

Social Changes

As you read, look for:

- the effects of the women's rights movement in Louisiana,
- the growth of the suburbs,
- the effects of the Vietnam War, and
- vocabulary terms **interstate highway**, **suburbs**, and **busing**.

The activism of the 1960s brought political and social change. Even in conservative Louisiana, changes took place. The voices demanding to be heard could not be ignored.

Women's Rights

The civil rights movement of the 1960s brought attention to women's rights. In 1964, Governor McKeithen appointed a Commission on the Status of Women to study women's rights and opportunities. He stated, "The full realization of the rights and potentials of women is of vital importance to the advancement of our state." The group recommended that Louisiana laws concerning voting, holding public office, serving on a jury, and owning property be revised to be the same for men and women. At the time, women were called to serve on juries only if they had specifically signed up to be considered.

As the women's rights movement grew, more women were elected to public office. Louisiana had elected only a few women to public office before the 1960s. The first woman to be elected to a statewide office was Lucille May Grace, who was elected as the register of the State Land Office in 1931. She succeeded her father in the position. In 1936, after her husband's death, Doris Holland was appointed to finish his term as a state senator. She then ran for a seat in the state house of representatives and served there until 1948.

The first woman to be elected to the Louisiana senate was Virginia Shehee. She was elected in 1976 from a Caddo Parish district. Louisiana also sent a woman to Congress in the 1970s. When Congressman Hale Boggs from New Orleans died in a plane crash in 1972, his wife was elected to take his place. Lindy Boggs served the district for eighteen years and became a popular and powerful member of Congress.

Lagniappe

Lindy Boggs is the great, great, great grandniece of W. C. C. Claiborne, territorial governor and the first state governor of Louisiana.



Above: Corinne "Lindy" Boggs was the first woman elected to Congress from Louisiana. She filled the seat held by her husband Hale, who was killed in an Alaska plane crash in 1972. Lindy Boggs served nine terms in the U.S. House of Representatives.

By 1980, changes in attitudes about the role of women finally ended a state law known as the “head and master law.” This law made the husband the head and master of his household. The law had required the man to take care of his family but was also used against wives because a husband could sell the family home without her knowledge. Now husband and wife are legal partners in a marriage.

Suburban Growth

This era brought other major changes. The interstate highway system modified the landscape and the lifestyle of Louisiana. Small towns bypassed by the new highways soon declined. New businesses developed near the access ramps of the new interstates. Fast-food restaurants enticed travelers to stop for a quick meal. Cities changed as the highways crowded out old businesses and neighborhoods.

The **interstate highway** system began with an act of Congress in 1956. These multilane, limited-access highways were planned to cover America from coast to coast. The two east-west highways that pass through Louisiana were begun during the 1960s. By 1976, Louisiana had more than five hundred miles of interstate highways. The elevated highway crossing the Atchafalaya Basin was an engineering marvel.

The interstates fed the growth of the **suburbs**. American cities developed these neighborhoods on the outer edges of cities after World War II. When the soldiers returned from the war, they married and bought homes in the new developments. The G.I. Bill helped finance that growth.

Below: The I-10 bridge across the Atchafalaya Swamp received design awards even before it opened in March 1973.



Figure 32 Most Populous Parishes

1950	1960	1970
Orleans, 570,445	Orleans, 627,525	Orleans, 593,471
Caddo, 176,547	East Baton Rouge, 230,058	Jefferson, 337,568
East Baton Rouge, 158,236	Caddo, 223,859	East Baton Rouge, 285,167
Jefferson, 103,873	Jefferson, 208,769	Caddo, 230,184
Rapides, 90,648	Calcasieu, 145,475	Calcasieu, 145,415

Air conditioning and television antennas signaled the new technology available to suburban homeowners. New appliances such as dishwashers and clothes dryers changed the lifestyle of Louisiana's families. Shopping malls replaced downtown shopping districts and served as gathering places.

People also moved to the suburbs because of the conflict over desegregation in the city schools. In a court opinion known as *Brown II*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that desegregation must be carried out "with all deliberate speed." At first, this was interpreted as allowing freedom of choice; students could request a transfer to a school where the majority of students were of another race. When this approach brought little progress toward desegregation, a new plan was introduced.

Desegregation in school districts was to be achieved through **busing**. That is, schoolchildren could be transported to a school out of their neighborhood to create schools that were racially balanced. *White flight* was the result. White parents moved their families to the suburbs to avoid the busing, and private schools were established in many parishes in Louisiana.

Lifestyle Changes

The unrest of the 1960s and 1970s helped create a new lifestyle for young Americans. Although most Louisiana young people were not "hippies," some elements of this new culture were adopted. In Jackson Square in New Orleans, tie-dyed clothing, bare feet, and long hair were common sights.

The adults of the 1960s and 1970s were even more upset by this cultural change than they had been about the rock and roll of the 1950s. The conflict between the older generation and the younger generation centered on the Vietnam War. Fathers who were veterans of World War II were angry and disappointed that their sons wanted to dodge the draft instead of serving their country.

Lagniappe

The fastest growing areas of the state between the census of 1960 and the census of 1970 were Vernon Parish, because of Fort Polk, and Jefferson Parish, which had become a major suburb of New Orleans.



Above: As American soldiers slogged through the rice paddies of Vietnam, the nation was dividing over America's involvement in the war.

Vietnam

In the 1960s, the world turned its attention to a small area of southeast Asia. Vietnam was a divided nation, with North Vietnam controlled by the communists. Because the spread of communism was considered a threat to the United States, Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy sent military advisors to South Vietnam. The advisors turned into troops, and, by 1968, there were almost 600,000 Americans serving there.

Young soldiers from all over America were sent to Fort Polk in Vernon Parish for army training. The population increase improved the economy of both Vernon and Beauregard parishes during this period.

People in Louisiana were more supportive of the war because there were so many military bases in the state. Children at a Baton Rouge elementary school wrote letters to the father of one of their third-grade classmates. His reply described Vietnam as looking much like the area between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. He also explained the war to the children: "War is so terrible that I doubt if anybody wins because the price is so high."

The *Shreveport Times* sent a special monthly newsletter to three thousand servicemen in Vietnam. News briefs kept the soldiers up to date on life at home. Three army specialists from North Louisiana wanted a Louisiana state flag to fly in Vietnam. The newspaper sent them a flag, which they flew over their barracks. "We are proud to be from a state whose citizens are so civic minded."

Local communities honored their citizens involved in the military. The *New Iberia* newspaper informed the town that Daniel Holmes, a local young man serving in the navy, had been selected from among eight thousand men to be honored as "Sailor of the Month." In Lake Charles, the Young Men's Business Club built a tower as a memorial to peace.

Local support was also organized by the Red Cross. In Baton Rouge, the group sponsored "Christmas in Vietnam" by having local women make drawstring cloth bags. Residents could pick up a bag and fill it with military-approved personal items. The bags were sent to Vietnam for several years.

Student protests, however, became louder as the war continued. A group of several hundred Louisiana State University students marched three miles from the campus to the old State Capitol. This protest followed the death of four college students at Kent State University in Ohio. The LSU students protested the use of U.S. military troops on unruly campuses. They wanted to "commemorate the deaths of our fellow students who were murdered." The rally was closed with the National Anthem, but many students refused to sing.

College students across the country joined in an antiwar demonstration on October 15, 1969. In Louisiana, this event was mostly peaceful and uneventful. At LSU and Tulane University, crosses were planted to symbolize the war dead. The antiwar groups at most Louisiana campuses were a small part of the student body. At the University of Louisiana at Monroe, where enrollment was about 7,000, only about 300 students attended the rally. At Nicholls State in Thibodaux, the demonstration was canceled, and more than 2,000 students wore buttons that said "I am proud I am an American."

Some young Americans supported the war. More than one thousand students from Loyola University in New Orleans sent President Lyndon Johnson a statement of support. College students in the Shreveport area organized the Young Americans for Freedom group in 1966. Students from Louisiana Tech and from Centenary College led the group supporting the war. They described the protests as "irresponsible mutterings" and urged students to support the United States.

Louisiana Celebrates the Bicentennial

By 1976, the mood in the country had changed. Louisiana joined the nation in celebrating the Bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence. In every parish, bicentennial committees presented the local area's role in the two-hundred-year-old United States. Only Massachusetts had more communities involved in bicentennial programs than Louisiana.

An interest in local history and landmarks developed from the bicentennial effort. The United States Bicentennial Commission provided grants to local groups. Towns and cities around the state planned local projects. Baker restored an early twentieth-century home. St. Tammany Parish filmed a history of the parish. Students at Southeastern Louisiana University completed an oral history project. The 1907 town hall in Slidell was renovated to become a museum. Beauregard Parish had a festival, and Bossier City painted an outdoor mural. Louisiana had not been a state in 1776, but the citizens of 1976 proudly celebrated the Bicentennial.



Map 39 Vietnam

Map Skill: What countries lie to the west of South Vietnam?

Lagniappe

To celebrate the nation's Bicentennial, the U.S. Mint issued Bicentennial quarters dated "1776-1976."

Check for Understanding ✓

1. What was one way the women's rights movement affected Louisiana?
2. What was one reason for the growth of the suburbs?
3. What was the main cause of the conflict between the older and younger generations during the 1960s?
4. How did college students in Louisiana react to the Vietnam War?
5. What was the purpose of the Bicentennial of 1976?