

HISTORICAL THINKING CONCEPT:

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

Historians know that events are not inevitable. They all have causes. Historians try to discover all the causes of events and determine which were more important in making the event happen. Background causes are those that have been around for a long time. A trigger cause is a background cause that makes changes happen rapidly.

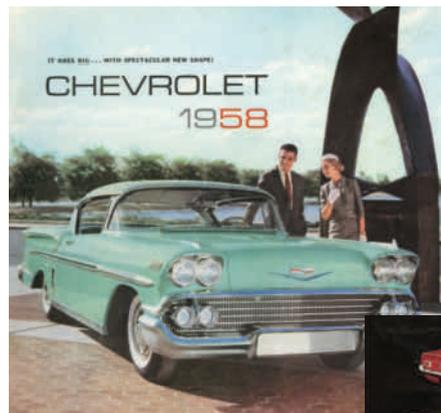
Historical events have consequences. The consequences of an event are all the things that resulted from the event, both positive and negative, intended and unintended (planned and unplanned).

Cause and Consequence: Car Size

Here's an example of a change: In the 1950s, Canada had the technology to make smaller cars, but they did not become popular until the 1970s. What were the causes of this change in popularity? What were the consequences?

As a historical thinker wondering about cause and consequence, ask yourself questions such as these:

- What were the causes of this event?
- Who were the people influencing this event?
- What were the social or economic conditions influencing this event?
- What were the ideas and beliefs influencing this event?
- What were the consequences of this event?
- What were the intended and unintended consequences?



▲ **Figure 5** In the 1950s, car manufacturers promoted the large size of their cars.



▶ **Figure 6** This 1972 ad for another car manufacturer shows the popularity of smaller cars.

BACKGROUND CAUSES

Cause: PEOPLE

Car manufacturers realized more people were buying smaller cars than larger cars. Companies began producing more smaller cars.

Cause: SOCIAL CONDITIONS

In the 1950s, many Canadians needed larger cars because they had larger families. In the 1970s, many Canadians preferred to purchase smaller cars because most families had only one or two children.

Cause: IDEAS AND BELIEFS

For decades, there was a common belief that owning a big car symbolized a person's success. This helps explain why large cars were popular for many years. By the 1970s, many people believed that saving money by driving a small car outweighed the benefit of having a large car.

Cause: ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

When the price of gas suddenly increased in the 1970s, many people couldn't afford to buy the same amount of gas anymore. They bought smaller cars so they could drive the same distance as before and spend the same amount of money, or less, on gas.

TRIGGER CAUSE

CONSEQUENCES

Consequence: INTENDED CONSEQUENCE

Manufacturers made smaller cars because many people wanted to save on gas.

Consequence: UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCE

The amount of pollution created by cars was reduced because of their smaller size.

▲ **Figure 7** Which of the consequences would be considered positive? Which one would be considered negative?