

## American Suburbia

Professor: Jason Richards  
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Course: FYWS 151 Sections 5 & 6  
Semester: Fall 2012  
Time: 12-12:50 & 1-1:50 MWF  
Room: Barret 214

Writing Fellows: Ryllis Lyle (Section 5) and Katherine Neale (Section 6)

### Course Description

This writing seminar focuses on the culture of American suburbia, paying particular attention to suburban life after 1945, when the suburbanization of America really took flight. Today roughly half of the nation lives in the suburbs, a phenomenon that has resulted in city abandonment, social segregation, environmental havoc, and the reorganization of political power. Are the suburbs, as critics have argued, a place of robotic conformity and racial division? Or are they heterogeneous and human, with a complex cultural fabric of their own? Who lives in suburbia and who doesn't? How has the mythology of suburbia changed over time? Why are these havens, which epitomize the American dream, often a place of nightmares? What does the geography of suburbia say about those who live there? Is suburbia, as some scholars suggest, declining as people move back to the city? To explore these and other questions, we'll consider the divide between cities and suburbs; the politics of race, class, and gender in suburbia; suburbia's impact on national identity; religion's role in suburban life; suburbia as a teenage wasteland; and several other issues. Prompts for critical thinking and writing will include essays, advertisements, artwork, newspaper articles, music, television, photography, literature, and film.

### Required Texts

Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference* (Bedford, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition)  
Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (Orb Books)

### Grading

Essay 1 (3-4 pages)	10%
Essay 2 (4-5 pages)	20%
Essay 3 (4-5 pages)	20%
Essay 4 (9-10 pages)	30%
Paragraphs	10%
Participation/Professionalism	10%
Total	100%

**A** = 100-94; **A-** = 93-90; **B+** = 89-87; **B** = 86-84; **B-** = 83-80; **C+** = 79-77; **C** = 76-74;  
**C-** = 73-70; **D+** = 69-67; **D** = 66-64; **D-** = 63-60; **F** < 60

**Participation/Professionalism:** While I will often begin class with a lecture, this course relies heavily on discussion. You are expected to have all the readings done for the day they are assigned and come prepared to discuss them, and you must always bring the reading(s) we are discussing to class. Participation will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. Part of your participation grade includes quizzes, which are **unannounced** and given at the beginning of class. **If you are late or absent on a quiz day, you cannot make up the quiz.** I will drop your lowest quiz grade. Quizzes must be done on paper with clean edges. Finally, a lack of professionalism (e.g., not following course policies, rude behavior, and so on) will negatively affect this portion of your grade.

**Electronic Devices:** No laptops, cell phones, etc. allowed. **Texting is expressly forbidden.**

**Email Policy: The best way to address questions about our class is by meeting in person.** I am always happy to talk with you during my office hours, by appointment, or after class. That said, I am available by email for **simple and succinct** queries. I typically respond to email once a day between 9am-5pm Monday-Friday. If you do need to email, here are some rules to follow:

- Email is not the place to discuss grade concerns or negotiate any kind of special request
- Email is not the place to seek feedback on your writing or ideas; that must be done in person
- Do not email at the last minute (e.g., the night before an assignment is due) asking for help
- Do not email if you plan to visit during office hours; I'll be there, unless otherwise stated
- Do not email about your absences, unless you are missing two or more classes in a row

**Appointments:** If you cannot meet with me during my office hours or after class, we can set up an appointment at a time that is mutually convenient. If you need to make an appointment, please plan to do so **at least 24 hours in advance.**

**Attendance:** While I expect you to attend every class, you are allowed three absences during the semester. After three absences, every additional absence will lower your final grade by one percentage point (e.g., 80% becomes 79%, and so on). If you miss more than six classes, you will fail the course. **Note: If you miss class, please don't contact me to ask what you missed. Instead, you should exchange contact information with other classmates and ask them what we covered in class.**

**Tardiness:** Please do not come late to class. Tardiness disrupts the flow of class and distracts other students. If you have a scheduling conflict, you are advised to drop the class. Tardiness will lower your participation/professionalism grade.

**Paragraphs:** During the semester, you will write several paragraphs (**225 words maximum**) designed to prepare you for the major essays. These brief pieces expect a concise and provocative **analysis** that addresses the assigned topic. The paragraphs, like the major essays, must follow the mode-of-submission guidelines. **Note: You will lose points for exceeding the 225 word limit; you must include a word count for each paragraph.**

**Essays:** You will receive a handout with guidelines for each major essay.

**Workshops and Drafts:** During the semester, you are required to participate in one full-class draft workshop. You are also required to work on a draft with our writing fellow (Ryllis for section 5, Katherine for section 6). Should you fail to meet these requirements, your final participation grade will be lowered by ten percentage points (e.g., 80% becomes 70%). You are assigned a group for both the workshop and the writing-fellow conference.

**Writing Center:** The Writing Center in the Barret Library is a valuable resource that can help you improve your writing skills and essays. You are strongly encouraged to visit the Writing Center throughout the semester.

**Mode of Submission:** Papers are due at the beginning of class. All papers must be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced, with 1-inch margins on the top and bottom and **1.25-inch margins on the sides**. Please use printer ink that produces a copy dark enough to be easily legible. Place your name, instructor's name, course number, and date in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. Your last name and page number should appear in the upper right-hand corner of all pages. Do not include a title page. Place your title above the text on page one and double space above and beneath it. Your title should not be underlined. Be sure to staple your paper. You may lose points for not following these guidelines. **Note: I do not accept papers by email.**

**Late Work:** All work must be turned in on time. **No extensions are granted.** If you will not be in class when a paper is due, it must be in my mailbox before the deadline. A late paper will lose one percentage point for each weekday it is late and two percentage points over the weekend.

**Submission of All Work:** All major assignments are integral to the goals of the course. Failure to complete any major assignment will result in a grade of F for the course.

**Intellectual honesty:** All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor's prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Clear evidence of plagiarism (failure to use quotation marks around verbatim or copied language, failure to adequately paraphrase, and failure to cite the source of quoted, paraphrased, or borrowed text and ideas), regardless of the Council hearing outcome, may likewise result in failure of the course. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult me.

**Disability Issues:** Students with documented disabilities should meet with me at the beginning of the semester to discuss appropriate accommodations. Please contact the office of Student Disability Services for more information. In all cases, it is your responsibility to provide me with an official letter from SDS.

## Schedule (subject to change)

### Unit One: The Suburban Dream

**Note:** PF = Public Folder (you must print up every reading, read it, and bring it to class)

#### Week 1

Aug 22: Introduction

Aug 24: Lecture: What is Suburbia?; Jackson, from *Crabgrass Frontier* (PF)

#### Week 2

Aug 27: Wright, from *Building the Dream* (PF); Sies, ““God’s Very Kingdom on the Earth”” (PF)

Aug 29: Nicolaides and Weise, “Postwar America” and “Critiques of Postwar Suburbia” (PF); Bradbury, “The Veldt” (PF)

Aug 31: Cheever, “The Housebreaker of Shady Hill” (PF); **Paragraph Due:** Analyze One Aspect of Suburbia in “The Housebreaker of Shady Hill”

#### Week 3

Sept 3: **Labor Day**

Sept 5: Cheever, “The Swimmer” (PF); **Handout: Essay 1**

Sept 7: Discuss Essay 1: Come with Essay Topic in Mind; Lecture: Introduction and Thesis, Integrating Quoted Material, Analyzing Text

**Week 4: Group A Meets with Ryllis or Katherine by Thursday (with a Draft of Essay 1)**

Sept 10: Workshop: Draft of Essay 1 for Group C

Sept 12: Workshop: Draft of Essay 1 for Group C

Sept 14: **Essay 1 Due**; Presentations

### Unit Two: The Image of Suburbia

#### Week 5

Sept 17: Friedan, from *The Feminine Mystique* (PF); In-Class Analysis: Suburban Housewife Images

Sept 19: Berger, “The Myth of Suburbia” (PF); In-Class Analysis: Malvina Reynolds, “Little Boxes”; In-Class Analysis: Advertising Suburbia, Photography, and Artwork

Sept 21: **Paragraph Due:** Find and Analyze an Image of Suburbia; Presentations

#### Week 6

Sept 24: Garreau, from *Edge City* (PF); Kunstler, “A Crisis in Landscape and Townscape” (PF); Hayden, “What is Sprawl?” (PF); In-Class Analysis: Images of Sprawl

Sept 26: Bruegmann, “The Paradoxes of Anti-Sprawl Reform” (PF); Clips/Discussion: “What Happened to Suburbia?” and “Modern-Day Ghost Towns”; **Handout: Essay 2**

Sept 28: Discuss Essay 2: Come with Essay Topic in Mind; Lecture: Topic Sentences, Transitions, Analyzing Images

**Week 7: Group B Meets with Ryllis or Katherine by Thursday (with a Draft of Essay 2)**

Oct 1: Workshop: Draft of Essay 2 for Group D

Oct 3: Workshop: Draft of Essay 2 for Group D

Oct 5: **Essay 2 Due**; Presentations

## Unit Three: Suburban Identities

### Week 8

Oct 8: Beuka, from “Color Adjustment” (PF); Clips/Discussion: Sub/Urban Sitcom Openings

Oct 10: Clips/Discussion: *House Party*

Oct 12: Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness” (PF); Clips/Discussion: *Pleasantville*

### Week 9

Oct 15: **Fall Recess**

Oct 17: Luhr, from *Witnessing Suburbia* (PF)

Oct 19: Clips/Discussion: *Saved*; **Paragraph Due:** Analyze an Aspect of Suburban Identity in a Film or TV Show

### Week 10

Oct 22: Gaines, from *Teenage Wasteland* (PF); Caldwell, “Levittown to Littleton” (PF);  
Clips/Discussion: *The Lost Children of Rockdale County*

Oct 24: Clips/Discussion: *Disturbia*; **Handout: Paper 3**

Oct 26: Discuss Essay 3: Come with Essay Topic in Mind; Lecture: Improving Style, Analyzing Visual Media

**Week 11: Group C Meets with Ryllis or Katherine by Thursday (with a Draft of Essay 3)**

Oct 29: Workshop: Draft of Essay 3 for Group A

Oct 31: Workshop: Draft of Essay 3 for Group A

Nov 2: **Essay 3 Due**; Presentations

## Unit Four: The Dark Side of Suburbia

### Week 12

Nov 5: Murphy, “Welcome to Disturbia” (PF); Jim Stevens, “Schizophrenia” (handout)

Nov 7: Clips/Discussion: *Poltergeist*

Nov 9: Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 13-47 (Part One)

### Week 13

Nov 12: Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 49-117 (Part Two); **Handout: Paper 4**

Nov 14: Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 119-56 (Part Three)

Nov 16: Matheson, *I Am Legend* 157-70 (Part Four); **Paragraph Due:** Analyze any Aspect of Suburban Culture

### Week 14

Nov 19: Library Visit

Nov 21: Thanksgiving Recess

Nov 23: Thanksgiving Recess

### Week 15

Nov 26: Discuss Essay 4: Briefly Present Essay Topic; Lecture: Writing a Research Paper

Nov 28: Clips/Discussion: *Nightmare on Elm Street*

Nov 30: Oates, “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” (PF)

**Week 16 Group D Meets with Ryllis or Katherine by Thursday (with a Draft of Essay 4)**

Dec 3: Workshop: Draft of Essay 4 for Group B

Dec 5: Workshop: Draft of Essay 4 for Group B

Dec 7: **Research Paper Due**