

Growth of the Sun Belt

(Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California)

Causes

- World War II economic activity relocated laborers and military personnel, stimulating the poor South and under-populated West Coast.
- Defense-related spending (during World War II and the cold war) moved to Sun Belt regions — oil, military and aerospace.
- World War II wartime construction in thinly populated areas close to the coast (South) and in areas close to the Pacific war (West)
- Transportation costs were drastically reduced in post-war period.
- aging Baby Boomers, Social Security, Medicare
- warm winters and affordable air-conditioning due to electrical grid development
- inexpensive gas from Oklahoma and Texas
- explosion in automobile sales
- expansion of tourism
- lower labor costs/Bracero Program (series of laws and diplomatic agreements, initiated in 1942, when the US signed the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement with Mexico)
- increase in immigration from Mexico, Asia and Latin America
- weak labor laws: fewer unions, lower southern wages, southern right-to-work laws
- high-tech industry in South and West: Military and computer industries (National Aeronautical and Space Administration [NASA] in Florida and Texas) are emblematic.

- Post–Civil Rights Act of 1964 characterized primarily by migration to the Sun Belt.
- lower taxes
- lower costs in the South (for utilities, housing, etc)
- cheaper cost of land
- Sun Belt regions are attractive places to live.
- increase in infrastructure spending
- Northern states in the Rust Belt went through a deep economic depression in 1974-75.
- The decline of the Rust Belt undercut prosperity in the nation as a whole.
- Rust Belt workers fled to the Sun Belt for jobs, straining social services and infrastructure.
- Northern cities' treasuries were depleted.

Consequences

- increase in personal income, population and housing in the Sun Belt
- rise of Rust Belt identity and population decline in the Northeast
- 1970s: Nevada, California, Florida and Arizona were fastest growing states; 2000: 10% of US population lived in California.
- shift in congressional representation toward California, Florida, Texas
- more ethnic diversity in California and the West
- realigned political power in US: Political balance shifted South along with population and wealth.
- decline in federal aid to big cities since late 1970s
- shift to more conservative social policies nationally
- housing market expanded, prices of housing stock increased

- Sun Belt economy transformed from agriculture into industry, yet agriculture remains important in some areas.
- rise in recreational and retirement spending