SPACE, RACE, GENDER AND THE AMERICAN SUBURBS
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Spring 2011
506:402:08
Tuesday, 1:10 – 4:10 PM
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Course Description

New Jersey is known as the quintessential suburban state. The American suburban experience has transformed the nation’s political, social and cultural landscape. While generally depicted as white, middle-class space, the American suburbs have been surprisingly diverse and contested sites. In this seminar we will explore the spatial materiality of the suburb, its structural and discursive effects, through the lens of race, class and gender.

A constellation of social, material, and cultural processes has shaped suburban communities, while the accompanying stereotypes and tropes have influenced the suburban discourse and given it social and political currency in the American imagination. During the semester, we will attempt understand how cultural and material phenomena of place have shaped and reinforced constructions of race, gender and class in the US. In the process we will seek to disrupt the stereotype of the white middle-class homogeneous suburb and to complicate the trope of the single-family home that has come to symbolize the fulfillment of the American Dream.

Through the interrogation of secondary and primary sources we will raise questions about the cultural and material phenomena have contributed to the development of the suburb as cultural representation, discursive space, and political entity. What are the social and economic underpinnings and cultural dimensions that distinguish suburbs from cities? How has the power of suburban space shaped understandings of race, gender, and class? How have these formulations influenced American political and social cultures and practices? In what ways have these constructions been interrupted or reinforced?

METHOD OF INSTRUCTION:

Class Discussion: Discussion of assigned readings will serve as the center for class meetings, mandating preparation, attendance and participation in discussion. To ensure the thorough examination of the week's reading, assigned students will undertake the responsibility of leading discussions. Everyone will read core titles listed for the week, although sometimes the reading will be shared. Once during the semester you will lead

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1 This syllabus is not intended to cover all eventualities that may arise during the semester. Updates and revisions will be provided as needed.
the weekly discussion after developing questions on the readings for your fellow students.

**Analytical Responses**: Each week, you will write a one-page analytical response to the readings, including a question that you would like to bring up for discussion. You should pick some aspect of the assigned reading that you found intriguing, provocative, wrong, or profound, and write about it. You should not feel compelled to write about everything in an assigned reading that you found interesting; rather, you should pick out one feature for discussion.

**Research Paper**: Students will write a paper of about twenty (20) pages using primary and secondary sources to investigate an aspect of the interrelationship of suburban space and race, gender, and class.

**Suburban Profile**: To begin the process, develop a five (5) page profile of a suburban community, including its demographic, political, and cultural aspects. Focus on the built environment, that is, how people interact with their cultural forms, create a local culture and invest meaning in their locale to create the cultural and political product that is the suburb. How does the suburb present itself and how is it perceived by others? What has the suburb done to protect its image and lifeways? In developing your profile you will want to consider demographic changes, organizational and social practices, cultural representations and influences. In preparing your community profile peruse official records, local newspapers and histories, visual material (photographs, published representations, etc.).

**GRADING**

- Class Participation 15%
- Reading Responses 15%
- Suburban profile 10%
- Primary research paper 60%
  - **prospectus**: a short statement of the topic you will explore 5%
  - **annotated bibliography**, including both secondary and primary sources 15%
  - draft of research paper; all students are required to give a short oral presentation about their research 15%
  - final draft 25%

**Key Texts**:


**January 18:** Welcome/Introduction/Outline of Course

**January 25:** The Suburban Ideal
Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier,* Chapters 1-9

**Primary Document:** *The Suburbanite,* May 1908, vol. 6 no. 3; vol. 7, June 1908. http://www.archive.org/stream/suburbanitemonth04cent#page/n27/mode/2up

**February 1:** The Power of Space


**February 8:** Better Homes/Better Space

**COMMUNITY PROFILE DUE**


**Primary Document**: Better homes in America, publications no. 11, guidebook for better homes campaigns in rural communities and small towns, and no., 12, guidebook for better homes campaigns in cities and towns.  
http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/cool:@field(DOCID+@lit(lg58T000)):

**February 15**: Library Session

**February 22**: The Other Suburbanites

Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, Chapters 1-3

Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, Chapters 1-4

**March 1**: The Era of Mass Suburbanization

Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, Chapters 1, 2, 3

http://juh.sagepub.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/content/36/6/792.full.pdf+html

**Primary Document**: “Negores Demand Bonus to Sell,” *New York Times*, April 20, 1930  

**March 8**: Race, Rights

Weise, *Places of Their Own*, Chapters 4-7

http://asp6new.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/was2/was2.object.details.aspx?dorpID=1001113549&fulltext=suburb
March 22: Race, Rights, Reaction

Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis, Chapters 7, 8, Epilogue

http://asp6new.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/was2/was2.object.details.aspx?dorpid=1000689795&fulltext=good%20housekeeping

March 29: Contested Space

Weise, Places of Their Own, Chapters 8-9

Nicolaides, My Blue Heaven, Chapter 5-7

April 5: Oral Presentations

April 12: Oral Presentations

April 19: Oral Presentations

April 26: Papers Due
SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERROGATING TEXTS FOR WEEKLY READINGS AND YOUR PAPERS:

Secondary Sources:

1. What questions does the author attempt to answer?
2. What is the author’s thesis? What related arguments does s/he make?
3. What kinds of evidence and sources does the author use to support her/his argument?
4. What are the strengths and limitations of the evidence? Is the evidence representative, or do the conclusions rest on exceptional cases? Could the evidence support a position that contradicts the author’s claims?
5. What biases and assumption shape the analysis?
6. For your response papers, pick one or two aspects of the reading to analyze, rather than trying to deal with the entire piece.

Primary Sources:

1. In what historical context did the document originate?
2. What claims and assumptions does the document make?
3. What is the purpose of the document? The intended audience? How did the intended audience shape the document? How do you think the audience responded?
4. How would you evaluate the source as historical evidence? Consider its credibility, assumptions/biases, limitations/strengths, etc.
5. What questions does the document raise for you? What questions does it answer?
6. What is the tone of the piece?
7. To what authorities does the author look?

**A helpful online source is: [http://www.lincoln.edu/history/tools/helpful-tools.htm](http://www.lincoln.edu/history/tools/helpful-tools.htm).

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**Statement on Plagiarism**


Plagiarism is the representation of the words or ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise. To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or by appropriate indentation and must be properly cited in the text or in a footnote. Acknowledgment is required when material from another source stored in print, electronic or other medium is paraphrased or summarized in whole or in part in one's own words. To acknowledge a paraphrase properly, one might state: "to paraphrase Plato's comment..." and conclude with a footnote identifying the exact reference. A footnote acknowledging only a directly quoted statement does not suffice to notify the reader of any preceding or succeeding paraphrased material. Information which is common knowledge such as names of leaders of prominent nations, basic scientific laws,
etc, need not be footnoted; however, all facts or information obtained in reading or research that are not common knowledge among students in the course must be acknowledged.

In addition to materials specifically cited in the text, only materials that contribute to one's general understanding of the subject may be acknowledged in the bibliography. Plagiarism can, in some cases, be a subtle issue. Any questions about what constitutes plagiarism should be discussed with the faculty member.

The Rutgers Writing Program also maintains a website that defines and discusses plagiarism, which we encourage all faculty and students to visit.