

Lecture #2: A Path Out of Town: Reading the Madison Landscape

Suggested Readings:

Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (2012)

David Mollenhoff, *Madison: A History of the Formative Years*, 2nd edition (2003)

Stuart Levitan, *Madison: The Illustrated Sesquicentennial History, Vol. 1, 1856-1931* (2006)

Grady Clay, *Close-Up: How to Read the American City* (1973); *Real Places* (1994)

Tips for reading landscapes: <http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/landscapes.htm>

Tips for reading cityscapes: <http://nelson.wisc.edu/che/events/place-based-workshops/2009/project/index.php>

Outline:

I. Applying an Ecological Method to the Study of Cultural Landscapes

goal today is to offer a visual example of the kind of exercise you'll be doing for your first paper & for *Car Country* as we'll learn in a later lecture, Frederick Clements a pioneer ecologist who introduced concept of "transect" to U.S. by running a survey transect across a plot of land and counting all plants along it, ecologist can sample vegetation if we apply this same technique to a human landscape, one can likewise sample different *cultural* landscapes American landscapes (like those in western Europe and elsewhere) can generally be partitioned into four broad categories: city, suburb, working lands (rural, pastoral), wilderness, arrayed from most to least densely settled important to note that these categories are fractal (expressed on all scales) and exist only in relation to each other because cities in U.S. historically often grew outward from an initial starting point, a transect outward from city center also tends to cut across places that represent different growth periods in layouts and physical forms if we apply this to Madison—running a transect from the Capitol outward to western Dane County—we'll see the city's changing life mapped out in geographies that themselves reflect different historical moments because transportation exercises such powerful influences over human geographies, parts of cities influenced by different transport systems (horses, railroads, automobiles, aircraft) have strikingly different forms if Wells is right that the U.S. today is quintessential *Car Country*, we should see influence of automobile everywhere

II. Driving the Transect: City

route followed in lecture departs Capitol Square down West Washington, west on Regent to Speedway, then west on Mineral Point Road all the way out past Pine Bluff to State Highway 78: tracking across different historical periods and (arguably) across all four cultural landscapes of **city, suburb, pastoral, wild** as we trek outwards from downtown, we move through progressively younger periods of urban development but it's only by using historical documents (like images you're using for your first paper) that we can confirm our intuitions about what happened where when; cf title of planner Kevin Lynch's book *What Time Is This Place?* cf changing land use in southwestern bend of Beltline (1949) near West Towne: you can revisit the series I showed in class on the following page: http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/maps.htm#_Multiple_Maps_ — move backward through time from contemporary suburb & malls to subdivision and finally farmland (aerial sequences like these very powerful, and you can find them for your chosen place at Map Library, Science Hall Capitol Square: named and platted in 1836 by James Duane Doty, on glacial drumlin in middle of Isthmus Capitol is 3rd on site, completed 1917; buildings on Square various dates, but principally post-WWII redevelopment dropping downhill on W. Washington Ave, after Broom St. are 3-story multi-family wooden dwellings from era of streetcar development: close to street, no front yards, porches where families can watch children, see neighbors, with—strikingly—post-WWII infill in back yards to provide auto parking completely unneeded before after crossing RR corridor at SW Bike Path, turn right onto Regent, pass through old Greenbush neighborhood, largely Jewish, African-American, Irish, and Italian (stonecutters for Capitol) in early 20th century in 1962, urban renewal project razed this old neighborhood, only remnants left: Greenbush Bar (was Italian Workmen's Club), Fraboni's Italian Grocery; most else absorbed by Meriter Hospital & other development heading west on Regent St, you're on an old post-WWII "strip": a road increasingly designed for auto retail, with offstreet parking, large signs designed to attract attention of motorists passing by at Camp Randall, leap back in time to Civil War mustering ground, followed by athletic fields of university

II. Driving the Transect: Suburb (Streetcars to Cars)

west of these, University Heights neighborhood first laid out in 1893 as elite streetcar suburb oldest houses in neighborhood made no provision for cars, but as you travel west, you can literally watch cars become ever more important to Madison families: first with detached garage sheds added to back yards, then small one-car garages added to original bldgs., then 1-car garages integral to design of building, then 2-car garages, with garage becoming ever more important to façade house presents to street; by time you reach Far West Side, there are even 3-car garages that completely take over the façade of the house as garages increase, we're making the transition into a suburb principally based on automobile transport, increasingly mandated after WWII by standardized zoning ordinances requiring houses on large lots with big setbacks from the street, significant distance from neighboring structures, with little mixed retail use Frank Lloyd Wright's Jacobs I House at 441 Toepfer St. built 1936, points way toward ranch houses of post-WWII Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church (1949): suburban movement of parishes & congregations west with cars, worshippers dependent on cars (with large parking lot) to reach place of worship dropping down Mineral Point Rd across Midvale Blvd, road widens, speed limits rise, traffic increases, road becomes noisier, more dangerous, houses begin to turn backs from arterial, replaced by apartments, office parks, stores, various other institutional uses—residences migrate away from arterial traffic

James Madison Memorial H.S. (1966) and West Towne Mall (1970) represented emergence of massive retail & service complex on west side, premised on vast paved areas of free parking in direct competition w downtown; eventually with “big box” retail stores that assumed customers willing to drive many miles to reach them; large customer bases enabled stores to make high-volume purchases to achieve bigger discounts, lower prices past Beltline enter remnant agricultural area protected by urban zoning, but with increasing signs of development, including Blackhawk megachurch (with its own parking ramp), anchoring growing subdivisions older 1950s-vintage subdivision (dateable by ranch-house designs) sold by farmer as “rooms with a view” paradox of urbanites wanting to move to the country to get closer to the natural landscapes they cherish—but because the open prairie views that are so beautiful are in fact farmland and pasture, the disappearance of farming means the regrowth of trees and the eventual loss of the view possible ways of maintaining the view include prairie restoration...and mechanical mowing to replace cows

III. Driving the Transect: Pastoral

west of Beltline, Mineral Point Rd gradually rises to ridgeline that is Johnstown Terminal Moraine of glacier:

recognizable because roadcut at crest of hill is not a bedrock outcropping, but loose earth held back by paving west of moraine, expansive flattish area for 2-3 miles is old outwash plain where glacial meltwaters drained

west of this outwash plain, at Pine Bluff, road suddenly narrows (county tax base no longer pays for maintenance, only local township), terrain becomes much steeper and more rolling, and you’re now in the “Driftless Area”

where glacial “drift”—gravel, till, other loose earth materials left by glacier in SE Wisconsin—no longer here rolling terrain benefited from dairy industry from late 19th-century forward as urban bicyclists and motorists joined forces with dairy farmers seeking good roads needed for daily milk delivery pickups: southwestern Wisconsin remains prime bicycling area even though the dairy farms and local cheese factories disappearing

the migration of urbanites into the countryside in search of a “room with a view”—and a home close to wild “nature”—continues, with new developments taking place far out into western Dane County and beyond...but

the problem of how to preserve views in the face of encroaching forest remains a paradox of this process urbanites like the views they get across croplands and pasture...but don’t like the smell of manure, and don’t

recognize how the rising real estate values they help generate encourage farmers to cash in the value of land as dairy cattle have departed from farms in the Driftless Area, trees have gradually grown up on old pastures,

enabled by fire suppression, so the area is probably now more forested than it has been in thousands of years that fact can stand as a symbol both of the divisions among the cultural landscapes of modern America—city,

suburb, countryside, wild—and the extent to which they are integrated with each other: urban dwellers seek a view of wild nature from their picture windows by looking out over farmland to forests that will encroach upon

that farmland and block the view if active steps aren’t taken to prevent them from doing so...and all dependent on the food grown on the farms that are disappearing from the landscape in the process

and...Chris Wells would want us to remember that in the 20th century they all came to be coupled together in this way roads, automobiles, and all the other forms of infrastructure that turned the United States into *Car Country*