



South Side: 1950s and 1960s Boom, Migration and Industrial Decline

Historical Context and Overview

Following World War II, population patterns in the United States shifted in two primary ways: a move away from older cities in the Midwest and toward newer urban centers in the South; and a mass exodus from center cities to the suburbs. Automobiles and highways were both essential to suburban growth. In 1945, Americans owned 25 million cars; by 1965 the number had tripled to 75 million.

More cars required more highways, which were funded largely by the federal government. In 1956, Congress passed the National Interstate and Defense Highway Act, linking the entire country with roads at least four lanes wide. The interstate highway promoted suburban development, but cut wide swaths through neighborhoods in cities. Many new highways went through poor and minority neighborhoods where buildings were old and where residents had little political power.

In Columbus, many families began to leave the South Side neighborhoods and move eastward along Livingston Avenue. The arrival of Interstate 70 in the 1960s further fueled this pattern of suburbanization. While bypassing more affluent communities, Interstate 70 cut off predominately African-American neighborhoods like Hanford Village near Livingston Avenue.

While the suburbs boomed, both industry and retail businesses declined in the cities in the 1960s. Retail businesses found a better consumer base in the suburbs. Many industries were attracted to the growing “Sunbelt” region in the South, and others moved overseas. Railroad-related industries, including Buckeye Steel, declined as other modes of transportation and shipping—automobiles and trucks traveling along highways—became more popular. As industries closed or moved, more people moved away from cities and many neighborhoods fell into disrepair.

Standards Alignment

Ohio's New Learning Standards: Social Studies

Grade 3

Content Statement 3. Local communities change over time.

Content Statement 7. Systems of transportation and communication move people, products and ideas from place to place.

Grade 4

Content Statement 13. The population of the United States has changed over time, becoming more diverse. Ohio's population has become increasingly reflective of the cultural diversity of the United States.

HS American History

Content Statement 29. The postwar economic boom, greatly affected by advances in science, produced epic changes in American life.

Content Statement 30. The continuing population flow from cities to suburbs, the internal migrations from the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt and the increase in immigration resulting from passage of the 1965

Immigration Act have had social and political effects.

Learning Objectives

- Cite causes of internal migration in the 1950s and 1960s as reflected in the Appalachian migration to Columbus.
- Explain how internal migration brings cultural changes to communities.
- Explain the factors that contributed to urban decline and suburbanization in the 1950s and 1960s.
- Discuss reasons for industrial decline and its impact on communities.

Discussion Questions

1. What factors led to the large-scale migration of people from West Virginia and Kentucky (Appalachian) to the South Side? How did this migration change the South side?
2. What cultural practices were introduced to Columbus as a result of Appalachian migration?
3. How did the increased ownership of cars in the 1950s contribute to suburbanization?
4. What was the impact of the construction of Interstate 70 on the neighborhoods of the South Side?
5. What caused industrial decline in the South Side neighborhoods in the 1950s and 1960s? Why was Buckeye Steel especially in trouble?
6. How did industrial decline impact the people and neighborhoods of the South Side?

Extension Activities

- Many families in cities lost their homes to “highway takes” in which houses were demolished to make room for highways. Protests against these new highways took place in cities throughout the nation. Have students write a letter, from the perspective of someone in the 1960s, to an elected official expressing their feelings on demolition and highway construction during that time period.

Additional Resources

- From the “Rust Belt” to the “Sun Belt”
<http://www.inmotionaame.org/migrations/topic.cfm?migration=11&topic=4>
- Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*.
- Eisenhower Interstate Highway System: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/interstate/homepage.cfm>
- Cities vs. Suburbs: <http://amhistory.si.edu/onthemove/learning/classroom.html#1950>