

AMERICAN CULTURAL LANDSCAPES, 1945 — PRESENT

NJIT-Rutgers, Newark: Spring 2007
Undergraduate Honors Capstone Seminar: HSS 491: H06
Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30-12:55
Location: Kupfrian 208

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

Office Hours:

Tuesdays, 2:00-4:00 p.m., Cullimore (NJIT), Room 325
Thursdays, 2:00-4:00 p.m., Conklin (Rutgers), Room 308
And by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This reading and discussion course introduces students to a variety of North American landscapes and methods used in analyzing them. We will focus our analysis on “reading” everyday landscapes found in North America between 1945 and the present in order to better understand the culture of ordinary people during the postwar period. We will explore a variety of landscapes, from suburban homes and highways to urban ghettos and rural recreation areas. To place such landscapes in their historic context, the course will weave a chronological approach with an examination of major themes and events in postwar America including the Cold War, the Civil Rights and anti-war movements, and the conservative politics of the 1980s and 1990s. The semester will end with a two-week “paper writing workshop” that will include a discussion of paper writing strategies as well as working sessions where students explain their final paper topics and receive feedback and suggestions from fellow classmates.

Each week of the semester we will divide our class time between two types of work. First, at each of our TUESDAY class meetings, we will examine an important theme within the field of landscape studies. This examination will draw directly from the assigned reading for that day. Then, on THURSDAY of each week, will use the theme discussed on Monday to undertake a close “reading” of a particular American landscape that will tease out its historic and cultural meaning. This exercise in “reading” landscapes will take place in class each Thursday.

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. Remember, 50% of your grade is dependent on your class participation. For those of you who feel less comfortable discussing openly in class, participation through written responses to the reading is also required each week.

Reading Assignments: Reading assignments will average seventy-five to one-hundred pages per week, and will consist of theoretical essays on cultural landscapes as well as more general reading on the history of the postwar United States. 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 to think critically about the author's argument. Please purchase the books for the class; there are only two and both are available at the NJIT Bookstore (many used copies available). There will also be a "course reader" of landscape essays that you must also purchase from the NJIT bookstore.

Writing Assignments: Because this is an Honors Capstone Seminar, this class on American cultural landscape 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 described below, you will be graded on both your ideas and your writing.

- 1. On-Line Reader's Responses:** Every Monday evening of the semester by 5:00 p.m. you will post a "reader's response" on our WebCT "bulletin board" pertaining to the reading assigned for that upcoming Tuesday's class (the following day). These "responses" can be in a variety of forms -- a few sentences, a full paragraph, several questions you had about the reading -- but should demonstrate a critical understanding of the author's major arguments, and refrain from simply retelling the reading or speculating about things the authors have not addressed or included. Questions of comparison between that week's readings and earlier readings or discussions are especially welcome. Keep in mind that the goal is to facilitate high-level discussion and speculation.

Posting Readers Responses: Your "reader's response" will be an important part of the weekly work for this class, and will help structure our weekly discussions. The response must be posted to our "bulletin board" section of the course Web CT site, which will have a discussion thread for each week. You can log onto our course WebCT homepage at <http://webct.njit.edu>. These posts by you on the WebCT discussion board will not be individually graded, but will be considered as part of your participation grade for the class, which counts for 50% of your final

grade. Late posting will not be accepted, and missing postings will bring your discussion grade down.

2. **Two-Page Paper:** Early on in the semester you will write a two-page paper in which you undertake a close “reading” of a postcard from the 1950s for clues to American culture during this era (I will supply the postcards). I will explain this writing assignment in more detail during the semester.
3. **Final Paper:** Your final assignment of the semester will be a research paper approximately 10-12 pages in length. For this paper you will choose one landscape of the postwar period, and undertake a close reading of its cultural importance. Two additional assignment will help you with this project:

Landscape Proposal: Right after spring break you will be asked to write a one-page project proposal, in which you explain the landscape you have chosen for your final paper. You will also be asked to include a “primary text” of this landscape (a photograph, map, drawing, etc) as well as the title and author of one secondary source that you will use to help you better understand the history of the landscape you have chosen.

Paper Outline: Before our paper workshop begins during the last two weeks of the semester, you will be asked to hand in an outline for your paper. This outline should include your ideas for both an overall argument, as well as a structure (outline) for how you are going to organize your paper.

Note on Final Paper: You will be graded on both of these assignments (Proposal and Outline), and the grades will count towards your overall Final Paper grade.

GRADING:

Participation (includes attendance and readers responses):	50%
One-Page Paper:	10%
Final Paper (includes proposal and outline)	40%

Consistent effort and improvement will be weighted heavily in grading.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

D.W. Meinig, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*

Paul Boyer, *Promises to Keep: The United States Since World War II*

Course Reader (also available at the NJIT Bookstore)

***EXTREMELY IMPORTANT:** Please remember to bring the assigned reading for each class meeting with you to class every day. In other words, bring to class whatever we’re reading for that day. We will constantly refer to these readings during in-class discussions.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

INTRODUCTION

WEEK 1 INTRODUCING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

January 16: **What are Cultural Landscapes?**

Required Reading:

None

In-Class Discussion: How do you define “landscape?”

January 18: **Why History Matters?**

Required Reading:

John Fraser Hart, “Reading the Landscape,” in George Thompson, ed.,
Landscape in America, 23-42 (reader).

In-Class Discussion: The “Meaning” of Plastic Pink Flamingos

In-Class Reading: Jenny Price, “In the Pink No More,” *New York Times*,
17 November 2006

* Reminder: 1st on-line reader’s response due this upcoming Monday by
5:00 p.m.

PART I: THE POSTWAR YEARS AND THE 1950s

WEEK 2 COLD WAR BEGINNINGS

January 23: **Theme: Vernacular Landscapes**

Required Reading:

D.W. Meinig, “Introduction,” in D.W. Meinig, *The Interpretation of
Ordinary Landscapes*, 1-7.

D.W. Meinig, “The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene,” in
The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, 33-48.

J.B. Jackson, “The Word Itself,” in J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the
Vernacular Landscape*, 3-8 (reader).

J.B. Jackson, “Vernacular,” in J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular
Landscape*, 85-87 (reader).

In-Class Discussion: Towards a definition of landscape

On-Line Assignment Due: 1st reader’s response due Monday (yesterday)
by 5:00 p.m.

January 25: **Landscape: Comparing Cold War Spaces**

Required Reading:

Paul Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, xxii-64 (preface and chapter 1 & 2).

In-Class Landscape Exercise: Vernacular vs. “Official” Cold War landscapes

* Reminder: 2nd reader’s response due this upcoming Monday by 5:00 p.m.

WEEK 3 COMING HOME

January 30: **Theme: Symbolic Landscapes**

Required Reading:

D.W. Meinig, “Symbolic Landscapes: Some Idealizations of American Communities,” in Meinig, *Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, 164-192.

J.B. Jackson, “Ghosts at the Door,” in *Landscape in Sight*, 107-117 (reader).

In-Class Discussion: How landscapes become symbolic

On-Line Assignment Due: 2nd reader’s response due Monday (yesterday) by 5:00 p.m.

February 1: **Landscape: The Postwar Suburb**

Required Reading:

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, 65-128, (chapters 3 & 4).

In-Class Landscape Exercise: “Reading” Levittown

* Reminder: 3rd reader’s response due this upcoming Monday by 5:00 p.m.

WEEK 4 AMERICA ON THE MOVE

February 6: **Theme: “Reading” 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*, 11-32.

In-Class Discussion: How Can We “Read” Landscapes?

On-Line Assignment Due: 3rd reader’s response due Monday (yesterday) by 5:00 p.m.

February 8: **Landscape: The Automobile**

Required Reading:

John Jakle, “Landscapes Redesigned for the Automobile,” in Michael Cozen, *The Making of the American Landscape*, 293-310 (reader).

J.B. Jackson, “Other Directed Houses,” in *Landscape in Sight*, 185-197 (reader).

J.B. Jackson, “The Domestication of the Garage,” in *Landscape in Sight*, 118-125 (reader).

In-Class Landscape Exercise: “Reading” Roads

Next On-Line Assignment Explained: Using Axioms to “read” 1950s postcards

WEEK 5: ECONOMIC BOOMTIME

February 13: **Theme: Consumerism**

Required Reading:

Jennifer Price, “Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the Nature Company,” in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground*, 186-203 (reader).

In-Class Discussion: The Politics of Purchasing

On-Line Assignment Due: “Reading” 1950s postcards due Monday (yesterday) by 5:00 p.m.

February 15: **Landscape: The American Mall**

Required Reading:

Read your classmates' 1950s postcard papers

Assignment: Write one question in response to each of your classmates' two-page papers. Bring these questions to class.

In-Class Discussion: your two-page papers on the American mall

* Reminder: 4th reader's response due this upcoming Monday by 5:00 p.m.

WEEK 6 POSTWAR PLAY

February 20: **Theme: Leisure**

Required Reading:

Susan Davis, "Producing the Sea World Experience: Landscape and Labor," in *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience* (reader).

J.B. Jackson, "Places for Fun and Games," in *Landscape in Sight*, 1-16 (reader).

In-Class Discussion: Recreational landscapes

On-Line Assignment Due: 4th reader's responses due Monday (yesterday) by 5:00 p.m.

February 22: **Landscape: Amusement Parks**

Required Reading:

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, 130-184 (chapters 5 & 6).

In-Class Landscape Exercise: "Reading" Disneyland

* Reminder: 5th reader's responses due this upcoming Monday by 5:00 p.m.

PART II: THE “SIXTIES” AND “SEVENTIES”

WEEK 7 INEQUALITIES (note: week 7 and week 8 should be reversed. MLK should come first, and then the Newark riots. Must switch the order of these next time I teach).

February 27: **Theme: Race and Ethnicity**

Required Reading:

Don Mitchell, “A Place for Everyone: Cultural Geographies of Race” in *Cultural Geography: An Introduction*, 230-258 (reader).

Field Trip: Newark’s Central Ward

On-Line Assignment Due: 5th reader’s responses due Monday (yesterday) by 5:00 p.m.

March 1: **Landscape: The Ghetto**

Required Reading:

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, 185-240 (chapters 7 & 8).

In-Class Landscape Exercise: Reading the Newark riots

* Reminder: 6th reader’s response due this upcoming Monday by 5:00 p.m.

WEEK 8 DISSENT

March 6: **Theme: Politics**

Required Reading:

Scott A. Sandage, “A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939-1963,” *Journal of American History*, vol. 80, no. 1 (June 1993): 135-167 (reader).

J.B. Jackson, “The Public Landscape,” in *Landscapes: Selected Writings of J.B. Jackson*, 153-160 (reader).

In-Class Discussion: Can landscapes be political?

On-Line Assignment Due: 6th reader’s responses due Monday (yesterday) by 5:00 p.m.

March 8: **Landscape: The Protest**

Required Reading:

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, 242-290 (chapters 9 & 10)

In-Class Landscape Exercise: Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" vs. Jimi Hendrix's *Star Spangled Banner*

* Reminder: Research paper proposal due on-line March 19

WEEK 9 SPRING BREAK

March 13-15: Required Reading:

None — Begin reading for final paper.

WEEK 10 THE MILITARY INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

March 20: **Theme: Technology**

Required Reading:

David Nye, "Introduction," in *Narratives and Spaces: Technology and the Construction of American Culture*, 1-10 (reader).

David Nye, "Don't Fly Me to the Moon: The Public and the Apollo Space Program," in *Narratives and Spaces: Technology and the Construction of American Culture*, 147-160 (reader).

In-Class Discussion: Technology and landscape

On-Line Assignment Due: Research Project Proposal due Monday (yesterday) by 5:00 p.m.

March 22: **Landscape: The Space Race**

Required Reading:

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, 291-348 (chapters 11 & 12)

In-Class Landscape Exercise: NASA's Cape Canaveral

In-Class Discussion: your research projects proposals

* Reminder: 7th reader's response due this upcoming Monday by 5:00 p.m.

PART III: THE REAGAN “EIGHTIES” TO TODAY

WEEK 11 CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM

March 27: **Theme: Spirituality**

Required Reading:

J.B. Jackson, “The Order of a Landscape: Reason and Religion in Newtonian America,” in D.W. Meinig, ed., *Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, 153-163.

J.B. Jackson, “The Sacred Grove in America” in *The Necessity for Ruins*, 77-88 (reader).

Jane Lampman, “Charting America’s Religious Landscape,” *Christian Science Monitor* (October 10, 2002), (reader).

In-Class Discussion: How do places become holy?

On-Line Assignment Due: 7th reader’s responses due Monday (yesterday) by 5:00 p.m.

March 29: **Landscape: Sacred Spaces**

Required Reading:

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, 350-424 (chapters 13 & 14)

In-Class Landscape Exercise: Televangelist Billy Graham’s “Time Square Crusade, 1957”

(note: must put note here to self that today in class I need to discuss the paper outlines, which are due one week from today)

* Reminder: 8th reader’s response due this upcoming Monday by 5:00 p.m.

WEEK 12 THE NEW RIGHT

April 3: **Theme: Conservatism**

Required Reading:

To be announced

In-Class Discussion: To be announced

On-Line Assignment Due: 8th reader’s responses due Monday by 5:00 p.m.

April 5: **Landscape: Advertising Place**
Required Reading:
 Boyer, Promises to Keep, 425-509 (chapters 15 & 16)

In-Class Landscape Exercise: Ronald Reagan’s Presidential Campaign

In-Class Assignment Due: Rough Draft Paper Outlines

* Reminder: 9th reader’s response due Monday by 5:00 p.m.

WEEK 13 “NATURAL” DISASTERS

April 10: **Theme: Social Inequality**
Required Readings:
 Mike Davis, “The Case for Letting Malibu Burn,” in *Ecology of Fear*, 93-147 (reader).

In-Class Discussion: The unnaturalness of “natural” disasters

On-Line Assignment Due: 9th reader’s responses due Monday by 5:00 p.m.

Note: Hand out workshop directions today

April 12: **Landscape: Hurricane Katrina’s New Orleans**
Required Reading:
 Mark Fischetti, “Drowning New Orleans,” *Scientific American* (2001): 1-9 (reader).

In-Class Landscape Exercise: New Orleans after the Storm

In-Class Reading:
 Ari Kelman, “City of Nature: New Orleans” Blessing; New Orleans’ Curse, in *Slate* (31 August, 2005): 1-4 (reader).

(Note: Don’t assign the first Kelman reading from Slate. The Nation article is better, and they repeat one another)

 Ari Kelman, “In the Shadow of Disaster,” in *The Nation* (2 January 2006): 1-7 (reader).

Note: Hand out Writing Guidelines Today

PART IV: PAPER WORKSHOP

WEEK 14 ON WRITING WELL

April 17: **In-Class Workshop I**
Required Reading:
Your classmates' on-line postings

Assignment: Overall paper arguments due

April 19: **In-Class Workshop II**
Required Reading:
Your classmates' on-line postings

WEEK 15 PAPER WORKSHOP

April 24: **In-Class Workshop III**
Required Reading:
Your classmates' on-line postings

April 26: **In-Class Workshop IV**
Required Reading:
Your classmates' on-line postings