

## **Directions for "Suburban Images" Assignment Honors Seminar 2290; Dr. Sarah Robbins; fall 2000**

Historian Emily Fourmy Cutrer has proposed that studies of American life need to place more emphasis on "visual culture": while admitting that this field "is a youthful, amorphous medium that is still trying to find its own identity," Cutrer nonetheless explains that "the end is not so much to interpret specific images as *to understand how images operate within culture,*" or, in the words of W. J. T. Mitchell, to "*trace their linkages to issues of power, value, and human interest*" ("Visualizing Nineteenth-Century American Culture," American Quarterly 51.4 (December 1999): 896).

Some images are relatively "fixed" in a particular rhetorical context--in a newspaper photograph, for example, or on a brochure; within a television commercial or film; in a family photo album. Other images may be a part of our everyday experience, but they can still be powerful (if potentially more dynamic) cultural documents: they might be places we see as we drive to work, or a person we encounter who somehow embodies a community culture idea we've been thinking about.

The goal of this assignment is for you to select one of the second type of image--something you see as a part of your everyday life--and turn it into part of an argument within a meaningful rhetorical context. Your argument should relate to your reading from Crabgrass Frontier by Kenneth Jackson. It might reinforce one of Jackson's ideas, resist something he said, synthesize several key points, or present an alternative, more complex view of one of the issues he explored. Your argument will be constructed through a combination of visual image and verbal text. In other words, you will write interpretive material to go along with your image. Your interpretive material should be partially **explanatory**: it should identify where you found the image and what is "going on" there in literal terms (i.e., provide a kind of when, where, how, and why for the image). Your interpretive material should also include a component that is **creative and dialogic**--that speaks *to, about, against, into* or *out of* the image using a *different genre of writing than explanation or description*. You might, for instance, find or write a poem

that illuminates the image. You might append a short oral history from someone who appears in the image. You might tell a brief "imaginary" (or historical) story about the image.

Finally, as suggested above, you should have a piece of text that is **relational**--that sets your image and the material with it in conversation with Jackson's text somehow. You might blend this piece into your explanation--say, for instance, by summarizing a key point from Jackson and then responding to it, or even by quoting a passage you want to affirm or resist through your image.

Besides thinking about what you want to include for each element in this hybrid presentation of visual and verbal material, you should think about your COMPOSITION choices--about *what goes where* and *why* in your presentation display.

Medium of presentation should be another purposeful decision. You might want to set this up as a "word document" with the image imbedded in it. You might want to create a series of PowerPoint slides. You might want to create a web page or pages. Select a medium you are fairly confident using and one that seems to fit your subject and material well.

Most important of all: have fun doing the assignment and find a way to say something provocative, useful, entertaining, informative, poignant, exciting, or.... about the Atlanta suburbs today.

**Scoring Rubric to be used is as follows:**

Possible points		Points earned
__10__	1. appropriate subject for image and high quality image	_____
__10__	2. detail and style of explanatory information about image	_____
__20__	3. apt reference/relating to topic/issue from <u>Crabgrass</u> book	_____
__20__	4. striking and content-effective "creative" verbal element(s)	_____
__20__	5. overall design of presentation/display	_____
__20__	6. unity and effectiveness of total package's argument	_____
_____	TOTAL	_____