous demand for housing. As early as August of 1945, with victory in Europe secured and the defeat of Imperial Japan appearing more likely, Federal Housing Administration (FHA) Administrator Raymond Foley created a committee of government employees and private contractors, bankers, and mortgage lenders to assess how the FHA could best facilitate enough housing growth to meet demand.[8] This collaboration and a variety of other initiatives taken by the US government and private builders initiated one of the most robust infrastructure booms in modern American history . While only 114,000 single-family homes

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[6] Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 232.
[7] Ibid. For more on the intersection of media/propaganda with suburban development, see Lynn Spigel's *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Postwar Media and Postwar Suburbs*.
[8] David M.P. Freund, *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 19-20.

were built toward the end of the war in 1944, 937,000 were built just two years later in 1946, and 1,183,000 in 1948.[9]

These new communities of mostly single-family homes were constructed on the outskirts of cities. No longer were these new suburban residents able to walk to their jobs in the city. The distance and commute necessitated the purchase of cars. Initially, the infrastructure and roads in many of these new communities were unable to handle the new traffic and offered little more than inconvenient and circuitous routes to points of interest in nearby cities. Suburban life was more isolated than living in the city. Although many newly constructed communities were built around older, preexisting suburbs, such as the Main Line outside of Philadelphia, some of these suburbs were secluded. Anywhere from thirty to fifty miles away from the center of Philadelphia, Bucks County was one of these isolated suburbs. Bucks County is different from many postwar suburbs like Montgomery and Delaware Counties outside of Philadelphia, Orange County outside of Los Angeles, and northern Fulton County outside of Atlanta in terms of its greater distance to the nearest urban center. However, the postwar development of Bucks County mirrored the growth of all of the aforementioned counties. The story of what happened in Bucks County is the story of what happened in thousands of communities across the United States.

Demographic and Population Trends

During World War II and after the end of the war, the population of the United States surged. In 1930, the U.S. boasted a population of about 123.1 million people.[10] Only thirty years later, this number increased to 180.7 million, revealing that the United States had one of the

[9] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 233.
[10] U.S. Census Bureau. Total Population, 1930.

fastest growth rates of nations around the world.[11] While much of this growth initially occurred in cities around the U.S., beginning after the end of World War II, many new families moved out of their homes in city centers and into new communities at their city's edges. While the United States aggregate population swelled in the years after World War II, certain areas of the nation grew more quickly than others.

Specifically, the suburbs were the main beneficiaries of this rapid growth. While many American cities declined in population in the postwar years, the suburbs swelled.[12] For example, Orange County, California, now one of the largest counties in the state, supported a population of only 130,760 in 1940. During the postwar era, however, its population grew at an astounding rate of 385 percent, surging to 703,925 people by 1960.[13] Many of these new residents came from nearby Los Angeles, whose exceptional growth contributed to the growth of surrounding communities.

While Los Angeles's growth translated into the population explosion of its surrounding suburban communities, some suburbs grew as nearby cities shrank in population. Many other cities across the United States, especially in the urban North, saw drops in their population during the postwar period. The population of Suffolk County, Massachusetts, which houses Boston, dropped more than 8 percent from 863,248 people in 1940 to 791,329 people in 1960.[14] However, over the same period, adjacent Norfolk and Middlesex Counties, home to towns such as Newton and Cambridge, both increased in population by about 57 percent and 28 percent, respectively.[15] New York County, which encompasses all of Manhattan, similarly saw a decline

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[11] U.S. Census Bureau. Total Population, 1960.
[12] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 4.
[13] Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 28.
[14] U.S. Census Bureau. Total Population, 1940 and 1960. Prepared by Social Explorer.
[15] Ibid.

in population from 1940 to 1960 as surrounding counties outside of the five boroughs and in New Jersey grew. Even if urban populations did not decline across this period, they were almost always outpaced by the growth of the surrounding communities. Cities such as as Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Denver, Philadelphia, and San Francisco also grew at slower rates than their surrounding suburbs.[16] These demographic trends transcended geography and illustrate the universal and ubiquitous suburban population explosion that came to characterize the postwar period.

Bordering Philadelphia, Bucks County was no exception to this rapid population growth. In 1940, Bucks County, a semi-rural area composed of farms and small communities, had a population of 107,715 people.[17] By 1950, the county grew to a population of 144,629 people and more than doubled to 308,567 in 1960.[18] Despite the fact that the United States was inundated by the arrival of the "baby boomers" after the end of the Second World War, the nation's growth rate paled in comparison to robust growth in Philadelphia's most rural suburb. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the US experienced a growth rate of 1.4 percent from 1940 to 1950 while Bucks County grew by 3.0 percent over the same period. In the following decade, the disparity widened even further: the US grew at a healthy rate of 1.7 percent from 1950 to 1960 while Bucks experienced a remarkable 7.8 percent growth. In the postwar moment, Bucks County was the fastest growing county in the state of Pennsylvania. Its growth was rivaled by only a handful of counties in the United States.[19]

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[16] Ibid.
[17] "Population Comparisons: Bucks County and United States." *Bucks County Economic & Demographic Profile*. Philadelphia Electric Company, April 1973. Box 586, Folder 12, General Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Urban Archives.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

While white residents comprised the racial majority in Bucks County and were, without question, the fastest growing racial group in the area, Bucks County has historically had a sizable African American presence. As many recent historians have contended, the American suburbs have always had an African American presence, stretching back to the earliest days of the Republic.[20] As far back as 1820, Bucks County's population was about 3.39 percent black.[21] In the twentieth century, however, Bucks County has had a smaller, but still significant percentage of African American residents. In the postwar era, Bucks County's African American percentage fluctuated between one and two percent. In 1940, about 1,956 of the county's 107,715 residents, or about 1.8 percent, identified as black.[22] In the following decades, the black population of the area grew to 2,491 people in 1950 and more than doubled to 5,488 people in 1960.[23] Despite this black demographic growth, a surge of new white residents, who accounted for the overwhelming majority of the county's postwar growth, dwarfed these figured. From the 1940s through the 1960s, African Americans still comprised only less than two percent of the total county population.

Predictably, there are a number of locations within Bucks County that have much greater racial diversity than other areas. As a general trend, Upper Bucks County, which is more agrarian, less densely populated, and farther away from centers of industry such as Philadelphia and Trenton, New Jersey and closer toward the Lehigh Valley, has fewer black residents than the rest of the county. The majority of black Bucks County residents, according to U.S. Census data, live in Lower Bucks, near the county line with Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania-New Jersey

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[20] For some of the most recent work on the historic presence of African Americans in the suburbs, see Andrew Wiese's *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Thomas Sugrue's *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008).
[21] U.S. Census Bureau. Race, 1820. Prepared by Social Explorer.
[22] U.S. Census Bureau. Race, 1940. Prepared by Social Explorer.
[23] U.S. Census Bureau. Race, 1950 and 1960. Prepared by Social Explorer.

state line. Examining Levittown, PA provides a unique image of why many African Americans lived in the lower part of the county. Levittown, the quintessential new suburban community whose growth far surpassed all other towns in Bucks County, focuses this analysis of suburbanization and race relations in the North. Levittown and its surrounding area attracted many black residents. For example, when U.S. Steel opened one of its largest plants near Levittown in December of 1952, the company welcomed African American workers. At the time, U.S. Steel heralded itself as America's largest employer of African Americans and hired many new black workers for the Bucks County plant.[24] The arrival of new businesses like U.S. Steel into the area attracted many black families to the county, only for them to settle where they could find affordable living in desegregated or predominantly black neighborhoods. Employment in Bucks County, which will be discussed later in this thesis, shaped the pattern of black settlement in Bucks County which centered in Lower Bucks County, near places like Levittown. This increased African American presence unsettled many nearby white communities, only for tensions to turn violent when black residents finally bought houses in their neighborhoods.

Considering these black patterns of settlement, few places in the county rival the growth of Bristol Township, a township in Lower Bucks County and the home to Levittown. The township experienced meteoric growth of both black and white residents in the postwar decades that outpaced all other areas of the county. In Pennsylvania, a township a collection of towns and typically the most local governmental body for a given area. For example, from smallest unit of organization to the largest, Levittown is a town in Bristol Township, which is a township in Bucks County.[25] While Bristol Township struggled to consistently maintain 5,000 residents in

[24] James Wolfinger, "'The American Dream – For All Americans': Race, Politics, and the Campaign to Desegregate Levittown." *Journal of Urban History* 38 no. 3 (May 2012), 431.

[25] While the differences between towns, townships, and counties may be confusing and convolute the discussion, much of the Census data available around the mid-twentieth-century is limited to townships as opposed to individual

the decades prior to 1940, the township surged from 5,857 people in 1940 to 12,184 people in 1950. After the development of additional postwar infrastructure and the arrival of new employers like U.S. Steel around Levittown and Fairless Hills, PA, the township boasted 59,298 people in 1960 and 67,498 people in 1970.[26] This exceptional growth that characterized Bristol Township and Levittown contributed to the growth of Bucks County and highlights the importance of examining Bristol Township and Levittown to understand the postwar history of the region.

While the rapid increase in population of areas like Bristol can be explained by outmigration from the cities, the population distributions of the county reveal how age factored into the growth. Just like in suburbs around the United States, the majority of the new residents moving to Bucks County were young couples and families. The settlement of these young families influenced age distributions in the county. In 1960, the percentage of Bucks residents under the age of five and from the ages of five to fourteen were both nearly 3% higher than that of distribution of the entire population of the United States.[27] The younger population of Bucks County facilitated even further growth in the area in the decades to follow. As those children who were born in the area came of age and began starting families of their own, many decided remained in Bucks County. While populations were in flux around the country, a common characteristic exhibited by many postwar suburbs was the sustained growth created by the decision of the children of the "first" families of a suburb to remain and raise their own children.

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towns. This limitation posed challenges when attempting to utilize Census information, as Levittown's population was lumped together with the rest of Bristol Township's. However, Levittown was the largest town in Bristol Township and therefore had the most influence on the population and demographic trends in Bristol Township.

[26] "Population of Township & Boroughs of Bucks County." *Bucks County Economic & Demographic Profile*. Philadelphia Electric Company, April 1973. Box 586, Folder 12, General Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Urban Archives.

[27] "Population Distributions." *Bucks County Economic & Demographic Profile*. Philadelphia Electric Company, April 1973. Box 586, Folder 12, General Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Urban Archives.

"We Can Solve a Housing Problem, or We Can Try to Solve a Racial Problem:" The Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration

Another way Bucks County reflected broader trends of suburbanization was through the role the federal government took in shaping the development of the county. The federal government's contribution to the postwar construction boom stretches back to the New Deal. Signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt on June 13, 1933, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) was created to revamp ineffective and inefficient loaning practices crafted under the Hoover administration, refinance mortgages for those on the verge of default, and even grant loans at low-interest rates to individuals who wished to purchase homes previously foreclosed on by their bank.[28] The organization made home ownership accessible for Americans recovering from the destitution of the Great Depression, prompting about 40 percent of all Americans eligible to receive assistance to take advantage of the HOLC.[29] Under the loan programs established by the HOLC, Americans receiving assistance would have up to twenty years to repay their loans at competitively low interest rates. The HOLC increased the sheer number of Americans taking out loans by making loans more accessible. The increased access to manageable and achievable loans increased demand for home ownership, which stimulated national development of new neighborhoods.

While the HOLC did make homeownership a possibility for millions of Americans and helped to ease the voracious demand for housing in the postwar United States, it also exacerbated de facto segregation and prohibited certain citizens from obtaining these loans and owning homes. Another consequence of the policies of the HOLC was the institutionalization of the

[28] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier,* 196.
[29] Ibid.

practice of redlining. As part of its goal, the HOLC sought to standardize appraisal methods of American neighborhoods.[30] The HOLC developed a rating system to meticulously value American neighborhoods, block by block, to better understand the risks associated with distributing loans to buy homes in certain neighborhoods. The rating system was broken down into four categories: A, B, C, and D. A, which was colored green on HOLC appraisal maps, was considered first grade and denoted the most desirable places to live. This scale continued down from A to D, which was denoted by red and represented the least desirable places to live.

A variety of factors went into evaluating each neighborhood, including the level of racial mixing and dilapidation of infrastructure. The finest neighborhoods, according to the HOLC, were homogenous, professional white neighborhoods on the outskirts of cities. As Kenneth Jackson noted, relators and HOLC employees were aware of the "intense antagonisms" that middle-class black families inflicted upon white residents when attempting to move into white neighborhoods.[31]Maintaining the same social and racial classes was imperative to the HOLC; any "incompatible" race mixing in a neighborhood invariably lowered its rating.[32]

These ratings, which favored homogenous white neighborhoods far from the racially and ethnically diverse centers of cities, prompted a surge in building toward the suburbs. The HOLC was more willing to provide Americans loans to purchase homes in these highly rated areas. This served an impediment to many black tenants, who found themselves at odds with real estate developers. Housing developers such as William Levitt, creator of his eponymous Levittown in Bucks County, explicitly prohibited African Americans from purchasing homes in these new

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[30] Ibid, 197.
[31] Ibid., 198. For additional discussion of the HOLC and FHA's evaluation of race in their appraisal systems, see the chapter "Federal Subsidy and the Suburban Dream" of *Crabgrass Frontier* and chapter one, "Marketing the Free Market" of *The New Suburban History*.
[32] David M. P. Freund, "Marketing the Free Market," *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16.

suburbs. Up until the Supreme Court ruled them a violation of the Equal Protection Clause in the 1948 case *Shelley v. Kraemer*, racial covenants were found in many housing agreements nationwide. These ubiquitous covenants prohibited the current homeowner from selling his or her home to anybody other than another white person. William Levitt, who employed racial covenants in the creation of all of his developments until 1948, attempted to rationalize this behavior by claiming that white tenants would not purchase his homes if he also sold to African Americans.[33] He infamously said that "we can solve a housing problem, or we can try to solve a racial problem," "but we cannot combine the two."[34] These practices exhibited by Levitt and real estate developers like him prevented African Americans from moving out of their homes in the cities and contributed to creating a homogenously white suburb. If an African American individual could secure a loan to purchase a house elsewhere, the HOLC would most likely only provide a loan to purchase a home in a desirable, first grade location. The fact that real estate developers were constructing homes in these grade-A areas and had a vested interest in only selling to whites to encourage even more whites to purchase homes prevented black individuals from purchasing homes elsewhere and contributed to a stark disparity: the conception of the white suburb and the black city.

Almost exactly a year later in 1934, the creation of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) continued many trends initiated by the HOLC and exacerbated residential segregation of American neighborhoods. Initially created as a way to combat historically high unemployment, the FHA sought to stimulate construction of new homes that would both create jobs in the

[33] Levitt, William. Interview by Stuart Bird. 1993. Transcript, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 5, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.
[34] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 241.

construction industry accessible to millions of unemployed Americans and later house millions of returning American veterans after the defeat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.[35]

While the FHA did not loan money to private contractors to stimulate construction of new houses, they relied upon credit and insurance to promote economic activity. The FHA insured mortgage loans made by private banks and lenders for the purposes of residential construction.[36] Insuring these loans lowered risk for lenders and prompted banks to lend out more money for construction. As a result, housing construction increased to unprecedented levels in the decades following World War II. The FHA stimulated the same kind of growth that the HOLC sought to create, and also suffered from the same deficiencies in terms of exacerbating residential segregation.

For example, by using the appraisal maps that the HOLC created, the FHA continued the legacy of discriminatory practices in mortgage loaning and influenced private contractors to only build homes for white families. In order to qualify for FHA insurance, federal underwriters evaluated the quality of residential areas, using a modified version of the formula used by HOLC appraisers. For the FHA, "relative economic stability" comprised 40% of the evaluation and "protection from adverse influences" comprised 20%.[37] These subjective criteria prompted many underwriters to reward all-white neighborhoods and penalize heterogeneous neighborhoods, similar to the HOLC map system.

The systems of racial exclusion that institutions like the HOLC and FHA forged and maintained shaped suburban development around the United States as well as in Bucks County. Businessmen like William Levitt both explicitly refused and strongly discouraged the sale of

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[35] Ibid, 203-204.
[36] Ibid., 204, and David M. P. Freund, "Marketing the Free Market," *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 14.
[37] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 207.

homes to people of color. The practices initiated by these institutions prompted banks to provide loans to other white families seeking to move to white neighborhoods and influenced residents to not sell to people of other races. For white residents, selling their homes to non-whites could potentially make their neighborhood less desirable for other whites, thereby lower the rating of their neighborhood, and subsequently lower the price of their homes. The practices of these governmental organizations generated economic concerns among white citizens, who sought to protect their investment in their homes. That is why when one of the protestors of the Myers' family move to Levittown was asked by a reporter his thoughts on having a black neighbor, he replied that Bill Myers, the father of the family, "was 'probably a nice guy, but every time I look at him I see $2,000 drop off the value of my house.'"[38]

Steel in the Suburbs: White Flight and Employment Patterns

While the federal government shaped the patterns of housing and demographic transition in places in Bucks County, it also created opportunity for defense contractors and the military-industrial complex that indelibly altered the landscape of the American suburb. While the end of World War II precipitated demobilization and prompted many business owners to return back to civilian production upon the termination of their wartime, government contracts, government defense spending continued to rise in the subsequent decades. Since 1951, U.S. real defense spending never dipped below $390 billion in 2018 dollars.[39] The decades following the Second World War were marked by an increase in government military contracts with private U.S.

[38] Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 226.
[39] Data taken from Ann Markusen et al., *The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 10. Markusen's book uses figured in 1982 dollars, so I have adjusted these numbers to 2018 dollars to provide a more accurate illustration of the U.S. government's spending on military matters.

enterprises. Thanks in part to the GI Bill, these lucrative contracts offered by the government allowed defense contractors to expand and hire thousands of newly college-educated engineers, scientists, and managers, attracting them from their hometowns to these new plants, factories, and laboratories.

While the main beneficiaries of these government contracts were contractors in states like California and New York, Pennsylvania ranked in the top states receiving government military contracts and has been overlooked by many historians. In the comprehensive and thorough *The Rise of the Gunbelt*, Ann Markusen and her coauthors illustrate that Pennsylvania consistently ranked in the top ten states housing companies that received federal defense contracts from 1941 to 1977.[40] In their analysis, Markusen and her colleagues tend to focus on the top five states receiving the largest percentage of government contracts over the same period. While this approach narrows the focus of their research and facilitates a detailed analysis of the evolution of the defense industry in places like California, New York, Texas, and Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, which held the rank of sixth from 1941 to 1952 and again from 1967 to 1972, is overlooked simply for receiving a slightly smaller percentage of contracts. In some cases, the difference between Pennsylvania and the state with the fifth highest percentage of federal contracts is as small as 0.1%.[41] Pennsylvania does not receive the same amount of attention as other regions, such as the West Coast and New England, and is mentioned sparingly.[42] Despite this lack of scholarly attention, Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia in particular, saw a similar pattern of government contracting in its suburbs feeding the growth of the defense industry in the

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[40] Ann Markusen et al., *The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 13.
[41] Ibid., specifically when looking at defense contracts from 1941 to 1958.
[42] For additional reading on the growth of the military-industrial complex and how it shaped the American suburb, see Lisa McGirr's analysis of Orange County, CA in *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

decades following World War II. Bucks County was chosen as the home for new factories and laboratories by many defense contractors and contributed to the growth of the county, like many other suburban communities around the United States.

Although the steel industry declined in decades following the Second World War, the largest employer and defense contractor in Bucks County during the 1950s was the United States Steel Corporation, more commonly known as U.S. Steel.[43] U.S. Steel, the largest manufacturer of steel products in the nation, sought to expand their enterprise by creating steel plants solely devoted to fulfilling government contacts. In order to achieve this goal and attract lucrative government contracts to manufacture steel parts for military machinery, U.S. Steel purchased over 3,900 acres of land in lower Bucks County originally devoted to spinach cultivation as the site for this new plant.[44] Named after U.S. Steel President Benjamin Fairless, the Fairless Works was strategically placed in the new community of Fairless Hills (also named after the Benjamin Fairless) in Bucks County. Much like neighboring Levittown, Fairless Hills was also a pre-planned community, built by real estate developer and mogul John W. Galbreath, meant to provide adequate housing for the thousands of new workers and their families moving to Bucks County seeking employment.[45] Only about six miles to Trenton, New Jersey and about eight miles to the Philadelphia city line, Fairless Hills offered an ideal location, nestled between two industrial centers and close enough to the Delaware River and port of Philadelphia for shipping.

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[43] Ann Markusen et al., *The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3; Employment statistic from "Economic Analysis." *Bucks County Economic & Demographic Profile*. Philadelphia Electric Company, April 1973. Box 586, Folder 12, General Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Urban Archives.

[44] "Fairless Works Highlights." *U.S. Steel Workers & Fairless Hills*. United States Steel Corporation, 1951; "A Steel Plant Rises Where Spinach Grew." *U.S. Steel News*. United States Steel Corporation, January 1952. MSC 803, Box 5, Folder 1, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.

[45] Greg Walter, "The Fractured Fairyland," *Philadelphia Magazine*, December 1968; "Fairless Hills…A New Town for Steelworkers." *U.S. Steel News*. United States Steel Corporation, January 1952. MSC 803, Box 5, Folder 1, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.

The need for this new plant came as the United States entered conflict in Korea in the 1950s. While the plant began producing a limited supply of finished steel products in 1951, the Fairless Works was not completed until December of 1952. *U.S. Steel Workers & Fairless Hill*, a magazine published by U.S. Steel featuring the writing of U.S. Steel executives, employees, and steelworkers, justified the need for the Fairless Works in early 1952 citing "a world in turmoil" and an ideological threat to American "national existence [and]…way of life."[46] The author invoked U.S. Steel's patriotic duty to answer the call from "Our Government…for more steel again to equip an Army for duty throughout the world."[47] With these concerns in mind, and the U.S. government contracting millions of tons of steel and steel products, U.S. Steel was able to expand and attract thousands of employees, ranging from blue-collar steelworkers to scientists and engineers.

Upon the completion of the "Tower of Defense," a self-proclaimed title that U.S. Steel gave to its new plant due to its its characteristic twenty-three-story blast furnace, the Fairless Works produced a variety of finished products, including tin and steel sheeting, piping, and plating.[48] These products were used in "essential" civilian industries as well as for military machinery.[49]

The Fairless Works had an indelible effect on Bucks County and shaped its employment and demographic patterns. After the Fairless Works began full operations in December of 1952, the percentage of workers in Bucks County working in industry increased. By 1960, over twenty

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[46] Introduction to "Growing with America," *U.S. Steel Workers & Fairless Hills*. United States Steel Corporation, 1952. MSC 803, Box 5, Folder 1, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.
[47] Ibid.
[48] "Fairless Works Highlights." *U.S. Steel Workers & Fairless Hills*. United States Steel Corporation, 1951. MSC 803, Box 5, Folder 1, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.
[49] Ibid.

percent of the entire county was classified as an "operative or kindred workers," or a worker who operated heavy machinery or with the help of heavy machinery, by the U.S. Census.[50] Additionally, the two largest industries in Bucks County became primary metals and chemical and allied products in the years following the completion of the plant.[51] As more workers moved to Bucks County to work in the new plant, the population rate of nearby Philadelphia slowed as Bucks County's rapidly increased.[52] New workers, many veterans of World War II, moved from their homes in nearby Philadelphia to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the new, gainful employment and cheap, convenient housing.

Although Bucks County is a unique example of the influences of military contracting, the patterns of postwar employment created demographic shifts in the county similar to those in areas around the country. Despite the exceptionally impactful effect steel had on southeastern Pennsylvania in the 1950s despite the resource's nationally diminishing influence, U.S. Steel still received similar kinds of government contracts that prompted the need to build additional plants and hire new workers. Although many of the government contracts issued from the 1950s through the 1970s were mainly aerospace and advanced technology contracts, Bucks County's legacy of steel influenced the growth of the area in similar ways as these other types of contacts.[53]

Although the growth of the steel industry in Bucks County led to a population explosion, comprised of mostly white, recently GI Bill-educated, workers from nearby Philadelphia, there

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[50] "Occupation and Industry." *Bucks County Economic & Demographic Profile*. Philadelphia Electric Company, April 1973. Box 586, Folder 12, General Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Urban Archives.
[51] "Manufacturing Industries." *Bucks County Economic & Demographic Profile*. Philadelphia Electric Company, April 1973. Box 586, Folder 12, General Pamphlet Collection, Temple University Urban Archives.
[52] U.S. Census Bureau. Total Population, 1940 and 1960. Prepared by Social Explorer.
[53] For for information at the growth of federal aerospace and advanced technology contracts, like missile defense, laser technology, and stealth technology, see Ann Markusen et al., *The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Markusen and her colleges perform a detailed analysis of the new kinds of defense contracting that emerges in the postwar period.

were other industries present in the area that blossomed as a result of lucrative government contracts, albeit with less impact on the area than U.S. Steel had. While steel drove the postwar demographic explosion in Bucks County and attracted new employees from Philadelphia, there were smaller, advanced technology companies present that also contributed to this shift, especially in lower Bucks County near Levittown. One of the largest and most notable defense contractors in Bucks County was Thiokol. Thiokol, a chemical and aerospace manufacturer that produced solid and liquid rocket fuel as well as a small variety of specialty rocket propulsion products, moved its headquarters to Bristol, Pennsylvania in 1958, but possessed holdings and facilities in Bristol since the early 1950s when they were headquartered in nearby Trenton, NJ.[54]

Thiokol is another example of the great impact that federal military contracting had on the development of the American suburb, and specifically Bucks County. In their company magazine, *Astronaut*, and in a variety of internal documents, Thiokol acknowledged that most of their business came from dealings with the U.S. Army, mentioning that wars like the Korean War increased the need for their products.[55] As these postwar contracts proliferated, so did Thiokol. In the decades following the Korean War, Thiokol expanded and built facilities in places like Utah, Alabama, Mississippi, Maryland, and Texas.[56] Just like in Bucks County, these new facilities attracted engineers and scientists and contributed to the growth of the white suburb.

Eventually, Thiokol was purchased by large aerospace contractor Northrup Grumman and closed down in Bucks County. However, Bucks County still maintained a legacy of

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[54] Marion C. Mizenko, "A History of the Thiokol Bristol Facility Property." MSC 803, Box 5, Folder 5, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.
[55] Ibid; J.W. Wiggins, "Quality Assurance, the Concept behind Rocket Readiness," *Astronaut* 1, no. 3: 3.
[56] Thiokol Chemical Corporation Promotional Flier, Box 5, Folder 5, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.

advanced technology engineering as Lockheed Martin retained their plant in Newtown, Pennsylvania up until they decided to relocated the plant from Bucks County to Denver in 2015. While neither Thiokol nor Lockheed Martin were as large as U.S. Steel and did not employ as many workers as the Fairless Works, all of these companies called Bucks County home and contributed to the postwar development of the county.

Although Bucks County is eclipsed in the literature on suburbanization by other notable suburbs, it is necessary to illuminate some of the trends that appear in other suburban works in order to provide a holistic image of a county in flux. By examining the demographic changes precipitated by new federal housing policy and federal defense contracting, similarities between Bucks County's growth and the growth of counties around the country become more apparent. These policies drew tens of thousands of new residents out into the suburbs, but prohibited certain individuals from joining the movement. These policies and practices created a fragile, insulated white suburb by only selling homes to white people and attracting white people to new gainful employment. The policies and practices also set the stage for what was to occur in 1957, when the first black family moved into all-white Levittown.

Chapter 2: Levittown 1957

When Levittown was completed in 1952 just after about a year of construction, it was larger than Wheeling, West Virginia.[57] Comprised of 16,000 new homes in addition to a spattering of parks, civic centers, places of worship, and police and fire posts, the community boasted about 70,000 residents by 1955, many them young families with heads of household under the age of thirty.[58] The new development in historic lower Bucks County represented the fruition of William Levitt's goal: the first step of the proliferation of his preplanned tract communities around the nation. After the construction of the first Levitt and Sons community on Long Island, Levitt and his company sought to expand his cheap and quick method of community building to new areas. The construction of Levittown, PA marked a milestone for Levitt. Breaking ground in Bucks County, Levitt and his real estate company were able to break out of New York and expand into a new region, complete with cheaper land and more room to expand. "The start of suburbia," as Levitt heralded his developments, had taken its first steps out of New York and entered Pennsylvania.[59]

Despite Levittown, Pennsylvania's initial success and growth, Levitt still sought to expand and add more homes to the burgeoning community. In 1958, as a way to promote the new community, he wrote an article for the nationally popular *Good Housekeeping* magazine. Titled "What! Live in Levittown?," Levitt sought to dispel ten misconceptions about living in a preplanned community and highlight the advantages of living in a home produced en masse. One

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[57] Craig Thompson, "Growing Pains of a Brand-New City," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 69, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 5, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Levitt and Sons Promotional Pamphlet, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 5, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.

of the misconceptions that Levitt sought to dispel for readers was the notion that "to get along with neighbors, conformity is a must."[60] *Good Housekeeping* published the article about a year after the Myers family moved into Levittown, and Levitt's answer rings eerily reminiscent and problematically ignorant of the violence and the chaos that erupted in his town in August of 1957. According to Levitt, "a certain amount of conformity is expected in any group. An oddball is an oddball anywhere, and people will have nothing do with him. As sociologists would say, the aberrant individual is rejected by the group."[61] Levitt's ironic promotion of homogeneity and rejecting the atypical in the wake of the unrest in Levittown revealed a surprising tone deafness about the Myers fiasco. From the moment they began moving into their new home at 43 Deepgreen Lane, Bill and Daisy Myers became these "aberrant individuals." Almost immediately on August 13, 1957, the Myers family was rejected by many of the lily-white residents, who resisted their move with violence, intimidation, and grassroots organizations.

The Road to Deepgreen Lane

The Myers family did not move into Levittown on a whim; they moved as a part of a calculated effort to upset the racial hegemony of the region in one of America's quintessential suburbs. As alone and ostracized as the Myers family must have felt when they took up residence in Levittown, their move to the all-white community was facilitated by religious and civil rights organizations at nearly every step of the process. Although the memoirs of Daisy Myers, written in the immediate aftermath of the Levittown incident, and of other Levittown neighbors provide reliable details, background, and day-by-day updates of the events that occurred in August of

[60] William J. Levitt, "What! Live in Levittown?," *Good Housekeeping*, July 1958, 47, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 5, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.
[61] Ibid.

1957, these accounts all seem to overlook how the Myers family became the first black family to move into Levittown. Popular imagination portrays the Myerses as the unwitting and naïve victims of hidden racial animus, but the family was actually acutely aware of the implications of their actions due to the upbringing of Bill and Daisy Myers and the actions they took in the months and years leading up to August 13, 1957.

Through her upbringing, education, and experience teaching in high schools, Daisy Myers knew of the challenges facing African Americans in the twentieth century and committed herself to advancing civil rights whenever possible. Born in 1925 in Richmond, Virginia, Daisy Dailey was the only child of railroad worker Myers and his wife Lottie. According to her memoirs, Daisy grew up in a middle-class home under parents who emphasized faith and education.[62] Daisy's parents taught her early in her life about the obstacles faced by African Americans living in the Jim Crow South. Both Myers and Lottie Dailey were members of the NAACP and joined grassroots efforts encouraging other black families to save for and pay the poll tax and vote in elections. They also made themselves available to drive other black residents to the polls on election day.[63] Daisy's parents also encouraged her to excel in class as a student. At the age of sixteen, Daisy graduated from high school and enrolled in Virginia Union College to study sociology and education.[64] In 1947, Daisy continued her education by pursuing a graduate degree at New York University, but was only able to study in New York for one year before family concerns forced her to return to Virginia and finish her graduate studies at Hampton Institute.[65]

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[62] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 11.
[63] Ibid., 13.
[64] Ibid., 12.
[65] Ibid., 12-14.

Due to her exposure to life in the urban North and the time committed to her graduate studies, Daisy claims that she began to question the institutions and practices that she had grown up with in the South. Daisy claims that she "had not thought about the race problem while [she] was growing up." She characterized her life in Virginia as ignorant, going as far to say that "living in Virginia is like working deep inside a coal mine. You don't know what's going on until you come up for a breath of fresh air, if you can get up."[66] Daisy's opportunity for a breath of fresh air came with her move to New York City. Her exposure to integrated classrooms and interactions with successful black professionals revealed to her just how oppressed Southern blacks were during her childhood. For example, while working part-time at a New York City publishing firm, Daisy had the opportunity to work with both black and white coworkers. From her own accounts, she was especially impressed to become acquainted with some black employees who had white subordinates under their supervision.[67]

It was not until Daisy returned to the South, however, that she gained transformative and foundational perspective on the plight of African Americans under Jim Crow. When she returned to teach in Virginia as she finished her studies at Hampton Institute, she became keenly aware of the drastically deficient quality of education and facilities inherited by black youth in Virginia. Becoming a high school teacher for a public school on Hampton's campus in 1949, Daisy was able to critically reexamine the challenges facing the African American students in schools with insufficient resources.

It was also in Virginia that she met her future husband, Bill Myers, an instructor on courses about electricity at Hampton. Originally enrolled at Hampton on a basketball

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[66] Quotes from Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 12.
[67] Ibid., 13.

scholarship, Bill's undergraduate studies were interrupted in 1942 by America's entrance into the Second World War. Achieving the rank of staff sergeant in the Army, Bill fought in the European theatre before returning to Virginia to complete his degree from Hampton.[68] Upon graduation, Bill was immediately employed by Hampton, where he met Daisy. The two did not date for very long; after about a year of knowing each other, the two married in December of 1950.[69]

The marriage of Daisy Dailey and Bill Myers was the impetus for Myers' move to Pennsylvania. Bill, a native of York, Pennsylvania, sought to return to his hometown in search of more lucrative employment and a larger home. Although Daisy claimed that York, a small town in south-central Pennsylvania about thirty miles south of Harrisburg, was an ideal spot to raise a family, the small community lacked the employment opportunities found in other parts of the state. From York, the family of four moved east to Philadelphia, looking for a new home after the birth of two boys. Quickly, the two moved again from Philadelphia to an integrated neighborhood in Bristol, Pennsylvania in Bucks County, seeking a house in the suburbs. The Myers' entrance into Bucks County exposed the family to civil rights institutions, social activism, and the Quaker tradition, all of which influenced them to move from their Bristol home to a new home in all-white Levittown in 1957.

In her memoir, Daisy seems almost nonchalant about the decision to move to Levittown. She mentions being a member of an "informal discussion group" sponsored by the William Penn Center, a Quaker meetinghouse with activist members devoted to advancing civil right.[70] But the work of other scholars reveals that these meetings were far from informal and were part of a

[68] Ibid., 14.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 23.

concerted effort of Quaker activism in southeastern Pennsylvania that originated upon the completion of Levittown, PA. Scholars such as Thomas Sugrue have indicated that beginning in 1953, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), another Quaker civil rights group, had been holding "secret meetings" in places like the William Penn Center in order to plan how to break the white homogeneity of Levittown.[71] The AFSC had a taskforce specifically devoted to the desegregation of Levittown. The Community Relations Division, as it was called internally by the AFSC, interviewed prospective black families to move into the community while simultaneously recruiting current Levittown residents who would be sympathetic to integrating their community.[72] The AFSC, along with the Human Relations Council (HRC), another organization devoted to advancing civil rights in Bucks County of which Bill and Daisy Myers were members, pooled resources in order to host meetings and discussions about opening Levittown to black families.

Despite the dogged persistence of the Community Relations Division, finding a suitable black family that was willing to move into Levittown was more challenging than recruiting white allies of integration within the community. After years of interviewing families and organizing a committee of supportive white Levittown residents, the AFSC and the HRC finally had the opportunity to interview the Myers family. Although the Myerses eventually became members of the HRC when they first moved to Bristol, they were initially unaware of the HRC initiative to integrate Levittown.[73] Once Bill and Daisy learned about the AFSC and were interviewed by Quaker activists, they began to seriously consider the possibility of moving. Similarly, after these

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[71] Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 220, 222.
[72] Ibid., 222-223.
[73] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 23.

interviews and learning that Bill was a veteran of World War II and now a refrigeration technician in nearby Trenton, New Jersey and that Daisy was a graduate-school educated former schoolteacher and mother of two, the AFSC felt that they had found their perfect family and began to seriously pursue them.[74] The Myers family was to move into Levittown once a house became available to purchase.

"Niggers have moved into Levittown!:" August 13, 1957

It did not take long to find a home to purchase. Through AFSC meetings held at the William Penn Center, the Myerses met Lewis and Bea Wechsler. The Wechslers, Jewish former communists, members of the HRC, and Levittown residents, connected the Myerses with their next door neighbor who was seeking to sell his home at 43 Deepgreen Lane.[75] While the neighbor was fearful of the potential backlash in selling his home to a black family, he used Lewis as an intermediary to help set up private meetings and discussions with the Myerses.[76] Eventually, a deal was finalized, and on August 10, 1957, the Myers family purchased the home.[77] Through the HRC and AFSC meetings at the William Penn Center, the Myerses found an unwavering ally in the Wechslers. The families forged close friendships that both Daisy and Lewis discuss at length in their respective memoirs. Their relationship and the unconditional support of the Wechslers would become one of the few stabilizing forces for the Myerses in the coming weeks.

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[74] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 25; Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 224.
[75] Lewis Wechsler, *The First Stone: A Memoir of the Racial Integration of Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: Grounds for Growth Press, 2004), 18-19.
[76] Ibid., 19.
[77] *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania v. Eldred Williams et al.,* "Complaint in Equity," *Court of Common Pleas of Bucks County*, September 1957, 1, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 11, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.

The moved into the new home on the morning of August 13, 1957. While many residents first thought that Bill and Daisy were cleaning the home before the arrival of the new owners, word quickly spread throughout the town that, in fact, the first black family had moved into Levittown. While Lewis Wechsler was in the Myers' new home to help the family move their furniture, he heard a knock at the door. Daisy Myers opened the door to find the mailman asking for Mr. Myers. When Daisy informed the postal worker that she was Mrs. Myers and could accept the mail on his behalf, the mailman handed her the mail and proceeded to walk down the street. According to Wechsler, the mailman began to spread the news that "niggers have moved into Levittown, in 43 Deepgreen!"[78] This was merely the inauspicious beginning to the Myers' tumultuous first weeks living in white suburbia.

While word spread quickly from neighbor to neighbor, one of the principal ways Levittown residents were informed of the Myers' entry into their neighborhood was through the newspaper. On the afternoon of the same day, the local *Levittown Times* ran a small-print, second page story on the Myers family. Only about two paragraphs long and overshadowed by stories about Clark Gable and local union graft, the article announced that "the first Negro family to buy a Levittown home moved into the Dogwood Hollow section this morning."[79] The article provided the name of William and Daisy as well as of their three children, with the third child born just one month before the move. The article highlighted that Bill Myers was veteran of World War II while leaving out details about Daisy's life.[80]

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[78] David B. Bittan, "Ordeal in Levittown," *Look,* 19 August 1958, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 11, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA; Lewis Wechsler, *The First Stone: A Memoir of the Racial Integration of Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: Grounds for Growth Press, 2004), 2.
[79] "First Negro Family Moves Into Levittown" *The Levittown Times*, 13 August 1957.
[80] Ibid.

In the wake of the article's publication in the afternoon of August 13, a trickle of Levittown residents began to walk by the corner home on Deepgreen Lane to see their new black neighbors for themselves. Some were simply curious while others were in disbelief. The white residents who paid a visit to the Myers' new home remained off the Myers' property, on the street, and were peaceful.[81] As Bill and Daisy organized their home, Lewis noticed the trickle of residents from his home and went outside to talk with the gathering residents. There he was able to hear firsthand about the anxieties of his neighbors. One Levittown resident claimed that the NAACP had purchased the home "for the niggers as a test case," as a pilot project with the goal to integrate neighborhoods nationwide.[82] Another was angry about the effect black neighbors had on the value of his home, claiming that their houses were "worth only half of what they were worth yesterday" and that more blacks from Philadelphia will be sure to follow and flood the town.[83]

From this anxiety grew grassroots organization and resistance against the Myers family. Most notable among the people who gathered outside the Myers family's home was James Newell, a native of Durham, North Carolina and nearby neighbor of the Myers'. He remained in front of the Myers' home from the afternoon to the evening on August 13, speaking to other discontented residents.[84] From these anxieties, Newell and other concerned white residents organized mobs to demonstrate outside of the Myers' home in the coming weeks.

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[81] This characterization comes from Lewis Wechsler, *The First Stone: A Memoir of the Racial Integration of Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: Grounds for Growth Press, 2004), 3-4, as well as the lack of violence reported on by local newspapers.
[82] Lewis Wechsler, *The First Stone: A Memoir of the Racial Integration of Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: Grounds for Growth Press, 2004), 4.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

The Myers family did not sleep in their new home on August 13. While much of their furniture was now in Levittown, the house was not hooked up to the local hot water system.[85] While the Myers family slept in their home in Bristol that night, the first crowd descended upon their home. A crowd of more than two-hundred gathered on the street in front of the house shortly after sundown with individuals fomenting unrest and delivering scathing invectives about the Myerses and about the dangers of allowing a black family to move in next door.[86] James Newell, who had been lingering outside the Myers' home during the day, was present in the crowd and one of these speakers. In the chaos of the mob, individuals had cast stones at the Myers' house, shattering one of their large glass windows. Additionally, some had thrown lit cigarette butts onto the Myers' dry lawn nearly starting a fire.[87] Some bystanders deemed it unruly and quickly called the police. From the information Daisy Myers received from her friends in Levittown while she was in Bristol, she estimated that the police were called around 8:00 PM that evening but did not arrive until around midnight.[88] At that time, the police gave the crowd three minutes to disperse. While most of the mob dispersed, some resistant mob members remained and were subsequently arrested. In total, five people were arrested on the night of August 13, three teenagers, and a husband and wife.[89]

The Myers' first day in Levittown served as a portent of what resistance they were to face in the coming weeks. Almost immediately, disorganized crowds of white residents, upset and anxious about the entrance of a black family into their town, swarmed upon 43 Deepgreen Lane. While protest and unruliness would continue to plague the Myerses for the week to come, the

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[85] "Protest Over Negro Family Ends Meeting," *The Levittown Times*, 15 August 1957.
[86] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 29; "Five Arrested in Levittown Disorder," *The Levittown Times*, 14 August 1957.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

next few days were characteristically different from this first day. Immediately after August 13, many white residents began to organize coordinated, grassroots resistance in response to the Myers' move. In response to this anti-Myers sentiment, a coalition of religious groups, civil rights groups, and concerned allies of the Myers' formed its own organization to advocate for the acceptance of Levittown's new black neighbors. The next weeks played out as a battle for the hearts of Levittown, with the two organizations contesting and antagonizing each other, each promoting their own answer to the racial problem in Levittown.

James "Jim" Newell, North Carolina native and leader of the Levittown Betterment Committee that sought to have the Myers family removed from Levittown.

Photo from "Triumph Over Violence: Levittown's Week of Conflict," *Bucks County Traveler*, September 1957, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 11, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA

Two police officers examine the damage done to the Myers house after members of the mob threw stones on the night of August 13, 1957.

Photo from the George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Photograph Collection, Temple University Urban Archives.

August 14-16: The Levittown Betterment Committee, the Levittown Citizens Committee, and the Organizational Development of the Conflict

When the Myerses returned to Levittown on the following day, they were greeted by a line of local police outside of their home. While the police's presence surely calmed the Myerses and their allies, the police had not been not called to protect the Myerses. Rather, they were ordered by the sheriff to direct traffic. The news of the Myers's arrival and the backlash it had generated reached the front-page of the local *Levittown Times*.[90] Now, residents from all around Levittown and Bucks County were walking and driving down Deepgreen Lane to see Levittown's first black family for themselves.[91] The traffic became so intense that the local police had to close off the entrances to the Myers' section of Levittown after about one thousand cars drove by the home on the afternoon of the fourteenth.[92] Meanwhile, as crowds of people gathered on the streets, the Myerses and their friends began to clean up from the destruction of the previous night.

Inside the home, the Myerses, the Wechslers, and other friends and allies from the William Penn Center gathered to discuss what had happened the previous night as well as assist in a variety of housekeeping chores, such as painting and putting up wallpaper.[93] As the group began to work, many noticed that the telephone began to ring nonstop. From nearby and across the country, many Americans had heard about the Myers' story on national radio and television and sought to send a message to the family. Many called to encourage the Myerses, including a man from Yuma, Arizona who encouraged them to continue fighting to show the world that "all

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[90] See "Five Arrested In Levittown Disorder" and "Council Lauds Calm Levittowner Stand" on the front page of the August 14, 1957 edition of the *Levittown Times*.
[91] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 30-31; Lewis Wechsler, *The First Stone: A Memoir of the Racial Integration of Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: Grounds for Growth Press, 2004), 24.
[92] "Protest Over Negro Family Ends Meeting," *Levittown Times*, 15 August, 1957.
[93] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 30.

men are created equal."[94] The calls eventually became so burdensome that the William Penn Center sent over an additional two volunteers to answer calls for the family and accept telegrams. However, this proved insufficient. Calls continued to flood the house and eventually William Penn Center members began taking turns working hourly shifts from the morning into the evening for the Myerses.[95]

Despite the support the family received from around the nation, the situation in Levittown grew increasingly volatile. With little to do during the summer, many teenagers began to congregate outside of the Myers' home, revving their engines in order to disturb the family inside.[96] As people returned home from work, the daytime crowd that seemed more inquisitive than intimidating was replaced by protestors. As the angry neighbors gathered, vitriolic rumors swirled outside. According to many Myers allies, many protestors claimed that the NAACP or communists had initiated the move.[97] Others linked the Wechslers to the Myerses and claimed that the Jews had been behind a grand national conspiracy to integrate communities across the country, going so far as to mail the Wechslers a letter claiming that "I have yet to see a colert [*sic*] person ever to indanger [*sic*] himself in defense of a Jew. Now I can see why the Jew is hated, they do not stick to [their] own," signed by "Millions of white People."[98]

As the mob on Deepgreen continued to grow on the evening of August 14, a group of concerned citizens interrupted a local township meeting. Over one hundred residents, angry about the Myers' move to Levittown, packed into the meeting of the Bristol Township Board of

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 31.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 31, 38.; Letter from Lewis Wechsler, *The First Stone: A Memoir of the Racial Integration of Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: Grounds for Growth Press, 2004), 22.

Commissioners to demand that they "do something" about the Myerses.[99] To this first crowd, William J. Carlin, Bristol Township solicitor, said that the there was nothing the commissioners could do about the Myerses.[100] Strategically downplaying the influence of the municipal government as to not further incense his constituents, Carlin simply affirmed that the "federal courts have ruled in this matter" and the question was not "in the scope of the legal limitations of the commissioners."[101] Harold Lefcourt, the township commissioner who represented the Dogwood Hollow section of Levittown that the Myerses now lived in, suggested that those against the move should organize "if they wish to fight the matter legally."[102] Lefcourt continued and advocated for a peaceful resolution, but neither Lefcourt nor Carlin sought to discourage the protests. As elected officials, both men enabled the protesters and leveraged their credibility and positions of authority to advocate for open resistance to the arrival of Levittown's first black residents.

After the first group of protestors departed from the meeting, a second group of residents arrived about fifteen minutes after the first, coming directly from the Myers' home.[103] Despite their attempts to quell the crowd and explain to the new protestors what they had discussed with the previous group, the second group grew increasingly frustrated and relentlessly yelled and jeered the commissioners.[104] According to C. Leroy Murray, the sheriff of Bucks County at the time, the people in this second group said they would take matters into their own hands if the

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[99] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 31; "Protest Over Negro Family Ends Meeting," *Levittown Times*, 15 August, 1957.
[100] "Protest Over Negro Family Ends Meeting," *Levittown Times*, 15 August, 1957.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

commissioners did nothing.[105] Due to the commotion and the threats, the commissioners voted to recess at 11:00 PM. and ceased all discussion, leaving the group with no answers.

Meanwhile, as protestors interrupted the local township meetings and residents continued to linger outside of the Myers home, a new grassroots organization met for the first time at the John Billington Veterans of Foreign Wars Post (VFW), only about a half of a mile away from the Myers residence. Calling themselves the Levittown Betterment Committee, this organization of concerned neighbors sought legal ways to remove the Myerses from their town.[106] James Newell, a regular face in the crowds that gathered outside of the Myers' home and a nearby neighbor in the Dogwood Hollow section of Levittown, served as the chairman of this new organization.[107] According to Daisy Myers, Newell was a former post and county VFW commander, giving him access to the facilities in Levittown.[108] The VFW post would serve as the meeting place of the committee in the coming weeks and the central command where Newell and a select group of other residents would plan their protests. Although Newell publically claimed that the organization sought a peaceful end to the Myers' time living in Levittown, both Wechsler and Daisy Myers remembered his rhetoric and actions fostering an inhospitable environment, inciting violence and paranoia amongst the crowds. For these reasons, some of the Myers' allies referred to this new organization as the "Bitterment Committee."[109]

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[105] Telegram from C. Leroy Murray to Governor George M. Leader, 15 August, 1957, Manuscript Group 207, George M. Leader Papers, Subject File 9-0288, Box 31, Folder 2, Levittown State Police Action, M-2, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.
[106] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 32, 34; "Anti-Negro Group Seeks Legal Bolster," *The Levittown Times*, 16 August, 1957.
[107] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 34; Lewis Wechsler, *The First Stone: A Memoir of the Racial Integration of Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: Grounds for Growth Press, 2004), 28; "Anti-Negro Group Seeks Legal Bolster," *The Levittown Times*, 16 August, 1957.
[108] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 34.
[109] Lewis Wechsler, *The First Stone: A Memoir of the Racial Integration of Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: Grounds for Growth Press, 2004), 25.

Despite the creation of the Betterment Committee and the chaos at the Bristol Township meeting, the evening of Wednesday, August 14 was surprisingly calmer than the previous night. The crowds that did gather outside were peaceful; nobody threw stones at any windows and nobody lit any fires. While the police did leave the Myers' home in the late afternoon of the fourteenth after stemming the flow of traffic and managing the crowds, police chief John R. Stewart ordered officers back to the home after the raucous mob walked from the Township meeting to the Myers' home to protest. One teenager in the crowd did attempt to throw a stone at the Myers' home, but he was quickly stopped by other members of the mob.[110] There were two arrests on the evening of the fourteenth, but not for any overtly violent acts. *The Levittown Times* reported that one woman was arrested for disorderly conduct after running down Deepgreen Lane and yelling in an attempt to get people out of their homes and protest. She plead guilty and paid her fine of $19.[111] No other paper provided the reason the other man was arrested that night. The newspaper painted the protests not as a mob, but merely as a "discussion in the streets."[112] The *Bucks County Traveler* attributed this brief lull in the violence to a sense of shame and increased police supervision.[113]

Still unable to get the gas hooked up to their home and the hot water heater operating, the Myerses spent the night of the fourteenth in their Bristol home, again. They did not witness the crowds outside their home for the second night. However, when they awoke on the morning of Thursday, August 15, they chose not to return to Levittown for the day. Instead the couple decided to take their children to York, Pennsylvania to stay with Bill's family for the day,

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[110] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 33.
[111] "Protest Over Negro Family Ends Meeting," *Levittown Times*, 15 August, 1957.
[112] Ibid.
[113] "Triumph Over Violence: Levittown's Week of Conflict," *Bucks County Traveler*, September 1957, 24, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 11, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.

seeking peace and relaxation.[114] When it became clear to Bill and Daisy that the protests would not stop anytime soon, the two sought to take their children out of Levittown and away from the potential for violence. When they arrived in York, they did not get the relaxation they sought. Hounded by newspaper reporters, the couple answered questions for national and local reporters, about the reactions of their new neighbors and their motivation for moving.

While the Myerses stayed far from Levittown on the fifteenth, the situation quickly deteriorated. Thursday, August 15 marked a watershed day in the violence and pandemonium experienced in Bucks County. With the local township and county officials tacitly endorsing the protests by refusing to comment on the situation and suggesting that upset residents attempt to find a legal solution, the only other authority who would attempt to put an end to the chaos was the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Much like the days before, residents continued to gather outside of the Myers' home during the daylight hours, refraining from violence but still continuing to gather and protest. As residents gathered, word spread that the Betterment Committee was having a meeting that evening at the VFW Post. Taking heed from the previous night, Bucks County Sheriff C. Leroy Murray grew concerned about residents marching on the Myers' home following the meeting. Worried that local police alone would not be able to quell a larger crowd of protestors, Murray sent an emergency telegram to Harrisburg, intended for Pennsylvania Governor M. George Leader at around 3:30 PM.[115]

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[114] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 33.

[115] Telegram from C. Leroy Murray to Governor George M. Leader, 15 August, 1957, Manuscript Group 207, George M. Leader Papers, Subject File 9-0288, Box 31, Folder 2, Levittown State Police Action, M-2, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

In a three-page telegram, Murray wrote that "the citizens in Levittown are out of control" and that the local chief of police, the Bristol Township manager, and the Board of Bristol Township Commissioners all requested that he seek the assistance of the state police.[116] Murray went on to write that the people expressed that they would "take things into their own hands" and be especially "irate" and in larger numbers after tonight's Betterment Committee meeting.[117] For these reasons, Murray requested that state troopers be sent into Levittown to assist the local police in keeping the peace. Only with the Commonwealth's help could the group "be quelled without bloodshed."[118] At the request of Murray, Leader ordered state troopers to protect the Myers' home in Levittown.[119]

That night, the Levittown Betterment Committee reached its peak membership. Meeting at the VFW post at about 8:00 PM, the *Levittown Times* reported that about six hundred people gathered in the parking lot outside of the building.[120] According to newspaper reporters as well as friends and allies of the Myerses that attended the Betterment meeting, the meeting was poorly organized and merely an echo chamber of hateful messages. Newell and the leadership of the Committee had trouble speaking over the commotion of the crowd.[121] One man suggested that there were two options they could take: "We can vote them out or we can force them out."[122] While another man threw his support behind a vote, suggesting that the group could ask Bill Myers to abide by a poll of the neighborhood whether or not he could stay in Levittown, the idea

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[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] "Anti-Negro Group Seeks Legal Bolster," *The Levittown Times*, 16 August, 1957.
[120] "Anti-Negro Group Seeks Legal Bolster," *The Levittown Times*, 16 August, 1957; Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 34.
[121] "Anti-Negro Group Seeks Legal Bolster," *The Levittown Times*, 16 August, 1957; Daisy Myers provides the account that Reverend Harwick gave to her after he attended the meeting. See Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 35.
[122] "Anti-Negro Group Seeks Legal Bolster," *The Levittown Times*, 16 August, 1957.

was vehemently rejected by those present.[123] Another person suggested that the group could refuse to pay their mortgages as long as the Myerses live in Levittown.[124] Others suggested they could "burn them out."[125] While Newell reaffirmed his goal to peacefully and legally find a way to remove the Myerses and rejected the violent proposals, the suggestions of the crowd reveal that the Betterment Committee generated a violent and hateful atmosphere where dangerous ideas were deemed a part of acceptable discourse and had a backing of at least some of the protestors.

After the meeting ended, most of those attending began the half mile walk to the Myers' home. Newell and nine other leaders of the group stayed at the VFW Post to discuss possible legal recourse they could take against the Myers' as the group marched to Deepgreen Lane. The local paper described the scene as a "carnival atmosphere."[126] However, despite the crowd reaching its largest size since the move, law enforcement was prepared. Waiting for the crowd were twelve Pennsylvania state troopers as well as a group of local township police working in a joint operation.[127] The police presence did not stop the crowd from forming. They proceeded to march down the street in a single file line, only to be broken up by the police after a few minutes.[128]

When it became clear that violence within the crowd was possible, nearby neighbors began to take actions to stop the protests. Bernard Ball, who lived across the street from the Myerses, took his car and drove around in circles on his own front lawn in an effort to rid his

[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.

property of the protesters who had spilled onto his land.[129] Stopping only a few feet short of some of the protesters, Ball was reported as getting out of his car and saying that "this don't make any sense…This won't accomplish anything. These people don't have any right to do this…This crowd is violating Myers' right to live where he wants, and my right to sleep."[130] After the outburst, Ball asked the chief of police to clear his lawn of protestors. The chief fulfilled his request.

As the police broke up the protest and ordered residents to disperse from the area, someone burned a cross near the Myers house. At about 10:00 PM, while the police monitored the protesting on Deepgreen Lane, the Falls Township emergency dispatcher notified the chief of police that a patrolling officer had seen the burning cross.[131] Standing eight feet tall and made of bamboo and turpentine-soaked rags, the cross stood on the grounds of the nearby Walt Disney Elementary School only about two miles away. In an open field, the cross would have been plainly visible to all who drove down the Levittown Parkway, one of the main highways in Levittown that residents had to drive on in order to reach their homes in the neighborhoods adjacent to Dogwood Hollow, such as Lakeside, Pinewood, and Farmbrook.[132]

Governor Leader denounced the demonstrations and scare tactics at a multi-county meeting in Reading, Pennsylvania. Leader said that "the stoning of the house of the first Negro family in Levittown is completely alien to the historic principles on which Pennsylvania was

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[129] "Anti-Negro Group Seeks Legal Bolster," *The Levittown Times*, 16 August, 1957; Lewis Wechsler, *The First Stone: A Memoir of the Racial Integration of Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: Grounds for Growth Press, 2004), 28.

[130] Quote from the August 15, 1957 edition of the *Philadelphia Bulletin.* Found in Lewis Wechsler, *The First Stone: A Memoir of the Racial Integration of Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: Grounds for Growth Press, 2004), 18-19.

[131] "Anti-Negro Group Seeks Legal Bolster," *The Levittown Times*, 16 August, 1957.

[132] After visiting the elementary school and reading reports of the cross burning in local newspapers to learn about the possible location where the cross could have been, it appears that the burning cross was far enough as to not be visible from the Myers home, but still would have attracted attention from residents in the nearby sections of Levittown.

built." He went on to say that "any family has the right to live where it can obtain the right of legal possession – on any street, road, or highway in the Commonwealth."[133] Unlike the county and township officials, the state was quick to condemn the actions of the mob and send police officers to keep the Myers family safe from harm.

As the Levittown Betterment Committee continued to grow and attract more attention from the local press, many concerned Levittown residents noticed that there was a glaring absence of a unified organization on the other of the conflict. In both of their memoirs, Daisy Myers and Lewis Wechsler suggested that the hodgepodge of civil rights and social action organizations present in Levittown in the 1950s neutered civil rights efforts by creating a confusing and disorganized bureaucracy to navigate. Organizations that were instrumental in planning the Myers' move such as the American Friends Service Committee and the Human Relations Council, as well as other organizations such as the NAACP, all had similar missions and goals. Rather than join forces, these organizations had to plan across institutional lines, creating a fickler and more cumbersome process for planning events and beginning initiatives. However, on Friday, August 16, 1957, the Myers and their allies sat down and created their own organization devoted to supporting Levittown's first black family and advancing civil rights: the Citizens' Committee for Levittown.

Emerging from a need to coordinate responses to the Betterment Committee and protestors across a variety of religious, civic, and advocacy groups, the Citizens' Committee formed from smaller meetings hosted by the Human Relations Council (HRC). While the

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[133] "Legal Means Sought to Force Negroes To Leave Levittown," *The Levittown Times*, 16 August, 1957; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 16, 1957, 42.; "Triumph Over Violence: Levittown's Week of Conflict," *Bucks County Traveler*, September 1957, 24, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 11, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.

Betterment Committee met at the VFW post on the night of Thursday, August 15, the HRC called a meeting at the William Penn Center to look for new ways to support the Myers. Representatives from local organizations such as Temple Shalom of Levittown, the Jewish War Veterans, the Levittown Jewish Center, the Fallsington Monthly Meeting of Friends, the American Friends Service Committee, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the Levittown Civic Association all attended the meeting.[134] The represented organizations of the meeting would become the foundation of the new Citizens' Committee and illustrate how diverse and broad the sources of support were for the Myers family.

One of the key figures in unifying these organizations and creating the Citizens' Committee was Reverend Ray L. Harwick, the pastor of the Church of the Reformation in Levittown. He had arrived back in Bucks County from vacation on August 13, the first day that the Myerses moved into their new home.[135] Returning in the midst of the conflict, the pastor was informed of the actions of the Betterment Committee, the violence, and the burning cross from Reverend Daniel Stevick, the president of the Lower Bucks County Council of Churches. With this information, Harwick decided to attend the Betterment Committee meeting at the VFW on Thursday night and was repulsed by the hateful tone and spirit of the group.[136] Harwick personally sought to comfort the Myers family and made himself available to them once he learned of the hateful and intolerant acts committed by other Levittown residents, many of them his congregants.

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[134] List from Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 35. Interestingly, due to declining membership, Temple Shalom of Levittown had to merge with Shir Ami of Newtown in 2011, which is the synagogue I grew up attending and am still a member of today.
[135] Ibid, 34.
[136] Ibid.

One of the first actions of the newly created Citizens' Committee was generating publicity. On Friday, August 16, the group adopted a "Declaration of Conscience" that served as a mission statement. The declaration called for the "maintenance of law and order" as well as "deplore[d] all actions of violence and intimidation against the Myers family."[137] The group was able to get a version of the declaration published in the *Levittown Times* signed by the Council of Churches in Lower Bucks County, the Jewish Community Council, the William Penn Center, and the Levittown Civic Association. This version stated that "demonstrations of racial and religious bigotry have no place in our community, and we know that further developments in Levittown will keep faith with the wholesome democratic traditions of our nation."[138]

With the declaration written and ready to publish, the group quickly moved onto adopting a "seven point program" bluntly titled "What We Can Do To Stop Violence."[139] Included in these seven points were:

(1) Do not panic.
(2) Work up a fact sheet to squelch rumors.
(3) Have church bodies draw a "Declaration of Conscience."
(4) Flood the mail with "letters to the editor."
(5) Call neighbors and friends and tell them how you feel about the Myers' situation.
(6) Appeal to real estate men not to take advantage of the panic.
(7) Distribute literature on tolerance.[140]

Reverend Daniel Stevick, the temporary chairman of the Citizens' Committee, said that in addition to this plan, "Protestants, Catholics, and Jewish denominations [must] take a united stand for integration."[141] Reverend Stevick went on to say that the seven-point program would not stop the violence, but it would help until educational programs help teach tolerance and

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[137] Ibid, 37.
[138] "Declaration of Conscience," August 1957, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 11, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA
[139] "Both Factions Urge Peace in Solution," *The Levittown Times,* 17 August, 1957.
[140] List comes from "Both Factions Urge Peace in Solution," *The Levittown Times,* 17 August, 1957.
[141] Ibid.

respect. Stevick received airtime from the local CBS station, helping bolster his case advocating for the Myers.

On this first day of operation, the Citizens' Committee also telegraphed Governor Leader. Described by the local newspaper as "hastily worded," the Committee sent a message warning of the potential for violence after the Betterment Committee meeting planned for the next day, Saturday August 17, at 5:30 PM.[142] Despite the fear of violence the following night, much of the protesting that Friday evening was non-violent. Before the gathering, James Newell had urged the crowd to avoid "mob violence" and try to resolve the dispute through "peaceful means."[143] He had unsuccessfully attempted to contact William Levitt and discuss the possibility of getting one of America's most successful real estate developers involved with removing the Myerses.[144] The crowd, gathered outside the still empty Myers home that evening, was never broken up by the local police or state troopers. Despite this, no crosses were burned, and no people were arrested.

[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.

Daisy and Bill Myers prepare for dinner in their Levittown home on the evening of August 19, 1957.

Photo from the George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Photograph Collection, Temple University Urban Archives.

Bill Myers is interviewed by reporters outside of his Levittown home on August 21, 1957.

Photo from the George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Photograph Collection, Temple University Urban Archives.

James Newell (holding megaphone) attempts to talk to crowd gathered near Myers home.

Photo from the George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Photograph Collection, Temple University Urban Archives.

Aug 17-20: "Gestapo," "Brutes," and "Dictators"

From August 17 until August 20, there was not much development in the fight to rid Levittown of the Myers family. Toward the end of the Myers' first week in Levittown, the Betterment Committee continued to meet and organize outside of the Myers home, only to be countered by the Citizens' Council in the press with public statements. However, while the Betterment Committee's model of nightly meetings and mobilization outside of the Myers home seemed to be gaining the attention that they sought in order to garner more support and intimidate the Myerses, it quickly led to its downfall. The hateful attitude of the protests fostered by the Betterment Committee quickly turned violent and destroyed any of the public support it had gained throughout its week of protesting.

After another night of non-violent protest, on Saturday, August 17, the Citizens' Council met again and declared Reverend Harwick the chairman of the Citizens' Committee.[145] As Daisy Myers described it, the Citizens' Committee quickly phased out the now-obsolete Human Rights Council (HRC) as the two organizations had very similar missions. As a result, many of the members of the HRC simply began attending Citizens' Committee meetings, leading to the HRC falling into disuse.[146] This consolidation of the groups brought along many other religious groups of both Christian and Jewish faith, creating an even wider platform for the Citizens' Committee to spread its message of tolerance.

The choice to make Reverend Harwick the commissioner of the Committee was a strategic decision to unite the Jewish and Protestant coalition. While Harwick was personable and well-liked within the community, he was not chosen simply because of his charisma and

[145] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 38.
[146] Ibid.

public platform. Unlike other members of clergy on the committee, Harwick occupied the unique position to both welcome invaluable support from Jewish groups and attempt to work with recalcitrant Catholic organizations. Harwick, who had experience coordinating with Jewish groups in Levittown, publicly supported the efforts of Jewish groups and possessed the religious network possible to get Jewish congregations and organizations to publicly support the Myers' move. While many were hesitant to discuss Jewish influence in the Myers' move due to anti-Semitic rumors that the Jews had planned this forced integration, Daisy Myers reported that Harwick told the Citizens' Committee that "the best Christians in our town are our Jewish neighbors" and preached the same at his church.[147] On the other side of the conflict, while many Catholic priests stated that they "[could not] involve [themselves] in activities such as this" and called the situation "too hot to handle" and refused to address their congregations, Harwick was able to appeal to Catholic parishioners by using his pulpit and Christian scripture to justify love and tolerance for the Myerses.

That night, after the Citizens' Committee sent the frantic telegram to Governor Leader of the fear of potential violence, the Betterment Committee resumed its regular protesting outside of the Myers' still empty home. Tipped off by the telegram, twenty-five state troopers stood on Deepgreen Lane, waiting for the group of protestors. As the protestors arrived, Sherriff Murray announced that the group would not be allowed to congregate and ordered all protesters to quickly move through Deepgreen Lane.[148] While most protesters heeded the sheriff's warning, one man resisted, resulting in the eighth arrest related to the protests.[149] Despite the arrest, the crowd again remained non-violent.

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[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.

While the protest that night did not result in any bloodshed or property damage, local and state officials sought to prevent any future gatherings in order to squash the possibility for additional violence. On Sunday, August 18, Sheriff Murray called Betterment Committee meetings "unlawful" because the organization sought to "plan discrimination," which was illegal.[150] Despite the sheriff's orders, James Newell issued a statement that he would seek to hold a public meeting in the coming week.[151] Newell also discussed a plan to raise money in order to pay the Myers family to move to nearby Concord Park, an integrated suburban community also in Bucks County.[152]

With the threat of the sheriff looming, Newell decided not to call for a Betterment Committee meeting that Sunday. Despite backing down from his original plan, he postured to local papers saying that he was actively seeking a space large enough to hold the next gathering.[153] Newell later distributed a written announcement to the local press reading that despite the sheriff's orders, the Betterment Committee had not disbanded and was gaining additional members.[154] While demonstrators still rallied outside of the Myers home, the group was much smaller than it had been on other nights.[155] Without a Betterment Committee meeting, the protesters had no rallying point to meet before traveling to Deepgreen Lane.

After the atypically calm Sunday, the next two days saw an increase in activity and violence. The beginning of the week on Monday, August 19 initiated a chaotic crescendo with its

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[150] "More Meetings Planned On L'town Issue," *The Levittown Times*, 18 August, 1957.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid. For more information on Concord Park, see Benjamin W. Piggot, "The 'Problem' of the Black Middle Class: Morris Milgram's Concord Park and the Residential Integration of Philadelphia's Postwar Suburbs." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 132, no. 2 (April 2008): 173-190; Thomas Sugrue, "Concord Park, Open Housing, and the Lost Promise of Civil Rights in the North." *Pennsylvania Legacies* 10, no. 2 (November 2010): 18-23.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.

ultimate climax on Tuesday, August 20. The events of this week would indelibly weaken the Betterment Committee and ensure the end of organized, grassroots, resistance to the Myers in Levittown, as well as generate backlash from other white Levittowners fed up with the violent actions of the Betterment Committee.

Six days after first moving into Levittown, the Myers were finally ready to spend the night in their new home on Monday, August 19. After a repairman fixed the hot water heater Monday morning and the first delivery of oil for the heater reached the home around noon, the Myers left for Levittown in the afternoon.[156] Reaching Levittown in the late afternoon, the couple and some close friends quickly entered their home with a number of reporters. Bill and Daisy Myers had reluctantly agreed to conduct a press conference inside of their home to publicize their permanent move into their new home.[157]

When talking to the reporters, Daisy and Bill were resolute in their goal of staying in Levittown despite the resistance and danger against their family. When asked about why he decided to move to Levittown, Bill Myers told a reporter that "I am a veteran, and I feel that I have a right to live where I choose. I selected my Levittown home because it fits my family needs."[158] A reporter then asked Bill whether his family had received any external assistance from civil rights groups. Bill categorically denied the question and reaffirmed that he and Daisy had deliberately chosen Levittown on their own accord.[159]

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[156] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 43.
"State Troopers Break Up Crowd; Man Held for Disorderly Conduct," *The Levittown Times*, 20 August, 1957.
[157] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 44.
[158] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 45; "State Troopers Break Up Crowd; Man Held for Disorderly Conduct," *The Levittown Times*, 20 August, 1957; "State Troopers Break Up Crowd; Man Held for Disorderly Conduct," *The Levittown Times*, 20 August, 1957.
[159] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 45.

As the interviews continued and Bill and Daisy fielded questions, the flurry of press activity outside of the home had attracted a group of protesters on Deepgreen Lane. The group, which had grown to about four hundred people, began to jeer and yell at the Myers as the interviews were conducted inside.[160] The distractions from outside prompted many reporters to shift their questioning to Bill and Daisy's reactions to the protests. When asked his thoughts about the protests, Bill Myers stated that "I know most of the crowds outside are not indicative of the feeling of most of the people in Levittown" and hoped for the ability "to live a normal life again."[161] Daisy Myers questioned the reporters, asking why the newspapermen did not "write about the good things happening to us? One hundred fifty Levittown people have written us letters. Other Levittowners have mowed our lawn, hung our curtains, presented us with a fine oil painting, brought cakes and fruit, and kept us busy receiving well-wishers."[162]

As the press conference continued into the evening, the situation outside of the home grew increasingly volatile. As the crowd grew and continued to yell at the Myerses, Lieutenant M.J. Wicker of the Pennsylvania State Police ordered the crowd to move. The lieutenant actually complimented the crowd on its peaceful behavior, telling the group that they were a "good crowd" but they had grown too large and had to relocate a block away.[163] However, after being moved down the street, many residents grew angry and began to throw stones. One of the stones struck a state trooper, prompting Lieutenant Wicker to give the crowd ten minutes to leave the area. Despite the warning, only about half of the crowd dispersed, according to a reporter from the *Levittown Times*.[164] After the ten minutes, a line of over twenty state troopers marched into

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[160] "State Troopers Break Up Crowd; Man Held for Disorderly Conduct," *The Levittown Times*, 20 August, 1957.
[161] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 45.
[162] Ibid., 45.
[163] "State Troopers Break Up Crowd; Man Held for Disorderly Conduct," *The Levittown Times*, 20 August, 1957.
[164] Ibid.

the crowd, demanding that spectators and protesters leave. Some of the troopers used their clubs to hit resistant members in the crowd, sending one woman to the hospital.[165] As the troopers pushed through the crowd, many of the protestors shouted at the troopers, calling them "gestapo," "brutes," "dictators," and "woman beaters."[166] Daisy Myers remembered hearing someone shout "This is America! I came here to be free; now I have to live with Negroes!"[167] That night, the police arrested one man, who plead guilty to charges of disorderly conduct.[168]

By the time the police had finished pushing back the crowd, it was about 1:15 AM and the Myers family remained awake inside of their home.[169] For Bill and Daisy, this had been the first time they had experienced one of the tumultuous nights that had plagued their street for about a week. That night, they invited two friends and allies, one from the American Friends Service Association and one from the Jewish Labor Committee, to stay overnight and keep them company.[170] Despite witnessing the chaos firsthand, the couple decided to keep their family in Levittown instead of retreating to Bristol or York.

Many in Levittown believed that the police had gone too far when they marched on the crowd with their batons. On Tuesday, August 20, many members of the Levittown Civic Association suggested that the organization contact Governor Leader to notify him of the "State Police brutality" outside the Myers home.[171] James Newell also responded to the violence, stating that he would hold another Levittown Betterment Committee meeting on Tuesday night

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[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid; Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 46.
[167] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 46.
[168] "State Troopers Break Up Crowd; Man Held for Disorderly Conduct," *The Levittown Times*, 20 August, 1957...
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid; Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 46.
[171] Ibid.

as a result of the violence. "The only real violence to date," according to Newell, was "the brutal clubbing of one of the citizens of Levittown."[172] After talking to an attorney, Newell felt that he was within his constitutional rights to ignore Sheriff Murray's moratorium on meetings. He announced to the local press that the Betterment Committee would meet Tuesday night and discuss the instances of police violence.[173]

For the Myerses, that Tuesday brought more press to their home. After Bill Myers left for work in Trenton, New Jersey, Daisy remained back at home, surrounded by reporters and friends. While answering questions from reporters, Daisy received a call from Bill at work. According to Bill, someone had painted "Get Nigger Myers outta here, outta here, outta here" on the walls of the refrigeration plant that day.[174] With the graffiti removed before he arrived at the plant, Bill was assured by his superiors that his job was secure and that a full investigation would be launched to find the culprit.[175]

After returning home from work that Tuesday, Bill, Daisy, and a small cohort of friends remained inside of their home. Shortly after nightfall, crowds materialized on the streets surrounding the Myers' home, just as they had the day before. As a result of the violence on Monday, the police forbade crowds from gathering directly on Deepgreen Lane.[176] As state troopers and local police stood guard and monitored the crowd, the crowd grew increasingly restless. Just as many had done the previous night, some in the crowd lobbed insults at the police

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[172] "Triumph Over Violence: Levittown's Week of Conflict," *Bucks County Traveler*, September 1957, 24, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 11, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.
[173] "State Troopers Break Up Crowd; Man Held for Disorderly Conduct," *The Levittown Times*, 20 August, 1957.
[174] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 51.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid.

officers, calling them the "gestapo" and yelling out that "this is Russia!"[177] About five hundred people gathered that night, making it the second largest crowd to gather during the Myers' first week in Levittown.[178]

At about 9:30 PM, the crowd charged the police line in an attempt to get closer to the Myers' home.[179] The group overran the twenty police officers monitoring the crowd, knocking down many officers in the commotion. At around the same time as the charge, someone in the crowd threw a stone. The stone struck Sergeant Thomas Stewart of the Bristol Township Police on the side of his head above his ear.[180] Stewart, a Levittown resident, collapsed to the ground, unconscious, and was rushed to the hospital.[181] With the officer down, about a dozen other police officers bearing their riot sticks chased the crowd through the woods, as some officers remained to tend to Sergeant Stewart.[182] The police cleared the crowd quickly. Before midnight, the entire area around the Myers' home was cleared of people. The police requested the assistance of the Bucks County Rescue Squad to illuminate the area with spotlights as law enforcement directed all pedestrians and cars out of the area.[183]

As the police cleared the area, Sergeant Stewart was taken to the hospital to be treated for his wounds. Doctors treated Stewart for a lacerated ear and a cerebral concussion.[184] Stewart's ear eventually required surgery, but he made a full recovery by the following morning. Law

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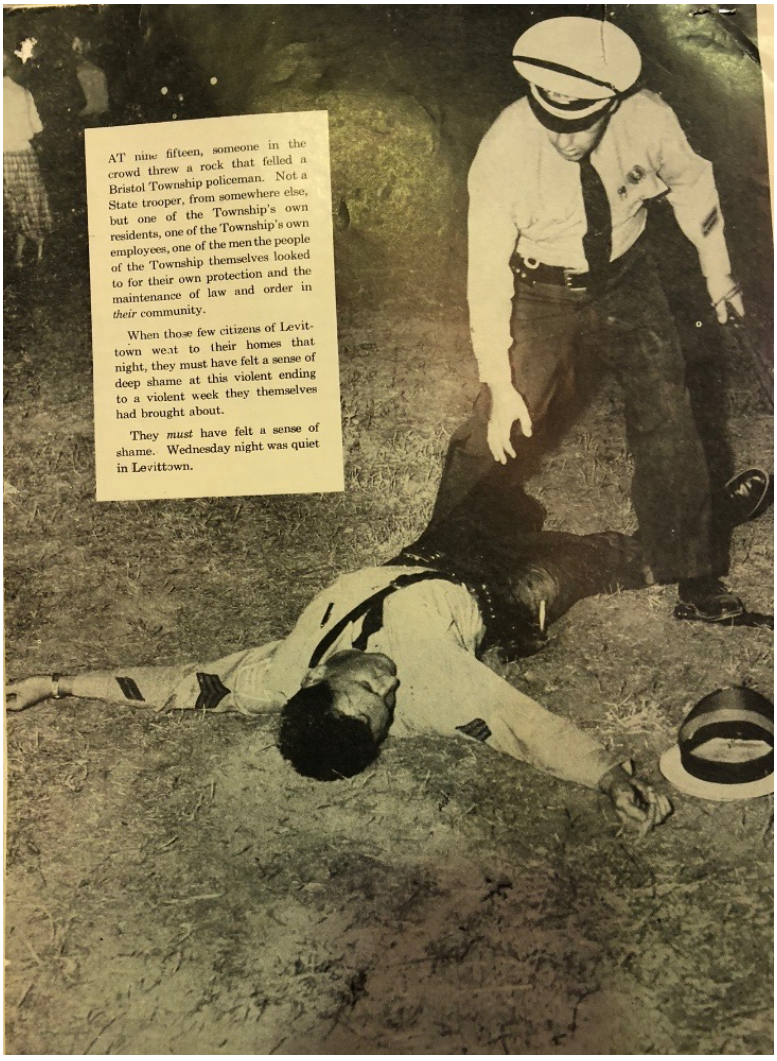
[177] "Police Ban Crowds; Twp. Officer Hurt," *The Levittown Times*, 21 August 1957; Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 225.
[178] These numbers come from *Levittown Times* newspaper reporting, which seem to give reliable numbers that corroborate the account given by Daisy Myers in her memoir; "Police Ban Crowds; Twp. Officer Hurt," *The Levittown Times*, 21 August 1957.
[179] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 51; "Police Ban Crowds; Twp. Officer Hurt," *The Levittown Times*, 21 August 1957.
[180] "Police Ban Crowds; Twp. Officer Hurt," *The Levittown Times*, 21 August 1957.
[181] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 52-53; "Police Ban Crowds; Twp. Officer Hurt," *The Levittown Times*, 21 August 1957.
[182] "Police Ban Crowds; Twp. Officer Hurt," *The Levittown Times*, 21 August 1957.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.

enforcement did not make any arrests as they attempted to control the mob Tuesday night, but they did arrest two teenagers in the surrounding area suspected of throwing the rock that fell Stewart.[185] After the attack on Stewart, the police banned crowds from gathering on any street near the Myers' house. The violent mobs and groups that had plagued the Dogwood Hollow neighborhood of Levittown stopped gathering. According to Daisy Myers, after Tuesday, August 20, "we began to feel that peace might prevail in Levittown."[186]



A police officer tends to Sergeant Thomas Stewart as he lay unconscious on the ground after being hit in the head by a stone.

Photo from "Triumph Over Violence: Levittown's Week of Conflict," *Bucks County Traveler*, September 1957, 24, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 11, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA

[185] Ibid.
[186] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 53.

Chapter 3: The Aftermath

"*Peace Came to Levittown*"

The assault of Bristol Township Police Officer Thomas Stewart forced many residents and organization to recognize and denounce the violence perpetuated by the crowds and the members of the Betterment Committee who comprised them. Many Catholic organizations, which had remained conspicuously silent or ambiguous on their position of the Myers family in Levittown, publically encouraged peace through a "true Christian neighborliness" the day after the attack.[187] Local politicians who attempted to remain above the controversy began to condemn the actions of the mob.[188] The Bucks County Young Women's Christian Association called for peace via the triumph of the "Christian spirit."[189] Officials from the United States Steel Workers called for their union members who lived in Levittown and worked in the new Fairless Works to "help halt the demonstrations against the Myerses."[190] With pressure mounting from religious, civic, and labor leaders, many protesters could not justify the violence instigated by the group that night. After the assault, public perception turned against the Betterment Committee. The hundreds of people that Newell and his committee had been able to rally earlier that week seemed nearly impossible to after the incident.

A confluence of denunciations, obstacles and controversies surrounding the Betterment Committee sullied the group's reputation and hastened the decline of the organization. Although the organization lacked any formal membership logs or directories, the Betterment Committee

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[187] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 53.
[188] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 54.
[189] Ibid.
[190] William G. Weart, "Mob Again Chased From Negro Home," *The New York Times*, 21 August, 1957.

appeared to have lost significant participation in the immediate aftermath of the attack. Through tracking the actions of the Betterment Committee using newspaper reports, the organization seemed to have downscaled their operations dramatically and eventually fell into disuse. For example, Newell had originally called for a meeting on the evening on Wednesday, August 21, the day after Sergeant Stewart was injured. However, Newell had to cancel the meeting because the venue reneged on the agreement to let Newell use the space.[191] The VFW post that Newell had used as a meeting place just a few days earlier also denied Newell the right to use the space despite Newell's VFW membership and veteran status. Newell faced insurmountable challenges after Tuesday night; he could not find a venue that would allow his group to meet and was not allowed to rally in the area by police decree. Without the ability to congregate or hold meetings, the Betterment Committee was not able to attract or sustain the growth it had seen during the previous week.

That Wednesday, Newell also suggested that the Betterment Committee use the Levittown Civic Association (LCA) as a vehicle to plan meetings and search for a way to remove the Myers family. He urged his "followers" to join the LCA while he decided when to call for another in-person meeting.[192] By urging his members to join a different organization, Newell recognized the decaying influence and deterioration of his group. Newell may have believed that more effective challenges to the Myerses in Levittown could only come through sanctioned groups like the LCA. However, no matter his rationale for urging his members to join the LCA, one thing was clear: the founder of the Betterment Committee believed the organization was no

[191] "Police Ban Crowds; Twp. Officer Hurt," *The Levittown Times*, 21 August 1957.
[192] Ibid.

longer viable or as effective at achieving its goal of "the restoring of our entire white community."[193]

In addition to the logistical challenges to Newell and his organization, the chairman also faced an investigation that tarnished his reputation. After Newell used the John Billington VFW post for some of his first Betterment Committee meetings, many Pennsylvania VFW officials began to take notice. William J. Tepsic, the commander of the Department of Pennsylvania for the VFW, said that "anti-racial discrimination" was forbidden under the VFW constitution.[194] Tepsic ordered an investigation into how the post was used by Newell and issued a statement saying that "'I personally, and officially,…denounce association of our organization's name with this matter, regret its occurrence and forbid any such meetings at the Levittown post, or any other VFW post.'"[195] To be denounced by the VFW in a town with a high percentage of residents who served in World War II carried heavy consequences for Newell and his organization.

Despite the declension of the Betterment Committee, the organization still managed to host gatherings and events in the wake of the August 20 attack on Sergeant Stewart. On August 21, Newell scheduled a public debate between himself and Reverend Harwick of the Citizens' Committee. Open to all and sponsored by the Levittown Kiwanis Club, the debate between Newell and Harwick was the first public dialogue held between the two groups.[196] To start the debate, both Reverend Harwick and James Newell agreed that removing the Myers family from their home through violence was unacceptable.[197] However, Newell qualified his response saying that peace would "only be achieved when Mr. Myers gets out of Levittown."[198]

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[193] William G. Weart, "Mob Again Chased From Negro Home," *The New York Times*, 21 August, 1957.
[194] "VFW To Probe Use of Post Home," *The Levittown Times*, 20 August, 1957.
[195] Ibid.
[196] "Quiet Night Prevails In Levittown," *The Levittown Times*, 22 August, 1957.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.

After this initial agreement, Newell continued to make his case to the audience. He claimed that his opposition to the Myerses living in Levittown did not originate from bigotry, but from financial concern. "'Property definitely decreases when colored families move into white neighborhoods,'" Newell explained. To counter this, Reverend Harwick cited the increasing property value of Levittown, Long Island, New York after about six black families had purchased homes there.[199] After a back and forth about the economic concerns generated by the Myers family's presence, Harwick suggested that the Betterment Committee have a joint meeting with the Citizens' Committee. Newell side-stepped this suggestion, claiming that he "could not speak for all members" of his committee and would consider the proposition.[200]

One of the most revealing moments of this debate occurred when the topic of mob violence was introduced by Reverend Harwick. Harwick asked Newell to stop the "mob violence," to which Newell replied that his group was "not a mob."[201] Newell appealed to his own ignorance, saying that "there may have been members from my group around the Myers home during the demonstration but I don't know of any violence by any of them."[202] He went on to claim that "the violence was started when the State Police moved in and starting working over the people."[203] Failing to acknowledge that the police only charged the protesters after the rock hit Sergeant Stewart, Newell misrepresented the events to the audience in an attempt to make the Betterment Committee look better after a series of public blunders and reprimands.

While no joint meetings between the Citizens' Committee or the Betterment Committee occurred after the debate, on Friday, August 23, Newell and members of his organization held

[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid.

their first meeting since Tuesday. Still struggling to find a space for an in-person meeting, Newell called for a radio meeting to be broadcast over WPEN in Philadelphia.[204] Broadcasting sometime between 11 PM and 2 AM, Newell had the opportunity for his message to be heard by any awake to listen.[205] Daisy Myers claimed that the broadcast actually hurt the Betterment Committee, saying that "it was obvious to thousands who listened that here was a group of rabid bigots, unable to reason, think, or express themselves intelligently."[206] The broadcast seemed to mark the end of formal Betterment Committee mobilization in Levittown. Despite being meticulously covered by the local press during the previous week, the radio broadcast is the last mention of any event held by the committee in the *Levittown Times*. The memoirs of Daisy Myers and Lewis Wechsler also do not mention any Betterment rallies or meetings after this date.

With the Betterment Committee unable to host any in-person meetings, the streets of Dogwood Hollow finally were quiet. By order of Governor Leader, police continued to stand guard outside of the Myers home, monitoring the neighborhood, for months after the last protest on August 20.[207] However, after a few months, when it appeared that there was no threat of mob violence, the daily guard was lifted. While the *Levittown Times* reported that "peace came to Levittown" when no people gathered on the streets following August 20, Daisy Myers said that her life was finally "beginning to take on a normal pattern" once the police had left.[208]

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[204] "Betterment Group Sets Radio Meeting," *The Levittown Times*, 23 August, 1957.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 63.
[207] Ibid.
[208] "Quiet Night Prevails In Levittown," *The Levittown Times*, 22 August, 1957; Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 63.

"Levittown's Shame"

The Myers' struggle to remain in Levittown had gained national attention. Newspaper and television reporters from across the nation descended upon Levittown to report on the violence and chaos in America's iconic suburb. As a result of the heightened media attention, there is a wealth of information about what happened to the Myers family in the weeks following the end of mass protests on the streets of Dogwood Hollow. Although the mobs ceased to congregate, individuals in Levittown still sought to intimidate the Myers family.

Some of the first media outlets to comment on the events in Levittown were from nearby Philadelphia and Trenton. The *Philadelphia Tribune*, Philadelphia's largest African American newspaper, was among the first newspapers to publish editorials condemning the actions of the Betterment Committee and anti-Myers protestors. "Levittown is a disgrace to America!" the author wrote.[209] She continued writing "the people responsible for this jim crow [*sic*] town in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are as prejudiced as the most anti-Negro bigot in the Deep South!"[210] In the *Trenton Evening News*, an editorial titled "LEVITTOWN'S SHAME" was published a day earlier. The author called it "in many respects a model town…[but] this demonstration of racial antagonism reveals an unseemly and repulsive aspect of life in a community whose people enjoy many superior advantages."[211]

Other reporters from periodicals outside of the region also came to Bucks County to report on the events in Levittown. Reporters from the *New York Times* and *New York Amsterdam News* traveled down to Levittown to report on what they experienced. James L. Hicks, a reporter for the *New York Amsterdam News*, New York City's oldest African American newspaper, spent

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[209] Dorothy Anderson, "Levittown A Disgrace to America," *Philadelphia Tribune*. 17 August, 1957.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Quote from David Kushner, *Levittown: Two Families, One Tycoon, and the Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb* (New York: Walter & Company, 2009), 123.

an evening in Levittown and reported on the tension between the white protestors and the police, claiming that an officer said that some protestors "may be shot on sight" if they did not vacate the area.[212] *Life Magazine* also sent a reporter to Levittown to interview the Myerses in the aftermath of the mob violence. According to the article, Bill Myers claimed that things had been "quieting down" since Sergeant Stewart was hit with a rock and the protestors stopped gathering outside of his home.[213]

Despite the calming situation in Levittown and the gradual return to normalcy, the Myers family and their allies still had to withstand intimidation from resistant neighbors. In the wake of the attack on Officer Stewart, someone burned a cross at the nearby Penn Valley school on August 22.[214] On September 6, another five-foot cross was burned on the front lawn of the Myers' next door neighbor and ally, Lewis Wechsler, only a few days after police discovered a stash of Molotov cocktails in the forest near his home.[215] In October, *Time* magazine reported that one of the homes neighboring the Myers began to fly the Confederate flag and allow people to come over to loudly sing songs such as "Dixie" and "Old Black Joe" and "Old Man River."[216] On October 18, local police arrested Howard Bentcliffe, an organizer of the Betterment Committee and friend of James Newell, for painting "KKK" on the side of Lewis Wechsler's house and pasting a Ku Klux Klan poster next to the graffiti.[217] Although the Betterment Committee failed to organize and the rallies outside of the Myers' home had ceased, the intimidation of the family and their allies persisted in the months after the street protests, and

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[212] James L. Hicks, "'May Be Shot On Sight:' State Trooper," *New York Amsterdam News*, 24 August, 1957.
[213] "Integration Troubles Beset Northern Town," *Life*, 2 September, 1957, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 11, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.
[214] "Quiet Night Prevails In Levittown," *The Levittown Times*, 22 August, 1957.
[215] "Cross Burned on Lawn Next to Myers," *The Levittown Times*, 6 September, 1957.
[216] From "War of Nerves," *Time*, 7 October, 1957.
[217] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 77; "Levittown Man Held In Bail On Charges Of Printing 'KKK,'" *The Levittown Times*, 18 October, 1957.

would only come to an end following state prosecution of Newell and other Betterment Committee members.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania vs. Williams et al.

As neighbors continued to intimidate the Myers family and their allies in the months following the attack on Sergeant Stewart, the Levittown Citizens' Committee made it their goal to get the state involved in protecting the Myerses. While Pennsylvania Attorney General Thomas D. McBride had promised the Myerses police protection as long as they deemed it necessary, the Citizens' Committee went a step further requesting a permanent injunction against Levittown residents who had burned crosses, vandalized homes, and intimidated the Myerses in other ways.[218] After a state investigation into the unrest in Levittown found that an injunction was merited, the Bucks County Court granted a temporary injunction against eight Levittown residents, including James Newell and Howard Bentcliffe, for "enter[ing] into a conspiracy to force the Myers family to move."[219] The injunction listed some of the intimidation tactics used by the eight named in the injunction, such as intimidating white residents who did not oppose the Myers' move to Levitttown, soliciting Ku Klux Klan membership, burning crosses, painting "KKK" letters on homes of white residents, organizing "automobile caravans" to drive past the Myers' home bearing the Confederate flag, and threatening to "blow up" any home sold to a black family.[220] Attorney General McBride said that "we cannot tolerate for a single minute these attempts to stir up racial hatred in defiance of our state and federal laws and

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[218] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 75.
[219] *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania v. Eldred Williams et al.,* "Decree," *Court of Common Pleas of Bucks County*, 23 October 1957, 1-2, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 11, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA; "Court Grants Injunction in Myers' Case," *The Levittown Times*, 23 October, 1957.
[220] "Court Grants Injunction in Myers' Case," *The Levittown Times*, 23 October, 1957.

constitutions."[221] After the temporary injunction was issued, Judge Edwin H. Satterthwaite ordered a full hearing in December to determine whether a permanent injunction and any punitive measures were necessary. James Newell and the seven others listed in the injunction would be brought to the county courthouse in Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

In the time between the issuance of the temporary injunction and the court proceedings. The Levittown Citizens' Committee sought to capitalize on this legal development as part of their education campaign. Reverend Harwick and the rest of the Citizens' Committee wished to notify the public of the upcoming court case as well as inform Levittown residents of the nefarious activities that the Betterment Committee leadership was accused of engaging in. On November 15, 1957, written on "Citizens' Committee of Levittown" stationary, the committee distributed a letter addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. Levittowner" to as many Levittown residents as possible. The letter read:

> "Here are two legal looking documents.
>
> Before you throw 'em in the waste-basket, DON'T READ THEM. Just flip through a couple pages. Start anywhere, page 3 or 4 of the heavier document, for example.
>
> Do that. Then throw it away if you can.
>
> This is the "official status of forces which recently incited rioting in Levittown. You don't have to be a lawyer to translate "the KKK has eyes," or "milk bottles filled with gasoline".[222]

The letter, signed by Reverend Harwick, was attached to two legal documents: a copy of the temporary injunction handed down by Judge Satterthwaite and a copy of the complaint listing the

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[221] Ibid.

[222] This is an excerpt from the whole letter. Letter from Reverend Ray L Harwick to "Mr. and Mrs. Levittowner," 15 November, 1957, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 11, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA; "Court Grants Injunction in Myers' Case," *The Levittown Times*, 23 October, 1957.

eight accused and ways they allegedly intimidated the Myers family, signed by Pennsylvania Attorney General McBride and Pennsylvania Deputy Attorney General Lois Forer.

On December 9, 1957, less than a month after the letter was distributed to the people of Levittown, the injunction trial began at the Bucks County courthouse in Doylestown. Just before the beginning of the trial, however, one of the defendants was dropped from the suit after he proved that he did not participate in any of the activities listed, decreasing the number of defendants to seven.[223]

Taking a strong stance against the actions of the defendants, the state government in Harrisburg sent Attorney General McBride to represent the Commonwealth. The rest of the accused were either represented by private counsel or represented themselves. The first witness called to the stand was Daisy Myers.[224] On the stand, McBride asked Daisy to identify the defendants and recount what they had done to her during her first week in Levittown. After correctly identifying those named in the suit, Daisy described the actions of the defendants. Betterment Committee member Eldred Williams would linger along the edges of the Myers property with his dog named Nigger and organize cars to drive by the Myers house while hoisting the Confederate flag.[225] Howard Bentcliffe had written down the license plate numbers of all those driving to the Myers' house to assist the family and would call allies "nigger lovers."[226] James Newell organized the rallies and was seen entering the nearby home with the Confederate flag.[227] One by one, Daisy Myers listed the nefarious and egregious activities of those named in the suit and remained composed during fierce cross-examination.

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[223] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 83.
[224] "Myers Injunction Case Underway," *The Levittown Times*, 9 December, 1957.
[225] David Kushner, *Levittown: Two Families, One Tycoon, and the Fight for Civil Rights in America's Legendary Suburb* (New York: Walter & Company, 2009), 173, 174.
[226] Ibid., 173.
[227] Ibid.

After Daisy Myers' testimony, forty-two other witnesses were called into court. State troopers, neighbors, Reverend Harwick, and some of the defendants themselves took the stand, describing what they saw and heard from August to December. Attorney General McBride had elicited from a police officer that Howard Bentcliffe had a letter from the imperial wizard of the Ku Klux Klan and an application to join the Klan signed by Bentecliffe and Eldred Williams in his possession when Bentcliffe was arrested for allegedly burning a cross on Lewis Wechsler's lawn.[228] Other testimony revealed that members of the Klan had asked Betterment Committee officials to join forces. While that proposal was shot down by the majority of Betterment officials, James Newell and Eldred Williams were in favor of the idea.[229] During the trial, James Newell also revealed that Georgia Senator Richard Russell had sent him a letter "expressing 'sympathy' with efforts" of the Betterment Committee to drive out the Myerses.[230] No matter how many times members of the Betterment Committee attempted to hide behind a guise of legal and economic concerns to justify their actions during court, Klan ties revealed that their actions were racially motivated.

After three days, the trial concluded and Judge Satterthwaite convened court, telling those present that a final ruling could take months. On August 15, 1958, a year and two days after the Myerses first moved into Levittown, Judge Satterthwaite granted the permanent injunction against those named.[231] To Daisy Myers, the permanent injunction was the key to ending the

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[228] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 85.
[229] "Betterment Group Refused Ku Klux Klan Help," *The Levittown Times*, 11 December, 1957; David B. Bittan, "Ordeal in Levittown," *Look*, 19 August 1958, MSC 803, Box 4, Folder 11, Levittown Community Collection, Bucks County Historical Society Archives, Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 86.

violence and chaos that had plagued her family since she had moved to all-white Levittown. In her words, "we were finally assured a peaceful life in Levittown."[232]

[232] Ibid.

Afterword: Beyond Levittown

Much to the pleasure of the Myers family, the permanent injunction did relieve them of the racial intimidation of their neighbors. With the court order in place, life continued its gradual, but steady, return to normalcy. Once unable to participate in the public life of their community, Bill and Daisy began joining clubs, attending dinner parties, and even corresponding with national icons who had followed their struggle closely, such as Jackie Robinson and Martin Luther King, Jr..[233] Daisy Myers was correct in her assessment that only a minority of Levittowners truly opposed their move into their town. The hundreds of letters and seemingly never-ending stream of neighbors she welcomed at her door confirmed that the majority of people did not mind living next to a black family.

However, despite the end of explicit racial antagonisms and mobilizations, Daisy Myers did notice "undercurrents of hard feelings."[234] While passing Howard Bentcliffe on the street, the man spat on the sidewalk as Daisy walked by.[235] James Newell ran for the office of committeeman, telling a local reporter that while "there are no legal means we can use to get [the Myerses] out….I still feel Myers shouldn't be in Levittown."[236] Newell handily lost the election. However, these incidents were isolated and eclipsed by the overwhelming support that the Myerses received as they reentered the public sphere, crossing the threshold from hostages into their own home to local celebrities.

Despite the Myers' dogged persistence to remain in Levittown in 1957 and the arrival of peace in the months and years after their move, they did not stay in Bucks County permanently.

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[233] Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 89.
[234] Ibid., 91.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Quote from Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 91.

In 1962, Bill Myers was hired by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to be the superintendent of the state finance building in the state capital.[237] Leaving Levittown about five years after they had arrived, the Myers family left Bucks County for the same reason they had arrived: "for a comfortable home."[238] They left to find the same economic opportunity as they searched for when arriving to Levittown.

While American historical imagination seems to place instances of grassroots resistance and mobilization against integration in the communities of the American South, the story of the Myerses in Levittown serves as a reminder that these forces crossed geographic and sectional boundaries. As historians such as Kevin Kruse and Matthew Lassiter have chronicled white resistance to integration in places like Atlanta and Charlotte, where white residents employed tactics similar to those used in Levittown, not enough scholarly attention has been paid to these occurrences happening north of the Mason-Dixon Line.[239] However, historians must be mindful of the stark differences of grassroots resistance in the North and South. In intensity and scope, the events of Levittown pale in comparison to Little Rock, Arkansas, or to the resistance mounted by groups like the Columbians in Atlanta.[240] The experiences of the Myers family in Levittown reveal that white resistance manifested across regions in United States, in the urban and rural South as well as the suburban North. The Myerses' experience does not, however, mean that the resistance was equal.

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[237] Ibid., 101.
[238] Ibid., 102.
[239] For more on white resistance to integration in the American South, see, Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) and Matthew D. Lassiter *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).
[240] For more on the Columbians, an anti-integration group linked to burning down the homes of black families in white neighborhoods, see Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005, 42.

The different reactions to integration between the North and the South demand additional scholarship and must be studied by contemporary historians. The existing scholarship on Levittown lacks any nuanced discussion of the reactions of public and state officials. One of most notable differences between Levittown and white resistance elsewhere is that Governor Leader explicitly condemned the actions of the Betterment Committee. Leader both publicly denounced the protests in Levittown and sent Attorney General McBride to Levittown to represent the Commonwealth in the injunction trial. This overt support from local and state politicians is conspicuously absent in many instances of violence in the South and other regions of the country, where politicians either endorsed the rights of the demonstrators to protest or remained silent and did nothing. New scholarship comparing the reactions of public figures and politicians would add considerable nuance and complicate the burgeoning historical movement of locating racial unrest in the North and comparing them to those in the South.

The Myers' efforts to live in Levittown also benefitted from a great degree of institutional support. Despite how some remember the Myers story, Bill and Daisy Myers did not simply decide to move to Levittown on a whim. The Myers story reminds contemporary readers that challenges to unjust practices were not simply carried out by lone idealists. Many civil rights campaigns were the products of concerted efforts of civil rights organizations. In Levittown, there were two organizations wholly devoted to facilitating the Myers' move, the HRC and the AFSC. They had planned the move for months, slowly introducing the community to the Myerses through meetings and public statements. This institutional support then grew exponentially once the Myers first faced the protestors. Churches, meetinghouses, synagogues, civic organizations, women's groups, and labor unions all provided support for the family by urging their members to practice tolerance and denouncing the activities of the Betterment

Committee.[241] Bill and Daisy Myers were never alone in their campaign to live peacefully in Levittown.

The events in Levittown also reveal the financial sources of anxiety for white residents fearful of new black neighbors. In addition to racist fears of miscegenation and spikes in crime, the complaints of those resistant to the Myers' move illustrate that federal practices of home evaluation contributed to their opposition. The depreciation of the value of homes and drops in property value were of paramount concern to many members of the Betterment Committee. The introduction of black residents would make their neighborhood less desirable to live in, according to the valuation guidelines used by the FHA and HOLC. While the burning crosses, KKK influence, and racist rhetoric confirm that the opposition to the Myerses was rooted in racism, these financial concerns cannot be ignored. Levittown in 1957 substantiates previous investigations into the nuanced anxieties of white residents opposed to neighborhood integration.

One of the great ironies of the unrest in Levittown is that today the area is disproportionately more African American than the rest of Bucks County. Recent Census information reveals that as of 2017, almost ten percent of residents who live in Levittown are African American.[242] To put this into perspective, just a few miles north in Central Bucks County, these percentages drop to as low to zero to one percent African American.[243] Not only did the campaign to keep Levittown white fail, but the violent and chaotic actions of those who crusaded against the Myerses discouraged others from doing so again to the other African American families that eventually moved into the town. Just a month after the initial protests in

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[241] For a full list of the organizations that Daisy Myers thanked for their support, see Daisy D. Myers, *Sticks n' Stones: The Myers Family in Levittown* (York, PA: York County Heritage Trust, 2005), 89.

[242] U.S. Census Bureau. Total Population Black or African American Alone, 2017. Prepared by Social Explorer.
[243] Ibid.

September of 1957, a black school teacher made national headlines when he began his first day teaching at the local James Buchanan School in Levittown. But in the wake of the Myers incident and the public backlash against the Betterment Committee, no mobs sought to drive him out of the town. All remained peaceful in Levittown. [244]

[244] "Levittown in the News Again; This Time A Negro Teacher," *Atlanta Daily World*, 19 September, 1957.

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