instructor: Jessica Sewell  
course title: American Landscapes  
institution: Boston University  
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This course uses the idea of landscape as an interdisciplinary lens for exploring American culture. We will examine the physical and metaphorical landscape of America across time, exploring how we have shaped the landscape, used it to define ourselves as a nation, and asked it to serve as resource, religion, symbol, and setting.

Requirements

Participation and Reaction Papers

The primary requirement of the course is participation: doing the reading, coming to class, and participating in discussion. Absences will seriously affect your participation grade. The success of the class depends on your preparation and participation; please come to class having completed the reading and ready to discuss it.

You will write short, informal weekly reaction papers to each set of readings, which you will post on a discussion board on the Blackboard website by Sunday night. These informal papers are not graded, but are required, and will count towards your participation grade. More importantly, they will help you fully engage in discussion.

Participation, including reaction papers, will be worth 50% of your grade for the course.

Research Paper

This course will culminate in a research paper that uses the idea of landscape to explore an aspect of American Culture. As this course in interdisciplinary and the background of students is varied, you may use a wide range of methods and sources for this paper. For undergraduates, the paper will be 15 pages long; for graduate students, the paper should be approximately 25 pages long. You will be handing in a proposal and preliminary bibliography for the paper on February 27, and will be presenting your research to your colleagues in class in one of the last three sessions. The paper, including proposal and presentation, is worth 50% of your grade for the course. The paper is due Monday, April 27.
For all assignments, you are required to follow the rules of style laid out in Kate Turabian et. al.’s *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, which has been ordered as a required book. It will tell you what you need to know about margins, spacing, footnotes, punctuation, etc. Use it. I also recommend reading and paying heed to Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*.

All work done for this class must be in accordance with the academic conduct code, available online at http://www.bu.edu/cas/academics/programs/conductcode.html.

**Assessment**

- Participation: 50%
- Paper: 50%

**Readings**

Most of the readings required for this class are available online through the courseinfo site in the course documents folder or online through the links folder. You can access the site by going to http://blackboard.bu.edu. You will need to sign in to the site using your Kerberos password and username. Other sources are available online on Google books.

**Required Books**


**Recommended Books**


Schedule of Course Meetings

Class 1: Jan 16  Introductions

Class 2: Jan. 23  Cultural Landscapes

Pierce Lewis, “Axioms for Reading the Landscape” in Meinig, ed. The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes.

Class 3: Jan 30  Landscape as Resource

William Cronon. Chapters 2-4, 8 in Changes in the Land

Class 4: Feb 6  The American Landscape

James Vance, “Democratic Utopia and the American Landscape” in Conzen, ed. The Making of the American Landscape
Class 5: Feb 13  

**Order**

Hildegard Binder Johnson, “Toward a National Landscape” in Conzon, ed. *The Making of the American Landscape*

Wilbur Zelinsky, “The Imprint of Central Authority” in Conzon, ed. *The Making of the American Landscape*


Class 6: Feb 20  

**The Sublime**

Edmund Burke, Part II: and Part III of *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. (J. Dodsley, 1776) (various editions available online; check Google books)


Recommended: Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, in *Leaves of Grass*, 1855, on Google books

Class 7: Feb 27  

**Nature**

Emerson, *Nature* 1836 Available from Google books


Roderick Nash, “Henry David Thoreau: Philosopher” in *Wilderness and the American Mind*

Christian Zapatka, “Pastoral Reserves in the Nineteenth-Century City” in *The American Landscape*


**Proposal due for final paper**
Wilderness

Krista Comer, “Sidestepping Environmental Justice: ‘Natural’ Landscapes and the Wilderness Plot” in Landscapes of the New West: Gender and Geography in Contemporary Women’s Writings

No class, Spring break

The West

Selected maps from Center of the American West, Atlas of the New West (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997)
Krista Comer, “Landscapes of Westernness: Gender, Race, and the Politics of American Space” in Landscapes of the New West
Class 10: March 27  **The Road**

John Jakle, “Landscapes Redesigned for the Automobile” in Conzon, ed. *The Making of the American Landscape*

J.B. Jackson, “Truck City” and “Roads Belong in the Landscape” in *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994)

J.B. Jackson, “The Abstract World of the Hot Rodder” in *Landscape in Sight*

Christian Zapatka, “National Parks and First Cross Country Highway”


Class 11: April 3  **Suburbia**

Dolores Hayden, Chapters 1-5, 7-8 in *Building Suburbia*.


Mark Gillem, “Homeward Bound: Identity, Consumption, and Place” in *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007)

Class 12: April 10  **Presentations**

Class 13: April 17  **Presentations**

Class 14: April 24  **Presentations**