

DBQ 13**The Interstate Highway System, 1956–2000**

Directions: Answer the following question by writing an essay that includes your interpretation of Documents A–J as well as your own knowledge of the history of this time period.

How did the Interstate highway system change the lives of Americans between 1956 and 2000?

Consider the impact on local communities and the environment, as well as on American society and culture generally.

Answer this question using the documents and your knowledge of Chapters 26–30.

Document A

Source: Article in *Automotive Industries*, December 1956.

In laying the general pattern of the 41,000-mile chain of national express routes, the planners have steered away from the heavily built-up industrial and residential cores of the cities. Belt lines and bypasses are to allow through traffic on the new system to remain free of urban bottlenecks. Those drivers with destinations downtown will be able to reach them via access thoroughfares, but there is to be no dumping of Interstate traffic in front of city hall.

Document B

Source: U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

U.S. Vehicle-Miles (in millions)

	<i>Passenger Car</i>	<i>Amtrak Intercity Train</i>	<i>Domestic Airline</i>
1960	587,012	209	858
1970	916,700	93	2,068
1980	1,111,596	30	2,523
1990	1,408,266	33	3,963
2000	1,600,287	35	5,664

Document C

Source: Ben Kelley, former public affairs director, National Highway Administration, *The Pavers and the Paved*, 1970.

No one in or out of the federal highway program would argue against the charge that treatment of expressway construction displacees has been historically shabby, its major characteristics having been routings through low-income, often minority-group neighborhoods; quick but grossly inadequate settlements with owner-occupants and tenants; and a nearly complete failure to insure availability of decent relocation housing at fair cost.

Document D

Source: Rev. Channing E. Phillips, member of D.C. Democratic Central Committee, statement to Washington, D.C., City Council, 1970.

A freeway is its own worst enemy. It attracts automobile traffic. A freeway worsens, rather than relieves, traffic congestion. A freeway is also the worst enemy of rapid rail transit. . . . The city should adopt a plan that protects and guarantees the public's investment in the transit system. It must reject the Highway Department's proposal [for a new Interstate bridge into D.C.] which will destroy that investment. . . .

We can . . . aid the struggle for a healthy environment by refusing to cooperate with automobile manufacturers, by refusing to provide any more highways.

Document E

Source: *Play It As It Lays*, novel by Joan Didion, 1970.

Once she was on the freeway and had maneuvered her way to a fast lane she turned on the radio at high volume and she drove. She drove the San Diego to the Harbor, the Harbor up to the Hollywood, the Hollywood to the Golden State, the Santa Monica, the Santa Ana, the Pasadena, the Ventura. She drove as a riverman runs a river, every day more attuned to its currents, its deceptions, and just as a riverman feels the pull of the rapids in the lull between sleeping and waking, so Maria lay at night in the still of Beverly Hills and saw the great signs soar overhead at seventy miles an hour.

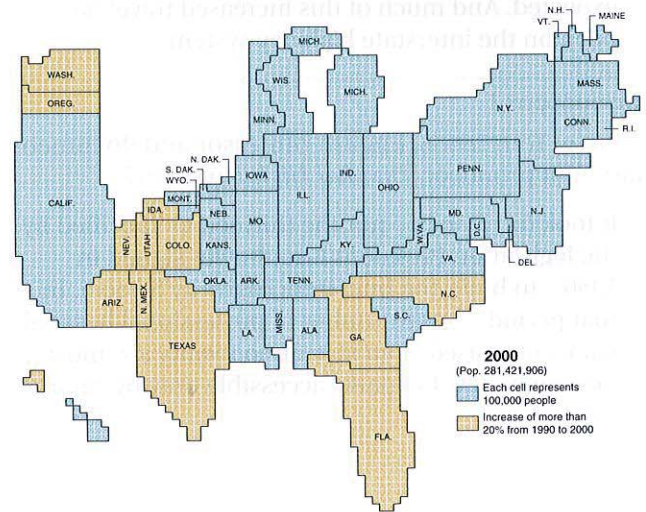
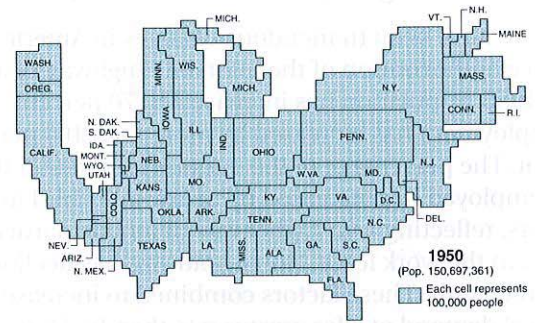
Document F

Source: Phil Patton, journalist, *Open Road*, 1986.

... [T]he distribution of funds [from the National Highway Trust Fund], after the first few years of the program, was adjusted to pay states not according to their population but to their proportion of the total system. This provision helped states like California, Florida, and Texas, less populated states with long stretches of planned highway in what would become known as the Sunbelt.

Document G

Source: Map 27.1, *The Growth of the Sunbelt, 1950–2000*. (See text p. 843 for full-size maps.)



Document H

Source: Wendell Cox and Jean Love, “40 Years of the Interstate Highway System: An Analysis,” study for the American Highway Users Alliance, 1996.

There have been tremendous changes in America since authorization of the interstate highway system in 1956. Population has increased by 70 percent, but employment has increased by more than 100 percent. The percentage of the nation’s population that is employed has increased by nearly one-third in 40 years, reflecting a far higher rate of female participation in the work force. Household size has declined significantly. These factors combined to increase travel demand at a far greater rate than had been expected. And much of this increased travel has been on the interstate highway system.

Document I

Source: Tom Lewis, English professor and documentary film producer, *Divided Highways*, 1997.

It took forty years—not the thirteen as specified by the legislation President Eisenhower signed in 1956—to build the Interstate Highway System. In that period . . . the number of professional baseball teams increased from sixteen to twenty six, most playing in new ballparks accessible only by car and Interstate.

Document J

Source: “Life Is a Highway,” *Transportation Builder*, Summer 2006.

From *Thelma and Louise* (1991) where Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon take a bad turn on a weekend getaway to Chevy Chase and his family on their wacky road trip to Wally World in *National Lampoon’s Vacation* (1983), or the just plain ridiculous romp from Ithaca, N.Y., to Texas with Tom Green in *Road Trip* (2000), roads and our interstates become a central theme [in movies].