DIANNE HARRIS
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A Second Suburb: The Landscape of Levittown, PA
Wednesday, November 18, 2009 at 5:30 p.m.
at Dumbarton Oaks in the Music Room at the Main House
(Registration begins at 5:00 p.m.)

Abstract
Carved from eight square miles of Bucks County farmland
northeast of Philadelphia, Levittown, Pennsylvania, is a
symbol of postwar suburbia and the fulfillment of the Ameri-
can dream. Begun in 1951, after the completion of an
identically named community on Long Island, the second
Levittown soon eclipsed its New York counterpart in scale
and ambition, yet it continues to live in the shadow of its
better-known sister and has received limited scholarly
attention. An overview of her forthcoming edited volume, “A
Second Suburb” uncovers the unique story of Levittown,
Pennsylvania, and its significance to American social,
archetypal, landscape, environmental, and political
history. As Harris’s lecture will show, Levittown, PA, played an
important role in establishing specific models for suburban
residential landscape design, but it also served as a site for
experimentation in domestic architecture, modernism,
environmentalism, and eventually as a battle ground for civil
rights in the suburban north. Second Suburb explores the
surprisingly rich interplay of design, technology, and social
response that marks the emergence and maturation of an
exceptionally potent rendition of the American Dream, writ
large in the landscape.

Dianne Harris is Director of the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities and Professor of Landscape Architec-
ture, Architecture, Art History, and History at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where she teaches courses
in landscape and in architectural history. She holds a BA in Landscape Architecture, a Master’s in Architecture, and
a PhD in Architectural History from the University of California, Berkeley. Her publications include the co-edited
volumes Villas and Gardens in Early Modern Italy and France (Cambridge University Press, 2001), and Sites Unseen:
Landscape and Vision (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007). She is the author of The Nature of Authority: Villa Culture,
Landscape, and Representation in Eighteenth-Century Lombardy (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003) and
Maybeck’s Landscapes: Drawing in Nature (William Stoul Publisher, 2005). Professor Harris served as guest editor for a
special issue of Landscape Journal devoted to the topic of “Race and Space” (May, 2007), and she is editor of a
multidisciplinary volume on the Pennsylvania Levittown that will be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press in
2010. She is currently writing a book that focuses on ordinary postwar houses and gardens in the United States
between 1945 and 1960, which will be published by the University of Minnesota Press. Professor Harris is the First
Vice-President for the Society of Architectural Historians and the recipient of a 2006 Iris Foundation Award for
outstanding scholarly contributions in the history of art, decorative arts, and cultural history.