

Images of the Suburbs

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Office Hours: Tues & Thurs 10 a.m.-noon & Wed & Fri 1-2:30 p.m.

Required Texts:

John Cheever, The Stories of John Cheever

Jeffrey Eugenides, The Virgin Suicides

A. M. Homes, Music for Torching

Rick Moody, The Ice Storm

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

Lynn Spigel, Make Room for TV: Television and the Ideal Family in Postwar America

This syllabus is online at <http://www.dickinson.edu/~gill/syllabi.htm>

Course Description:

Suburban America, where more of us now live than live in rural and urban America combined, has been characterized as an intellectual, spiritual, and cultural wasteland dominated by consumerism, anonymity, and conformity. At the same time, the suburbs have been depicted as a “green-lawned paradise,” the culmination of the American Dream. This seminar will examine the range of images of the suburbs that come to us from television, movies, and books. We will look at television family sitcoms of the 1950s and ‘60s, which continue to shape so much of our thinking about suburbia. We will look at satirical exposes of the dark side of suburban life that dominate so many contemporary films and novels. By focusing on representations of life in the suburbs in the popular media and serious literature, we will trace the changing images of the suburbs in the media and the influence of these images on our perceptions and misperceptions of suburban life in America in the past 50 years. To frame some of the issues and debates about the suburbs and their representation in the media, we will read some historical and social critiques of the suburbs and popular culture.

Course Objectives:

The overarching goal of this and other freshman seminars is to introduce you to important aspects of college-level academic work: critical thinking, effective writing, careful reading, engaged discussion, and research skills. In reading, writing, and discussion, we will focus on the concept of argument and the construction and communication of effective arguments. I hope you will develop your ability to recognize and critique the arguments of others and to formulate and defend your own arguments on the basis of logical thinking and evidence. Though I hope you will find the subject matter of the seminar interesting, I am more interested in helping you develop the intellectual skills and habits of mind that will serve you well throughout your academic career at Dickinson and beyond.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Your course grade will be determined by the following criteria:

Paper #1	15%
Paper #2	15%
Paper #3	20%
Paper #4	25%
Participation	25%

Each of the four papers will go through a drafting, critiquing, and revising process. The grade on the final version of each paper will take into account the extent and effectiveness of your revision. Included in your participation grade are miscellaneous assignments such as reading responses, preparation of questions for class discussion, and research exercises; meeting deadlines; oral and written responses on classmates' drafts; and contribution to class discussion.

Paper topics and guidelines will be given to you as the semester progresses. For each paper, you will have ample time for writing the first version and for revising after writing workshops and conferences. You are encouraged to visit the Writing Center at any point in the writing process. All papers (first and final versions) must be word-processed and meet standard format practices: double-spaced; pages numbered, first page with title, your name, and date of submission; consistent citation and documentation style (MLA is the easiest). Late papers will not be accepted, and plagiarism will not be tolerated (see the Student Handbook for the definition of plagiarism). If you have any questions about citation (what should be cited and how), please ask us.

Kirk Moll is our library liaison; he will meet with us once or twice during the semester to talk about research and resources available in the library and online. Our linked Writing Center consultant is Brooke Digges, a senior English major and co-head tutor. I encourage you to make use of their knowledge, expertise, and willingness to help you in this seminar with your research and writing. I also hope you will come see me or email me with questions or concerns about any aspect of the seminar.

Course Schedule:

Mon, Sept 3	Introduction and Syllabus
Wed, Sept 5	The Suburbs: what are they and where did they come from? Excerpts from Robert Fishman's <u>Bourgeois Utopias</u> and Kenneth Jackson's <u>Crabgrass Frontier</u>
Fri, Sept 7	Points of View: in defense of the suburbs: excerpts from Tom Martinson's <u>American Dreamscape</u> and Irving Allen's <u>New Towns and the Suburban Dream</u>
Mon, Sept 10	Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck, <u>Suburban Nation</u> , pp. 3-96 (chapters 1-5)
Wed, Sept 12	<u>Suburban Nation</u> , pp. 115-151 and 183-214 (chapters 7, 8, and 10)
*Fri, Sept 14	Draft of paper #1 due
Mon, Sept 17	John Cheever stories
Wed, Sept 19	John Cheever stories
Fri, Sept 21	John Cheever stories

*Mon, Sept 24	Final version of paper #1 due TV sitcoms of the '50s and '60s
Wed, Sept. 26	TV sitcoms of the '50s and '60s
Fri, Sept 28	Lynn Spiegel's <u>Make Room for TV</u>
Mon, Oct 1	<u>Make Room for TV</u>
Wed, Oct 3	<u>Make Room for TV</u>
Fri, Oct 5	Draft of paper #2 due
Mon, Oct 8	Workshop
Wed, Oct 10	Workshop
Fri, Oct 12	Workshop
Mon, Oct 15	Discussion of <u>Pleasantville</u>
Wed, Oct 17	Rick Moody's <u>The Ice Storm</u>
Fri, Oct 19	<u>The Ice Storm</u> Final version of paper #2 due
Mon, Oct 22	Midterm Pause
Wed, Oct 24	<u>The Ice Storm</u>
Fri, Oct 26	Library Session
Mon, Oct 29	Jeffrey Eugenides, <u>The Virgin Suicides</u>
Wed, Oct 31	<u>The Virgin Suicides</u>
*Fri, Nov 2	<u>The Virgin Suicides</u> Draft of paper #3 due
Mon, Nov 5	Discussion of <u>American Beauty</u>
Wed, Nov 7	Contemporary tv family sitcoms
Fri, Nov 9	Contemporary tv family sitcoms
Mon, Nov 12	A. M. Homes' <u>Music for Torching</u>
*Wed, Nov 14	<u>Music for Torching</u> Final version of paper #3 due
Fri, Nov 16	<u>Music for Torching</u>
Mon, Nov 19	TBA

Wed, Nov 21	Thanksgiving Vacation
Fri, Nov 23	Thanksgiving Vacation
*Mon, Nov 26	Draft of paper #4 due
Wed, Nov 28	Workshop
Fri, Nov 30	Workshop
Mon, Dec 3	Workshop
Wed, Dec 5	Wrap-up and Evaluation
*Fri, Dec 7	Final version of paper #4 due