History 364

History of American Suburbia

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History of American Suburbia

Fall 2010
Tu/Th 11:30-1:00
Angell Hall Aud. C

Office Hours: Thurs. 2:00-4:00 pm, and by appointment

Course Webpage: CTools: History 364 001 F10 [https://ctools.umich.edu/portal]

Graduate Student Instructors:

Adrienne Carson <adcarson@umich.edu>
Sections 003, 004
Sarah Nobles <shnobles@umich.edu>
Sections 007, 008, 009

In post-1945 U.S. history, the suburbs have emerged as the dominant method of social organization, the primary focus of land-use planning, and the center of political power. Critics have blamed suburbia for everything from the abandonment of the cities to the alienation of youth to the environmental devastation of sprawl. Defenders have praised the suburbs for the safety of their neighborhoods, the quality of their schools, and the broad expansion of the middle-class “American Dream” of a detached, single-family home. This course will grapple with the dominant themes and legacies of suburbanization in modern America through a focus on popular culture; social and political history; race, class, gender, and generational analysis; urban planning policies and environmental consequences. Did the same forces that produced the sprawling suburbs also create the urban crisis? How does a metropolitan approach to modern American history recast discussions about liberalism and conservatism, the power shift from Rustbelt to Sunbelt, the changing ideologies of class and race, the politics of family and community, and the relationship between local and national policies? How can the increasing diversity and dynamism of the suburbs be reconciled with the pervasive stereotypes of affluent whiteness, architectural blandness, and cultural conformity? What does it mean to say that the United States has become a “Suburban Nation”?

Lecture themes and discussion topics range from Levittown to Columbine, from the “Feminine Mystique” to the black middle class, from the “Silent Majority” to the anti-sprawl movement, from immigrant enclaves to the recent subprime meltdown. We will begin by confronting the dominant discourses of suburbia in American politics and pop culture, and the course will focus extensively on films, novels, and other mass media sources as key shapers of suburban identity. We will pay close attention to battles over inclusion and exclusion in suburban communities, including political conflicts over school desegregation and housing integration. Throughout the semester, we will examine the changing meaning of the “suburban” label, as middle-class bedroom communities have evolved into autonomous horizontal cities no longer dependent on the urban core, while the suburbs are now home to more than half of all racial and ethnic minorities residing in metropolitan areas.
**Requirements:** Students are expected to attend lectures regularly, to be present at all discussion sections, and to be prepared and participate actively in the section meetings. If you must miss your regular section, you should arrange to attend another one taught by your GSI, or if this is not possible then one taught by the other GSI. If neither option works, then in order to receive credit for participation you should turn in a one-page, single-spaced summary of the readings/films for the section that you missed (in addition to any assigned discussion project). Your GSI will distribute a discussion section syllabus with additional information, including class policy for missing section, religious holidays, and more. Assigned films should be watched in advance of the weekly discussion section. Students should consult the History 364 CTools site routinely for reading material, assignment guidelines, research links, class updates, and general course information.

**Lecture Outlines:** The lecture outlines will be available for printing or downloading on CTools in the Resources/Lecture Outlines folder by the morning before the class meeting.

**Technology in the Classroom:** Please turn off or mute your cell phones during lecture and discussion sections and resist the urge to use them for any reason during class time. Laptops can serve useful purposes in the classroom, such as downloading the lecture outlines, taking notes, and bringing up electronic copies of assigned articles during section. If you cannot help browsing the web or using your laptop for non-class-related purposes during lecture, please sit in the back rows so that such activities don’t distract other students. Laptops should not be used for any non-class-related purpose during your discussion section.

**Films:** We will watch seven films/documentaries outside of regularly scheduled class meetings. Students should analyze films with the same rigor as reading assignments—as historical documents and as cultural texts—taking notes in preparation for discussion section and in anticipation of graded assignments. Each film will be available in streaming video format through the History 364 CTools site—best viewed with a broadband (not wireless) connection with the Quicktime 7 player or better required.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film #1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Little Children</th>
<th>137 min.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Film #2</td>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>A Raisin in the Sun</td>
<td>128 min.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Film #3</td>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>The Graduate</td>
<td>106 min.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Film #4</td>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Ordinary People</td>
<td>124 min.</td>
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<td>Film #5</td>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Falling Down</td>
<td>113 min.</td>
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<td>Film #6</td>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Farmingville</td>
<td>79 min.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Film #7</td>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Thirteen</td>
<td>99 min.</td>
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**Discussion Projects:** On five occasions during the semester, discussion projects will include a short (one page, single-spaced) written assignment that should be completed by the start of section. These include responses to films and readings, summaries of oral interviews/family research projects, and an urban planning report. The details for the discussion projects can be found in the Resources/Discussion Projects folder on the CTools site [denoted as DP below].
**Graded Assignments:** The guidelines for graded assignments also will be posted on CTools in a timely fashion. Anything covered in the course—reading assignments, films, lectures—is fair game for the final exam, although it will be tilted toward the material after the midterm. A final exam review guide also will be available on CTools before the end of classes. All four components listed below must be completed in order to receive a passing grade in the course.

*Discussion: consistent attendance, active participation, discussion projects (30%)
*A 5-page midterm, take-home essay assignment, based on course readings (20%)
*A 9-10 page research paper, based on primary and secondary sources (25%)
*A comprehensive final exam on Dec. 16, 1:30-3:30, in Angell Aud. C (25%)

**Style Guide:** The History 364 Style Guide is available on CTools in the Resources Folder. These guidelines should be followed for the midterm essay and the research paper, and they also explain issues such as the documentation of sources and the penalties for plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty.

**Academic Minor:** History 364 counts as a “perspectives” class under the requirements for the Academic Minor in Urban and Community Studies. For more information about this minor program, contact the Academic Services Office of the Residential College.

**Readings:**

1. **Electronic Reader [ER]:** A selection of article and book chapters is available on CTools in the Resources/Electronic Reader section. These assignments are denoted as [ER] in the syllabus. Some are pdf files, and others are hyperlinks to primary documents available on the web.

2. **Required Books:** The following books are available for purchase online and at area bookstores that participate in the U-M textbook system (Ulrich’s, Michigan Book and Supply, Michigan Union). One copy of each is on reserve at Shapiro Undergraduate Library.

- Dean Bakopoulos, *Please Don’t Come Back from the Moon*
- Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*
- Richard Yates, *Revolutionary Road*
- Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than Zero*
- Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*
- Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Andres Duany, and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*
- Elinor Burkett, *Another Planet: A Year in the Life of a Suburban High School*

**Abbreviations in Course Outline:**

CT = CTools: History 364 001 F10 [https://ctools.umich.edu/portal]
ER = Electronic Reader Folder [History 364 001 F10 Resources/Electronic Reader]
DP = Discussion Projects Folder [History 364 001 F10 Resources/Discussion Projects]
Course Outline

Week 1—Introduction

Sept. 7: The Suburban Crisis

Sept. 9: Mapping the Metropolis

**Discussion Reading: Robert Fishman, “The American Metropolis at Century’s End: Past and Future Influences” [ER]

*Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley, “Divided We Sprawl,” Atlantic Monthly (Dec. 1999) [ER]


Week 2—Suburban Discourses

Sept. 14: Suburban Pathology

Sept. 16: Suburban Exceptionalism

**Discussion Reading: Bakopoulos, Please Don’t Come Back from the Moon

**Film #1: Little Children (2006), dir. Todd Field, 137 min.

**Discussion Project #1: American Dreams [DP]

Week 3—Origins of Suburbia

Sept. 21: Planning Utopian Communities

Sept. 23: Reconstructing the “American Dream”

**Discussion Reading: Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier (Introduction, Chapters 8-16)

**“Housing: Up from the Potato Fields,” Time (July 3, 1950) [ER]

**“Americana: The Roots of Home,” Time (June 20, 1960) [ER]
**Week 4—Fifties America**

Sept. 28: The “Affluent Society”

Sept. 30: The Domestic Crisis

**Discussion Reading:** Yates, *Revolutionary Road*

**Film #2:** *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961), dir. Daniel Petrie, 128 min.

**Discussion Project #2:** Family History Project [DP] (due either Week 4 or 5)

**Week 5—Culture of Containment**

Oct. 5: The Baby Boom

Oct. 7: Cold War Suburbs

**Discussion Reading:** May, *Golden State, Golden Youth*

*Students for a Democratic Society, “The Port Huron Statement” (1962) [ER]*

**Film #3:** *The Graduate* (1967), dir. Mike Nichols, 106 min.

**Discussion Project #2:** Family History Project [DP] (due either Week 4 or 5)

**Week 6—Suburban Rebels**

Oct. 12: The Silent Majority

Oct. 14: Class Traitors

**Discussion Reading:** “Youth: The Hippies,” *Time* (July 7, 1967) [ER]

*“When the Young Teach and the Old Learn,”* *Time* (Aug. 17, 1970) [ER]

*“Man and Woman of the Year: The Middle Americans”* *Time* (Jan. 5, 1970) [ER]

*Richard Lemon, “The Troubled American” (pp. 13-40, 65-75, 211-219) [ER]*

*Robert Coles, “The Middle Americans” (pp. 43-49, 95-106) [ER]*

**Oct. 15—Midterm Essay Due [CT]**
Week 7—The Urban Crisis

Oct. 19: Fall Break (no class)

Oct. 21: Motor City

**Discussion Reading: Thomas Sugrue, “Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction Against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940-1964” (pp. 551-578) [ER]
*Detroit News Special Report, “A Time of Tragedy” (Aug. 11, 1967) [ER]
*Kerner Commission, “Summary” and “Future of the Cities” (pp. 1-29, 389-409) [ER]
*Stanley Greenberg, “Macomb County in the American Mind” (pp. 23-54) [ER]
*Detroit News Special Reports, “The Cost of Segregation” (2002) and “Where We Stand” (2007) [ER]

**Discussion Project #3: Historical Memory Project [DP]

**Discussion sections will meet this week (Tuesday sections to be rescheduled)

Week 8—Middle-Class Malaise

Oct. 26: Family Values

Oct. 28: Teenage Wasteland

**Discussion Reading: Ellis, Less Than Zero
*“Teenagers’ No. 1 Drug: Alcohol,” Los Angeles Times (Sept. 18, 1983) [ER]
*“Twentysomething: Proceeding with Caution,” Time (July 16, 1990) [ER]

**Film #4: Ordinary People (1980), dir. Robert Redford, 124 min.

Week 9—The “New American Dilemma”? 

Nov. 2: Housing and Neighborhoods

Nov. 4: Schools and Democracy

**Discussion Reading: “I’m Not Against It, But,” New York Times (Oct. 27, 1963) [ER]
*Andrew Wiese, “Places of Their Own” (pp. 209-213, 225-268) [ER]
*Lizabeth Cohen, “Residence: Inequality in Mass Suburbia” (pp. 200-222, 227-251)

**Discussion Project #4: Class and Race [DP]
**Week 10—Postsuburban America**

Nov. 9: California Dreamin’

Nov. 11: The Sunbelt Mystique

**Discussion Reading:** Davis, *City of Quartz* (Prologue, Chapters 3-5)

**“Marauders from Inner City Prey on L.A.’s Suburbs,” Los Angeles Times (July 12, 1981) [ER]

**Film #5: Falling Down (1993), dir. Joel Schumacher, 113 min.**

**Week 11—Suburban Diversity**

Nov. 16: Global Suburbs

Nov. 18: Black Suburbs


*Sheryll Cashin, “Dilemmas of Place and Suburbanization of the Black Middle Class” (pp. 87-110) [ER]

*Kristin Hill Maher, “Borders and Social Distinction in the Global Suburb” (pp. 781-806) [ER]


**“The New White Flight,” Wall Street Journal (Nov. 19, 2005) [ER]

**Film #6: Farmingville (2004), dir. Carlos Sandoval and Catherine Tambini, 79 min.**

**Week 12—Suburban Political Majority**

Nov. 23: Swing Voters

Nov. 25: Thanksgiving (no class)

**Discussion sections do not meet this week**

**Nov. 24—Research Paper Due [CT]**
Week 13—Metropolitan Planning

Nov. 30: Sprawl and Smart Growth

Dec. 2: The Regionalism Agenda

**Discussion Reading: Plater-Zyberk, Duany, and Speck, Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream**

**Discussion Project #5: Urban Planning Project [DP]**

Week 14—Culture of Fear

Dec. 7: Suburban Panics

Dec. 9: Victims and Heroes

**Discussion Reading: Burkett, Another Planet (pp. 1-40, 57-234, 245-321)
*Columbine Electronic Packet [ER]*

**Film #7: Thirteen (2003), dir. Catherine Hardwicke, 99 min.**

**Final Exam:** Dec. 16, 1:30-3:30 p.m. in Angell Aud. C. (Review guidelines will be posted on CTools by Dec. 1)