

The American Built Environment

History 389, section 4. George Mason University. Fall 2004

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30 am - 11:45 am, Krug Hall 7

Prof. Zachary M. Schrag

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-4 and by appointment.

Syllabus revised: August 30, 2004

This course will track the ways in which Americans have shaped their physical surroundings from the colonial period to the present. Architects, engineers, and planners have played important parts, but so have farmers, builders, miners, developers, politicians, and everyone who owns a home or business. We will study their actions, and the landscapes they have created, including such common artifacts as fences, railroad tracks, manhole covers, amusement parks, cul-de-sacs, and chain restaurants. And we will use such artifacts and landscapes, along with more traditional written and visual sources, to build a more complete understanding of the American past and today's built environment.

Books

The following texts are required and are in stock at the George Mason bookstore in the Johnson Center. *Building Suburbia* is just coming out in paperback and will not arrive until early November. I have also asked that the readings be placed on reserve at the Johnson Center library, but I encourage students to purchase the books.

Cronon, William. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1992.

Findlay, John M. *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Hales, Peter Bacon. *Atomic Spaces: Living on the Manhattan Project*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999.

Hanchett, Thomas W. *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Hayden, Dolores. *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*. New York: Vintage, 2004.

Nye, David E. *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.

Stilgoe, John R. *Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Requirements

Attendance and Participation (20 percent)

You are expected to attend class twice a week. The attendance and participation grade is based on your prompt arrival and active participation in discussions, especially on those weeks when you have a paper due. You should be in your seat, ready to take notes at 10:30 am; chronic tardiness will be reflected in your grade.

Basic classroom rules:

- Bring the books we are discussing to class on Tuesdays.
- Do not eat in the classroom, before or during class.

- Turn off all cell phones, pagers, and other noisemakers.

Response Papers (40 percent)

For each week reading is due, students will submit three-paragraph (roughly 750 words) papers in response to the assigned readings. Twelve assignments will be given, but only the top ten grades will be counted, so it is possible to miss two assignments due to illness, computer malfunction, or other mishap without affecting the final grade.

Unless specified otherwise, the assignment for each week will be the same: Choose one fact or one image from the reading and explain why it is surprising to you, and how it supports or fails to support the author's arguments.

Responses should not summarize the readings. Rather, they should challenge, complicate, or extend the readings in ways that will provoke classroom discussions.

Responses should be sent by e-mail to zschrag@gmu.edu by 10:30 am on each Monday reading is due. Please include "hist389" in subject header. In the event of a computer failure, you may submit a paper essay, but please do not make it a habit. Responses will be graded on a 10-point scale, based on the accuracy with which you explain the author's arguments, the originality of your analysis, and the style of your writing. Responses sent less than 24 hours ahead of class or brought to the start of class will have 3 points deducted. No credit will be given for assignments sent after the start of class or brought late to class.

Essays (15 and 25 percent)

Students will write two essays, due October 14 and December 9.

For essay #1 (750-1000 words), students will choose and analyze an image depicting the American landscape. Almost anything is fair game: you may take a photograph yourself, clip a magazine advertisement, download an image from a reputable website, etc., so long as you cite your source properly. The only images that may not be used are images taken from the assigned readings and images of the Fairfax Campus of George Mason University. You may want to do some research, for example, to learn the age of a building, but the emphasis here is on the image.

Essay #2 (1000-1250 words) requires comparison of two images. For example, you might compare a historic image with an image of the same landscape today, or two similar landscapes from different parts of the country, or the same landscape depicted in two different ways.

Each paper is due at the start of class on the specified dates. In addition, students will prepare 5-minute presentations of their findings for the class. Since the presentations will only make sense if the class can see your images, please prepare transparencies or handouts or get me the images at least 48 hours in advance so I can project them for you.

Guidelines for reading efficiently, building strong thesis statements, and organizing essays can be found online at <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/teaching.html>.

All assignments are governed by the George Mason University honor code, online at <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/unilife/honorcode.html>. You are expected to work independently and to acknowledge all sources, including assigned texts and materials found online. Consult Gordon Harvey's "Writing with Sources," <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources> for instructions on when and how to cite, and ask me if you need clarification. In general, any sentence in your work that can be traced to a single sentence in someone else's work should bear a footnote. Any collaboration, such as consultation with the Writing Center, should also be acknowledged. Violations of academic integrity will be reported to the administration and may result in grade penalties, including failure of the course.

Class Schedule

Weekly page counts are in brackets.

1.

August 31. Looking at Landscapes

September 2. Lecture: Gentility

2

Read for Tuesday: Stilgoe, *Common Landscape*, 33-134 [101]

September 6. Response papers due by e-mail 24 hours before class.

September 7. Discussion

September 9. Lecture: Property

3

Read for Tuesday: Stilgoe, *Common Landscape*, 137-208, Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 23-54 [102]

September 13. Response papers due by e-mail 24 hours before class.

September 14. Discussion. **Last day to add a class or to drop without tuition liability.**

September 16. Lecture: River

4

Read for Tuesday: Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 97-206 [109]

September 20. Response papers due by e-mail 24 hours before class.

September 21. Discussion.

September 23. Lecture: Railroad

5

Read for Tuesday: Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 207-259, 310-369 [111]

September 27. Response papers due by e-mail 24 hours before class.

September 28. Discussion.

September 30. Lecture: Mine

October 1: **Last day to drop with no academic liability**

6

Read for Tuesday: Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, 1-88; [88]

October 4. Response papers due by e-mail 24 hours before class.

October 5. Discussion.

October 7. Lecture: Factory

7

October 12 NO CLASS (COLUMBUS DAY/MONDAY SCHEDULE)

October 14. **Essay #1 due at start of class.** Presentations.

8

Read for Tuesday: Nye, *Electrifying America*, 185-286 [101]

October 18. Response papers due by e-mail 24 hours before class.

October 19. Discussion.

October 21. Lecture: Home

9

Read for Tuesday: Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, 89-183 [94]

October 25. Response papers due by e-mail 24 hours before class.

October 26. Discussion.

October 28. Lecture: Downtown

10

Read for Tuesday: Nye, *Electrifying America*, 29-137 [108]

November 1. Response papers due by e-mail 24 hours before class.

November 2. Discussion.

November 4. Lecture: War

11

Read for Tuesday: Hales, *Atomic Spaces*, 1-113 [113]

November 8. Response papers due by e-mail 24 hours before class.

November 9. Discussion.

November 11. Lecture: Road

12

Read for Tuesday: Hales, *Atomic Spaces*, 115-189, 301-331 [105]

November 15. Response papers due by e-mail 24 hours before class.

November 16. Discussion.

November 18. Lecture: Suburb

13

Read for Tuesday: Findlay, *Magic Lands*, 52-159 [107]

November 22. Response papers due by e-mail 24 hours before class.

November 23. Discussion.

November 25. NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING)

14

Read for Tuesday: *Building Suburbia*, 154-248 [95]

November 29. Response papers due by e-mail 24 hours before class.

November 30. Discussion

December 2. Lecture: Ruin

15

December 7. Movie.

December 9. **Essay #2 due at start of class.** Presentations.