

Suburbia: Refuge, Fortress, or Prison

a joint graduate/undergraduate seminar

Soc 152b
Brandeis University
Fall 2007
W 2:10-5:00
Pearlman 202

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W 12:00-1:00
and by appointment

From its beginnings, American suburbia has been defined as a place apart. Constructed in the nineteenth century as a environment where individuals, especially middle class women and children, could escape the perceived evils of the city, American suburbs have long been associated with nature, the primacy of the family, and the search for the tranquility that comes from residing among the socially similar. Yet the dream of splendid isolation -- from threatening classes and races, from social problems, and from competing influences on the family's affections -- has not been so easy to maintain. Diverse populations have moved in, women and children have not always been content to stay in, soothing nature has disappeared as development has expanded, and social problems have both come knocking at the door and emerged home-grown from suburban soil. This course examines these various developments along with debates about who suburbia is designed to serve, who has access to it and how access is limited, and who actually benefits from suburban environments. We explore these questions with a particular emphasis on race, class, age, and gender. While we will spend some time looking at the historical development of American suburbia, much of our focus will be on the contemporary era with a view towards trying to understand whether there is an identifiable suburban culture, whether suburbia can still be characterized as closed and homogenous, and how these characteristics are related to the attributes that some find so gratifying and others find so stifling.

Requirements

This is a seminar, and therefore students are expected to play an active role in carrying the class. In order to do so, it is essential that you keep up with the readings and participate in discussions. Twice during the semester, in groups of two, you will be responsible for leading class discussion. In addition, you will complete a short (5-6 page) paper on course material, and a research paper on a topic of your choice (subject to my approval). Research papers should be 12-15 pages for undergrads, and 20-30 pages for grad students.

Evaluation

Short paper	25%
Class participation	30%
Research paper	45%

Students are expected to uphold standards of academic integrity. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person

without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use references and, where appropriate, quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, or ideas not your own -- whether they are found in written materials or on the Internet, and whether they are created by a published author, another student, or your parent. Violations of University policies on academic integrity may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. Students with questions about standards of academic integrity are advised to consult Section 4 of Rights and Responsibilities from the Brandeis Student Handbook and/or speak to me. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course, you must ask for clarification.

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, you should contact me, and present your letter of accommodation, as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations, you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay In Academic Services at 736-3470. Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

The following books are available for purchase from the university bookstore:

Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Sonya Salamon, *Newcomers to Old Towns: Suburbanization of the Heartland*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Setha Low, *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Lorraine Delia Kenny, *Daughters of Suburbia: Growing Up White, Middle Class, and Female*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000.

Wayne Brekhaus, *Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

All but the Low and Brekhaus books are also presently on reserve in the library. The library does not yet own the Low and Brekhaus books; I have requested these books be purchased, and hopefully they will be on reserve by the time you need to read them.

Readings for Weeks 2 and 3 are on the Latte site for this class.

All other readings are contained in a custom course packet. Information on how to purchase this will be announced in class.

Course Schedule

Readings marked with an asterisk are required for graduate students and recommended for undergrads. All other readings are required for everyone.

week 1
Sep 5

Introduction

week 2
Sep 12

Defining, Defending, and Critiquing the Suburbs

David Riesman, "The Suburban Sadness." In William M. Dobriner, ed., *The Suburban Community*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1958, pp. 375-408.

Herbert J. Gans, "Urbanism and Suburbanism as Ways of Life: A Re-Evaluation of Definitions." In Sylvia Fleis Fava, ed., *Urbanism in World Perspective: A Reader*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968, pp. 63-81.

William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock, "Bold New City or Built-Up 'Burb?: Redefining Contemporary Suburbia." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 1, March 1994, pp. 1-30.

Brett W. Hawkins and Stephen L. Percy, "On Anti-Suburban Orthodoxy." *Social Science Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 3, September 1991, pp. 478-490.

week 3
Sep 19

Who Built Suburbia I

Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*. New York: Basic Books, 1987, Introduction, chap. 1.

Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, Introduction, chaps. 1 & 7.

* Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, chaps. 2-3.

* Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, chaps. 3-4.

week 4
Oct 3

Who Built Suburbia II

Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, chaps. 10-13, 15-16.

* Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, chaps. 8-9, 14.

week 5
Oct 10

A Gendered Space?

Clifford E. Clark Jr., "Ranch-House Suburbia: Ideals and Realities." In Lary May,

ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp. 171-191.

Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen, *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened*. New York: Basic Books, 2000, chap. 15.

Kim V.L. England, "Changing Suburbs, Changing Women: Geographic Perspectives on Suburban Women and Suburbanization." *Frontiers*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1993, pp. 24-43.

week 6
Oct 17

Creating One Refuge Out of Another

Sonya Salamon, *Newcomers to Old Towns: Suburbanization of the Heartland*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, chaps. 1-2, 4, 6-7.

* Salamon, *Newcomers to Old Towns*, entire book.

week 7
Oct 24

The Meaning of Refuge

Tom Martinson, *American Dreamscape: The Pursuit of Happiness in Postwar Suburbia*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2000, "Why Are the Suburbs So Bad?" (pp. 125-139).

Constance Perin, *Belonging in America: Reading Between the Lines*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988, "Imperfect People" (pp. 143-174).

Nancy G. Duncan and James S. Duncan, "Deep Suburban Irony: The Perils of Democracy in Westchester County, New York." In Roger Silverstone, ed., *Visions of Suburbia*. London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 161-179.

short paper due

week 8
Oct 31

Constructing the Fortress -- Old Style

Charles M. Lamb, *Housing Segregation in Suburban America since 1960: Presidential and Judicial Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, chap. 5.

Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn against Liberalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985, Introduction, chap. 6.

* Lamb, *Housing Segregation in Suburban America since 1960*, chap. 6.

* Rieder, *Canarsie*, chap. 7.

week 9
Nov 7

Constructing the Fortress -- New Style

Setha Low, *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America*. New York: Routledge, 2003, Prologue, chaps. 1-2, 5-8.

* Low, *Behind the Gates*, entire book.

week 10
Nov 14

Safe Inside or No Way Out: Suburban Seniors and Suburban Youth

John M. Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, chap. 4.

Susanne Hand, "Making the Suburban State: Teenagers, Design, and Communities in New Jersey." In Kathryn Grover, ed. *Teenage New Jersey 1941-1975*. Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1997, pp. 13-36.

Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, "'Respectable People': Growing Up Black in the New Jersey Suburbs." In Kathryn Grover, ed. *Teenage New Jersey 1941-1975*. Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1997, pp. 37-49.

William L. Hamilton, "How Suburban Design Is Failing Teen-Agers." *New York Times* May 6, 1999, pp. F1, F4.

Catherine Saint Louis, "The Art of Boredom," *New York Times Magazine* April 9, 2000, pp. 74-78.

* Donna Gaines, *Teenage Wasteland: Suburbia's Dead End Kids*. New York: Pantheon, 1991, pp. 39-87.

week 11
Nov 21

A Suburban Identity? Learning Age, Race, Gender, and Class in the 'Burbs

France Winddance Twine, "Brown-Skinned White Girls: Class, Culture, and the Construction of White Identity in Suburban Communities." In Ruth Frankenberg, ed., *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997, pp. 214-243.

Lorraine Delia Kenny, *Daughters of Suburbia: Growing Up White, Middle Class, and Female*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000, chaps. 4-6.

* Kenny, *Daughters of Suburbia*, entire book.

Transformation or Incorporation: Suburban Diversification...

week 12
Nov 28

...by Race and Immigration

Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, chaps. 8-9.

Sarah J. Mahler, *Salvadorans in Suburbia: Symbiosis and Conflict*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995, chap. 5.

* Wiese, *Places of Their Own*, chaps. 6-7.

week 13
Dec 5

...by Sexual Orientation

Wayne Brekhaus, *Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, chaps. 2-4, 6.

* Brekhaus, *Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs*, chaps. 1, 7.

Final paper due Monday, December 17th