

Decoding Historic Sites: American Cultural Landscapes



**L98/U89 AMCS 402 and U19 SUST 402, Summer 2017
Monday & Wednesday 6:00 – 8:45 PM, July 10 – August 16
Room: Simon 020**

Instructor: Michael Allen

Instructor Contact Information: 314.920.5680 | allen.m@wustl.edu
Office hours by appointment.

Description

The history of land is the history of land use, land rights, land surveying, tourism, conquest, taxation, engineering and land management. American places constituted through their symbolic, utilitarian, architectural, scenographic or personal meanings rather than traditional attributes of landscape or urban design are more central to shaping the Americans' understandings of the places of their lives. Most landscapes in fact are hybrid terrains that fuse nature, design and human culture. From roadsides to homesteads to tourist attractions to landfills to urban neighborhoods, vernacular landscapes define the image of America to large extent. This course examines this intersected space of the "cultural landscape" through a series of thematic reviews of types of landscapes. Along the way, course readings and experiences (including field work) will examine American landscapes including the appropriated and mythologized lands of First Americans, the Gateway Arch grounds, a radioactive landfill, the neighborhoods of Detroit, cemeteries and vacant lots in St. Louis, the hills of Kentucky, the mighty Mississippi, and other sites of memory and meaning.

Throughout the semester, the course will interrogate the concept of vernacular landscapes, more broadly defined as landscapes of everyday life. Readings will draw on the work of geographers, historians, writers, preservationists and artists. The course will pose a taxonomy of the types of cultural landscapes while presenting various methods for decoding, recording, interpreting, preserving and altering these places. Field experiences and course discussions will unpack the contingencies between design, economics, cultural politics, agriculture, consumption and technology that inscribe culture across the land.

Readings

Students should obtain copies of these books, which will be read in entirety or near entirety:

- Dora Apel, *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2015)
- bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (New York: Routledge Press, 2009)
- J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984)
- Lucy Lippard, *Undermining: A Wild Ride Through Land Use, Politics and Art in the Changing West* (New York and London: The New Press, 2014)
- Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2014)

All other required and suggested readings are accessible on Blackboard (<http://bb.wustl.edu>). None of the required books will be posted on Blackboard.

This Is a Seminar

Seminar: *Oxford English Dictionary* definition 1.1: "A class at university in which a topic is discussed by a teacher and a small group of students." Origin: Late 19th century: from German Seminar, from Latin seminarium (see seminary).

In this course, each of us is responsible for producing discussion. There will be some lectures, but most of the course time will be driven by students' bringing their responses to and questions about readings, sites and concepts. Reading on the syllabus is posted to provide background for your participation, so you have ideas

against which to form your own. All readings are strongly encouraged. There will be no quizzes on content, so read with free curiosity.

Field Trips

Field work is indispensable for the subject matter, and several course sessions will involve field work outside of class. Students will provide their own transportation, and may carpool if there are any issues. Some field sessions will begin at a site, and students should arrive at the class start time. After some of these sessions, the course will conclude on campus at the meeting room, while other times it may remain in the field for the entire class time.

Response Papers

Students will complete three assigned response papers, which will address distributed prompts. Due to the short nature of the summer course, the papers will be brief. If any student needs an extension on one of these assignments, the student should ask for one at the start of the class *before* which the paper is due. One extension will be granted, but only if it is requested according to the requirement listed on this syllabus. Late assignments will lose 3 grade points for each day they are not submitted. Email submission is strongly encouraged.

Final Project

The final project will consist of a photographic essay on a local cultural landscape selected from an assignment description circulated by the second week of the course. In the fourth week, students will share their topics with the full course in an informal presentation. The essay should be 10 pages in length, illustrated by maps and the student's own original photographs.

Grade Distribution

Assigned Papers	30%
Final Project	40%
Course Attendance and Participation	30%

Academic Integrity

You are responsible for adhering to the university's academic integrity policies. In particular, you are expected to produce your own work, to avoid inappropriate collaboration (especially on the written assignments), and to avoid various other forms of academic dishonesty, including falsification of data and misrepresentation of sources. Failure to cite and formally acknowledge your sources constitutes plagiarism, and will result in a failing grade (and likely disciplinary action within the bounds of Washington University's usual policies). You should produce work that is *very clear* in its acknowledgement of others' work – not only quoted material, but ideas and language as well

Citations and Formatting

All work for the course should use the Chicago Style or MLA Style. Please use an 11-point font, double space your work, and provide page numbers, appropriate references and a works cited or bibliography at the end. Papers should also have a title, which can be generic or simply a statement of theme.

Schedule

* Denotes a reading posted as PDF on Blackboard. Additional readings may be assigned or recommended.

WEEK 1

Monday, July 10 (Looking at Land)

Introductions

Film Excerpt In Class:

Introduction to *True Stories* (1988; David Byrne, director)

Film in Class:

Koyaanisqatsi (1983; Godfrey Reggio, director)

Suggested Reading:

Robinson Meyer, "Koyaanistocks: A Modern Classic Recreated With Stock Footage," *The Atlantic* (April 8, 2016).

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/04/koyannistocks-the-modern-classic-recreated-with-stock-footage/477543/>

Wednesday, July 12 (Defining the Cultural Landscape)

Films In Class:

In the Street (1948; Helen Levitt, director)

American Night (2012; Julian Rosefeldt, director)

Reading:

Grady Clay, "The Grammatical Landscape," *Right Before Your Eye* (Chicago: APA Planners Press, 1987)*

J.B. Jackson, "The Necessity for Ruins," *The Necessity for Ruins* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980)*

Peirce F. Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene," *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979)*

D.W. Meinig, "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene," *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979)*

WEEK 2

Monday, July 17 (Cultural Landscapes in Heritage Law)

Field Trip In Class (Meet at St. Louis Art Museum, start of class)

Forest Park Monuments

Reading:

Kim Bell and Celeste Bott, "Confederate Monument will be gone from Forest Park by Friday under new agreement," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (June 27, 2017).

http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/confederate-monument-will-be-gone-from-forest-park-by-friday/article_f5ffd027-64fe-5483-8f71-871c517b4f9f.html

Patrick Strickland, "Debate Over US Confederate Monuments Intensifies," *Al Jazeera* (June 28, 2017).

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/06/debate-confederate-monuments-intensifies-170619082627175.html>

National Park Service, *Preservation Brief 36: Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes*.

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/36-cultural-landscapes.htm>

Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place (2008).*

Suggested Reading:

George McCue, "The Blue and the Gray and the Bronze," *Sculpture City: St. Louis* (St. Louis: Laumeier Sculpture Park, 1988).*

Burra Charter: <http://australia.icomos.org/publications/charters/>

Wednesday, July 19 (Origins of the US Cultural Landscape)

Reading:

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, p. 1-116.

Suggested Reading:

Sam Durant, *Proposal for White and Dead Indian Monuments* (2005, art project)

<http://samdurant.net/index.php/project/proposal-for-white-and-indian-dead-monuments/>

Native Land (website to review – look up your home town): <http://native-land.ca>

Paper #1 Due

WEEK 3

Monday, July 24 (Cultural Contests, Cultural Constructs)

Reading:

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, p. 117-218.

Suggested Reading:

John Kelly, "Reading Through Time: The Landscape of Greater Cahokia."

<http://theamericanbottom.org/itineraryKelly.html>

Wednesday, July 26 (Land Uses and Abuses)

Reading:

Lucy Lippard, *Undermining*. Full text.

WEEK 4

Monday, July 31 (Vernacular Landscapes)

Film In Class:

Buffalo Common (2001; Bill Brown, director)

Reading:

J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*. p. 1-102; 125-157.

Suggested Reading:

J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*. p. 103-124.

Paper #2 Due

Wednesday August 2 (Landscapes of Labor, Landscapes of Struggle)

Film In Class:

Harlan County USA (1976; directed by Barbara Kopple).

Reading:

Jesse Vogler, "Company Towns," The American Bottom Project.

<http://theamericanbottom.org/itinerarySix.html>

bell hooks, *Belonging*, p. 1-68.

WEEK 5

Monday, August 7 (Landscapes of Despair)

Film In Class:

Escape from New York (1981; directed by John Carpenter).

Reading:

Dora Apel, *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline*. p. 1-11; 58-112; 132-152.

Barry Langford, "Seeing only corpses: Vision and/of urban disaster in apocalyptic cinema," *Urban Space and Cityscapes: Perspectives from Modern and Contemporary Culture* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2006).

Wednesday, August 9 (Landscapes of Hope)

Field Trip In Class (Meet at Simon Hall and Carpool):

The Ville

Guest Guide: Aaron Williams, Young Friends of the Ville

Post-Field Trip:

Return to Simon Hall for Wrap-Up Discussion

Reading:

Camilo Jose Vergara, "Energies of the Outmoded," *American Ruins* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995).*

George L. Henderson, "What (Else) We Talk About When We Talk About Landscape: For a Return to the Social Imagination," *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).*

Paper #3 Due

WEEK 6

Monday, August 14 (Sacred Landscapes)

Field Trip In Class (Meet At Site):

Greenwood Cemetery, 6571 St Louis Ave, St. Louis, MO 63121

Guest Guide: TBA

Reading:

John R. Stilgoe, "Graveyards," *Common Landscape of America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982).*

Kathy McKoy, "Afro-American Cemeteries in St. Louis," *Gateway Heritage* 63 (Winter 1985).
bell hooks, *Belonging*, p. 69-105.

Wednesday, August 16 (Sacred Landscapes, Documented Landscapes)

Field Trip:

Higher Ground: Honoring Washington Park Cemetery, Its People and Place (exhibition)

Sheldon Art Galleries,

Guest: Jennifer Colten, photographer (jennifercolten.com)

Reading:

Higher Ground: Honoring Washington Park, Its People and Place

<http://digital.wustl.edu/washingtonparkcemetery/>

bell hooks, *Belonging*, p. 106-119; 143-183 & 203-223.

Friday, August 18

Final Paper Due