

# Suburbanization: People, Place, and Politics

## URBG ---.-- and URBG ---.--

Summer 2009 – Term 2  
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:15 – 8:00 p.m.  
Hunter College North Building, Room TBA

Kevin Keenan  
Office: TBA  
Phone: (917) 816-0006

Email: kkeenan@hunter.cuny.edu  
Office hours: By appointment

### Course Description

The purpose of this course is to examine in some detail the most common residential setting in the United States: the suburb. As many scholars argue, to subsume suburbs under some presumed more interesting, important, and central “city” is problematic if suburbs represent the most prevalent form of American residence. Recognizing and building upon understandings of American cities, we examine the history, contemporary life and politics of American metropolitan areas, focusing on suburbs but not losing sight of the broader metropolitan—and urban—context. Students in this course will review histories of US suburbs in order to understand not simply their origins but debates about the forces driving suburbanization in America. We will examine twentieth-century accounts of suburban life, taking into account differences by gender, race, and ethnicity. Finally, we will examine the politics of suburbs: from governance to contemporary culture and questions of environmental sustainability.

### Objectives

Students successfully completing *Suburbanization: People, Place, and Politics* will be able to do three things: (1) *outline* the historical development of suburbia in the United States and *explain* the role of government policy in this process; (2) connect the historical development of suburbs to contemporary conditions, illustrating both recurring patterns as well as points of divergence; and (3) articulate an informed argument about what the future of suburbia may look like.

### Course Philosophy

The most important outcome of this course is the learning that students achieve. The course is designed as an introduction to the theories of suburbanization for upper-level undergraduates and master’s students. The course is scaled to learning at two levels, and writing and discussion are the primary method by which students will communicate their learning within these levels. At its basic-level, the course introduces students to

*foundational and factual knowledge* about suburbs (e.g., historical development). At a more advanced level, it asks students to *think conceptually* about the role suburbs have played in the American imagination, both as a utopian ideal and a problematic reality. The course challenges students to recognize how the suburbs have been shaped by the choices people make about where they live and work, but that suburbia itself has also shaped those choices. The course requires that students *comprehend* how the foundational knowledge and theoretical frameworks interrelate to form a useful body of knowledge.

## Course Texts

There are three required books for this course, and additional required readings are available on the course Blackboard site, sorted by class session.

The following required books are available in the campus bookstore:

Teaford, Jon C. 2008. *The American Suburb: The Basics*. NY: Routledge.

Nicolaides, Becky M. and Andrew Wiese, eds. 2006. *The Suburb Reader*. NY: Routledge.

Waldie, D.J. 2005 [1996]. *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*. NY: W.W. Norton.

## Course Overview

**Class #1 (14 July):** Meanings, history of suburbs

**Class #2 (16 July):** 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries: Industry, class, politics

**Class #3 (21 July):** Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century: Race and policy

**Class #4 (23 July):** Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century: New developments, cookie-cutter, women

\*\*\*\*Short Paper #1 is due by the start of class.

**Class #5 (28 July):** Cookie-cutter culture: Lakewood and Levittown

**Class #6 (30 July):** Contemporary life: Diversity and separation

**Class #7 (4 August):** Job centers and commercial/retail use

\*\*\*\*Short Paper #2 is due by the start of class.

**Class #8 (6 August):** Government, policy, sprawl

**Class #9 (11 August):** Environment and sustainability

**Class #10 (13 August):** Suburbs and the future

\*\*\*\*Short Paper #3 is due on **Monday, 17 August**.

## Assignments & Evaluation

**Short Paper #1** – What do you understand to be the historical purpose of the American suburb? What roles have private and public policy played in the historical development of the suburbs? This question asks you to synthesize the opening readings and distill an argument about the purpose of suburbs. In this argument, it is expected that you will consider how the policies of private industry as well as the government shaped the suburb. Short paper #1 counts towards **20% of your grade**. You will be evaluated on organization, grammar, spelling, and presentation (i.e. clean, wrinkle free paper with crisp, dark toner) in addition to appropriately and coherently addressing the assignment. See Rubric #1: “Evaluating short paper #1” for the specific guidelines that I will use to evaluate your work.

NOTE: Short paper #1 is due on **Thursday, 23 July** *in my email box* [kkeen@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:kkeen@hunter.cuny.edu) by 5:15 p.m. (*the start of class*). There are no exceptions. If you fail to turn in your short paper #1 on **Thursday, 23 July** *at the start of class*, you will lose 3 points (out of 100) for each day late. The paper should be turned in as a Microsoft Word document so that I may use the track changes and comment functions.

**Short Paper #2** – What are some of the predominant characteristics of suburban life today? Are these characteristics reflective of the past? If yes, how so? If no, why not? This question is asking you to select the characteristics of suburbia that you think are the most significant, to explain why you think they are significant, and to describe their qualities in some detail. You must then argue whether you see fundamental connections between these characteristics and the history of suburbs—that is, how has history shaped the present? If you don’t see any connections, why do you think that’s the case? Your answer should not be less than two pages or more than five pages. Short paper #2 counts towards **20% of your grade**. See Rubric #2: “Evaluating short paper #2” for the specific guidelines that I will use to evaluate your work.

NOTE: Short paper #2 is due on **Tuesday, 4 August** *in my email box* [kkeen@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:kkeen@hunter.cuny.edu) by 5:15 p.m. (*the start of class*). There are no exceptions. If you fail to turn in your short paper #2 on **Tuesday, 4 August** *at the start of class*, you will lose 3 points (out of 100) for each day late. The paper should be turned in as a Microsoft Word document so that I may use the track changes and comment functions.

**Short Paper #3** – Is there a future for the American suburb? What does it look like, if yes and why? If you think that there is no future for the suburb—in effect an argument that everyone will live and work in the city—what reasons do you offer for that conclusion? This question is asking you to articulate an informed vision for the future of suburbia based in the literature we have read and your own interpretations and synthesis of that literature. Your answer should not be less than two pages or more than five pages.

Short paper #3 counts towards **20% of your grade**. See Rubric #3: “Evaluating short paper #3” for the specific guidelines that I will use to evaluate your work.

NOTE: Short paper #3 is due on **Monday, 17 August** *in my email box [kkeen@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:kkeen@hunter.cuny.edu) by 5:15 p.m. (the start of class)*. There are no exceptions. If you fail to turn in your short paper #3 on **Monday, 17 August** *at the start of class*, you will receive a grade of ‘F’ for 20% of your grade. (Since grades must be issued immediately, there is no opportunity to turn in late papers.) The paper should be turned in as a Microsoft Word document so that I may use the track changes and comment functions.

**Presentations on selected readings** – You are required to read all readings throughout the semester, but you will be responsible for presenting on one (and in some instances maybe two) each week. Presentations should reflect serious engagement with the reading. Students should be prepared to give a general, 5 minute overview of the assigned reading, and provide a 1 page handout that includes a summary of the overall message of the reading, the key points, and several questions for discussion. The questions can ask for clarification on a particular point, may draw comparisons between readings, or may simply present points for general discussion. The presentations will count towards **20% of your grade**. You are requested to post your handouts on the blackboard site in the appropriate forum by midnight preceding the class. This will give the other students and me some time to review your materials before we meet for discussion. The collection of summary documents and questions will also become valuable study guides and references for you in the future; it is recommended that you save them. See Rubric #3: “Evaluating Presentations on the Readings” for the specific guidelines that I will use to evaluate your work.

**In-class participation** – The in-class participation grade will be determined by your attendance at each class, your engagement during the class discussions, and your responses to questions and other students’ comments. Sleeping or putting one’s head down during the course will adversely affect the grade. Lateness—both at the beginning of the course and after the break—as well as early departures, will adversely affect the grade. The participation grade will also be determined by your willingness to speak up and share thoughts, questions, and concerns during the course. In class participation counts as **20% of your grade**. See Rubric #4: “Evaluating Students’ In-class participation” for the specific guidelines that I will use to evaluate your participation.

**Your final grade for the course will be calculated using the following Hunter College undergraduate grade distribution (percentage of total score of all assignments).**

A+ = 97.5 – 100 %  
A = 92.5 – 97.4  
A- = 90 – 92.4

B+ = 87.5 – 89.9  
B = 82.5 – 87.4  
B- = 80 – 82.4

C+ = 77.5 – 79.9  
C = 70 – 77.4  
D = 60 – 69.9

F = 0.0 – 59.9

## General Policies and Procedures

- **Statement on Academic Integrity:** Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

Complete information on Hunter College's academic integrity policies is available through the Office of Student Services. Please see the following document, available online:

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/senate/assets/Documents/Hunter%20College%20Policy%20on%20Academic%20Integrity.pdf> .

- **Student Email:** Students are required to have a Hunter College email account and to check it at least once per day during the week. All notices regarding the course, including cancellations, will be sent to the Hunter College account.
- **Faculty Email:** The professor uses [kkeenan@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:kkeenan@hunter.cuny.edu) and will check it at least once per day. Immediate responses via email should not be expected, but can generally be expected within a 24-hour period.
- **Cell phones and pagers** must be turned off before the class starts.
- **Special needs or concerns:** Any students who have special learning needs or concerns are urged to speak with me during the first week of the semester if accommodations are needed. The Office of Student Services provides a comprehensive list of accessibility resources available at the College on the following website: <http://studentservices.hunter.cuny.edu/DSMAIN.html> .
- **Mutual respect for differing questions and ideas:** The College is a place for open inquiry and exchange of ideas. All members of the College should treat all other members of the College and members of society with mutual respect and appreciation.

## Course Schedule and Assigned Readings

*All selections are presented in the order in which you should read them.*

### TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE BY TOPIC AND ASSIGNED READINGS

- Readings from Nicolaides and Wiese, *The Suburb Reader* indicated by “N&W”, others on Blackboard or required (Teaford, Waldie). Full bibliography for readings at end of schedule.

Class	Date	Topic	Readings / material for discussion
One	14 July	Introduction	Introductions, discuss syllabus, course requirements, in-class handout for discussion: Hayden 2003, ch. 1, pp. 3-9.
		<i>Historical: meanings, history of suburbs</i>	Teaford Preface, pp. ix-xvi (all) Cronon, Prologue pp. 5-19 (Blackboard) Mumford, ch , pp. 482-524 (Blackboard)
Two	16 July	19 <sup>th</sup> - early 20 <sup>th</sup> century <i>suburbs and industry</i>	Teaford, ch. 1, pp. 1- top of p. 25 Walker and Lewis article pp. 3-19 (Blackboard) N&W: Essays 4-2 and 6-1 by Harris & Lewis, and Crawford, pp. 125-133, 182-186.
		19 <sup>th</sup> - early 20 <sup>th</sup> C <i>suburbs: class and politics</i>	Teaford, rest of ch. 1, pp. 25-41 N&W: Essays 1-1, 1-2, 1-3, and 5-1 by Jackson, Fishman, Archer, and Keating, pp. 26-44 and 147-153; Photo galleries 4-6 & 4-8, pp. 113-116, 118.
Three	21 July	Early-mid 20 <sup>th</sup> C <i>race</i>	N&W: 7-6, 7-7, essay 7-2 by Ponce, Aaron, and Wiese, pp. 203-208, 216-223 Photos 7-8 p. 208-9 Wiese in Kruse & Sugrue, pp. 99-119 (on BB)
		Mid-20 <sup>th</sup> C <i>race and policy</i>	N&W: Ch 8, pp. 225-253 ( <i>link with and continue from previous</i> )
<b>NOTE: Short paper #1 is due at the start of the next class (23 July).</b>			
Four	23 July	Mid-20 <sup>th</sup> C: <i>new developments, cookie-cutter, and women</i>	N&W: ch 9, pp. 257-290 ( <i>skip 9-7 pp. 271-2</i> ) N&W: 10-5, 10-6, 10-7, pp. 300-305 Gans ch 1, pp. 3-21 (blackboard)
Five	28 July	<i>Cookie-cutter culture? Lakewood and Levittown</i>	Waldie (entire book)) Gans ch 2, pp. 22-43 (blackboard)
Six	30 July	<i>Suburban diversity</i>	Teaford, ch. 2, pp. 43-86. (all) N&W: Essay 10-11 by Berger, pp. 312-316.

---

N&W: Ch 11, pp. 321-348.  
Teaford ch. 5, pp. 159-186. (all)  
N&W: ch 14, pp. 409-438  
Marcelli in Wolch et al., pp. 123-150.  
(blackboard)  
N&W: ch 15, pp. 439-467.  
Fasenfest et al. in Berube et al., pp. 93-117.  
(blackboard)

---

**NOTE: Short paper #2 is due at the start of the next class (4 August).**

---

Seven	4 August	<i>Job centers and retail/commercial use</i>	Teaford ch. 3, pp. 87-102 N&W: Essays 12-1, 12-2 by Muller and Self, pp. 362-375.  Teaford ch. 3, pp. 102-121. Goss article, pp. 45-75 ( <i>skim</i> ). (cicada, next also) O’Mara in Kruse and Sugrue, pp. 57-79.
Eight	6 August	<i>Government, politics, sprawl</i>	Teaford, ch. 4, pp. 123-158 (all) Orfield, TBA. (cicada)  Teaford, ch. 6, pp. 187-216 Duany et al., chs 1 & 2, pp. 3-37. (cicada)
Nine	11 August	<i>Environment and Sustainability</i>	Wolch et al., in Wolch et al., pp. 1-41. Gearin in Wolch et al., pp. 279-307. (both cicada)  Pincetl in Wolch et al., pp. 225-251. Walker and Fortmann article, pp. 469-491. (both cicada)
Ten	13 August	<i>Suburbs and the future</i>	Hayden, 2003, ch. 11, pp. 201-229.  Teaford, ch. 7, pp. 217-223 Hayden, 2003, ch. 11, pp. 230-248.

---

**NOTE: Short paper #3 is due on Monday, 17 August.**

**Full bibliographic list of class readings, by author:**

- Cronon William. 1991. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. NY: Norton and Co.
- Duany, Andres, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck. 2000. *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*. NY: North Point Press.
- Fasensfest, David, Jason Booza, and Kurt Metzger. 2006. Living together: a new look at racial and ethnic integration in metropolitan neighborhoods, 1990-2000. In *Redefining Urban and Suburban America: Evidence from Census 2000, Vol. 3*, A. Berube, B. Katz, and R. Lang, eds., Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. Pp. 93-117.
- Gans, Herbert J. 1967. *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community*. NY: Pantheon.
- Gearin, Elizabeth. 2004. Smart growth or smart growth machine? The smart growth movement and its implications. In *Up Against the Sprawl*, J. Wolch, M. Pastor, and P. Dreier, eds., Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. Pp. 279-307.
- Goss, Jon. 1999. Once-upon-a-time in the commodity world: An unofficial guide to mall of America. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 89(1): 45-75.
- Hayden, Delores. 2003. *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*. NY: Pantheon Books.
- Marcelli, Enrico. 2004. From the barrio to the 'burbs? Immigration and the dynamics of suburbanization. In *Up Against the Sprawl*, J. Wolch, M. Pastor, and P. Dreier, eds., Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. Pp. 123-150.
- Miller R, 1983, The Hoover® in the garden: middle-class women and suburbanization, 1850-1920. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 1(1) 73 – 87.
- Mumford, Lewis. 1961. *The City in History*. NY: Harcourt, Brace and World.
- O'Mara, Margaret Pugh. 2006. Uncovering the city in the suburb: cold war politics, scientific elites, and high-tech spaces. In *The New Suburban History*, Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds., Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 57-79.
- Orfield, Myron. 1996. *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

- Pincetl, Stephanie. 2004. The Preservation of nature at the urban fringe. In *Up Against the Sprawl*, J. Wolch, M. Pastor, and P. Dreier, eds., Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. Pp. 225-251.
- Sheller, Mimi and John Urry. 2000. The city and the car. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24: 737-757.
- Urry, John. 2004. The system of automobility. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21(4-5): 25-39.
- Walker, P. and L. Fortmann. 2003. Whose landscape? A political ecology of the 'exurban' Sierra. *Cultural Geographies*, 10(4): 469-491.
- Walker, Richard and Robert D. Lewis. 2001. Beyond the crabgrass frontier: industry and the spread of North American cities, 1850–1950. *Journal of Historical Geography*, 27(1): 3-19.
- Wiese, Andrew. 2006. “The house I live in”: Race, class, and African-American suburban dreams in the postwar United States. In *The New Suburban History*, Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds., Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 99-119.
- Wolch, Jennifer, Manuel Pastor Jr., and Peter Dreier. 2004. Introduction: Making Southern California: Public Policy, Markets, and the Dynamics of Growth. In *Up Against the Sprawl*, J. Wolch, M. Pastor, and P. Dreier, eds., Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. Pp. 1-41.