History 395: The American Suburban Experience

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Moravian College
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This upper level history course will explore how the suburban experience in the United States developed and transformed the nation’s political, social and cultural landscape. Although the course will provide an introduction to the long history of this development, the course will focus most extensively on the post-1945 changes that define the last fifty years of the nation’s history. Issues covered will include such topics as the development of political and social movements such as the tax revolution and environmental movement, critiques of the fast food industry, the sprawl debate and questions that center on schooling, housing and zoning policies and the racial structures of spatial development.

Since this course is grounded in our everyday life experiences, we can expect to have an engaging course—to do this, I will depend upon you to bring your detailed assessment of the assigned readings. The most important aspect of each class meeting will be our in-class discussions. Each week, I will provide a sense of what areas to address in your readings to help guide your reading, although you are also expected to raise your own questions and themes as well.

Books: All books are available at the Moravian College Bookstore. Please note that selected readings have been photocopied and are available in Reeves Library and the History Department Lounge in Comenius Hall.


Please note additional readings are available on reserve in the library and in the History Department lounge.
Grading and Assignments

Participation: 20%
As an upper-level special topics course, weekly class discussions based upon thorough interpretation of the assigned readings will form a major component of our class experience. You are expected to read all of the materials by the time our seminar meets, and be prepared to discuss the readings thoughtfully and in-depth. Each week, I will provide the class with a set of questions or reflection points to help guide the readings and set a possible tone for our discussions. For those who have taken classes with me in the past, please note that these are not “focus questions” on which your exams will be based; instead, they will provide an initial context for understanding the texts selected. It is hoped that you will go beyond these points and raise your own questions. Superior participation is marked not only by thoughtful contributions to our class discussions, but an intellectual vigor that displays original thinking on this emerging topic in American history.

Since we only meet once a week, it is imperative that you be in class. If you anticipate that you will be late or absent, please inform me via email or telephone. While such notification will be appreciated and understood as a courtesy, it will not be viewed as excusing the absence or lateness. Cases of absence based on medical circumstances or family related health issues will be excused, provided a doctor’s note is given.

Mid-term Exam 1: 10%
Mid-term Exam 2: 15%
Two mid-term bluebook exams will be given based upon all assigned readings, lectures, films and discussions.

Final Exam: 20%
A cumulative final exam will be given during finals week at a time and location determined by the Registrar.

Final Paper: 25%
A major component of this course is the completion of a major research paper on a topic of your choosing. Papers should follow standard format for History Papers (including footnotes at the bottom of the page and a bibliography) and include no less than 10 scholarly sources from books and/or articles. Each student is expected to consult with me about the topic selected and produce a preliminary bibliography no later than October 11.

Weekly reading reflections: 10%
Each week, you will hand in a 1 page (250 word) overview of the assigned readings. The overviews will provide a brief summary of the readings and also include any specific insights that you gained, possible connections to previous readings and themes raised in the class, points of disagreement with the author, as well as any questions that you would
like to raise in class. Reflections should be typed and single spaced. I will provide you with feedback on the reflections from week to week.

**August 30: Introduction to the class**

**September 6: The Politics of Home**

Readings: Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier, Chapters 9-12*

**September 13: The 1950s in Popular Memory**

Readings: Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier, Chapters 13-14*

David M. P. Freund, “Marketing the Free Market: State Intervention and the Politics of Prosperity in Metropolitan America,” in *The New Suburban History.*

**September 20: June Cleaver’s Nation: Women and the New Domesticity in the Post-War Period**


**September 27: Schooling, Race and the Meaning of Community.**

Readings: Matthew D. Lassiter, “Socioeconomic Integration” in the Suburbs: From Reactionary Populism to Class Fairness in Metropolitan Charlotte, in *The New Suburban History.*

**October 4: The Meaning of Suburban Community in Post-War America**

*Far From Heaven* shown in class


**October 11: Midterm 1**


*Preliminary Bibliography for Final papers Due in Class*
October 18: The Fiction of Suburbia


October 25: James Howard Kunstler and the Anti-Aesthetics of Suburbia

Reading: James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere*, pp. 9-131

November 1: The Sprawl Debate


David Harvey, “The New Urbanism and the Communitarian Trap,”
Matthew J. Kiefer, “Suburbia and its Discontents: Notes from the Sprawl Debate.”
Alex Krieger, “The Cost—and Benefits?—of Sprawl.”
Ellen Dunham-Jones “Smart Growth in Atlanta: A Response to Krieger and Kiefer.”

November 8: Lifestyle and Consumption

Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*.

November 15: Midterm 2

November 22—Thanksgiving holiday

November 29: New Perspectives on American Society: The Crisis of the Family

*The Ice Storm* shown in class.


December 6: Looking to the Future

Final class meeting


Kenneth Jackson, “Retrospect and Prospect,” *Crabgrass Frontier*, Chapter 16.