

Demographic Transition of London, England after the Second World War

Student Name

Class

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England welcomed the advent of the 20th century as a country with strong global power. During the reign of Queen Victoria, British Parliament passed the Commonwealth of Australia Act, the Boer Republics in South Africa were annexed (along with their gold mines) and London continued to grow as an industrial center with major enterprises in textiles, brewing, steel and shipbuilding and a recorded population of over 41 million people (Cook & Keith, 1975).

In 1914 war broke out and London was targeted with the use of new military aviation strikes. After a series of raids which turned London into “an armed camp”, England’s biggest city formed plans to better prepare for the next by building air raid shelters and developing a system for civil defense training (Clout, ed., 1991). These fears of attack were not unfounded. In September, 1940, Germany instituted the Blitz, a sustained six-month bombardment of London which killed 20,000 residents. The British were not ones to dwell on their misfortunes overly long. A poll of Londoners which asked what factors made them most depressed in the winter of 1940-41 netted the result that weather far outweighed the grim reality of air raids and the city went on with its day-to-day life (Clout, ed., 1991).

After the bombing ended in May, 1941, London became a “major centre of wartime production” (Clout, 1991) before Hitler renewed his assault on the city in summer of 1944 resulting in 29,890 Londoners killed and 50,507 injured. While the effects of these bombings were to reduce the population and cause significant damage throughout parts of the city, the end of the war became the impetus for England to start re-planning the layout of towns, roadways and public transport and urge relocation from overpopulated areas to the suburbs.

During the following two decades, “London’s status as the hub of the British Empire” (Clout, 1991) declined and it would not enjoy an elevated status again until the 1980’s when it became known as a major player in the global financial market. The manufacturing industry,

which had long sustained the working-class population of London, began to diminish in the 1960's and unemployment rose in direct proportion. In the 1970's, a reduction of employment in national and local government, health services and public transport (Clout, 1991) also took its toll.

Once again, England's largest city needed to reinvent itself and it did so by embracing the "new" media industries of film, radio and television. They began producing some of the world's most iconoclastic pop music and fashion trends as well as focusing on drama and the arts (Clout, 1991). As the population swelled during this time period (1960's – 1970's), London now had to address problems with a dearth of affordable housing (much of which was destroyed during the war) and the challenge of providing additional transportation options for the growing populace and creating a federal transport authority.

By 1986, the Greater London Development Council, which had dealt with issues of reconstruction, was abolished and for the first time in 97 years, "there was no unified representative government" for the city (Clout, 1991).

Today, the United Kingdom has a population of 60,776,238, with the majority of this based in London and Great Britain. The country enjoys a strong economy and low unemployment while the government is focusing on "the improvement of education, transport, and health services, at a cost in higher taxes and a widening public deficit" (CIA World Factbook, 2007).

This research paper will focus on the changes in population, economics and transportation in England, and specifically London, beginning with the post-war era, continuing into the 1960's, a look back at the 1980's and finally, an overview of these aspects in today's London society. How these factors were shaped by history to develop the city of today will be reviewed...

...Annotated Bibliography

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