

# THE FAMOUS ROUTE 66 - FROM GLORY TO DECLINE



Route 66, also known as the Will Rogers Highway, the Main Street of America or the Mother Road, is one of the best-known roads in the USA and arguably the world. There were times when many Americans made their way west along the route. They were driven by countless possibilities and economic opportunities, but these times have come to an end. The once so famous route 66 is now more of a myth, rather than what it was in the past.

“The road has always been a mirror held to reflect what goes on in the nation,” said Michael Wallis, a historian and author of *Route 66: The Mother Road*.

In the 1930s, route 66 became the biggest migration route westward. Its significance was also proved during World War II, as troops were transported to California along the highway. And thus **after the war it was no surprise that the route became the main highway of the nation, providing possibilities, migration to the west and much more.**

The turning point came in 1956. US President Dwight D Eisenhower signed the Federal Aid Highway Act. This act authorized the construction of 66,000 kilometers of new roads to replace the old highway. Thereafter many people started suffering from the decreased importance of the famous route 66, mainly communities dependent on the economic activity along the route. Thus began the decline of the highway.

One of the places affected by this is the town of Glenrio, located between Texas and New Mexico. “Coming into Glenrio looked like Times Square,” Wallis said. Today, however, Glenrio is nothing but a ghost town. “It has just been killed,” Willis concluded.

However, there is a sort of renaissance of the famous route 66. Despite the decline, people are seemingly feeling nostalgic about the legendary highway. The main target groups are foreigners, who come to the road to experience a piece of American history and relive the old highway nostalgia.

There are still many business, motels and attractions on the route. There are many neon-clad motels, souvenir shops. Examples are the Blue Swallow Motel in Tucumcari or the Wigwam Motel in Holbrook, Arizona. All still in harness and welcoming guests from all around the world, who want to feel the 50s in the form of the route 66.

“Route 66 is a metaphor for many things. A lost America. An America before it became generic,” Wallis explains what exactly attracts the visitors.

**The big boom of route 66 is over, but its authenticity and legacy still lives, with some people still eager to visit the globally-known attraction.** One thing, however, is certain. The big post-war boom of the Mother Road is something that will arguably never be witnessed again. But then again, every century and generation has its specificities.

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