

History 395: The American Suburban Experience

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Moravian College
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Class Meets: Weds: 2:20-4:00, 301 PPHAC

This upper level history course will explore how the suburban experience in the United States developed and transformed the nation's political, social and cultural landscape. Although the course will provide an introduction to the long history of this development, the course will focus most extensively on the post-1945 changes that define the last fifty years of the nation's history. Issues covered will include such topics as the development of political and social movements such as the tax revolution and environmental movement, critiques of the fast food industry, the sprawl debate and questions that center on schooling, housing and zoning policies and the racial structures of spatial development.

Since this course is grounded in our everyday life experiences, we can expect to have an engaging course—to do this, I will depend upon you to bring your detailed assessment of the assigned readings. The most important aspect of each class meeting will be our in-class discussions. Each week, I will provide a sense of what areas to address in your readings to help guide your reading, although you are also expected to raise your own questions and themes as well.

Books: All books are available at the Moravian College Bookstore. *Please note that selected readings have been photocopied and are available in Reeves Library and the History Department Lounge in Comenius Hall.*

Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States, Kenneth T. Jackson, Oxford University Press, 1985.

The New Suburban History, ed. By Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue University of Chicago, 2006.

Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal, Eric Schlosser, Perennial, 2002.

The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape, James Howard Kunstler, Touchstone, 1993.

Please note additional readings are available on reserve in the library and in the History Department lounge.

Grading and Assignments

Participation: 20%

As an upper-level special topics course, weekly class discussions based upon thorough interpretation of the assigned readings will form a major component of our class experience. You are expected to read all of the materials by the time our seminar meets, and be prepared to discuss the readings thoughtfully and in-depth. Each week, I will provide the class with a set of questions or reflection points to help guide the readings and set a possible tone for our discussions. For those who have taken classes with me in the past, please note that these are not “focus questions” on which your exams will be based; instead, they will provide an initial context for understanding the texts selected. It is hoped that you will go beyond these points and raise your own questions. Superior participation is marked not only by thoughtful contributions to our class discussions, but an intellectual vigor that displays original thinking on this emerging topic in American history.

Since we only meet once a week, it is imperative that you be in class. If you anticipate that you will be late or absent, please inform me via email or telephone. While such notification will be appreciated and understood as a courtesy, it will not be viewed as excusing the absence or lateness. Cases of absence based on medical circumstances or family related health issues will be excused, provided a doctor’s note is given.

Mid-term Exam 1: 10%

Mid-term Exam 2: 15%

Two mid-term bluebook exams will be given based upon all assigned readings, lectures, films and discussions.

Final Exam: 20%

A cumulative final exam will be given during finals week at a time and location determined by the Registrar.

Final Paper: 25%

A major component of this course is the completion of a major research paper on a topic of your choosing. Papers should follow standard format for History Papers (including footnotes at the bottom of the page and a bibliography) and include no less than 10 scholarly sources from books and/or articles. Each student is expected to consult with me about the topic selected and produce a preliminary bibliography no later than October 11.

Weekly reading reflections: 10%

Each week, you will hand in a 1 page (250 word) overview of the assigned readings. The overviews will provide a brief summary of the readings and also include any specific insights that you gained, possible connections to previous readings and themes raised in the class, points of disagreement with the author, as well as any questions that you would

like to raise in class. Reflections should be typed and single spaced. I will provide you with feedback on the reflections from week to week.

August 30: Introduction to the class

September 6: The Politics of Home

Readings: Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, Chapters 9-12

September 13: The 1950s in Popular Memory

Readings: Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, Chapters 13-14

David M. P. Freund, "Marketing the Free Market: State Intervention and the Politics of Prosperity in Metropolitan America," in *The New Suburban History*.

September 20: June Cleaver's Nation: Women and the New Domesticity in the Post-War Period

Readings: Elaine Tyler May, "Cold War—Warm Hearth: Politics and the Family in Post-War America."

September 27: Schooling, Race and the Meaning of Community.

Readings: Matthew D. Lassiter, "Socioeconomic Integration" in the Suburbs: From Reactionary Populism to Class Fairness in Metropolitan Charlotte, in *The New Suburban History*.

October 4: The Meaning of Suburban Community in Post-War America

Far From Heaven shown in class

Andrew Wiese, "The House I Live In: Race, Class, and African American Suburban Dreams in the Postwar United States" in *The New Suburban History*.

October 11: Midterm 1

Reading: Becky Nicolaides, "How Hell Moved to the Suburbs" in *The New Suburban History*.

Preliminary Bibliography for Final papers Due in Class

October 18: The Fiction of Suburbia

Readings: John Cheever, “The Sorrows of Gin,” “The Trouble of Marcie Flint,” “The Swimmer.” Joyce Carol Oates, “Boy and Girl.”

Kenneth Jackson, “The Loss of Community in Metropolitan America,” *Crabgrass Frontier*, Chapter 15.

October 25: James Howard Kunstler and the Anti-Aesthetics of Suburbia

Reading: James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere*, pp. 9-131

November 1: The Sprawl Debate

Readings: James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere*, 133-275.

David Harvey, “The New Urbanism and the Communitarian Trap,”

Matthew J. Kiefer, “Suburbia and its Discontents: Notes from the Sprawl Debate.”

Alex Krieger, “The Cost—and Benefits?—of Sprawl.”

Ellen Dunham-Jones “Smart Growth in Atlanta: A Response to Krieger and Kiefer.”

November 8: Lifestyle and Consumption

Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*.

November 15: Midterm 2

November 22—Thanksgiving holiday

November 29: New Perspectives on American Society: The Crisis of the Family

The Ice Storm shown in class.

Readings: Robert O. Self, “Prelude to the Tax Revolt: the Politics of the Tax Dollar in Postwar California,” and Peter Siskind, “Suburban Growth and its Discontents: The Logic and Limits of Reform on the Postwar Northeast Corridor,” in *The New Suburban History*.

December 6: Looking to the Future

Final class meeting

Readings: Michael Jones-Correa, “Reshaping the American Dream: Immigrants, Ethnic Minorities, and the Politics of the New Suburbs,” in *The New Suburban History*.

Kenneth Jackson, “Retrospect and Prospect,” *Crabgrass Frontier*, Chapter 16.

