American Landscapes:
History, Culture, and the Built Environment

Course Syllabus
Geography 160
Spring 2019

Instructor:
Dr. Peter Ekman
psrekman@berkeley.edu

3 Le Conte Hall
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.

This course introduces ways of seeing, describing, interpreting, and speculating on how everyday American built environments have given shape and meaning to social life. To that end, it surveys transformations in the country’s vernacular urban, suburban, and (to some extent) rural landscapes, at several scales: houses, yards, storefronts, parks, fences, fields, street patterns, workplaces, transit infrastructures, billboards, gas stations, and more. Addressed at one level to landscape as material culture, the course also assembles an eclectic intellectual history of lay and official attempts to study, define, critique, make sense of, represent, and intervene on ordinary Americans and their space.

Readings include primary as well as secondary sources. Sections will include some exercises in field study, in addition to textual and visual analysis.

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GSIs
John Elrick: jelrick@berkeley.edu
Eve McGlynn: emcglynn@berkeley.edu

There are four discussion sections, each of which meets once a week for an hour in 135 McCone Hall:
Tuesdays at 10:00 a.m. (Section 101; Eve)
Tuesdays at 4:00 p.m. (Section 102; Eve)
Thursdays at 10:00 a.m. (Section 103; John)
Thursdays at 11:00 a.m. (Section 104; John)

Lectures happen twice a week: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m., in 3 Le Conte Hall.

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Office Hours
Each member of the teaching team will hold two hours’ worth of office hours each week. No appointment needed:

Peter Ekman: Tuesdays, 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., 561 McCone
John Elrick: Thursdays, 12:00 to 2:00 p.m., 193 McCone
Eve McGlynn: TBD
**Week 1: Methods for a History of the Landscape**  
(January 22 and 24)


*Recommended:*


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**PART I: COLONIAL LANDSCAPES**

**Week 2: Town, Country, and Colony in New England**  
(January 29 and 31)

1/29: Township as Cosmic Order: Organicity and Hierarchy

1/31: Fences and Fields: Allocating Land and Landscape


Recommended:

Week 3: Native Landscapes, New Europes, and the Shape of Sovereignty
(February 5 and 7)
2/5: Openings: Landscape and Life Before Europeanization
2/7: Colonial Closures: Beyond New England


Recommended:

(February 12 and 14)
2/12: Georgian Order: Spaces of a Slave Society in the Tidewater and Points South
2/14: Near Wests: Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic, and the Landscapes of Capital


Recommended:


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**PART II: SHAPING THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY**

**Week 5: Gridding City and Country**  
*(February 19 and 21)*

2/19: New Units, New Lines: The Grid, the Fence, the Camp, and the West  
2/21: Street Grids and the Shape of the Urban Future


**Recommended:**


**Week 6: Water, Fabric, Steam, and Steel: Industrializing Space and Time (February 26 and 28)**

2/26: Infrastructures of “Communication”: Turnpikes, Canals, and Textiles
2/28: Railroad Time: Between Rationality and the Sublime

*The Lowell Offering* (1840–1845), selections


**Recommended:**


**Week 7: Sorting Out the Industrial Metropolis: Urban Form and Progressive Reform (March 5 and 7)**

3/5: Engineering the American Downtown
3/7: Reforming City Life: Density, Decentralization, and “Efficiency”


**Recommended:**


**Week 8: The Edges of the Metropolis: Suburbs of First and Last Resort**

(March 12 and 14)

3/12: Industrial Borderlands; or, The Machine in the Garden

3/14: Residential Suburbs Before the Automobile

Mason–McDuffie and Baldwin & Howell, *St. Francis Wood* (1912; pamphlet not included in reader).


Grosvenor Atterbury, “Model Towns in America,” *Scribner’s* 52 (July 1912), 20–35.


**Recommended:**


Week 9: Regional Visions, Neotechnic Landscapes, and Interwar Critique; Also, the Midterm (March 19 and 21)
3/19: Flow and the “Fourth Migration”

*The City* (1939; film)

Recommended:

March 21: MIDTERM EXAM

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NO CLASS MARCH 26 OR 28: SPRING BREAK

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PART III: MIDCENTURY MILIEUX

Week 10: Landscapes and Legacies of the New Deal
(April 2 and 4)
4/2: Conservation and the Rural New Deal
4/4: The Sub-Urban New Deal: Resettling America, Regionally

**Recommended:**


**Week 11: Wartime Mobilizations, Postwar Mobilities: From Atomic Landscapes to Autopia (April 9 and 11)**

4/9: Landscapes of Total War: Nucularity and Dispersal

4/11: The View from the Road: The Highway, the Strip, and the Art of Motion


**Recommended:**


Week 12: The Forms of the “Formless” Suburb
(April 16 and 18)
4/16: Single-Family, Single-Use: Landscapes of “Total Living”


Recommended:


Christopher Grampp, *From Yard to Garden* (Chicago: Center for American Places, 2008)


Week 13: Between Demolition and Reuse: New Downtowns for Old
(April 23 and 25)
4/23: Beyond the Federal Bulldozer: Urban Renewal as American Vernacular
4/25: After the Planners: New Uses for Old Cities


*Form, Design, and the City* (1962; film)


**Recommended:**


Sharon Zukin, Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).


**April 25: Final paper due**

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**CODA**

**Week 14: Goodbye, Twentieth Century: Abandonment, the Ruinscape, and the Future (April 30 and May 2)**


**Recommended:**


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“RRR”: May 6 to 10

Final exam: Monday, May 13, 11:30 a.m.

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Readings

One bound reader containing all assigned texts is available for purchase at Copy Central at 2411 Telegraph Avenue. Note that there are multiple Copy Central locations within reach of campus; only the one at 2411 Telegraph has the reader. Buy the reader. Virtually all the books and journal articles reprinted therein are available in the Berkeley library system, and one copy of the reader will be kept on reserve in Doe Library, but the readings will not be posted online. You are, of course, free to buy any of the books excerpted in the reader (or to consult Peter Ekman for further recommendations on any topic). The readings marked “recommended” on the syllabus are purely optional. They represent small, curated extracts of conversations that have been going on for generations.

The following required books will be available for purchase at the Cal Student Store (or elsewhere):

Henry James, The American Scene;
Benton MacKaye, The New Exploration; and
Paul Reyes, Exiles in Eden.

One copy of each of these books will be on two-hour reserve all semester long at the Moffitt Library circulation desk.

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Grading

Section participation: 25%
Midterm exam: 20%
Research paper: 25%
Final exam: 30%

Attendance is not formally part of the grading calculations. That is to say, you are not awarded points solely for showing up. There are only deductions for absences. It is assumed that you will be present for both lecture and section. Attendance will occasionally be taken in lecture without warning. More than one unaccounted-for absence from section will readily put your grade in jeopardy.

The major written assignment for this course, due at the last lecture, is a research paper on an American landscape, or a set of landscapes, of your choosing. Your topic need not be local. You will have considerable freedom in choosing a paper topic. Details on this assignment will come later in the term.

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Technology and Plagiarism

The use of electronic devices — laptops, tablets, phones, cameras, voice recorders, etc. — will categorically not be allowed in the classroom during either lecture or section. A significant body of research shows that humans learn better when taking notes by hand. Even without confirmation by said research, it is perfectly obvious that these devices, while useful, pose distractions to you and to others.

There will be a bCourses site for Geography 160, through which Peter Ekman may occasionally send resources or reminders. Your GSI may set up a section-specific bCourses site as well.

Plagiarism of any sort will result in the severest punishment allowable. Refer to Berkeley’s Campus Code of Student Conduct if you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, academic dishonesty more broadly, or their consequences.

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Health Resources

Counseling & Psychological Services (CPS) and Social Services (SOS), both housed at University Health Services at the Tang Center, make themselves available for students in need. The Student Learning Center (SLC) offers various forms of academic support, including tutoring, advising, and assistance with written work. Consult the website of any of these units to schedule an appointment.

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Welcome

Although this is an upper-division course, there are no prerequisites. Students from absolutely all departments and disciplinary traditions are welcome. Previous iterations of this course were cross-listed with Environmental Design and American Studies. Students have often come from History, Art History, Rhetoric, the various CED tracks, the various social sciences, and ESPM, in addition to Geography.