

U.S. Cities and Suburbs



Dr. Ben Jordan

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Office Hour: Wednesday 1:00-2:00 and by appointment. I will often be in Wednesday morning.

Class: History 305-01 Meeting: Clough Hall 417 Wednesday 2:00-4:30

Class goals: Both urban and environmental historians have increasingly argued that the assumed dichotomy between people and nature is a misleading one and that people are an integral part of the broader non-human world. The environmental studies field has thus expanded to investigate communities in which people live, work, and play; while urban and suburban historians have focused more attention on environmental dynamics. This class will examine the broad range of urban and suburban environments which different groups of Americans have called home and the ways in which these locales have endured and changed from 1800 to the present. Our readings and class activities will balance the study of cultural ideas, social practices, and institutional structures. Students will set these developments within the context of broad forces of historical change such as industrialization, immigration, and globalization. We will examine how history has shaped human-built environment concepts and practices in current society and in our own lives. For example, we will take field trips to downtown Memphis and to its surrounding suburbs to see how national trends played out in our region. Students will build proficiencies in analyzing primary sources, evaluating historical interpretations, assessing changes in the urban and suburban historiography, recognizing multiple cultural perspectives, and expressing themselves effectively in oral and written work.

Class methods: This upper level course relies primarily on the seminar discussion method. We will read and discuss the equivalent of roughly half a book per week. Students should keep up with reading assignments and attend class faithfully so that we can have engaging and productive discussions. In class, we will also practice analyzing primary sources such as images, written documents, films, songs, and material culture in light of concepts from our readings. Each student is expected to contribute regularly to class discourse and activities.

Expectations and grading: Attendance, keeping up with readings, and active participation in all class discussions and activities are essential and will account for 20% of your semester grade. Successful class participation will also include submission of discussion questions and other assignments as well as events outside regular meetings that will be announced in class. My grading will stress effective essay writing, historical argumentation, and a grasp of the complex historiography.

Class Participation 20% (Involvement in Discussion & Activity, Attendance, Attentiveness)
Pop Quizzes 20% (Essay given sporadically; CAN'T make up unless excused)
Take-Home Essay 1 20% (Roughly 5-7 double-spaced pages on the assigned topic)
Take-Home Essay 2 20% (see above)
Final Exam 20% (Essay-based, Comprehensive = covering entire semester's themes)

*I will only excuse absences officially excused by the Dean's, Health, or Counseling Office.

Quizzes, Exams, and Class Participation CAN'T be made up unless absence is excused.

*Any assignment turned in late will be docked 10% each late day, starting with the 1st day.

Grade scale: 97-100% A+, 93-96 A, 90-92 A-, 87-89 B+, 83-86 B, 80-82 B-, 77-79 C+, 73-76 C, 70-72 C-, 67-69 D+, 63-66 D, 60-62 D-, 59 & below F. (I don't round up.)

Disability guidelines: If you have a disability for which you might need accommodation in order to participate fully in the course, please contact the office of disability services and also see me at the start of the semester so that we can work out the appropriate accommodation.

Readings: These required books should be at the bookstore. You will also have articles and primary sources assigned on the syllabus and in class available through the class website.

1. Martin Melosi, *Effluent America: Cities, Industry, Energy, and the Environment*
Paperback ISBN: 9780822957669 (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001)
2. Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*
ISBN: 9780465007479 (New York: Basic Books, 1989)
2. Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of American Life*
ISBN: 9780195049831 (Oxford University Press, 1987)
4. Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order, 1820-1920*
ISBN: 9780674931107 (Harvard University Press, 1992)
5. Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* ISBN: 9780521804905 (Cambridge University Press, 2001)

*I reserve the right to make modest changes to the syllabus, assignments, and grading.

***Please read the college's guidelines on plagiarism and cheating. They will be enforced.**

Week 1 - August 25 - What's a City? Defining City, Suburb, Town, and Rural

In-class Reading - Melosi, *Effluent America* (p. 1-4) "The difference between an anthill & a city"

Word Association Exercise - Students' Initial Definitions of City, Suburb, Town, and Rural

Week 2 - September 1 - Rural Virtue, Small Town Community, and Early Urban Reform

David Gordon, "Capitalist Development and the History of American Cities," from *Marxism and the Metropolis* (Oxford University Press, 1978): 25-63.

Boyer, *Urban Masses* (p. 1-66) Moral and Religious Perceptions of Jacksonian Cities

Week 3 - Sept. 8 - British Country Estates, French Boulevards: Roots & Alternatives

Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias* (p. ix Preface to p. 133) Suburbia in Britain & France, 1750-1850

Group Work – City Planning Exercise

Week 4 - Sept. 15 - Landscaping and Domesticating the Early American Suburb

Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (p. 3-86) Early American Suburbs, 1800-1860

Architectural Primer - Early American Housing and Building Types

Week 5 - Sept. 22 – "DOWNTOWN, no finer place for sure – everything's waiting for you"

Memphis Downtown reading excerpt to be announced (background for our field trip)

PAPER 1 DUE

FIELD TRIP #1 DOWNTOWN –Trolley Ride, Central Station & Mass Transit, Main Street, Mississippi River & Port, Orpheum's Urban Spectacle, Beale Street Black Music & Life

Week 6 - Sept. 29 - Race, Immigration, Industrialization, and Urban Reform, 1840s-1890s

Boyer, *Urban Masses* (p. 67-187) Urban Reform in the Victorian & Gilded Ages, 1840s-1890s
Song Analysis “Orphan Train” – Relocating New York City Orphans to Midwest Farm Villages
Paintings Analysis – The White City and “Colored” Midway at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair

Week 7 - October 6 – The Industrial City and Environmental Reform, 1870s-1920s

Melosi, *Effluent America* (p. 23-67, 225-237, then 207-224) Urban-industrial Growth & Reform
start Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias* (p. 134-172) Philadelphia Streetcar versus L.A. Car Suburbs
Photography Analysis – Women Social Workers Reform Working-Class Italian Boys and Girls?

Week 8 - October 13 - Railroad, Streetcar, and Automobile Suburbs 1870s-1920s

finish Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias* (p. 134-172) Philadelphia Streetcar versus L.A. Car Suburbs
Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (p. 87-189) Patterns of Suburbanization, 1870s-1920s
Class Debate on Transportation – Benefits and Drawbacks of Walking, Streetcar, and Car Cities

Week 9 - October 20 - Progressive City: Immigrants and WASP Middle Class Reformers

Boyer, *Urban Masses* (p. 189-292) The Progressive City, 1900-1920s
Role Play – Reformers and the Reformed: Competing Visions of the Good City Life

Week 10 - Oct. 27 - Reconceptualizing Suburbia as Farm, Factory, Working Class, & Black

Becky Nicolaidis, “‘Where the Working Man is Welcomed’: Working-Class Suburbs in Los Angeles, 1900-1940,” *Pacific Historical Review* 68.4 (1999): 517-559.
Andrew Wiese, “The Other Suburbanites: African American Suburbanization in the North before 1950,” *Journal of American History* (March 1999): 1-26.
Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (p. 190-230) Suburbs in the Depression and New Deal
Sanborn Map Exercise - Land Uses, Labor, and Community in Early 20th Century Suburbs

***PAPER #2 DUE Sunday, October 31st by 5:00pm.**

Week 11 - Nov. 3 - Cold War Homeowners' Rights: Policing Urban and Suburban Space

Thomas Sugrue, "Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940-1964," *Journal of American History* 82.2 (Sep. 1995): 551-578.
Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (p. 231-271) The Cookie-Cutter Suburban Boom, 1945-1965
Levittown Sprawl and American Forests – Processes and Prices of the Pro-Growth Mentality

Week 12 - November 10 - Environmental Impacts of Post-World War II Suburban Growth

Adam Rome excerpt, "Building on the Land: Toward an Environmental History of Cities and Suburbs, 1870-1945," *Journal of Urban History* (May 1994): 408-415.

Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside* (p. xi-118)

FIELD TRIP #2 SUBURBIA – Race and Space in Shelby County

Week 13 - Nov. 17 - Suburbs and the Emergence of Modern Environmentalism, 1950-1970s

Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside* (p. 119-270)

Ecology and Rachel Carson – Human Responsibility for Nature and Quality of Life Movements

THANKSGIVING BREAK November 23-27

Week 14 - December 1 - Urban Crisis, Revival, and Environmental Justice 1964-present

Jon Teaford excerpts, "An Age of Urban Crisis, 1964-1979" and "Toward a New Metropolis, 1980 and Beyond" in *The Twentieth Century American City* (p. 127-169)

Melosi, *Effluent America* (p. 92-106, then 68-91, & 238-262) Wastes and Environmental Justice
Memphis in Recent Decades – Urban Redevelopment: Beale Street, Pyramid, and Mud Island

Week 15 - December 8 - Bold New City or Built Up 'Burb? 1970s-present

Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (p. 272-306) Decentralized Suburbia

Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias* (p. 172-208) The Rise of Technoburbs

Sharpe & Wallock, Fishman, and Marsh, "Bold New City or Built Up 'Burb? Redefining Contemporary Suburbia," *American Quarterly* (March 1994): 1-23, 35-47, 55-60.

Class Debate - Historiography & Terminology - Fishman, Jackson, Marsh, Sharpe & Wallock

December 15th, 1:00pm - FINAL EXAM