

Divided We Sprawl: Suburbs and Beyond

The New School, Spring 2008
Anthropology (NANT3629)
Mondays: 6:00-7:50pm
Building B, Room 465

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With housing developments bordering dairy farms, office parks adjoining urban centers, and New Urbanism projects flanking strip malls, it is difficult to demarcate suburban, urban, and rural. In their article, “Divided We Sprawl,” Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley suggest that we shed these divides and imagine ourselves as part of a collective metropolitan whole. At stake are not just interrelated problems of transportation, housing, jobs, welfare, and schools. With “frantic privacy” winning out over “spontaneous public life,” what becomes of our ability to mingle in crowds, encounter difference, and collectively tackle societal problems?

In this course, we explore history, culture, and politics of (and in) metropolitan centers, from the vantage point of the suburbs. Beginning with the origin of the Anglo-American suburb in 18th-century England, we work our way to contemporary debates over gated communities, both in the United States and abroad. We examine tensions between “public” and “private” in spaces ranging from living rooms and lawns to highways and malls. Readings include historical texts, ethnographic accounts, sociological commentaries, popular culture parodies, and period films.

Required Readings:

The following required texts are available for purchase at Shakespeare & Company (716 Broadway @ Washington Place, 212.529.1330). A coursepack of required reading materials is available for purchase at Advanced Copy Center (552 LaGuardia Place @ 3rd Street, 212.388.1001). The texts and the coursepack also are being held on reserve at Fogelman Library (65 Fifth Avenue):

- Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Kalita, S. Mitra. *Suburban Sahibs: Three Immigrant Families and Their Passage from India to America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003.
- Ross, Andrew. *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property Value in Disney’s New Town*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1999.

Assignments and Grading:

Weekly Journal (30%): Each week during which there are outside readings, credit students are required to submit 1-page of writing (typed, single-spaced). These weekly journals are a chance for you to process your thoughts on the week’s readings before our class discussion. The first couple of paragraphs should summarize the authors’ key ideas and arguments. The final

paragraph(s) may either discuss links to other weeks' readings or explore connections between issues raised in the material and your own observations of suburban life. Your grade for these short writings will reflect your critical engagement with the reading material. **Because the weekly journals are an opportunity to organize your thoughts *before* class, they will not be accepted after the date on which they are due.**

Class Participation (20%): Your grade for class participation is not calculated by how much you speak, but rather how you participate in enabling a lively and useful discussion. At times this means bouncing an idea off the group or bringing up something that's puzzling you. At other times this involves asking one of your peers to elaborate more fully on a thought that they are sharing. And sometimes this entails sitting quietly and holding onto an idea that can best be entertained at a later point in the discussion. It is important that everyone get the chance to participate fully in our class discussions. We will be learning as much from each other as we will from our readings and our writing projects. All credit students are required to attend our weekly classes, so I expect you to let me know if you are unable to attend. **Extenuating circumstances aside, your grade for the course as a whole will be lowered upon more than 2 absences.**

Ethnographic Writing Project: Students will select a suburb to explore in their Ethnographic Writing Project. You can choose a suburb about which you are curious but not yet familiar, or you can choose a suburb that you already know quite well. Whatever town you choose, you will need to make at least one visit during the semester. Students will meet with me during the first few weeks of class to discuss their choice of towns. Your ethnographic writing project will be divided into two separate, but connected formal essay papers:

- **“Town Description” Paper (20%):** Your first paper describes in 4-5 pages (typed, double-spaced) the suburb that is the focus of your study. Imagine that the reader of your paper has never been to the town; it is up to you to bring the place to life through vivid descriptive writing. When describing the town, be sure to touch upon key issues addressed in the first half of the course: What forms of transportation are available to town residents? What types of housing and landscaping does one see as they move through its streets? What are the kinds of public spaces (or private public spaces, for that matter) that are available to its citizens? What is the class, race, and ethnic make-up of the town? And how does the town imagine itself, as revealed through town hall materials and/or promotional advertisements from real estate brokers and developers? Be sure to draw on (and properly cite) at least two class readings that resonate with the issues raised in your description. We will discuss in detail in class how you will go about doing the research for this paper, both in terms of conducting an observation and examining relevant sources, such as U.S. Census Data and real estate advertisements.
- **“Town Predicament” Paper (30%):** Your second paper builds upon your description in the first part of your project, expanding it into a 9-10 page (typed, double-spaced) paper. In addition to incorporating feedback received on your first paper, this paper will expand to address a specific problem facing the town. You can choose an issue that is already under discussion in

the local papers, or you can ask a town resident or town official what they feel is a critical problem facing the town. For example, is there contention over certain types of people hanging out in the downtown area? If there is no downtown area, are there complaints from kids and adults about having no place to gather? If it is a highly developed area, has the construction of new housing developments created a traffic nightmare? Has it raised the question of affordable housing or environmental sustainability? The possibilities for your paper topics are endless, though they should incorporate questions addressed in our course readings. To explore the problem, you can either conduct participant observation at a specific place or carry out an interview with someone directly affected by the problem. We will discuss in detail in class both of these research methods. When writing the paper, be sure to draw on (and properly cite) at least two more class readings, as well as any sources drawn from local papers. The “Town Description” paper is due on **April 7th**, and the “Town Predicament” paper is due on **May 12th**. Late papers will not be accepted.

Other Important Information:

University Writing Center: The University Writing Center offers students individual tutoring sessions that cover every phase of the writing process. Students can meet with a tutor to revise a paper, to develop a rough draft, or to discuss how to organize an assignment. To find out more information or to make an appointment, go to <http://www.newschool.edu/admin/writingcenter>.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism will result in an F in the course in accordance with the University’s policy on plagiarism (see Student Handbook). Students should purchase *A Writer’s Reference* by Diana Hacker for information on proper citation format.

Students with Disabilities: In keeping with the University’s policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who needs academic accommodations should contact the office of Student Disability Services. All conversations will be kept confidential. Students requesting any accommodations will also need to meet with Jason Luchs in the office of Student Disability Services, who will conduct an intake, and if appropriate, provide an academic accommodation notification letter. Mr. Luchs’ office is located at 79 Fifth Avenue on the 5th floor. His direct line is 212.229.5626 x3135. You may also access more information through the University’s web site: <http://www.newschool.edu/student-services/disability>.

Class Schedule:

January 28: Introduction: The End of Suburbia?

- In-class documentary: “The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and the Collapse of the American Dream” (2004)

February 4: 18th-Century Influences: Changing Notions of Family, Country, and City

- Jackson, Kenneth T. “Suburbs as Slums” in *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 12-19.
- Fishman, Robert. “London: Birthplace of Suburbia” and “Building the Bourgeois Utopia” in *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 18-72.
- Williams, Raymond. “Family” and “Private” in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 108-111, 203-204.

February 11: Technological Innovations: Omnibus, Railroad, Streetcar, Trolley, and Car

- Jackson, Kenneth T. “The Transportation Revolution and the Erosion of the Walking City,” “The Main Line: Elite Suburbs and Commuter Railroads,” “The Time of the Trolley,” and “The New Age of Automobility” in *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 20-44, 87-115, 157-171.

February 19: Building the Dream: Domesticating Homes, Yards, and Real Estate

- *****Monday classes meet on Tuesday this week.*****
- Wright, Gwendolyn. “Independence and the Rural Cottage” in *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981), 73-89.
- Jackson, Kenneth T. “Romantic Suburbs” in *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 73-86.
- Wright, Gwendolyn. “Victorian Suburbs and the Cult of Domesticity” and “The Progressive Housewife and the Bungalow” in *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981), 93-113, 155-176.
- Pollan, Michael. “Why Mow?” in *Second Nature: A Gardener’s Education* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1991), 54-65.
- In-class documentary: “Suburbs: Arcadia for Everyone” (1986); clips on Llewellyn Park and Riverside
- Recommended reading: John Archer, “Country and City in the American Romantic Suburb,” *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42 (May 1983): 139-156.

February 25: Housing the Masses: Public or Private?

- Baxandall, Rosalynn and Elizabeth Ewen. “Housing the Masses: Ideas and Experiments,” “The New Deal: One Third of a Nation Still Unhoused,” “The Common Good: Public or Private,” “World War II: Baptism by Fire,” “Postwar Housing Policies: The McCarthy Hearings on Housing,” and “Homeownership: Is it Sound?” in *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 37-116.
- In-class documentary: “New York: A Documentary” (2001, Episode 7); clips on federal housing policies
- Recommended Reading: Robert A. Beauregard’s *When America Became Suburban* (2006).

March 3: Legislating Inequality: Class and Race Disparities

- Jackson, Kenneth T. “Federal Subsidy and the Suburban Dream: How Washington Changed the Housing Market” and “The Cost of Good Intentions: The Ghettoization of Public Housing in the United States” in *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 190-230.
- Cohen, Elizabeth. “Residence: Inequality in Mass Suburbia” in *A Consumer’s Republic: the Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 194-256.
- Wiese, Andrew. “Places of Our Own: Suburban Black Towns Before 1960.” *Journal of Urban History* 19 (May 1993): 30-54.
- Czeglédy, André P. “Getting Around Town: Transportation and the Built Environment in Post-Apartheid South Africa.” *City & Society* 16 (December 2004): 63-92.
- In-class documentaries: “Race: The Power of an Illusion; Episode III: The House We Live In” (2003)
- Recommended readings: Richard F. Babcock and Fred P. Bosselman’s *Exclusionary Zoning: Land Use Regulation and Housing in the 1970s* (1973); David L. Kirp, John P. Dwyer, and Larry A. Rosenthal’s *Our Town: Race, Housing, and the Soul of Suburbia* (1995); Constance Perin’s *Everything in its Place: Social Order and Land Use in America* (1977); and Richard F. Babcock and Fred P. Bosselman’s *Exclusionary Zoning: Land Use Regulation and Housing in the 1970s* (1973).

March 10: Driving to the Mall: Car Culture and Mass Consumption in Postwar America

- Jackson, Kenneth T. “The Drive-in Culture of Contemporary America” in *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 246-271.
- Cohen, Elizabeth. “Commerce: Reconfiguring Community Marketplaces” in *A Consumer’s Republic: the Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 257-289.
- Whyte, William H. “Inconspicuous Consumption” in *The Organization Man* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002[1956]), 312-329.
- In-class short-film: Redbook’s “In the Suburbs” (1957)
- Recommended readings: Keith Bradsher’s *High and Mighty: SUVs - The World’s Most Dangerous Vehicles and How They Got That Way* (2002); Mary Cahill’s *Carpool: A Novel of Suburban Frustration* (1991); James J. Flink’s *The Car Culture* (1975); John Keat’s *The Insolent Chariots* (1958); Jane Holtz Kay’s *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America, and How We Can Take it Back* (1997); William S. Kowinski’s *The Malling of America: An Inside Look at the Great Consumer Paradise* (1985); and Lewis Mumford’s *The Highway and the City* (1953).

March 17: No Class – Spring Break

March 24: Television, Journalism, and Feminism: Promoting and Critiquing the Ideal

- Spigel, Lynn. “The Suburban Home Companion: Television and the Neighborhood Ideal in Postwar America” in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).
- Whyte, William H. “The Web of Friendship” and “The Outgoing Life” in *The Organization Man* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002[1956]), 330-365.
- Freidan, Betty. “The Problem That Has No Name” and “Housewifery Expands to Fill the Time Available” in *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 15-32, 233-257.
- In-class documentary: “Home Economics: A Documentary of Suburbia” (1994)
- Recommended readings and films: Herbert Gans’ *The Levittowners* (1967); George Lipsitz’s *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (1990); “American Beauty” (1999); “Avalon” (1990); “No Down Payment” (1957); “Over the Edge” (1979); “Rebel Without a Cause” (1950); “Stepford Wives” (1975); and “The Ice Storm” (1997).

March 31: (Sub)urban?: Technoburbs, Edge Cities, Rural Fringes, and Exopolis

- Fishman, Robert. “Beyond Suburbia: The Rise of the Technoburb” in *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 182-207.
- Garreau, Joel. “Introduction” and “The Search for the Future Inside Ourselves: Life on the New Frontier” in *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), xix-xxiii, 3-15.
- Hayden, Dolores. “Rural Fringes” in *Building Suburbia: Greenfields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 181-197.
- Soja, Edward. “Inside Exopolis: Scenes from Orange County” in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 94-122.
- Recommended reading: Fred Dewey’s “Cyburbanism as a Way of Life” in *Architecture of Fear*, ed. Nan Ellin; and William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock. “Bold New City or Built Up ‘Burb?: Redefining Contemporary Suburbia.” *American Quarterly* 46 (March 1994) 1-30.

April 7: Peer Review Workshop

- *****Town Description paper due*****
- We will spend our in-class time workshopping your “Town Description” papers in preparation for the research and writing of your “Town Predicament” papers.

April 14: New Immigrants: Straight to the Suburbs

- Kalita, S. Mitra. *Suburban Sahibs: Three Immigrant Families and Their Passage from India to America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).
- Recommended reading: Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen’s “New Immigrants” in *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened*.
- Recommended film: “Farmingville” (2004)

April 21: Gated Communities: United States and Abroad

- Blakely, Edward J. and Mary Gail Snyder. "Forting Up" in *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 1-28.
- Low, Setha. "Fear of Crime," "Niceness and Property Values," and "Private Governance Taxes, and Moral Minimalism" in *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 111-131, 153-197.
- Kuppinger, Petra. "Exclusive Greenery: Gated Communities in Cairo." *City & Society* 16 (December 2004): 35-61.
- Website to view: anti-gated communities art project: <http://heavytrash.blogspot.com>
- In-class popular-culture parody: "The X-Files," Episode: "Arcadia" (1999)
- Recommended reading: Teresa P. R. Caldeira's *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo* (2000).

April 28: Metropolitan Planning, "Smart Growth," and New Urbanism

- Katz, Bruce and Jennifer Bradley. "Divided We Sprawl." *The Atlantic Monthly* 284 (December 1999): 26, 28, 30, 38-42.
- Hayden, Dolores. "The Importance of Older Suburbs" in *Building Suburbia: Greenfields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 230-248.
- Duany, Andres, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck. "Introduction," "How to Make a Town," and "The Congress for New Urbanism" in *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2000), ix-xiv, 183-214, 253-261.
- Recommended readings: Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton's *Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl* (2001); James Howard Kunstler's *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Manmade Landscape* (1993); and Myron Orfield's *Metropolitica: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability* (1997).

May 5: Everyday Life in a New Urbanist Town

- Ross, Andrew. *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property Value in Disney's New Town* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), selections.
- Recommended film: "The Truman Show" (1998)

May 12 Final Class

- ***Town Predicament paper due***