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Special Topics in American Studies: American Landscapes

Boston University
Spring 2009

AM 502
Fridays, 11-2
226 Bay State Rd., Room 110

Professor Jessica Sewell

Office Hours:

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This course uses the idea of landscape as an interdisciplinary lens for exploring American culture. We will examine the physical and metaphorical landscape of America across time, exploring how we have shaped the landscape, used to it define ourselves as a nation, and asked it to serve as resource, religion, symbol, and setting.

Requirements

Participation and Reaction Papers

The primary requirement of the course is participation: doing the reading, coming to class, and participating in discussion. Absences will seriously affect your participation grade. The success of the class depends on your preparation and participation; please come to class having completed the reading and ready to discuss it.

You will write short, informal weekly reaction papers to each set of readings, which you will post on a discussion board on the Blackboard website by Sunday night. These informal papers are not graded, but are required, and will count towards your participation grade. More importantly, they will help you fully engage in discussion.

Participation, including reaction papers, will be worth 50% of your grade for the course.

Research Paper

This course will culminate in a research paper that uses the idea of landscape to explore an aspect of American Culture. As this course is interdisciplinary and the background of students is varied, you may use a wide range of methods and sources for this paper. For undergraduates, the paper will be 15 pages long; for graduate students, the paper should be approximately 25 pages long. You will be handing in a proposal and preliminary bibliography for the paper on February 27, and will be presenting your research to your colleagues in class in one of the last three sessions. The paper, including proposal and presentation, is worth 50% of your grade for the course. The paper is due Monday, April 27.

For all assignments, you are required to follow the rules of style laid out in Kate Turabian et. al.'s *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, which has been ordered as a required book. It will tell you what you need to know about margins, spacing, footnotes, punctuation, etc. Use it. I also recommend reading and paying heed to Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*.

All work done for this class must be in accordance with the academic conduct code, available online at <http://www.bu.edu/cas/academics/programs/conductcode.html>.

Assessment

Participation: 50%

Paper: 50%

Readings

Most of the readings required for this class are available online through the courseinfo site in the course documents folder or online through the links folder. You can access the site by going to <http://blackboard.bu.edu>. You will need to sign in to the site using your Kerberos password and username. Other sources are available online on Google books.

Required Books

- Conzon, William. *The Making of the American Landscape*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Cronon, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York, Hill and Wang, 1983.
- Hayden, Dolores. *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2003.
- Nash, Roderick Frazier. *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001 (1967))
- Turabian, Kate et. al. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 7th Edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Recommended Books

- Cronon, William, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996.
- Jackson, John Brinkerhoff. *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Wilson, Chris, and Paul Groth, eds. *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Zapatka, Christian. *The American Landscape*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995.

Schedule of Course Meetings

Class 1: Jan 16 **Introductions**

Class 2: Jan. 23 **Cultural Landscapes**

John Brinkerhoff Jackson, "The Word Itself" in *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

D.W. Meinig, "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene" in Meinig, ed. *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

Pierce Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape" in Meinig, ed. *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*.

George Henderson, "What (Else) We Talk About When We Talk About Landscape: For a Return to the Social Imagination" in Chris Wilson and Paul Groth, eds., *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

Michael P. Conzen, "Introduction" to *The Making of the American Landscape* (New York: Routledge, 1990)

Dell Upton, "Black and White Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia" in Robert Clair St. George, ed. *Material Life in America, 1600-1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988)

Class 3: Jan 30 **Landscape as Resource**

Stanley Trimble, "Nature's Continent," in Conzen, ed. *The Making of the American Landscape*
William Cronon. Chapters 2-4, 8 in *Changes in the Land*

Christine Macy and Sarah Bonnemaïson, "'Putting Nature to Work with the Tennessee Valley Authority" in *Architecture and Nature: Creating the American Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2003)

Class 4: Feb 6 **The American Landscape**

Leo Marx, "The Garden" in *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964)

Joseph Wood, "'Build, Therefore, Your Own World': The New England Village as Ideal" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81 (1) 1991.

James Vance, "Democratic Utopia and the American Landscape" in Conzen, ed. *The Making of the American Landscape*

Pierce Lewis, "The Northeast and the Making of American Geographical Habits" in Conzen, ed. *The Making of the American Landscape*

Alan Wallach, "Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy," *Arts Magazine* 56 (November 1981) pp. 94-106.

Class 5: Feb 13 **Order**

- Hildegard Binder Johnson, "Toward a National Landscape" in Conzon, ed. *The Making of the American Landscape*
- Wilbur Zelinsky, "The Imprint of Central Authority" in Conzon, ed. *The Making of the American Landscape*
- Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative" in Cronon, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996)
- Dell Upton, "The City as Material Culture" in Yentsch and Beaudry, eds., *The Art and Mystery of Historical Archaeology* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1989)
- Richard Bushman, "Houses and Gardens" in *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

Class 6: Feb 20 **The Sublime**

- Edmund Burke, Part II: and Part III of *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. (J. Dodsley, 1776) (various editions available online; check Google books)
- Rob Wilson, "Introduction" and "Walt Whitman: The American Sublime as 'Song of Myself'" in *American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).
- Tim Barringer, "The Course of Empires: Landscape and Identity in America and Britain, 1820-1880" in Andrew Wilton and Tim Barringer, *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820-1880*. (London: Tate Publishing, 2002)
- Recommended: Walt Whitman, Song of Myself, in *Leaves of Grass*, 1855, on Google books

Class 7: Feb 27 **Nature**

- Emerson, *Nature* 1836 Available from Google books
- Rebecca Durell, "Durand and the Therapeutic Landscape" in *The Anatomy of Nature: Geology and American Landscape Painting, 1825-1875* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- Roderick Nash, "Henry David Thoreau: Philosopher" in *Wilderness and the American Mind*
- Christian Zapatka, "Pastoral Reserves in the Nineteenth-Century City" in *The American Landscape*
- Anne Whiston Spurr, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frances Law Olmstead" in Cronon, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996)

Proposal due for final paper

Class 8: March 6 **Wilderness**

John Muir, "The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West" in *Our National Parks* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901); available on Google books

Roderick Frazier Nash, "Prologue," "The Romantic Wilderness," "The *American Wilderness*," "Wilderness Preserved," and "The Wilderness Cult" in *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001 (1967))

William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" in Cronon, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996)

Krista Comer, "Sidestepping Environmental Justice: 'Natural' Landscapes and the Wilderness Plot" in *Landscapes of the New West: Gender and Geography in Contemporary Women's Writings*

March 13: **No class, Spring break**

Class 9: March 20 **The West**

Patricia Limerick, "The Shadows of Heaven Itself" in Center of the American West, *Atlas of the New West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997)

Selected maps from Center of the American West, *Atlas of the New West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997)

Martha Sandweiss, "'Westward the Course of Empire': Photography and the Invention of an American Future," in *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).

Nancy K. Anderson, "'The Kiss of Enterprise': The Western Landscape as Symbol and Resource" in William H. Truettner, ed., *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991)

Krista Comer, "Landscapes of Westernness: Gender, Race, and the Politics of American Space" in *Landscapes of the New West*

Class 10: March 27 **The Road**

John Jakle, "Landscapes Redesigned for the Automobile" in Conzon, ed. *The Making of the American Landscape*

J.B. Jackson, "Truck City" and "Roads Belong in the Landscape" in *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994)

J.B. Jackson, "The Abstract World of the Hot Rodder" in *Landscape in Sight*

Christian Zapatka, "National Parks and First Cross Country Highway"

Timothy Davis, "'A Pleasant Illusion of Unspoiled Countryside': The American Parkway and the Problematics of an Institutionalized Vernacular" *Vernacular Architecture Forum* 9 (2003).

David Laderman, "Paving the Way: Sources and Features of the Road Movie" in *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

Barbara Klinger, "The Road to Dystopia: Landscaping the Nation in *Easy Rider*" in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, eds, *The Road Movie Book* (London: Routledge, 1997).

Class 11: April 3 **Suburbia**

Dolores Hayden, Chapters 1-5, 7-8 in *Building Suburbia*.

Robert Beuka, "Utopia, Dystopia, Heterotopia: The Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Culture and Thought" in *SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004)

Mark Gillem. "Homeward Bound: Identity, Consumption, and Place" in *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007)

Class 12: April 10 **Presentations**

Class 13: April 17 **Presentations**

Class 14: April 24 **Presentations**