

Homes for Veterans

In 1949, developer William Levitt purchased thousands of acres of farmland in Hempstead, on Long Island, New York. Drawing on modern production techniques, he constructed thousands of homes that he sold for just under \$8,000 each. Advertisements for Levittown captured the mood of the country as it stood poised to begin an era of unprecedented prosperity.

“This is Levittown! All yours for \$58 [a month]. You’re a lucky fellow, Mr. Veteran. Uncle Sam and the world’s largest builder have made [it] possible for you to live in a charming house in a delightful community without having to pay for them with your eyeteeth.”

—Advertisement for Levittown homes,
The New York Times, March 1949

▲ Moving vans line the street of a new suburban neighborhood.

A Society on the Move

Objectives

- Examine the rise of the suburbs and the growth of the Sunbelt.
- Describe changes in the U.S. economy and education in the postwar period.

Terms and People

Interstate Highway Act	multinational corporation
Sunbelt	AFL-CIO
service sector	California Master Plan
information industry	
franchise business	

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas

Complete a chart like the one below to capture the main ideas.

Postwar Changes		
Society	Economy	Education
• Growth of suburbs	• Service economy	•

Why It Matters Since the first colonists arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, Americans have been on the move. In the years following World War II, mobility became especially important. People moved to the suburbs and to the Sunbelt. They also moved into white-collar jobs. At the same time, the American economy was changing. The impact of these changes still affects us today. **Section Focus Question:** What social and economic factors changed American life during the 1950s?

Americans Move to the Suburbs

Between 1940 and 1960, more than 40 million Americans moved to the suburbs, one of the largest mass migrations in history. Rural regions suffered the most dramatic decline in population, but people also came by the thousands from older industrial cities, seeking, as one father put it, a place where “a kid could grow up with grass stains on his pants.” During the same time period, many older industrial cities lost population.

Suburbs Attract Young Americans People flocked to the suburbs in part because the nation suffered from a severe shortage of urban housing. During the depression and World War II, new housing construction had come to a near standstill. At war’s end, as Americans married and formed families, they went in search of a place they could call their own.

Fortunately, at this time of peak demand, developers figured out how to build affordable housing in a hurry. William Levitt became a leader in mass producing suburban homes. Entire rows of houses in Levittown were built using the same plan. This method enabled workers to build houses in weeks rather than in months. On the installment plan, buyers could pay \$58 a month toward the cost of a home. Demand for the homes was so great that Levitt built two other Levittowns—one outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the other in New Jersey. These houses were ideal for young couples starting out because they were affordable and comfortable. Other developers adopted Levitt's techniques, and suburbs were soon springing up across the country.

Suburban development depended on help from the government. State and federal governments constructed thousands of miles of highways that linked the suburbs to cities. New home buyers benefited from the GI bill and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which provided low-interest loans. FHA-backed loans allowed home buyers to pay as little as 5 to 10 percent of the purchase price and to pay off their mortgages over 30 years.

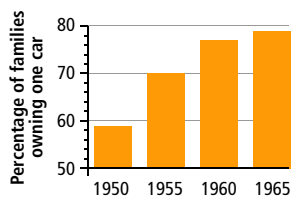
Residents of new suburbs faced the challenge of establishing new towns with churches and schools and police and fire departments. Through these institutions, the suburbanites forged a sense of community. During the 1950s, the suburbs became increasingly self-contained. While suburban residents of earlier generations had depended on the city for entertainment and shopping, the post-war suburban dweller could find a vast array of goods and services in nearby shopping centers.

The “Car Culture” Takes Over During the 1920s, automobile ownership had soared in the United States. With the explosion of suburban growth in the 1950s, Americans grew even more dependent upon their cars. The number of registered automobiles jumped from 26 million in 1945 to 60 million in 1960.

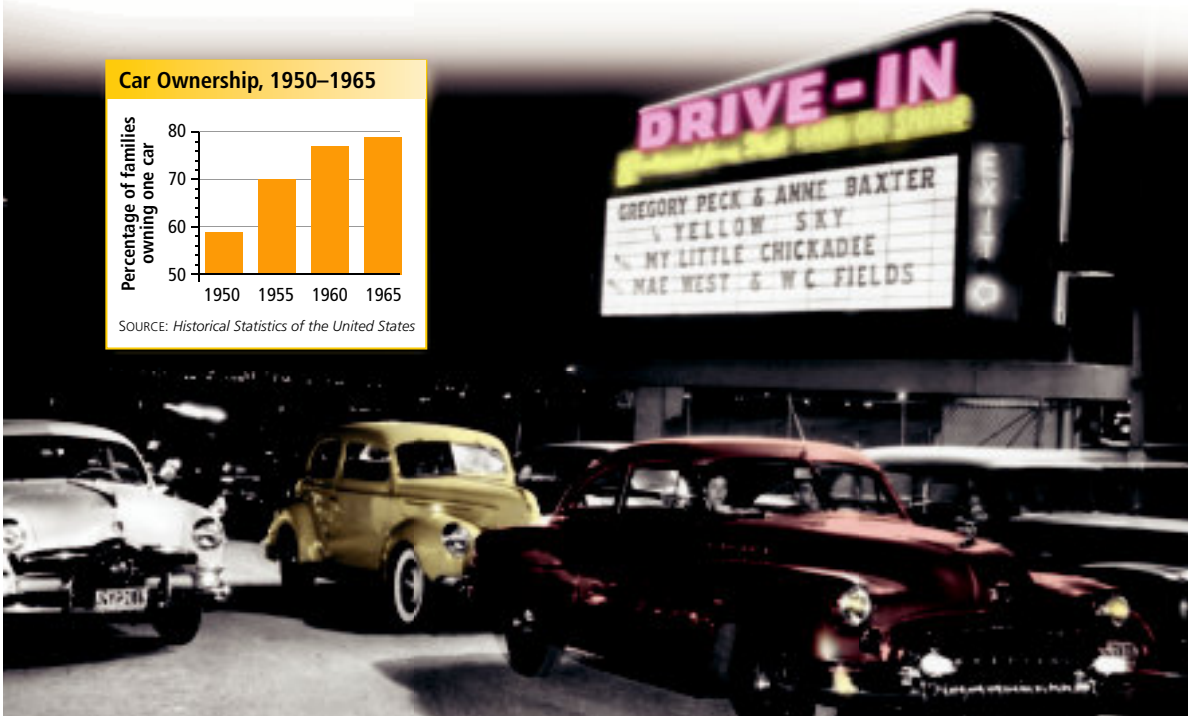
The Car Culture

The automobile industry thrived and, as a result, led to new businesses. As shown here, Americans were happy to spend leisure time in their cars and watch a movie at the local drive-in theater. The number of families that owned cars increased drastically between 1950 and 1960. *Do you think increased car ownership may have had negative effects?*

Car Ownership, 1950–1965



SOURCE: *Historical Statistics of the United States*

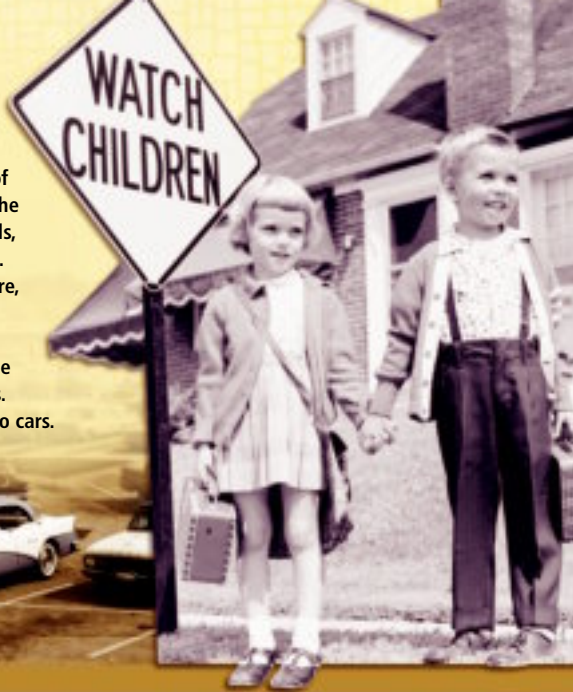


The New Suburban Lifestyle

As more families moved into the suburbs, a new way of life emerged. Suburban communities blossomed as all the services and conveniences of city life, including hospitals, entertainment, and shopping centers, became available. Schools were usually nearby, and children, as shown here, could easily walk to one.

Suburban dwellers greatly depended on the automobile. Shopping malls were built with large parking lots to accommodate shoppers' cars.

In time, most suburban families owned two cars.



These new automobiles tended to have big engines and enormous horsepower. They came with the newest technology, such as power steering and brakes and automatic transmission. Harley Earl of the Ford Motor Company captured the mood of the 1950s by designing cars with lots of chrome that reminded people of jet planes.

While some suburbanites rode the train or other forms of mass transportation, Americans increasingly depended upon their cars to commute to work. Suburbanites also needed their cars to shop at suburban shopping malls. Entrepreneurs opened fast-food restaurants and drive-in movie theaters, both of which catered to the car culture. While these businesses flourished, many older businesses, often located in older city neighborhoods, struggled to survive.



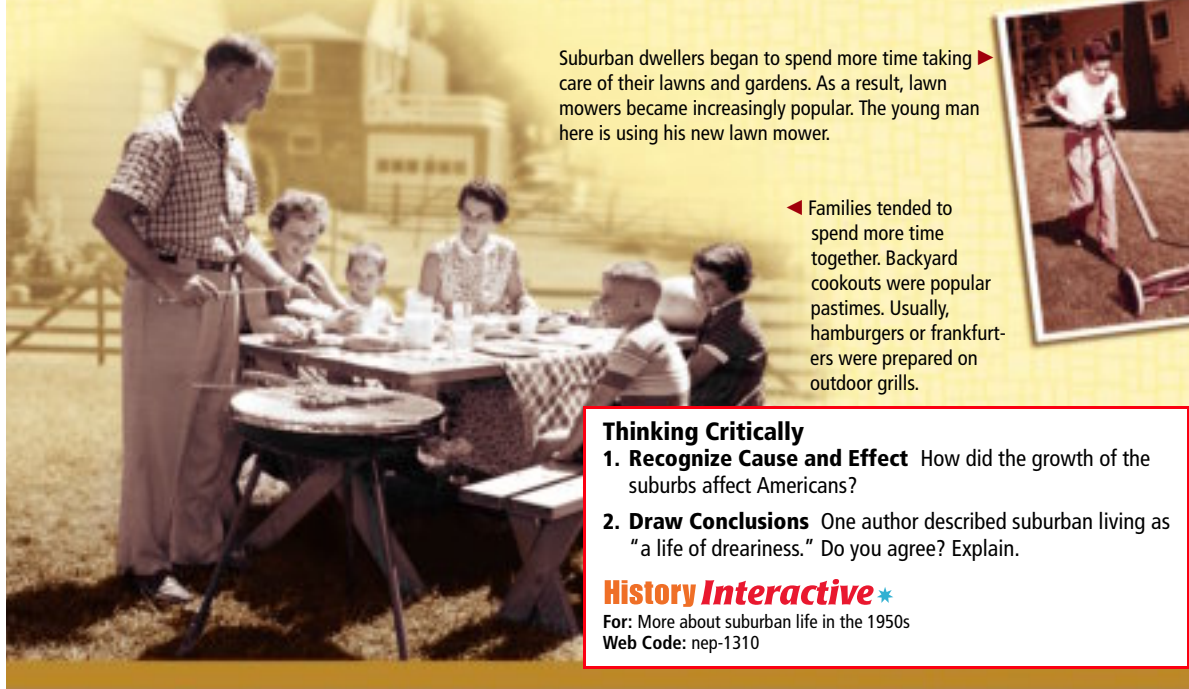
Checkpoint How did Americans living in the suburbs benefit from the “car culture”?

Eisenhower Interstate Highway System

The scale of suburban growth would not have been remotely possible without a massive federal program of highway building. Committed to the idea of easing automobile travel, President Eisenhower authorized the first funding of the interstate system in 1953. Further legislation passed by Congress in 1956 resulted in the **Interstate Highway Act**, which authorized funds to build 41,000 miles of highway consisting of multilane expressways that would connect the nation's major cities. This represented the biggest expenditure on public works in history, bigger by far than any project undertaken during the New Deal. In 1990, further recognition of President Eisenhower's role in establishing the massive highway system led to a renaming of the highways. It became the Dwight D. Eisenhower System of Interstate and Defense Highways.

Vocabulary Builder

undertake—(uhn der TAYK) *v.* to take upon oneself; agree to do



Suburban dwellers began to spend more time taking care of their lawns and gardens. As a result, lawn mowers became increasingly popular. The young man here is using his new lawn mower.

Families tended to spend more time together. Backyard cookouts were popular pastimes. Usually, hamburgers or frankfurters were prepared on outdoor grills.

Thinking Critically

- 1. Recognize Cause and Effect** How did the growth of the suburbs affect Americans?
- 2. Draw Conclusions** One author described suburban living as “a life of dreariness.” Do you agree? Explain.

History *Interactive* ★

For: More about suburban life in the 1950s
Web Code: nep-1310

Besides easing commutes from suburbs to cities, the new highways boosted the travel and vacation industries. Families traveled to national and state parks, to the beach, and to new destinations, such as Las Vegas. With more money and more children, American families avidly sought entertainment and leisure activity. Walt Disney met this demand by building an extraordinary amusement park in Southern California. Disneyland exhibits excited the imagination with spectacular visions of the future, including make-believe rides in space and a special exhibit based on the movie *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did the Interstate Highway System spur the growth of the suburbs?

Migrating to the Sunbelt

In 1958, the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants, two well-known baseball teams, moved from New York City to Los Angeles and San Francisco, respectively. Their move reflected another crucial trend of the postwar era, the growth of the **Sunbelt**, the name given to the southern and western states. By the mid-1960s, California passed New York as the state with the largest population. The migration to Sunbelt cities, such as Houston, Texas, and Los Angeles, California, continued for the rest of the twentieth century.

Seeking the Benefits of the Sunbelt Many factors played a role in attracting so many people to the Sunbelt. California, which added more than 5 million new residents in the 1940s and 1950s, had both an appealing climate and a large number of jobs in defense industries. The explosive growth of the aerospace and electronics industries also attracted newcomers to the Sunbelt. The booming petrochemical industry boosted Houston’s population. The development of air conditioning made it easier to live in hotter climates, too.

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Identify Causes and Effects As you read, identify the effects of the population shift to the Sunbelt.

Moving to the Sunbelt	
Causes	Effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">

Migration Patterns, 1950–2010

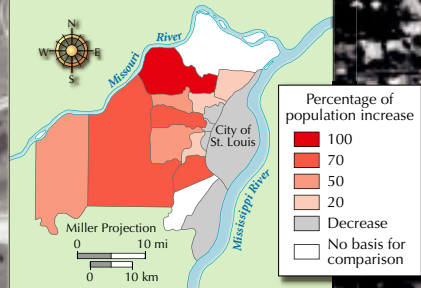
Geography Interactive

For: Interactive map

Web Code: nep-1303



The Growth of Suburban St. Louis, 1950–1960




Map Skills After World War II, several significant population shifts occurred. Many Americans migrated south and west to the Sunbelt states. Suburban communities grew as large numbers of white Americans left urban areas.

- 1. Locate** (a) San Diego, (b) Phoenix, (c) Houston, (d) Memphis
- 2. Region** Name three Sunbelt states in which population growth occurred.
- 3. Draw Conclusions** Based on your knowledge of postwar migration and the information in the map, why do you think population decreased in the city of St. Louis?

Latinos contributed to the growth of the Sunbelt. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, many Cubans, who were escaping the new regime of Fidel Castro, made Miami, Florida, their new home. Prior to World War II, most Mexican Americans lived in rural areas. However, by the 1960s, the majority of them migrated to urban areas, such as Los Angeles, El Paso, and Phoenix.

Impact of Migration The shift to the suburbs and the Sunbelt had a momentous impact on American society. As people moved, their political power went with them. Thus, suburbs and the Sunbelt gained representation. Urbanites in the Northeast and Midwest lost political power. California's representation in the House of Representatives, for example, more than doubled between 1948 and 1998.

Urban and suburban growth created environmental concerns, ranging from traffic jams and smog to water shortages. In the 1960s and 1970s, environmental groups would begin to grapple with some of the byproducts of this growth.

 **Checkpoint** What motivated so many Americans to migrate to the Sunbelt?

The American Economy Changes Focus

These important postwar population shifts were matched by equally groundbreaking structural changes in the American economy. For the first time in American history, more people found employment in the **service sector**, businesses that provide services, such as healthcare, law, retail, banking, or insurance, than in the manufacturing sector. These shifts led some to describe the United States as a postindustrial society.

The Service Sector Grows Between 1947 and 1957, the percentage of the American workforce employed in industrial or blue-collar jobs declined 4 percent. During the same time period, employment in the service sector, or white-collar jobs, rapidly grew. The new workforce included many who worked in **information industries**, including those who built or operated the first computers. These computers were enormous. One of the first, named ENIAC, short for Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer, took up roughly 18,000 square feet, or the size of three basketball courts! Despite its size, it was less powerful than today's desktop computer.

Still, ENIAC was a remarkable advance. By the 1960s, the government and private industry had found many uses for the computer. Hotels used computers to help make reservations, and banks used them to keep track of accounts. Industries started using computers to automate work or perform jobs once done by people.

Meanwhile, the number of women in the labor force continued to grow, doubling between 1940 and 1960. Many of these women worked part time. Few pursued long-term careers and most remained underpaid. Yet, without their paychecks, their families would have found it difficult to remain in the middle class.

While the service sector grew rapidly, both the number and percentage of Americans who made a living by farming continued to decline. In 1935, one fourth of the nation's families lived on farms. By 1960, less than one in ten families did. At the same

White-Collar Jobs

The number of white-collar workers, such as the office workers shown here, greatly increased in the 1950s.



time, improvements in technology, ranging from mechanical cotton pickers to chemical pesticides, made agriculture much more productive. This allowed fewer workers to grow even more food. New irrigation systems helped transform much of the land in the Southwest from arid to fertile fields.

Entrepreneurs Start Businesses At home, the postwar era saw the rise of **franchise businesses**. A franchise business allows a company to distribute its products or services through retail outlets owned by independent operators. Franchises were attractive to consumers because they stressed quality and sameness, no matter where one was in the United States. The Holiday Inn franchise came into existence following a trip that home builder Kemmons Wilson took to Washington, D.C., with his family of five children. Frustrated, Wilson found hotels difficult to locate, overpriced, and lacking adequate parking facilities. As he traveled, according to author David Halberstam, “Wilson became more irritated until he turned to his wife and announced that he was going into the hotel business. Everyone in this country, he thought, had a car and a family, and sooner or later everyone had to go somewhere.” Today, there are tens of thousands of Holiday Inn hotels all over the world.

Many postwar critics lamented the growth of franchise businesses. For them, the franchises represented a growing lack of originality, evidence that the United States was becoming a “bland” nation in which people ate bland food, lived in bland look-a-like houses, and watched bland television shows that followed the same plot line.

American Corporations Go Multinational As the postwar economy expanded, so did **multinational corporations**, companies that produced and sold their goods and services all over the world and established branches abroad. General Motors, General Electric, and IBM, produced a larger and larger share of all of the goods sold. Many of these corporations earned large portions of their profits abroad. Coca Cola, for instance, sold its soft drinks all over the globe. Hollywood movies found eager audiences in Tokyo, Mexico City, and Germany.

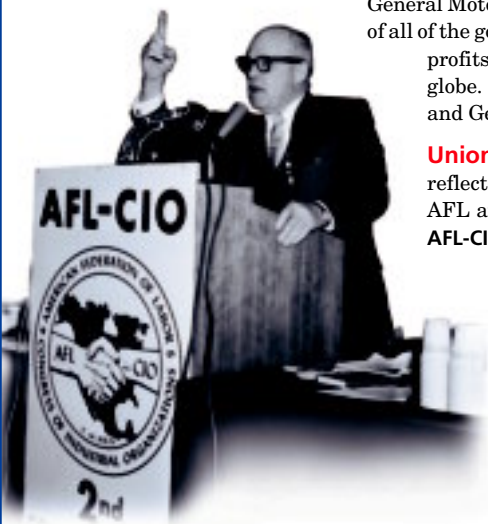
Unions Consolidate Their Gains The prosperity of the 1950s was reflected in generally good times for the labor movement. In 1955, the AFL and the CIO, which had split in the mid-1930s, united to form the **AFL-CIO**. The new organization enjoyed a good deal of political clout, especially within the Democratic Party. Yet, trade unions also lost some momentum during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Most of the new white-collar workers did not join unions, and labor’s image was tarnished by a corruption scandal involving the Teamsters Union. Government investigators accused the Teamsters, who represented truck drivers, of illegally using their members’ funds.



Checkpoint In what ways did American businesses change during the postwar period?

Vocabulary Builder

frustrate—(FRUHS tray) *v.* to annoy; disappoint



Labor Leader

George Meany served as the first president of the AFL-CIO.

Educational Opportunities Expand

As the economy grew, so too did opportunities for Americans to attain higher education. A more educated workforce boosted economic productivity. In 1940, only about 15 percent of college-age Americans attended college. By the early 1960s, however, close to 40 percent did. The percentage of Americans who completed high school also rose sharply. “The astonishing growth of education in the late

1940s (and thereafter),” wrote historian James Patterson, “seemed yet another sign that the American Dream was well and alive.”

Government Provides Funding for Education

Large sums of money were needed to meet the education needs of the baby-boom generation. In the 1950s and early 1960s, California opened a new school about once a week. Most of the funding for education came from local and state governments, but after the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik 1* in 1957, many Americans called for more federal funds for education.


In a mood of crisis, Congress quickly approved the National Defense Education Act. Its \$1 billion program was aimed at producing more scientists and science teachers. The act authorized money for loans to high school and college graduates to continue their scientific education.

Education Is “Democratized” The postwar era saw the stirrings of a movement to make education more accessible. Many states poured funds into their public universities, making it easier for ordinary Americans to attend college. California, for example, established a **California Master Plan**, which called for three tiers of higher education: research universities, state colleges, and community colleges. All of them were to be accessible to all of the state’s citizens. Other states also built or expanded their college systems. On another front, in 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that segregated schools were unconstitutional. However, it would be years before many schools were actually integrated.



Growing Classrooms

Class sizes increased as baby-boom children reached school age. The number of high school and college graduates soared.

 **Checkpoint** How did American education change in the years following World War II?

SECTION

2 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nea-1303

Comprehension

- 1. Terms and People** What is the relationship between each of the following terms and the social and economic changes that took place in the postwar period?
 - Interstate Highway Act
 - Sunbelt
 - service sector
 - information industries
 - franchise business
- 2. NoteTaking Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas** Use your chart to answer the Section Focus Question: What social and economic factors changed American life during the 1950s?

Writing About History

- 3. Quick Write: Evaluate Sources** Choose a topic from this section for further research. Use the Internet or the library to find one source that provides information about your selected topic. Determine the reliability of the source. Consider the following:
 - Is it a primary or secondary source?
 - Is the information supported by the evidence?
 - Is the information mostly facts or mostly opinions?
 - If you are using the Internet, is the information from a Web site that is known for being reliable?

Critical Thinking

- 4. Draw Conclusions** What were the benefits of the Interstate Highway Act? What were the disadvantages?
- 5. Demonstrate Reasoned Judgment** Do you think it was easy for people in declining manufacturing industries to switch into the service sector? Explain your answer.
- 6. Synthesize Information** How did the Sunbelt states benefit from the growth of the automobile and air conditioning industries?