HSS 404 – HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN SUBURB

Professor Kyle Riismandel
Spring 2012
Monday/Wednesday 1:00-2:25PM
Office – Cullimore Hall 326
Office Hours – Tuesday, 4-5PM

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
In this course, we will explore the history of the American suburb seeking to find how it has been defined and represented at different points in American history. In particular, we will explore the various narratives, images, and ideas that helped Americans make sense of suburban life. To do this we will do close readings of texts including but not limited to film, television, news media, and the built environment paying special attention to how discourses of consumerism, family, the environment, race, home ownership, and home defense shaped suburban life.

COURSE GOALS:
1. Understand the history of American suburbs including being able to identify the ways in which Americans both physically built and represented in culture suburbs at various times in American history
2. Identify and analyze primary and secondary historical evidence
3. Complete a long-term writing and research project using the skills of historical research and analysis learned throughout the semester

ASSIGNMENTS
Class Participation:
Attendance is mandatory. We have a small class based in large part on your participation. Without your attendance and participation, the class suffers. Participation in the context of this course does not simply mean showing up to class. You are asked to be active in and engaged with class discussions. This means you have done the week’s work before coming to class and have thought about the issues and questions I have raised for the week. This also means that you should respect your fellow students and me. During class, this includes but is not limited to refraining from all non-class related activities such as side conversations, text and instant messaging, completing homework for other courses, sleeping, and surfing the Internet.

Final Paper:
The assignments in the class will be the building blocks of the final paper as well as the final paper itself. This paper will be a chance for you to apply the skills you learn throughout the semester to write a 10–15 page paper analyzing a representation of American suburbs in its historical context. Each step in completing the paper, from the paper proposal to the final draft, will be completed in consultation with the
instructor. Further instructions will be distributed throughout the semester to guide you in your work.

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

Class Participation  - 40%
Final Paper   - 60%
  Paper Proposal    - 8%
  Outline and Lit Review - 12%
  Rough Draft      - 15%
  Final Draft      - 25%

Course Policies
Attendance:
Students are expected to attend all course meetings on-time unless receiving prior authorization.

Missing class will not only adversely affect your class participation grade, but there will be screenings in class that will only be offered during that class period so do your best to attend. If you accrue more than 5 unexcused absences, you will receive an F in this course. This policy refers to all absences, including missing class because you are ill or have a family emergency. However, if you miss class to attend an NJIT sponsored event, to observe a religious holiday, or documented illness such absences will be excused. For these absences to count as excused, you must receive permission from the instructor in advance or provide a doctor's note in the case of sickness.

Office hours/student appointments: My office hours will be every Tuesday from 4-5 PM. I am also available to meet by appointment if students are unable to make it to my office during these times. Feel free to send me an email to set up a meeting if you’d like to talk to me. And please feel free to come by if you have any questions about course topics, assignments, or grades.

Academic dishonesty: Students are expected to obey the NJIT honor code, and I will enforce this code to its fullest extent. For the tenets of the code or for clarification of what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please consult:

Cell phones: Students must turn off their cell phones before class begins. Under no circumstances may students answer their phones, make calls, send text messages, or use their cell phone in any manner during class hours unless approved by me before class begins. If I see a student using a cell phone in class, I will at minimum mark that student absent for the class and reserve the right to ask the student to leave for the remainder of the class. I do not want to interrupt class to ask you to stop texting. It interrupts the flow of discussion, distracts other students, and will inevitably embarrass the texter.
Laptops and miscellaneous technology rules: Students may use laptops in this course for class-related activities only. If I learn that students are using laptops for any other purpose, I will issue a laptop ban for this class. Students are also prohibited from listening to ipods or using any other device in this class that has not received prior authorization. Essentially, you are in class approximately 3 hours a week. Please be present and prepared when you are here. If you would rather text or surf the internet, please do not come to class.

Students with Disabilities or Special Needs: Students who have disabilities or special needs should contact NJIT’s Student Disability Services to help procure accommodations in completing coursework. The center can be found at http://www.njit.edu/counseling/services/disabilities.php.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

**WEEK 1**
JAN. 18TH - Introductions/Course Expectations/What is a Suburb?

**WEEK 2**
JAN 23 – Borderlands/Streetcar Suburbs
JAN 25 - Discussion
Primary Text: Design of Llewellyn Park, NJ

**WEEK 3**
JAN 30 – “White Flight” and Making the Postwar Suburb
FEB 1 – Discussion

**WEEK 4**
FEB 6 – Representing the Nuclear Family in Suburbia
FEB 8 – Discussion/Screening
Primary Text: *Leave it To Beaver* (1957)
Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, pp. 23–42

**WEEK 5**
FEB 13 - Conformity and Suburban Ennui
FEB 15 – Discussion
Secondary Texts: Scott Donaldson, The Suburban Myth, Ch. 12 “The Fictional
WEEK 6
FEB 20 – “Not In My Backyard!” – Environmentalism in the Suburbs
FEB 22 – Discussion

WEEK 7
FEB 27 – Shopping and Consumerism in Modern Suburbia
FEB 29 – Discussion/Mall walking tour
Secondary Text: Margaret Crawford, “The World in a Shopping Mall,” in Variations on a Theme Park

WEEK 8
MARCH 5 – Safety and Security in the Suburbs
MARCH 7 – Screening
Primary Text: Arlington Road (1999)

SPRING BREAK – MARCH 11-18

WEEK 9
MARCH 19 – Discussion
MARCH 21 – The Suburban Family at the End of the Century

WEEK 10
MARCH 26 – Screening
Primary Text: The Simpsons (1989–Present)
MARCH 28 – Discussion
Secondary Text: Jonathan Gray, Watching with the Simpsons: Television, Parody, and Intertextuality, pp. 43-69, 142-169

WEEK 11
APRIL 2 – What is a suburb? Edge City? Exurb?/Discussion
Secondary Text: Sharpe and Wollock, “Bold New City or Built-Up ’Burb?”
APRIL 4 – Topic Selection and the Paper Proposal Process

WEEK 12
APRIL 9 – NO CLASS/Work on Proposals
APRIL 11 – Individual Meetings to discuss proposals

WEEK 13
APRIL 16 – NO CLASS/Work on Outline and Literature Review
APRIL 18 – Individual Meetings to Discuss Outlines and Lit Reviews
**WEEK 14**
APRIL 23 – NO CLASS/Work on Rough Draft
APRIL 25 – PEER REVIEW

**WEEK 15**
APRIL 30 – Rough Draft Due/Individual Meetings to Discuss Rough Drafts
**FINAL DRAFT DUE: MAY 11, 5PM**