

‘Build Ups’ and ‘Slim Downs’: Re-shaping America, 1945–1970

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Abstract

Dieting and fitness has transformed into a multibillion-dollar business in America. The preoccupation with exercise and dieting as a way to achieve bodily perfection is certainly not merely a modern creation of the twenty-first century. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, being underweight, not overweight, was the leading concern of medical doctors. The article chronicles how America changed from a ‘build up’ to a ‘slim down’ nation. In the years after World War II, slimming down became a national obsession. Starting in the early 1950s, Americans, particularly women, dieted and exercised their way towards skinnier, firmer and trimmer figures, due to a tightened relationship between fashion, foreign policy, insurance figures and medical opinion.

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