



2 HOURS



US HISTORY

- Emergence of Modern America
- Great Depression
- Contemporary United States

ECONOMICS

- Supply and demand
- Post-war economics

The History of Shopping

Students read about the history of modern Retail starting with mail order in the late 1800s. They consider the social implications of the rise of urban department stores and suburban malls, and consider how technological innovations led to e-commerce. They do a jig-saw reading activity and create a timeline of events in Retail history. Many links can be made to social studies topics on the TASC exam.

PREP

- Prepare timelines on five of the sheets of butcher paper:
 1. Orient the paper horizontally.
 2. Draw a horizontal line through the center of the sheet as a timeline, and label it with the following dates from the history of Retail readings:

1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950,
1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020
 3. Label each timeline *A Retail Timeline: From 1880 to Now*.
- Be prepared to explain terminology:

Category killer: A retail chain store that is dominant in its product category—it generally offers an extensive selection of merchandise at prices so low that smaller stores cannot compete. Examples noted in the video below are Toys ‘R Us, Home Depot, and Barnes & Noble.

Superstore: A very large retail store that sells a vast variety of product lines including apparel, footwear, sporting goods, electronic devices, computers, home appliances, food, cosmetics and much more.
- Review “A Brief History of Retail” video.

Link: <https://www.wsj.com/video/series/a-brief-history-of/a-brief-history-of-retail/F1AE7DC6-BB25-499C-9A2A-D120C18C3798>

MATERIALS

- *A Brief History of Retail* worksheet
- *The Rise and Fall of Sears* reading
- *Purchasing Power* reading
- *The Lifecycle of the Suburban Mall* reading
- *Big Box Stores: What’s Next* reading
- *Talking Points* handout

- *A History of Retail from 1880 to the Present* handout
- Butcher paper, 5-6 sheets (4 for use plus 1-2 extras), each 3-5 feet long
- Markers
- A computer with a projector and speakers

EXPLAIN

- 1** The ways stores sell things and the ways we shop for them has changed a lot, even in one or two generations. It's hard to imagine what it was like, for example, for someone living in a rural area many decades ago who wanted to purchase an item not grown or raised nearby. They would either have to wait for a traveling merchant to come their way, or they would order it from a mail order catalog and have to wait weeks or even months to receive it.

We're going to learn more about the history of the Retail sector from the 1950s to now by watching a video.
- 2** We are going to watch the video through once without pausing. The second time we watch the video, I will be stopping the video at certain points so that you can take notes and respond to questions on a worksheet.
- 3** Open *The Wall Street Journal's* "A Brief History of Retail."
Link: <https://www.wsj.com/video/series/a-brief-history-of/a-brief-history-of-retail/F1AE7DC6-BB25-499C-9A2A-D120C18C3798>
- 4** Play the video straight through and ask students to watch the video for the main ideas and not take notes. After watching the video once, they should discuss their impressions with a partner.
- 5** Distribute *A Brief History of Retail* worksheet. Play the video again, this time, pausing as indicated below so that students can respond to the questions on the worksheet:
 - **Stop at 00:10**
What kind of retail stores are mentioned first? (*Question 1*)
 - **Stop at 00:26**
What kind of retail establishments started being built in the 1950s?
(*Question 2*)
 - **Stop at 00:44**
Write a few examples of "category killers." (*Question 3*)
Write a few examples of "superstores." (*Question 4*)
 - **Stop at 00:59**
What was the year that foot traffic in malls started to go down? (*Question 5*)
Why do you think that happened? (*Question 6*)

- **Stop at 01:45**

Which company is the “new winner” when it comes to sales?

(Question 7)

How many more online sales are there now than a decade ago?

(Question 8)

- 6 Divide the class into four groups. Ask students to work in their groups to respond to the discussion questions located at the bottom of the worksheet. Give students about 15 minutes for their discussion.

- 7 You are going to look more closely at the changes that have happened in Retail, going further back now, from the 1880s to today. Each group will read about one part of Retail history, then share what they learned with others who read the other readings to form a more complete understanding of how the Retail sector has developed.

This type of reading is called a jig-saw reading. Like a jig-saw puzzle, the four groups will add their own piece of the puzzle to come to an understanding of the whole together. They will then work to create a single timeline of the history of Retail from the 1880s to the present, based on information from each of the readings.

- 8 Distribute one of the following readings to each group: *The Rise and Fall of Sears, Purchasing Power*; *The Lifecycle of the Suburban Mall*, and *Big Box Stores: What’s Next?*

- 9 Distribute the *Talking Points* handout.

Say: In your group you will learn about one part of Retail history, then you will join members from another group to teach them about what you learned. You’ll take notes about what you’ve read and discussed with your group that you can use when telling members from another group about your reading. You can use the worksheet to write down talking points that will help you remember what you want to share.

- 10 Talking points are usually written as key words, short phrases or a sentence that will help you remember an idea you want to talk about. Talking points are helpful when you have to give a presentation. If you write very detailed notes, you might get confused while presenting or it might appear that you are reading from a script. Talking points are a tool that can help you remember the main points you want to talk about.

- 11 First you'll read and annotate the article, circling all dates. Then you will discuss it as a group. **What kinds of things are you going to want to discuss with your group?**
 - › *The main idea, what's important, new terms, information that might be useful to students, anything surprising or interesting, any question you might have.*
- 12 Give students time to read, discuss, and write their talking points.
- 13 When students are finished, divide them into new groups that include at least one member from each original group. Ask each new member of the group to take turns teaching each other about what they learned from the reading in their original group, using their talking points. Groups should feel free to discuss the new information with each other and ask each other questions.
- 14 Distribute *A History of Retail from 1880 to the Present* handout. Groups should discuss how each article relates to the others and answer the questions on the handout. Ask all students to complete the handout, discussing the questions and exchanging information from the different articles they read.
- 15 Distribute a blank *Retail Timeline: From 1880 to Now* that you created on butcher paper in *Prep* to each group.
- 16 Students should work together to fill in the timeline with information from their individual readings. Ask them to place the events in the decade or decades in which they happened.
- 17 Each group presents their timeline, including key information from the articles that they shared with each other.

NOTE

For guidance on teaching **annotation**, see “How to Teach Annotation” in the *User's Guide*, found at www.tinyurl.com/cunycareekits.

A Brief History of Retail

- 1 What kind of retail stores are mentioned first in the video?

- 2 What kind of retail establishments started being built in the 1950s?

- 3 Write a few examples of “category killers.”

- 4 Write a few examples of “superstores.”

- 5 What was the year that foot traffic in malls started to decrease?

- 6 Why do you think that happened?

- 7 Which company is the “new winner” when it comes to sales?

- 8 How many more online sales are there now than a decade ago?



GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do you think Barnes & Noble and Home Depot are called “category killers?”
- 2 Superstores, such as Target or Walmart, are sometimes called “big box stores.” Why do you think they are called that?
- 3 Why is it hard for “mom and pop stores” to compete with superstores?
- 4 What do you think is the main idea of this video?

The Rise and Fall of Sears

Adapted from: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/rise-and-fall-sears-180964181/>
<https://www.history.com/topics/history-of-sears>
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/11/business/the-incredible-shrinking-sears.html>
https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/capitalbusiness/the-big-missteps-that-brought-an-american-retail-icon-to-the-edge-of-collapse/2017/06/01/19f4bee4-35a3-11e7-b4ee-434b6d506b37_story.html?utm_term=.d5d5044f3c1a
<https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-04-05/spotify-s-non-ipo-wasn-t-much-of-an-ipo>
<https://www.investopedia.com/news/downfall-of-sears/>
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2018/10/15/sears-bankruptcy/1595399002/>

Sears is a symbol of American capitalism, reflecting the ups and downs of the American economy. For over 100 years, Sears was the way American manufacturers got their products into the hands of people who wanted to buy them. Sears, which started as a 19th century **mail order** company, changed along with the transformation of the American consumer population. It played a role in the urban department store **boom** as well as the rise of the post-World War 2 suburban shopping mall.

Early days

In 1886, a shipment of watches arrived at a Minnesota railway station. The local jeweler refused to accept them. Richard W. Sears, a Railway Station Agent, decided to buy and sell the watches to other station agents as a side job. He was successful, and he quit his railway job a few months later to establish the R.W.

Sears Watch Company in Minneapolis. A year later, Alvah C. Roebuck joined the business and they moved it to Chicago. By 1893, the partnership had officially become Sears, Roebuck and Company.

In the late 1890s, roughly two-thirds of Americans lived in **rural** areas, with little access to most consumer goods. Local general stores were usually high-priced, offered little selection, and were hard to get to. Sears and Roebuck used this as an opportunity to expand from a watch business into a mail order business that sold a wide variety of products. The United States' railroad system had grown to link many different parts of the country for the first time, which allowed Sears to sell to people who were otherwise unable to find a wide variety of products. The postal system expanded mail routes in rural areas, which gave

VOCABULARY

Mail order is the process of ordering and receiving products, also called “goods,” through the mail.

A **boom** is when something becomes very popular.

Rural refers to the countryside, as opposed to the town or city.

Brick and mortar stores are physical stores that you go to and shop in as opposed to online shopping or ordering something from a catalog.

Great Depression: The economic crisis and in the U.S. and other countries, roughly beginning October, 1929 and continuing through most of the 1930s.

Inflation is the general increase in prices, which decreases the amount that people can buy.

Bankruptcy is the failure to make enough profit to stay in business.



Sears another way to deliver their goods to rural customers.

Sears dominated this rural market through its huge catalog. The 500+ page catalog had everything from buggies and bicycles to sporting goods, clothing, cookware and sewing machines. It even included do-it-yourself kits for building houses. As part of its sales strategy, Sears used its catalog to educate millions of shoppers about mail-order procedures such as shipping, cash payment, substitutions and returns. These systems changed the way America shopped.

From rural areas to cities to suburbs

The early 20th century saw the movement of millions of people from rural areas to cities. Since city dwellers could get to a variety of stores easily, Sears no longer needed the huge mail order catalogs that were the foundation of their business strategy. The company responded by opening its first **brick and mortar** department store in 1925, on Chicago's West Side. By 1929, on the eve of the **Great Depression**, Sears was operating more than 300 department stores across the country. Growth continued even during the Depression, because Sears focused on selling basic items such as socks, tools, sheets and towels at low prices, rather than selling the more fashionable and expensive items found in traditional department stores.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Sears began to shift its focus from urban to suburban markets, following the movement of the American consumer from cities to the suburbs. Sears department stores were found in shopping malls all over the country, and Sears even sold auto insurance to capture the suburban motorist market.



Sears, Roebuck and Company Catalog, 1918

Image from: <https://archive.org/details/catalog1918sear>



Sears Grand Opening: Crowds at the opening of a Sears store on State Street in Chicago in 1932. Sears was once the store of choice for most Americans, with its famed catalog and large retail presence.

Credit: Sears, Roebuck and Co. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/11/business/the-incredible-shrinking-sears.html>

New challenges

Sears continued to grow and prosper until the 1970s, when high levels of **inflation** meant that the new low-price retailers such as Target, Kmart and Walmart (all founded in 1962) were what appealed most to consumers. In 1991, Walmart overtook Sears as the nation's largest retailer. Throughout the nineties, Sears faced increasing competition from big-box stores that offered even lower prices than Sears did. The company attempted to increase its range of products and services by expanding their insurance services and also offering financial services. Its credit card business, Discover, accounted for 60 percent of the company's profits by 1999.

In the 1890s, Sears was the “new kid on the block” that put many small rural stores out of business. Today, it finds itself in competition with even newer shopping options, such as giant retailers like Amazon. Over the last 15

years, Sears lost half its revenue (or company income) and laid off nearly 175,000 people as it battled to fight off big box stores while keeping up with the growth of online retailers. In 2018, Sears, which also owns retailer, Kmart, filed for bankruptcy.

Shortcomings of an American icon

Some might look at Sears' decline with sadness. But the Sears company did not always offer great working conditions to its employees. It was slow to allow workers to unionize, for example, long after other stores of its size had unions. African-American boycotts against Sears in the 1930s exposed racist hiring practices. Gender inequality was evident in hiring and promotion practices such as who got promotions or who was selected for the better paying sales jobs. In these ways, Sears reflects our nation's struggle to adapt to larger economic, political, and cultural change. •

An American Icon Withers Away

Sears Holdings revenue, by fiscal year (inflation adjusted to Jan. 2017 dollars)

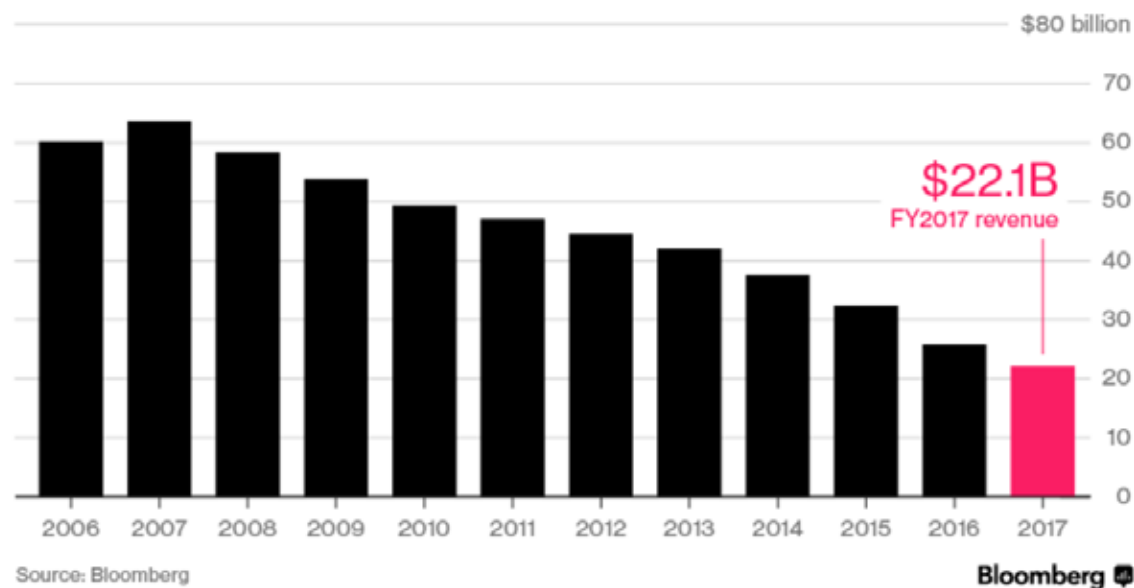


Image from: <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-04-05/spotify-s-non-ipo-wasn-t-much-of-an-ipo>



Purchasing Power

Adapted from: <https://www.history.com/news/how-19th-century-women-used-department-stores-to-gain-their-freedom>
<https://www.racked.com/2018/2/9/16951116/departments-stores-women-independence>
<https://www.nwhm.org/articles/departments-stores-changing-fashion-pattern>

A woman's place

“A woman’s place is in the home” was once more than a saying: it was a fact of life. In 1890, two women visited Manhattan for a weekend trip, where they learned the hard way that women weren’t allowed to dine in a restaurant past 6pm without a man as an escort. They were asked to leave, but instead of doing so, they asked a messenger boy from the street to join them at their table. Another time, a mother and daughter came into a restaurant to get out of the rain, but before they had a chance to shake the water out of their skirts, the owner took them by the elbows and kicked them out, grumbling about indecency. What did these women have in common? They were in men’s territory, which happened to be anywhere outside the home.

At the end of the 19th century, it was rare to see a middle-class housewife strolling in the town square alone. Other than women laborers, prostitutes were the only ones walking the sidewalk. While there were plenty of lower-class women moving through city streets in the 19th century — from maids running errands to factory workers and launderers rushing to and from work, they weren’t allowed to stop along the way. Many stores, restaurants and public places were closed off to women unless they were accompanied by men; in some places it was even illegal for a woman to enter alone, regardless of her race or economic class.

Breaking free

So how did women eventually break free from this strict set of social rules? Two words:

department stores. The **emancipation** of women started at the makeup counter, and sales receipts were a woman’s keys to the city.

The idea of freedom through shopping sounds ridiculous today. But in the late 19th and early 20th century, department stores represented a new opportunity for middle- and upper-class women. They were among the first urban spaces



Shoppers in the elevator on opening day of Lord & Taylor’s in New York City in 1873

Credit: Library of Congress



where women could go without an escort outside the home. In this way, department stores gave women an increased social and economic power, leading to a change in the culture.

A new shopping experience

Around this time, the number and variety of consumer goods available in stores grew rapidly, creating a need for more buyers. Stores decided to target a new market: **affluent** (wealthy) women. If these women were given a socially acceptable place to shop, retailers thought, they would learn about—and buy—new products. This led to the creation of an entirely different kind of store as these retailers realized something that earlier ones did not: Shopping could be fun.

Staffed largely by women, the new department stores were luxurious, but homelike, with thick carpets, lounge chairs and private dressing rooms. Prices were fixed, so women were not expected to bargain about the prices or, in some cases, even handle money. The Emporium in San Francisco contained a nursery, a post office, a beauty parlor and a library. Marshall Field's in Chicago had multiple places for women to dine and take tea. The restaurant at Macy's in New York City could seat 2,500 women at once. Many department stores had childcare available for their customers.

Changing culture

By the 1890s, restaurants wanted to be part of this new trend, so they created ladies' menus and dining rooms. They even offered alcohol, which had generally been socially forbidden to women. Soon, it was not unusual to see women walking around in public. They took buses and

trains, rode on bicycles, ordered carriages, or came in on foot.

At first, these developments caused a strong negative reaction. Doctors cautioned that shopping could make women **infertile**. Religious groups and newspaper editorials warned that shopping “leads to slang, bold talk and general fastness; to the love of pleasure; to the worst forms of luxury and selfishness.” Even more dangerously, some people thought, women shopping would lead to their wanting to vote. But despite the social backlash, women were not going to give up the economic power and increased independence that shopping provided.



Christmas shoppers in New York City, ca. 1910-15

Credit: <http://www.vintag.es/2015/12/christmas-time-stunning-vintage-photos.html>



Department stores and other businesses also employed women, opening the way to new careers. Crisp-bloused, young white women made up the majority of department store staff, assisting with sales, operating cash registers and wrapping purchases. Although these women were paid less than men, they earned enough money to live independently, another change for a society that had expected women to live with their parents until marriage. As women formed a larger part of the Retail market, jobs became available in advertising and publishing where a “women’s touch” was considered valuable in selling to other women.

Department stores: an uneven playing field

Access to department stores, both as consumers and as workers, was strictly divided by race and class. Working-class women couldn’t afford to do much shopping other than for basic needs, so they were not frequent customers. But many department stores realized that they could increase their business if they included some cheaper items. They put these items downstairs, which led to the term “bargain basement.”

Women of color faced major prejudice. Being a salesperson was considered a **white-collar, middle class job**, and therefore wasn’t open to African-Americans. It took until the 1940s for the first full-time black sales clerk to be hired. In general, black women were only allowed to work

in back rooms, cafeteria kitchens, and elevators, but even then, they could be let go to make room for white women workers.

In cities like New York City and Washington, D.C., wealthy African-American customers shopped at the same counters and ate at the same tea rooms as white customers. But in other cities like Baltimore, African-Americans weren’t allowed to shop in department stores unless they were wearing a maid’s uniform and had a list written in their employer’s handwriting.

Black women didn’t find their freedom in shopping like white women did. For white women, the challenge was that public space was meant for men only, but “public” also meant white. Protests and boycotts continued from the 1930s through 1960s to establish the right of African-Americans to work, shop and eat in department stores.

Shopping didn’t just represent the increased ability to be part of public life—it brought a new economic power, too. Over the years, women became the primary consumers for their families, and brands started to compete for their attention and their dollars. Once women became shoppers, they overwhelmed the marketplace. Today, up to 80 percent of all consumer purchasing decisions are made by women—which shows the huge economic power of those first department store shoppers, and of the generations of women that followed them. •

VOCABULARY

Emancipation means being freed from legal, social, or political restrictions; liberation.

Infertile: Physically unable to become pregnant.

White-collar, middle class job: A job that is often set in an office or similar and requires more mental work, as opposed to manual or physical labor, which is considered “blue collar” work.

The Lifecycle of the Suburban Mall

Adapted from <https://www.worldfinance.com/markets/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-us-mall>
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/death-and-rebirth-american-mall-180953444/>
<http://time.com/4865957/death-and-life-shopping-mall/>
<http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20140411-is-the-shopping-mall-dead>
<https://www.newsmax.com/finance/streettalk/shopping-mall-taubman-simon-retail/2017/06/29/id/798991/>
https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/ypa7jj/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-american-shopping-mall
<https://www.history.com/topics/1950s>
<http://money.cnn.com/2017/12/12/news/companies/mall-closing/index.html>
<https://www.curbed.com/2014/6/11/10090762/how-the-cold-war-shaped-the-design-of-american-malls>
<https://www.citylab.com/design/2012/07/shopping-mall-turns-60-and-prepares-retire/2568/>

During the 1950s, the United States seemed to be on top of the world. It was the world's strongest military and economic power. **“Booming”** was the word most often used to describe the United States, from the booming economy to the booming suburbs to the **baby boom**.

Suburban growth

The baby boom and the suburban boom went hand in hand. Almost as soon as World War II ended, real estate developers began to buy land on the outer edges of cities and use mass production techniques to build inexpensive

houses there. The G.I. Bill, a law that provided a range of benefits for returning World War II veterans, enabled these returning soldiers to get low-cost mortgages to buy houses. Because of this, it was often cheaper to buy one of these suburban houses than it was to rent an apartment in the city. Automobile production was increasing rapidly, and with an expanded highway system, it was relatively easy to commute from the new suburban homes to a job in the city.

These new communities were largely made up of young, white, married couples with children,



Credit: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-9JPrVt8TKo/VHV84qwWa5I/AAAAAAAAAGcs/GstgivM1zqw/s1600/4406537541_58a1e60217_b.jpg



who often had little or no connection with the cities they had left except for their jobs there. The G.I. bill enabled white veterans to buy homes in the suburbs, but did not extend the same loans in communities of color. The new suburban communities had many benefits to white families, but one thing they lacked was a neighborhood center with places to shop and meet with friends. Victor Gruen, an Austrian immigrant, missed the sense of community and exchange of ideas that were part of life in European town squares. His solution was the creation of the shopping mall.

Birth of the all-American mall

In 1956, he designed the Southdale Center, in Edina, Minnesota. It was the first enclosed shopping mall in America. Unlike traditional retail stores which faced the street, store entrances in the Southdale mall were all interior, facing the inside of the mall itself. Large “anchor” stores, usually major department stores that were the customers’ main destination, sat at the ends of the mall. Smaller retailers and restaurants filled the area between the two anchor stores. Although all these

features—indoor walkways, inward facing store entrances, food courts—are common now, back in 1956, they were revolutionary ideas.

Although Gruen was trying to create a place for conversation and the exchange of ideas, the mall became a place for spending money. The mall became a shopping destination, as shopping itself was becoming an important part of the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s. As Elizabeth King said in her article on the rise and fall of the suburbs, “If capitalism is America’s religion, the mall is its church.”

Copycat malls soon followed. The country’s second enclosed mall, in Harundale, Maryland, opened in 1958. As the concept of the mall took off, shopping centers popped up all over the suburbs of the United States. It didn’t take long for thousands of acres of farmland to be converted into massive centers for buying things, surrounded by blacktop parking lots. Their construction was helped along by the Interstate Highway System and changing tax laws which encouraged mall construction. The **white flight** from cities to the suburbs during the 1960s and ’70s assured a customer base for mall developers.



The Garden Court at Southdale Shopping Center, Edina, Minnesota, circa 1965

Credit: Minnesota Historical Society <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/02/when-malls-saved-cities-from-capitalism/553610/>



Rolling Acres Mall, Akron, Ohio

<http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20140411-is-the-shopping-mall-dead>

By the 1980s, there were around 3,000 Gruen-style malls in the U.S., and in 1986, Consumer Reports named the shopping mall one of the top 50 most revolutionary consumer innovations. Malls had become a way of life, with shopping not just an errand to get through, but an established leisure activity. Families spent the day at the mall. Teenagers hung out there with their friends. Mall shopping was an all-American pastime.

Factors in the fall of the shopping center

There are a variety of factors that fueled the rise of the mall—the building of interstate highways, the strong post-war economy, and the huge population shift from cities to suburbs—and many factors involved in its fall.

Eventually, there were more retail stores in malls than there were customers to keep them in business. Matt Billerbeck, Senior Vice President of Architecture, Planning and Design at CallisonRTKL, believes the current wave of mall closures is at least partly due to the sheer number of sites that opened between the 1950s and the 2000s. “It was too much of a good thing. There were just more shopping centers than the

market could support.” Tax breaks encouraged mall construction, so developers built them by the dozens.

But new malls weren’t necessarily a sign of a growing population. According to a 1996 study by historian Thomas Hanchett, the city of Cortland, New York barely grew at all between 1950 and 1970; however, in the same period, six different malls or shopping plazas were built within two miles of Cortland’s downtown.

By their very nature, malls were built big, and as they grew in size, required more land. This took them further away from the communities they served. Surrounded by wide highways and often lacking public transportation, many malls were impossible to get to without a car.

In addition, inflation and a tightening economy drew consumers away from department stores in malls and towards stores with cheaper prices. This led to an entirely new category of retailers called “big box stores” such as Walmart and Target, that sold a wide variety of products at lower cost; and “category killer” stores like Barnes & Noble and Home Depot that offered one type of product, such as books or hardware, at lower costs than smaller businesses specializing in the same areas. These retailers preferred to open in single-store locations rather than in malls.

These new retailers cut into the profits of “anchor” department stores such as Macy’s and Sears, leading department stores to close many of their mall locations. Without the foot traffic of an anchor store, the smaller stores in the malls lost business as well. The more stores that closed and were boarded up, the less appealing the mall became, creating a domino effect that often resulted in the closing of the entire mall.



Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Beyond the mall

Malls had once provided the convenience of having many retailers under one roof. But it's hard to find a more convenient shopping location than your own home or phone. With online shopping taking somewhere between 10 and 20 percent of mall sales—and expecting to rise—customers no longer need to travel for the basic and frequent purchases that once got people through the door.

Between 2007 and 2009, 400 of America's largest 2,000 malls closed, and experts predict that a quarter of the remaining 1,100 American malls will close in five years. In 2014, Taubman Centers Inc., an operator of luxury malls, built an enclosed 862,000-square-foot mall at University Town Center in Sarasota, Florida. Nobody at the time realized it might very well turn out to be the last mall built in America. •

VOCABULARY

Booming refers to great growth—economically, in population, or otherwise.

Baby boom: Period from the mid-1940s to mid-1960s when the number of babies born was much higher than it had been in other time periods.

White flight refers to the movement of white city-dwellers to the suburbs where there were less minorities.

Inflation is the general increase in prices, which decreases consumers' purchasing power.

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Big Box Stores: What's Next?

By Eleanor Cummins March 28, 2018

Adapted from: <https://www.popsoci.com/repurposing-big-box-stores>

My memory of Toys ‘R’ Us now consists mostly of big empty boxes. While I don’t remember many of the toys I got for Christmas as a child, the image of clumps of wrapping paper and piles of discarded cardboard is forever imprinted in my brain.

Now, Toys ‘R’ Us is leaving us with much bigger empty boxes—but these won’t be as easy to throw away. On March

15, 2018, the company announced that, unless someone comes up with a huge amount of cash to invest in the stores, the beloved chain will be closing, leaving its more than 800 American storefronts vacant.



Wikimedia Commons

<https://www.popsoci.com/repurposing-big-box-stores>

The beginning of the big box stores

Founded in 1948 by Charles Lazarus, Toys ‘R’ Us was the model of a post-war business. Most notably, it transformed the children’s toy industry from a seasonal market to an everyday luxury. By its peak in the mid-1990s, Toys ‘R’ Us had cemented its reputation as a “category killer”—a brand so dominant, thanks to its strategy of offering a wide variety of products within a single market (in this case, the toy market) at lower prices, that it eliminated all competition. But much of Toys ‘R’ Us’s success was due to its physical retail space: the big box store. Unfortunately, its downfall may have been brought on by the very same thing.

For millennials and younger generations, big box stores have always existed as part of the retail landscape, but at one time they were a radical invention. Instead of keeping most of the **inventory** sealed off in storage, big box stores put the products—all of them—on display.

It’s hard to pinpoint the start of this architectural style, but experts point to 1962 as a critical year for big box stores with the first Walmart, Target, and Kmart

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stores opening within a few months of each other. To fully show off their wares, these companies needed huge, open retail space, with high ceilings that allowed stock clerks to stack the seemingly endless supplies. Outside, they needed big parking lots to fit all their customers, and easy access to highways to keep their car-dependent shoppers close.

For decades, these big box retailers thrived, leading to the closure of smaller stores that couldn't compete with the variety and **abundance** of wares. But the rise of online retail has changed all that. Instead of driving to a big box store, our purchases come directly to us. As a result, 2017 saw a record-breaking 6,700 store closures, including big box stores like Kmart as well as specialty retail outlets like Teavana, a tea store. Architects, urban planners, and activists are starting to ask themselves: What becomes of these big, empty storefronts and their sprawling parking lots now that the companies inside have closed down or moved on?

Finding a new purpose

"It's a fork in the road," says architect Roger Lewis, professor emeritus of the University of Maryland's School of Architecture. In some cases, he says, new companies of similar size may seek to fill these spots. That could well be the case of Toys 'R' Us. A recent report from business magazine *Bloomberg* suggests Amazon, the very company that killed the category killers, is interested in buying some of the empty Toys 'R' Us stores for Amazon **brick and mortar** stores.

But even a company the size of Amazon can't buy every store it puts out of business. There are 10,379,714,043 square feet of retail space in the United States, or 32.5 square feet of retail per person, according to a 2016 report. And the parking lots for each of these retail centers is even bigger. Together, American retail stores and their parking lots equal an area roughly one-third the size of Delaware. That requires a little more vision than just putting a new business



Circuit City: going out of business
Wikimedia Commons

inside. “One option is to tear it down and build something new,” Lewis says, “and the other option is to **repurpose** it.”

While it’s not necessarily the preferred option, sometimes demolition (taking a building down by destroying it) may be the most practical. Lewis says that many of the big box stores were cheaply built, with less solid materials and mechanical systems. They were not meant to last more than 25 or 30 years. Some of the big box stores that have been torn down have had their building parts recycled and the property sold off. But William Leddy, of Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects in San Francisco, is a supporter of the second option: a repurposing strategy known as adaptive reuse, which means using existing architecture for a new purpose. Leddy knows that the big box store “skeletons” have limitations, but he still believes that the vacant stores have potential.

In Julia Christensen’s book, *Big Box Reuse*, the author documents the ways 10 communities have transformed their own empty box stores. Christensen found old Walmarts that had been turned into churches and community centers, and old Kmarts that were now courthouses and museums. Though not included in the book, one of the most famous big box reuse cases is the McAllen Main Library, which turned an abandoned 124,500 square-foot Walmart in Texas into a single-story library, complete with community and educational spaces.

Of course, even when a community has a vision for adaptive reuse, it’s not simply a matter of buying an old Toys ‘R’ Us and giving it an extreme makeover. Many adaptive reuse projects are limited by zoning laws, which restrict the kinds of buildings or developments allowed in a certain area. For example, space in a commercial area may only be allowed to be used for Retail, not for housing or other purposes.

While zoning laws can be rewritten, Lewis says it’s an uphill battle. “In every one of these situations, almost without exception, when someone comes in and wants to make a change—whatever that might be—there are going to be some people



Parking Lot

https://www.popsci.com/sites/popsci.com/files/styles/655_1x_/public/images/2018/03/5259733450_e30324632f_z.jpg?itok=Ym9KNvT1&fc=50,50



who fear change, oppose change, like it the way it is and are going to fight it,” he says. “[The ideas can’t] go anywhere unless there is political support for it.” Still, adaptive reuse is gaining support. In recent years, experts have worked to reduce, reuse, and recycle whenever possible. “The greenest thing you can do is reuse an existing building,” Leddy says.

Christensen, for her part, hopes for a future where reuse isn’t about giving a second life to an existing building, but instead, to have buildings designed with future purposes in mind. “The best solution, to me, begins long before abandonment—it begins with design,” she writes. “The trend of constructing single-use buildings with no future **adaptability** in mind is what has led to [this] huge issue.” •



Walmart/library © Lara Swimmer Photography

http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2012/07/07/abandoned_walmart_in_mcallen_texas_becomes_an_award-winning_public_library_how_big_box_stores_are_becoming_public_spaces.html

VOCABULARY

Inventory: Goods or merchandise to sell.

Abundance: A large quantity.

Brick and mortar: Physical stores as opposed to online shopping or ordering something from a catalog.

Repurpose: Adapt for use in a different way or for a different purpose.

Adaptability: The ability to adjust to new conditions.



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