

LANDSCAPE AND CULTURE IN AMERICA

NJIT-Rutgers, Newark: Spring 2002
Undergraduate Capstone Seminar: HSS 404-004
Time: Monday 2:30-3:55, Wednesday 1:00-2:25
Location: Faculty 306

Instructor: Prof. Neil Maher
Federated Department of History NJIT-Rutgers University at Newark

Office Hours:

Wednesdays, 3:00-5:00 PM and by appointment
Central Avenue Building, Room 4036

Contact Information:

E-mail: maher@njit.edu
Office Phone: 973-596-6348
Home Phone: 646-325-3704

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course examines the cultural meaning of a variety of American landscapes — from formal parks and gardens to more common spaces such as farms, town squares, and strip malls. To better understand the historic meaning of these landscapes, the course takes a chronological approach. After a brief introduction to the field of landscape studies, Part I of the course will survey several historic landscapes from our colonial past. We will then compare and contrast landscapes found along the eastern coast of the United States with those lying farther to the West. In Part III, we will shift our analysis to the American city, examining both industrialization's impact on the urban environment as well as city dwellers' efforts to reshape the urban landscape into a more livable space. And finally, we will focus our attention on one of the most important contemporary landscapes — the American suburb. The semester will end with a brief workshop on writing your final paper.

REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance and Class Participation: This is one of the most important components of your final grade. Because this is a small, seminar-style course, class participation should involve active listening and engagement — more than simply showing up, and more than sheer volume of oral output. No unexcused absences will be tolerated.

Reading Assignments: Reading assignments will average fifty to seventy-five pages per week, and will consist of landscape essays, historical books, and one work of fiction. You are expected to have completed the reading assignments BEFORE class, since our discussions for each class meeting will draw directly on the reading assignment for that week (THIS IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT!). When reading, try not only to understand the factual information being presented, but also think critically about the author's argument. Please purchase the books for the class; there are only four and all are available at New Jersey Books (University and Bleeker)

in inexpensive paperback editions (the books are NOT for sale at the NJIT bookstore). Any assigned articles not appearing in these books will be noted on the syllabus, and will be on reserve at Van Houton for in-library reading or photocopying. Each week we will also be reading a variety of short essays in class from the “reader” (see below), so make sure you BRING THE “READER” TO EACH CLASS MEETING.

Writing Assignments: Because this is a Capstone Seminar, this class on landscape, environment, and culture will be a writing-intensive course. Throughout the semester you will be asked to undertake three different types of writing assignments. In each of the assignments below, you will be graded on both your ideas and your writing.

Readers Journal: During each of the next five weeks of the semester you will be asked to make an entry in a “readers journal.” These one-page, double-spaced, type-written entries should show me that you have read all the assigned reading for that week (most of these assignments are from Conzen’s *The Making of the American Landscape*). The entries should be completed by the beginning of class on Wednesday of each week (late journal entries will not be accepted). Rather than polished essays, students should use the entries to reflect on the week’s assignment and to raise questions regarding the readings.

Short Paper: This semester we will also be reading one full-length book of history (David Schuyler’s *The New Urban Landscape*), on which you will be asked to write a short four page paper. This paper will be in response to a question that I give you in class two weeks before the writing assignment is due. This paper is due in class on April 1.

Final Paper: Your final assignment of the semester will be on a work of fiction that we are reading during the last portion of the semester (Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt*). For this paper, which will be 8-10 pages in length, you will be asked to choose one landscape described in Lewis’s book, and expound on the cultural meaning of that landscape for both the characters in Lewis’s story, as well as for Americans during the 1920s (Lewis wrote the book in 1922). Your final paper is due on the last day of class, May 6.

Mid-Term and Final Quizzes: This course on landscape, environment and culture in America will include an in-class mid-term and final quiz. Both will draw on material from the assigned readings and our class discussions. These should NOT be thought of as exams; rather they are in-class quizzes, and should involve little studying. If you show up, participate in class, and briefly review your notes, these two quizzes should be a breeze.

GRADING:

Attendance and Participation:	20%
Readers Journals	15%
Short paper:	15%
Final Paper:	30%

Quizzes:

20%

Consistent effort and improvement will be weighted heavily in grading.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Michael Conzen, *The Making of the American Landscape*

David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America*

Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*

John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America* (COURSE READER)

COURSE SCHEDULE:

INTRODUCTION TO LANDSCAPE

January 23: **Defining Landscape**

Required Reading:

None

Discussion: What is Landscape?

January 28: **“Reading” Cultural Landscapes**

Required Reading:

Pierce Lewis, “Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene” in D.W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, 11-27. (ON RESERVE)

Jackson, “J.B. Jackson and the Discovery of the American Landscape,” in *Landscape in Sight*, ix-xxxii.

Discussion: This week’s reading.

PART I: NATIVE AMERICAN AND COLONIAL LANDSCAPES

January 30: **The Ecological Indian?**

Required Reading:

Conzen, "The Indian Legacy in the American Landscape" (chapter 2), in *Making of the American Landscape*, 27-50.

Discussion: "Reading" Cahokia's town plan, and the week's reading.

February 4: **America's "Culture Areas"**

Required Reading:

Wilbur Zelinsky, "Structure," in *The Cultural Geography of the United States*, 109-140. (ON RESERVE).

Conzen, "Spanish Legacy in the Borderlands" (chapter 3), in *Making of the American Landscape*, 51-62.

Discussion: Jackson, "Looking at New Mexico," in *Landscape in Sight*, 55-67 (READ IN CLASS), and this week's reading.

February 6: **Colonial New World Landscapes**

Required Reading:

Conzen, "French Landscapes in North America" (chapter 4), in *Making of the American Landscape*, 63-79.

Conzen, "The Northeast and the Making of Geographical Habits" (chapter 5), in *Making of the American Landscape*, 80-103.

Discussion: Comparing and contrasting colonial landscapes and colonial cultures from this week's reading.

PART II: EASTERN VS. WESTERN LANDSCAPES

February 11: **Northeastern Forests**

Required Reading:

Conzen, "Clearing of the Forests" (chapter 8), in *Making of the American Landscape*, 146-168.

Discussion: Jackson, "The Moveable Dwelling and How it Came to America," in *Landscape in Sight*, 210-223 (READ IN CLASS), and this week's reading.

February 13: **Southeastern Slavery**

Required Reading:

Conzen, "Plantations and the Molding of the Southern Landscape" (chapter 6), in *Making of the American Landscape*, 104-126.

Discussion: Jackson, “Virginia Heritage: Fencing, Farming, and Cattle Raising,” in *Landscape in Sight*, 129-138 (READ IN CLASS), and this week’s reading.

February 18: **Selling the West**

Required Reading:

Conzen, “Towards a National Landscape” (chapter 7), in *Making of the American Landscape*, 127-145.

Conzen, “Settlement of the American Grassland” (chapter 9), in *Making of the American Landscape*, 169-185.

Discussion: Jackson, “The Almost Perfect Town,” in *Landscape in Sight*, 31-42 (READ IN CLASS), and this week’s reading.

February 20: **Settling the West**

Required Reading:

Conzen, “Challenging the Desert” (chapter 10), in *Making of the American Landscape*, 186-203.

Discussion: Jackson, “An Engineered Environment,” in *Landscape in Sight*, 225-235 (READ IN CLASS), and this week’s reading.

PART III: THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

February 25: **Immigrants and Industry**

Required Reading:

Conzen, “Ethnicity on the Land” (chapter 12), in *Making of the American Landscape*, 221-248.

Conzen, “The New Industrial Order” (chapter 13), in *Making of the American Landscape*, 249-268.

Discussion: Jackson, excerpt from “American Space,” in *Landscape in Sight*, 149-159 (READ IN CLASS), and this week’s reading.

February 27: **Urbanization**

Required Reading:

Conzen, “The Americanization of the City” (chapter 14), in *Making of the American Landscape*, 269-292.

Discussion: Jackson, “Truck City,” in *Landscape in Sight*, 255-265 (READ IN CLASS), and this week’s reading.

March 4: **The Anti-Urban Turn**
Required Reading:
Schuyler, *New Urban Landscape*, 1-56.

Discussion: Jackson, “From Monument to Place,” in *Landscape in Sight*, 163-174, and this week’s reading.

March 6: **The Hudson River School**
Required Reading:
Schuyler, *New Urban Landscape*, 59-100.

Field Trip: The Newark Museum

March 11: **Landscapes of Leisure**
Required Reading:
Schuyler, *New Urban Landscape*, 101-146.

Discussion: Jackson, “Places for Fun and Games,” in *Landscape in Sight*, 1-

March 13: **Mid-Term Quiz**
Required Reading:
None — Study for mid-term quiz

March 18: **NO CLASS — SPRING BREAK**

March 20: **NO CLASS — SPRING BREAK**

March 25: **City Parks**
Required Reading:
Schuyler, *New Urban Landscape*, 149-195.

Field Trip: Branch Brook Park

March 27: ***The New Urban Landscape: A Discussion***
Required Reading:

None — Catch up and finish Schuyler's *New Urban Landscape*.

Discussion: Schuyler, *New Urban Landscape*

PART IV: SUBURBIA — THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

April 1: **The Suburban House**

Required Reading:

Lewis, *Babbitt*, vii-xxx and 1-33 (chapters 1-3)

Discussion: Jackson, "The Domestication of the Garage," in *Landscape in Sight*, 118-125 (READ IN CLASS), and this week's reading.

Assignment: Short Paper Due

April 3: **The American Lawn**

Required Reading:

Lewis, *Babbitt*, 34-80 (chapters 4-6)

Discussion: Jackson, "Ghosts at the Door," in *Landscape in Sight*, 107-117 (READ IN CLASS), and this week's reading.

April 8: **Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*, and America in the 1920s**

Required Reading:

Lewis, *Babbitt*, 81-130 (chapters 7-10)

Discussion: Handout on Zenith landscapes for final paper, and this week's reading.

April 10: **The Automobile**

Required Reading:

Lewis, *Babbitt*, 131-180 (chapters 11-15)

Discussion: Jackson, "The Accessible Landscape," in *Landscape in Sight*, 68-77 (READ IN CLASS).

April 15: **Highways, Driveways, and Strip Malls**

Required Reading:

Lewis, *Babbitt*, 181-229 (chapters 16-20)

Discussion: Jackson, “Other Directed Houses,” in *Landscape in Sight*, 185-197
(READ IN CLASS), and this week’s reading.

PART V: FINAL PAPER WORKSHOP

April 17: **First Set of Individual Meetings**

Required Reading:

Lewis, *Babbitt*, 230-283 (chapters 21-28)

Assignment: *Babbitt* landscape choice and page citation list due — Group One.

April 22: **Second Set of Individual Meetings**

Required Reading:

Lewis, *Babbitt*, 284-355.

Assignment: *Babbitt* landscape choice and page citation list due — Group Two

April 24: **Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt*: A Discussion**

Required Reading:

None — Catch up on *Babbitt*.

Assignment: Final paper “argument statement” due.

April 29: **How To Write a Good Final Paper**

Required Reading:

William Zinsser, “Methods,” in *On Writing Well*, 49-92 (ON RESERVE).

Discussion: Visiting presentation by Janet Bodnar, Director, NJIT Writing Center

Assignment: Final paper outline due.

May 1: **In-Class Final Quiz**

Required Reading:

None — Work on Final Draft

May 6: **Final Paper Due**