

The History of U.S. Suburbia
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00-3:15 pm, SH 342

HIST 581

Fall, 2004

Professor Andrew Wiese

Office: 4198 Adams Humanities

Office Hours: TTh, 3:30-4:30pm

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Required Reading:

Robert Fishman, Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia (1987)

Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (1985)

Andrew Wiese, Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the 20th Century (2004)

Required Readings on Reserve (R), Love Library Reserve Book Room

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance, contribution to discussion, and in-class exercises. (30 percent)
2. Annotated Bibliography Paper I (6 pages) (20 percent)
3. Annotated Bibliography Paper II (6 pages) (20 percent)
4. Final Essay: Representations of Suburbia (8-10 pages) (40 percent)

The dominant mode of living in the United States is suburban. According to the 2000 Census, 50 percent of Americans lived in suburbs, representing a dramatic reversal of patterns since the 1920s, when the suburbs housed only 15 percent of the nation's population. The migration that produced this pattern is one of the most fundamental transformations in recent U.S. history. Suburbanization not only defined a distinct physical environment inhabited by increasing numbers of Americans, but it also shaped crucial historical processes. The rise of suburbia was inextricably linked to the formation of class, racial, and gender identities, the expanding role of the state, the evolution of success ideologies, and the construction of American culture in the 20th century.

History 581 will convey these multi-dimensional aspects of American suburban history, moving beyond a simple spatial/geographic emphasis to one that sees suburbanization as an integral component of the American experience over the past century and a half. Suburbia was not only a place where people moved in search of their American Dream – the ranch house, barbecue, and two-car garage. More deeply, the suburbanization process represented the spatial form and means through which social conflict and power were exercised among Americans competing for the abundant resources of their society. Therefore, the principal aim of this course will be to better understand the relationships between suburban places (or “space”) and social distinctions such as class, race, and gender. We will, likewise, explore the evolution of suburban landscapes, lifeways and ideals; how and why have Americans' suburban dreams changed over time? Lastly, we will investigate the role of real estate development, public land use planning, changes in technology, and the rise of a distinctive suburban polity in the making of this country's characteristic landscape.

The Course:

Week 1:

August 31 Introduction to the Course
September 2 Views of Suburbia
Reading: Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 1-19; Fishman, ix-17

Week 2: The Birth of the Suburbs

September 7 Transnational Origins of Suburbia
Reading: Fishman, 18-72; John Archer, "Colonial Suburbs in South Asia," (R); Document Set #2a (R)
September 9 The First American Suburbs
Reading: Jackson, 25-32; Doc. Set #2b (R)

Week 3: At Home in the Suburbs

September 14 Families, Gender, and Class in the Suburbs
Reading: Margaret Marsh, "From Separation to Togetherness," (R)
Doc. Set #3a (R)
September 16 Picturesque Suburbs
Reading: Jackson, 45-102; Fishman, 116-54; Doc. Set #3b (R)

Week 4: The Decentralizing Trend

September 21 Technology and Decentralization
Reading: Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 20-44, 103-15;
Doc. Set #4a (R)
September 23 Debating the Issues: Causes of Suburban Decentralization
Reading: Richard Harris and Robert Lewis, "Geography of North American Cities and Suburbs" (R); David Gordon, "Capitalist Development and the History of American Cities"; Doc. Set #4b (R)

Week 5: Popular Representations of Suburban Life

September 28 The Suburban Life Media
Reading: John Stilgoe, Borderlands (R); Catherine Jurca, White Diaspora; Doc. Set #5a (R)
September 30 Emergence of a Suburban Critique
Reading: Doc. Set #5b (R)

Week 6: Progressives and Suburbanites -- The Rise of Suburban Planning

October 5 Planned Exclusive Suburbs
Reading: Mary Corbin Sies, "'God's Very Own Kingdom on the Earth,'" (R); Doc. Set #6a (R)
October 7 Suburbs for the "Workingman"
Reading: Margaret Crawford, Building the Workingman's Paradise (R); Doc. Set #6b (R)

Week 7: The Other Suburbanites
October 12 Life in Working Class Suburbs
Reading: Wiese, Places of Their Own, 1-93; Nicolaides, "'Where the Workingman is Welcomed,'" (R); Doc. Set # 7a (R)
October 14 Debating the Issues: Suburban Ideal(s)
Reading: Richard Harris and Robert Lewis, "Creating a Fault(y) Zone," (R); Mary Corbin Sies, "North American Suburbs," (R); Andrew Wiese, "Stubborn Diversity" (R)

Week 8: The Tools of Exclusion
October 19 The Powers of Local Government
Reading: Marc Weiss, Rise of the Community Builders (R); Carol O'Connor, A Sort of Utopia (R); Doc. Set # 8a (R)
October 21 Federal Subsidy and the Suburban Dream
Reading: Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 191-218; Doc. Set #8b (R)

* **Annotated Bibliography Paper I due Thursday in class**

Week 9: Suburban Apotheosis
October 26 Suburbs for the Masses
Reading: Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 231-45, Fishman, Bourgeois Utopias, 155-81; Doc. Set # 9a (R)
October 28 The Baby Boom and Postwar Suburban Families
Reading: Elaine Tyler May, "Cold War, Warm Hearth," (R); Betty Friedan, Feminine Mystique, (R); Doc. Set #9b (R)

Week 10: Culture War over Postwar Suburbia
November 2 Crack in the Picture Window
Reading: John Keats, Crack in the Picture Window (R); Adam Rome, Bulldozer in the Countryside, (R); Doc. Set #10a (R)
November 4 In Defense of Suburbia
Reading: Herbert Gans, The Levittowners (R); Doc. Set # 10b (R)

Week 11: Postwar Suburbia and the Construction of Race / Class
November 9 Forbidden Neighbors
Reading: Wiese, Places of Their Own, 94-109; George Lipsitz, "Possessive Investment in Whiteness," (R); Doc. Set #11a (R)
November 11 African American Suburbanization
Reading: Wiese, Places of Their Own, 110-63; Doc. Set # 11b (R)

Week 12:

November 16 City - Suburb Divide
Reading: Thomas Sugrue, "Crabgrass-Roots Politics" (R); Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, American Apartheid, (R); Doc. Set # 12a (R)

November 18 Urban Crisis
Reading: Wiese, Places of Their Own, 209-54; Jonathan Kozol, Savage Inequalities (R); Doc. Set # 12b

* **Annotated Bibliography Paper II due Thursday in class**

Week 13: Exclusion and Inclusion in Late 20th Century Suburbs

November 23 Our Town
Reading: David Kirp, John Dwyer, Larry Rosenthal, Our Town (R); Ewen McKenzie, Privatopia (R); Setha Low, Gated Communities and the Discourse of Urban Fear (R)

November 25 No Class, Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 14: Changing Face of the Suburbs

November 30 Diversification in Suburbia
Reading: Wiese, Places of Their Own, 255-92; Doc. Set #14a

December 2 Suburbia Turns 2000
Reading: Sarah Mahler, American Dreaming (R); Timothy Fong, First Suburban Chinatown (R); Doc. Set # 14b

Week 15: The Future of Suburbia

December 7 Post Suburbia/ Edge City/ Burbopolis/ Technoburb
Reading: Fishman, Bourgeois Utopias, 182-207; Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 272-305; Doc. Set # 15a (R)

December 9 The Future of Metropolitan America
Reading: Myron Orfield, Metropolitics, 2000; Dolores Hayden, Fieldguide to Sprawl (R)

* **Final Paper Due: Friday, December 10 at noon**

Submit to 4207 AH Main Office of History Department

Document Set #2a (R): J.C. Loudon, The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion;
#2b: Andrew Jackson Downing, Architecture of Country Homes; Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature"

Document Set #3a: Catherine Beecher, "How to Redeem a Woman's Profession from Dishonor"; Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The Handy Man,";
#2b: "Promotional Plan for Llewellyn Park," "Progress Prospectus, Riverside, Illinois"

Document Set #4a: Frederick Coburn, "The 500 Mile City"
#4b: Graham Taylor, Satellite Cities; Harlan Douglass, The Suburban Trend;

Document Set #5a: Henry Bunner, Suburban Sage; articles from Suburban Life
#5b: Eugene Wood, "Why Pay Rent?"; Christine... "Is Suburban Living a Delusion?" (1928); Ethel Longworth Swift, "In Defense of Suburbia" (1928); Lewis Mumford, "Wilderness of Suburbia," (1921); Sinclair Lewis, Babbit (1921)

Document Set #6: Carol Aronovici, ".. Housing Problem..." ; "The Village that Ought to Be"(?)
"Pasadena the Beautiful" (?); Ebenezer Howard, Garden Cities; Clarence Stein, Garden Cities for America; Herbert Hoover, "Address to President's Conference" (1931)

Document Set #7a: Mary Helen Ponce, "Hoyt Street"; Henry Aaron, "I Had a Hammer";
Photographs of the Farm Security Administration

Document Set #8a: Frederick Lewis Allen, "Suburban Nightmare," (1925); J.C. Nichols, "When You Buy a Home Site," (1922); Restrictive Deed, San Diego, 1910;

Document Set #8b: Maps of the HOLC; FHA Underwriters' Manual (?)

Document Set #9a:

#9b: Magazine Images, Gender in Suburbs, 1940s-60s (Stilgoe/Davidson-Lytle); Elizabeth Herbert, "This is How I Keep House," (1949)

Document Set #10a: Peter Blake, God's Own Junkyard; Lewis Mumford, The City in History;
David Reisman, "Suburban Sadness";

Document Set #11a: Charles Abrams, Forbidden Neighbors, (1955)Lorraine Hansberry, A Raisin in the Sun, (1958);

#11b:

Document Set # 12a: W. Laas, "Suburbs are Strangling the City," ; Robert Moses, "Cities Be Damned," (1950); U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1961); ("white noose") ; Detroit News Special Series, "Costs of Segregation" (Jan. 2002)

#12 b: Kerner Commission Report (1968); *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974)

Document Set # 13: "Couple Sues to Lift Ban on Condo Doors," (1989); "Don't Even Think About Pink Flamingoes," (1991)

Document Set # 14a: "Black Suburb Rebuffs Uninvited Black Visitors" (1996);
14b: Donna Gaines "Teenage Wasteland" (

Document Set #15 a: Michael Pollen, "Suburban Nation: The Triumph of Burbopolis" (2000)

.....Among the topics covered in the course are research methods, bibliography and citation; modes of historical thinking; uses of evidence; and argumentation, interpretation and debate within the discipline. As a means of enabling students to read, write and think more clearly about history in general, the immediate goal of the course is to prepare students to complete

The course is organized into two parts. During the first weeks, students will In the next seven weeks, we will examine recent scholarship in Writing assignments will challenge students to think critically about the writing of history, historiography, research methodology, and historians' uses of evidence.