

Reading Guide – The Malling of America

¶ We continue our discussion of suburbanization and the politics of space in the postwar United States. Our focus today is on the rise of the Shopping Center, or “mall” in the 1950s and 1960s. As you read (and watch) the assigned materials pay close attention to the social, political, and economic impacts of the “mallings of America.” What role did malls play in the reshaping of the built environment in the postwar US?

Assigned Materials

- Lizabeth Cohen, “From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America,” *American Historical Review* v. 101:4 (1996) 1050-1081.
- Dolores Hayden, “Edge Nodes,” from *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (2004) 154-180.
- WATCH: *Shopping Can be Fun* (1957) 17min

Questions to Consider

Lizabeth Cohen’s influential article, “From Town Center to Shopping Center,” examines the political impacts of the shift from downtown marketplaces to suburban malls as the primary sites of consumption in the postwar US. What were those impacts? What role does gender play in Cohen’s account? Why, according to Cohen, do malls matter?

Dolores Hayden’s “Edge Nodes” is a chapter from her book *Building Suburbia*. In this chapter, Hayden examines the political, spatial, and economic history of shopping centers, suburbs, highways and car culture. What are “edge nodes,” and where did they come from? Why, according to Hayden, are they troublesome?

Take notes as you watch the 1957 promotional film for the Hillsdale Mall, located in an upscale suburb in the San Francisco Bay Area. What kinds of amenities and activities were available at Hillsdale Mall in the late 1950s? How might we put this short film in conversation with Cohen and Hayden?

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