

“Post World War II Society: Suburban Sprawl and Urban Renewal”

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for the UCLA History-Geography Project’s
“Places and Time” Institute

Suggested Time Period: 6-7 traditional class periods.
Note: With some adjustments by the teacher (which may include more lecture and less student work), the lessons can be done in less time.

GRADE  11  United States History

CALIFORNIA HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARDS

11.8  Students analyze the economic boom and social transformation of post-World War II America.
8.   Discuss forms of popular culture, with emphasis on their origins and geographic diffusion.

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FOCUS QUESTIONS:

What is the difference between urban and suburban areas?

Why did suburban areas develop and how were they different from what had previously existed?

What aspects of society changed after World War II?

How did the aspects of the post-World War II society affect the development of such places as Disneyland and Dodger Stadium?

What happened to the residents of Chavez Ravine?

What struggle took place in order to construct Dodger Stadium?

OUTCOME:

At the conclusion of the lessons, students will be able to:

• Define the concepts of urban and suburban.

• Describe the “new” aspects of post-World War II society.

• Explain how such places as Disneyland and Dodger Stadium fit into the scheme of the post-war society.

• Understand the “politics” and background to the building of Dodger Stadium including the struggle for the Chavez Ravine.

• Compare and contrast suburban development and urban redevelopment.

PRIMARY SOURCES/LITERATURE:

Chavez Ravine pictures (East Photo Collection, Automobile Club of Southern California)

“All Aboard for Disneyland”, Westways, July, 1955
**ASSESSMENT:**

Students will write an essay comparing and contrasting the development of two popular culture sites (Disneyland and Dodger Stadium) in which they look at how the building of each site was affected by the post-World War II society, how each experienced a different path of development, and the goals of each project. (This will be worked on during Day 6 and possibly Day 7.)

**FOLLOW-UP LESSONS:**

Either mixed in with this lesson or immediately afterward, the concepts of “white flight” and minority migration to the inner cities should be taught. Both the Disneyland lesson and the Dodger Stadium lesson allow for room to teach about “white flight” and how it played a role in the development of both places. The Dodger Stadium lesson allows the teacher to talk more about urban renewal, the inner city, and Mexican-Americans.

**LIST OF HAND-OUTS AND LECTURE NOTES FOR THE LESSONS:**

- Key points on post-World War II society in America
- “All Aboard for Disneyland” article
- *Fact sheet on Disneyland
- *Brooklyn move lecture notes
- Auto Club Pictures of Chavez Ravine, 1937
- *Chavez Ravine lecture notes
- *Notes on why baseball is more important than people
- *Scenario: City of Los Angeles vs. the people and supporters of Chavez Ravine

*denotes information that came from Avila book. For more information on the topic, please see his book cited in the bibliography.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Various images from the Automobile Club of Southern California’s *Westways* magazine and map collections (listed in the Appendix)
ACTIVITIES:

**Day One—Introduction to Post-World War II Society**

**Opener:** Students will answer the following questions to get them to begin to understand the basis of the lesson.

Questions: From what you know about the greater Los Angeles area, identify what areas are considered urban, suburban and rural (if any)? What is another word for urban? Can both words be used interchangeably?

Once the students have a chance to answer the questions, discuss with them the areas that qualify under each area. Be sure to explain that Los Angeles is the city center and that the surrounding cities are actual suburbs of Los Angeles, even though many of them are cities in their own right. The teacher may want to show pictures of each so the students have a visual image.

**Class Activities:** Students will read passages/excerpts about 6-7 topics common to the post-World War II society. These topics include housing, conglomerations/corporations, suburban lifestyle, leisure, automobile culture, television, and family. (Very limited key points of the topics follow. You should use a textbook or websites for something more in depth.) The notes the students take should reflect how society changed after the war. A discussion should follow the notetaking.

**Closure:** Ask students to jot down the following two questions: Why did this change to society happen after World War II? Was this change necessary? Students should be able to answer any of the questions and be prepared to give an answer before leaving the class (It is their ticket out the door.).

**ASSESSMENT:**

For homework, students are to explain how each change relates to the others.
KEY POINTS ON POST-WORLD WAR II SOCIETY IN AMERICA

Housing:
• After World War II, veterans returned home to a severe housing shortage.
• The suburbs began to emerge. Some, like Levittown in New York, were planned, while others developed out of necessity.

Conglomerates & Corporations:
• With jobs in the suburbs, people began to work again after the war.
• Industrial jobs were not as prevalent.
• Many workers became businessmen; women and took jobs as secretaries and salespeople or in areas such as advertising, communications and insurance, all of which were considered white collar, higher-paid positions.
• Taking these white collar jobs often meant conformity to what was desired by the company or business. Workers often had to dress in uniforms and follow company rules and regulations for doing things.
• Personal choice and creativeness were often stifled.

Suburban Lifestyle:
• The new, good jobs allowed people to provide their families with the good things in life.
• Most people worked in the city and lived in the suburbs.
• Of the 13 million homes built in the 1950’s, 85% were suburban.
• By the early 1960’s, every large city in the United States was surrounded by suburbs.
• Most people living in the suburbs owned an automobile.

Leisure:
• Most Americans in the 1950’s had more leisure time than ever before.
• Forty-hour work weeks and earned vacation gave them time to do things.
• Less time was spent on chores because of labor-saving machines such as the vacuum and washing machine.
• In 1953, more than $30 billion was spent on leisure activities.
• Leisure activities included playing sports, attending sporting games, watching television, listening to music, and reading.
Automobile culture:
- After World War II, new car sales rose from 6.7 million in 1950 to 7.9 million in 1955.
- The number of private cars on the road rose from 40 million in 1950 to 60 million in 1960.
- Suburban living made a car necessary. Public transportation was rarely available in the suburbs.
- With more cars on the road, more roads were needed.
- In 1956, the Interstate Highway Act was passed authorizing the building of a nationwide highway and networks of other highways.
- New roads led to new suburbs farther and farther away from the city center.
- The new roads encouraged families to take road trips to places such as mountains, national parks, historic sites and amusement parks.

Television:
- In 1954, television was in the homes of 55% of the American population; by 1960, it was in the homes of 90%.
- Television was more readily available because post-World War II innovations such as microwave relays could transmit television waves over long distances.
- The television offered people viewing of programs such as sporting events and family-type shows such as the Mickey Mouse Club.

Family:
- The nuclear family was the center of society.
- Stereotypical portrayals of the family were found on television showing the mother as the housewife who takes care of the kids, the house, and her husband’s needs, while the father was the “bread-winner” and king of the house.
- Families ate dinner together and went on family vacations.
- Families were at the heart of many development decisions being made.
Day Two—A Look at Suburbia: The Creation of the “Happiest Place on Earth”

Opener: Students will read the article entitled “All Aboard for Disneyland”. (The article from the Auto Club’s “Westways” magazine is in the appendix.)

Class activities: Pass out the fact sheet on the building of Disneyland, which follows. In pairs, students will read the fact sheet and break it down to identify the effects of post-World War II society. They should be able to find evidence of family, leisure, automobile culture, etc. While the pairs are working on this, the teacher should put all the themes on separate pieces of butcher paper and place them around the room. Once the pairs have an opportunity to read the article and break it down, they need to post answers on the papers around the room. After answers are posted, discuss the findings. Also, see if the students can figure out how order and predictability relate to the building of Disneyland.

Closure: Have students make some connection to Disneyland today so they can see how some things are still the same. (For example, the lands still represent order and predictability, the remodeling of the I-5 freeway had close association to what Disneyland wanted, the Disney look relates to conformity, etc.) Also let the students know that this is a look at suburbia; tomorrow they will begin to study the urban area of Los Angeles. Be sure the students understand the commonality is found in the facts of relationships; for example, the automobile culture related to the building of highways, which related to the building of the I-5 freeway, which related to ....
Fact Sheet on Disneyland

Disneyland presented a controlled landscape that paralleled the emerging culture of postwar suburbia. It encapsulated the values that had been built into the new suburban culture and the whiteness that dominated Southern California in the 1960’s and 1970’s.

The Building of Disneyland:
Initially, Disneyland (at the time known as Mickey Mouse Park) was going to be built in Burbank, but the city said no because they thought it would bring a negative Coney Island “carnie” feel to the city. Walt Disney then asked the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) to pick a new place for his amusement park. The SRI recommended Anaheim because it was near the planned I-5 freeway, and the city wanted development to boost the economy. Disneyland was marketed to a growing suburban population who left the city for many of the same reasons that influenced the placement of Disneyland in Orange County.

Disneyland was predictable, showing order and conformity just like the suburbs of post-World War II society. After the war, people wanted predictability in economics, world affairs, suburb design, and entertainment. Therefore, Disneyland was built in Anaheim because it was away from the inner-city’s concentration of racialized poverty, close to freeway access, near the development of more freeways to come because of suburban sprawl (which will inspire the building of the ride Autopia), near developing suburbs, and it had a direct line of sight to Mount Wilson’s master transmitters making it television-ready.

With the post-World War II emphasis on family entertainment, Disneyland put itself at the heart of this type of entertainment. It encouraged family time by affording families a comforting distraction from the many uncertainties and anxieties of the day. The typical family of four was at the center of the Disneyland experience. It became a place for family adventure where parents and children could have fun together.
Day Three—What’s Changing in the City?

Opener: Show the students a picture of Dodger Stadium from either its construction or from its opening in 1962 (do a Google image search). Just put it up and do not give any additional information. Ask the students to answer the following questions: What do you think the picture is? Where is this location? What do you think was there before this structure was built? After a few minutes, give the students the answers to the questions.

**In the appendix, you will find four pictures of what Chavez Ravine looked like prior to the building of Dodger Stadium. The pictures are from 1937. You can use these pictures to talk about what was there before or wait and use them for tomorrow’s lesson.

Class Activities: Explain that they are going to learn today about why the Dodgers wanted to move from Brooklyn and that this relates to what they have been studying about the changes in society from pre- to post-World War II. Students will read pages 146-149 of Eric Avila’s book Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight and attempt to identify what relation the reading has to the topics that have been talking about in post-World War II society. The reading should first be read aloud in class; the teacher may need to break down concepts/ideas that the students need clarified. Then have the students reread the pages broken down by paragraphs per row. This way students are responsible for identifying the relationships in smaller chunks. Give them ample time and then discuss the findings. After the discussion, give a quick lecture to fill in any blanks in the question—Why did the Dodgers want to move from Brooklyn? (You’ll find lecture notes below.)
Brooklyn Dodgers Move Lecture Notes

The question to consider is why did Walter O’Malley want to move the Dodgers from Brooklyn?

After the war, the cultural make-up of Brooklyn began to change. The move to suburbia, “white flight”, and the migration of minorities to the inner city changed the population of Brooklyn and the people that came to see the Dodgers play at Ebbets Field. The fans that had attended the games for years and years were not coming as frequently. Television and the distance from the stadium to the suburbs made coming to the games less attractive.

The move out of Brooklyn is summarized below:
Originally, the Dodgers were a Brooklyn team. However, after World War II, Brooklyn culture began to change. Post-war suburbanization played a role in the change at Ebbets Field. Other problems also existed. For example, there was no room to expand Ebbets Field because it was surrounded by streets, and there was not enough parking for the cars of everyone who came from the suburbs. A new “dark” incoming population moved into Brooklyn and “white flight” began. This shift in population brought growing tensions between the new and old populations of the city and fans of Dodger Stadiums. Before long, Ebbets Field seemed a forbidding place, not suitable for families. At the same time, there was a reduction in financial support for teams that shared cities, and television became an alternate way for those in the suburbs to watch the game instead of attending it. O’Malley knew it was necessary to have a new stadium, but he wanted to use private funds to build on public land, and New York said that was not possible. With that refusal to help him out, O’Malley began to look elsewhere for a place to take the Dodgers. [It should be noted that at this same time some of the other baseball teams began to move so he was also motivated by the money these teams (such as Boston’s Braves going to Milwaukee) were making.]
Days Four and Five— Baseball or People? A Dilemma

Opener: First, students need to describe what a city should have in order to make it a city. Make a list on the board, then have students read the paragraph that follows on what was happening in Los Angeles after the war that impacted Walter O’Malley’s choice to move here.

Class Activities: During class today (Depending on how deeply you want to go into this, it may take you longer.), the students are going to take a more extensive look at Chavez Ravine including what was promised there, the people of the Ravine, the geography, etc. In order to do this, the students will participate in a gallery walk in which they will look at pictures and read quotes of the residents of Chavez Ravine. (The pictures and quotes can be found in Don Normark’s book Chavez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story.) You can also include the four pictures included in the appendix. As they look/read, they should be writing down thoughts or ideas that come to mind. It should be something thoughtful and poignant. The students will write down their answers either on a chart or Cornell notes.

Next, the students need to know what happened with the residents of Chavez Ravine. Explain what happened with the area, including the way it was thought of, that the residents were promised something they didn’t get, and that they were never able to return to their homes. (You’ll find some help on the following page, but you will probably need to do some further research.)

Then, give the students a scenario about what was going from 1957-1962 in regard to the building of Dodger Stadium (pages 161-170 in the Avila book offer a thorough description, and additional information follows). Divide your students into two groups—those in favor of the stadium and those against—and ask them to do further research into the arguments. The groups could then present their arguments, and the class or a “judge” could decide which side is right. Be sure to have the students create posters or other means of promotion for their side of the struggle.

Closure: Have the students respond to the following question:

• Why were the people of the Chavez Ravine looked at as not as important as baseball?

Allow the students the opportunity to share their thoughts about this struggle. Encourage them to write down others’ comments, as they may be useful for the assessment. If there is time, read pages 182-183 entitled “Goodbye Bums” of Eric Avila’s book. It will sum up the work they’ve been doing. (If there is no time in class, then send it with them to read at home.)
Background Information on Los Angeles after the War

So, why Los Angeles?
There are many reasons the Dodgers moved to Los Angeles. Most of them are in line with the thinking of the post-World War II society. For example, the movement of people during and after the war was not limited to “city to suburbs”, but also from east to west to places like Los Angeles and Oakland. Also, there was a cry in Los Angeles for “urban renewal” and bringing glory and culture back to the downtown area. In the city officials’ minds, bringing a baseball team to Los Angeles would solidify their place as a major city. Finally, it helped that many new freeways were being built and that the stadium could be a place for family entertainment.

Chavez Ravine Lecture Notes

1949 -- Taft-Ellender-Wagner Bill passed – secured federal funding monies for public housing
--Los Angeles mayor at this time approved money to build public housing.
--The City Housing Authority (CHA) had the go-ahead to build 10,000 low rent “slum clearance” housing units.
--Chavez Ravine was identified as the most “blighted” area in the city and in need of rehabilitation.

1951 – The CHA approved 3,360 units of public housing to be built on 800 acres of Chavez Ravine.

1952-53 -- Residents of Chavez Ravine were cleared off the land with the promise that “this project is going to be built for you, we'll give you temporary housing . . . You'll have priority, you can have whatever you want.”

1953 -- A new mayor, Norris Poulson, was elected. (He received a lot of help in getting to this position from people with the Los Angeles Times, the Chamber of Commerce, and other groups that wanted certain things done in the L.A. area and were against public housing.
--Poulson cancelled the public housing plan in Chavez Ravine. (He believed that public housing was socialistic and during this time of the “Red Scare” he did not want to be seen as being connected to anything questionable.)
--The prior residents were not moved back and did not get housing or compensation for their loss.
--This was the death of public housing and the beginning of a corporate reincarnation and private redevelopment of downtown.

**Shortly after the death of public housing, the Ravine area was introduced to O'Malley as a place for a baseball stadium. Now Los Angeles officials had to argue why baseball was a more “American” alternative to public housing.**
1950’s – Los Angeles officials remained intent upon pursuing a grand civic vision that depended upon getting rid of the working class communities of color, places such as Bunker Hill and Chavez Ravine. Of the groups, the Mexican-Americans posed the largest obstacle because of the past stigmas of the Zoot Suit Riots, pachucos, and a combination of poverty and Chicano culture.

**Why Baseball Was More Important than People Notes**

- The fact the Chavez Ravine was suggested/given to O’Malley for the stadium shows a growing importance of sports teams and stadiums in the promotion of the city of Los Angeles and of urban redevelopment.

- Heavily influenced by the amount of money that Milwaukee was making from the Boston Braves moving there. Overnight the city was transformed.

- A sports team in Los Angeles would allow for the name of the city to be flashed across the nation and would encourage people to visit the city.

- “psychological value”—getting the Dodgers to Los Angeles would a boost to the city because we would have “taken it from New York right under their noses”

- material rewards included revitalizing the stewardship of downtown and improving the tourist industry.

- Showed a relationship between culture and space which was critical after the war.

- Upgrading downtown area

On the other side were the people who did not bring anything new or revitalizing to the downtown area. Instead, to city officials, they represented poverty, minority struggles, and no culture (in regards to museums, operas, etc.). In reality, Chavez Ravine was a flourishing culture. The people there celebrated weddings with the whole community, maintained gardens and ranches, hosted dances for all, went to church together, and shared a community at bonfires, events and schools. Traffic was absent compared to the city, and the people had formed a real neighborhood. But all of this was overlooked. All the city officials could see was a desolate area.
Scenario: City of Los Angeles vs. the People and Supporters of Chavez Ravine

It was an uphill battle to get Dodger Stadium built.

The battle began in 1957:

In 1957, O’Malley bought the Los Angeles Angels and Wrigley Field. He also visited Chavez Ravine to survey the site. He liked the site but found one problem. The deed for the land was very specific—its use was to be public, but a stadium is private use. Conveniently, this was changed very easily by the mayor who made it for private use. Now, O’Malley was promised the land. By the end of 1957, a formal agreement was made with O’Malley in which he got 315 acres (worth 2-6 million dollars) in exchange for the 9 acres of Wrigley Field. He also got all mineral rights to the land, a 90-year lease, all revenues from parking and concessions, and 4.7 million dollars in land preparation costs. In order not to completely ignore the public use of the original deed, he was to finance construction of a youth center adjacent to the stadium.

Opposition exploded in Los Angeles, especially from those who were in favor of public housing and on the side of the residents of Chavez Ravine who had been promised one thing and received nothing. The opposition claimed that the city officials “gave away the land.”

Regardless of the opposition, the contract was approved on October 9, 1957. It was opposed and a citywide vote (Proposition B) took place to approve the city-Dodgers contract. Proposition B passed on June 3, 1958, which meant that the contract was approved and building of the stadium could begin. However, the struggle did not end there. The case was taken to Superior Court where it was overturned on July 14, 1958, but the original decision was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in October, 1959.

While the court battles were going on, the residents who had not moved out of the Ravine in 1953 were forced out. The last family, the Arechiga family, had to be forcibly removed by the authorities on May 8, 1959. (A picture of this can be found in the Avila book and on the web with a Google images search.) This forcible eviction led to class tensions and widened the racial gap in post-war society. It also set the stage for many of the Chicano movements of the 1960’s.

Dodger Stadium opened April 10, 1962.
Days Six and Seven—Urban vs. Suburban: A Look at How They’ve Developed

Opener: Ask students to write down on a t-chart things they know about the development of Disneyland and Dodger Stadium. They should include building facts, relation to post-war society, who was involved, why each was built, etc. Give them time to do this and to pair/share their answers.

ASSESSMENT:

Students will write an essay comparing and contrasting the development of two popular culture sites—Disneyland and Dodger Stadium—in which they look at how the building of each site was affected by the post-World War II society, how each project followed a different path of development, and the goals of each project.

The best way to approach this is to break down the prompt and have the students work on one part at a time with a partner and then put it all together.
To begin, have the students use a Y-chart to write down the similarities and differences of the two sites. Once this information has been identified, the students can begin writing in pairs.

It is up to you, the teacher, to decide how you want to approach the writing, how you want it to look, and how long the students should get to work on it. The end product should be the same—an essay in which the reader can figure out that the two sites, although built in different areas and developing differently, did have somewhat similar goals.
APPENDIX

Images from the Automobile Club
  Panoramic Photo of Los Angeles from Chavez Ravine (1)
  Panoramic Photo of Los Angeles from Chavez Ravine (2)
  106-44 Chavez Ravine Photo
  106-45 Chavez Ravine Photo
  Automobile Road Map from Santa Monica to San Pedro and Long Beach via Coast Boulevard
  Automobile Boulevards from Los Angeles to Venice and Santa Monica