



The Short North

Freeways, Suburbanization, Urban Renewal and Revitalization

Historical Context and Overview

Following World War II, millions of Americans moved from cities to new suburban developments. Developers built single family homes on land that had been open farmland. The Federal Housing Administration offered low-cost loans to home buyers, and the GI Bill made these loans cheaper for veterans. Additionally, the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 provided government funding for superhighways that gave drivers easy access to suburbs. City residents moved to the suburbs to fulfill dreams of home ownership and escape congestion and pollution of city life. Suffering from a lack of tax revenue, city neighborhoods fell into further disrepair as a result of suburbanization.

In the 1950s and 1960s, freeway construction and urban renewal efforts resulted in the destruction of many historic city neighborhoods. In the Short North, the “Flytown” neighborhood was targeted for destruction, and the Goodale Expressway (later I-670) was constructed in its place. More recently, some cities have reversed the trend of suburbanization through efforts at revitalizing historic urban neighborhoods. Following the pattern of German Village, revitalization efforts in the Short North resulted in the rebirth of the Victorian Village and Harrison West neighborhoods, and the High Street commercial district.

Standards Alignment

Ohio’s New Learning Standards: K-12 Social Studies

Grade 3, Content Statement 3: Local communities change over time.

Grade 3, Content Statement 7: Systems of transportation and communication move people, products and ideas from place to place.

Grade 4, Content Statement 12: People have modified the environment since prehistoric times. There are both positive and negative consequences for modifying the environment in Ohio and the United States.

Grade 5, Content Statement 14: The choices people make have both present and future consequences.

Grade 8, Content Statement 16: Cultural biases, stereotypes and prejudices had social, political and economic consequences for minority groups and the population as a whole.

Grade 8, Content Statement 22: Choices made by individuals, businesses and governments have both present and future consequences.

HS American History Content Statement 12: immigration, internal migration and urbanization transformed American life.

HS American History 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

- Analyze the effects of transportation on downtown and suburban areas.
- Describe the advantages and disadvantages of the urban renewal movement.
- Discuss how the Short North area has changed over time.
- Explain the factors that contributed to suburbanization in the decades following World War II.
- Analyze the social and political effects of the movement of people from cities to suburbs.
- Discuss the short term and long term effects of decisions made, such as urban renewal, the demolition of Union Station, and the placement of the freeways.

Discussion Questions

1. How did the automobile and the freeway system influence the development of Columbus and the suburbs?
2. How did automobile transportation affect the railway system and Columbus?
3. What were positive and negative results of the urban renewal movement in Columbus?
4. How does the Short North today compare with the Short North area of the 40s? The 70s?
5. How did the demolition of Union Station shape the future of Columbus?
6. How did the construction of the freeway system in Columbus change the city?

Extension Activities

Have students participate in a debate. One side represents those on the pro-freeway development side while the other side represents those residents living in the soon-to-be-demolished neighborhoods.

Divide students into small groups and have each group research an organization in Columbus or Ohio dedicated to preserving historical buildings, sites, or materials (e.g. Columbus Landmarks, Ohio Historical Society, National Register of Historic Places, etc.).

Have students compare maps of Columbus before the construction of the freeways with maps of Columbus after the freeway construction. Students can analyze the streets and blocks that were removed, estimate how many people may have been relocated, and note where streets and neighborhoods were simply cut off from one another. Additionally, compare the population growth of suburban areas with the construction of the freeways.

Additional Resources

Columbus Neighborhoods - <http://www.columbusneighborhoods.org/content/short-north>

Teaching Columbus: The Short North - <http://www.teachingcolumbus.omeka.net/items/show/174>

Funding provided by:

