

American Architecture



A worker adjusts a bolt on the Empire State Building, 1931. Photograph by Lewis Hine.

**HIST 493/693 | Fall 2024
Tuesdays, 7:00–9:50PM]
Brooks Hall 302**

Instructor: Dr. Michael Allen
Office: Chitwood Hall 220
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:30–4:00PM & Fridays, 9:30–11:00AM
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INFORMATION

Description

In this course we will examine how American cultures and ideas have been expressed in architectural forms, paying particular attention to key themes, developments, and debates. The study of architecture brings together a number of academic disciplines – art, art history, geography, anthropology, archaeology, economics, sociology, engineering, and, of course, history, to name a few. We will examine the different ways researchers have approached the study of architecture, and how these approaches have changed over time. Furthermore, we will consider how the study of architecture and the built environment can be applied to enrich both historical analysis and the practice of public history. This course is not a strict survey of American architectural history, but a seminar in which we will undertake an initial summary survey before moving into deeper engagements around certain themes and building types.

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to recognize and describe key themes and developments in the history of American architecture.
- Students will critically evaluate diverse approaches to studying and interpreting architecture and the built environment.
- Students will be able to relate architecture to larger trends in American history.
- Students will analyze the relationship between architectural history and the fields of history and public history.
- Students will develop research, writing, and communication skills.

Office Hours

I keep office hours to support you, so please make use of them. There are two days on which I hold hours, hopefully creating at least one slot that works for each student. I welcome an email or text to the cell number on the syllabus to verify that you are stopping by, in case other meetings or reasons for absence occur. I will try to let the class know if any plans lead to cancelled hours. I also am glad to schedule a meeting outside of the stated office hours.

Academic Policies

Please familiarize yourself with WVU's academic policies, including those pertaining to academic integrity and standards, inclusivity, COVID-19, class recording, and mental health, among others. You can find these statements here:

<https://tlcommons.wvu.edu/syllabus-policies-and-statements>

Course Delivery and Organization

This course is an in-person lecture and discussion-based seminar. Course material, including assignments, will be delivered via eCampus, organized by week. I may amend the syllabus as the semester progresses, but all major readings are included here.

Assignments and Evaluation

Attendance and Participation	10%
Leading Class Discussion	15%
Reading Responses (5)	25%
Morgantown Building Essay	20%
Final Project	30%

Attendance and Participation

Attendance is mandatory, but can be excused with instructor permission. Excuses will be made for health and mental health reasons as well as personal crises, and can be made for travel or activities related to other courses or university activities. Please confer with me as soon as possible about any requests for an excuse, and do so *before* the session you would need to miss. Unexcused absences will proportionally affect the “Attendance and Participation” portion of your course grade. Given the single weekly meeting time, the class cannot function without your arriving prepared and ready for discussion.

While the use of electronic devices is necessary to access eBooks and PDFs, as well as to enhance learning by looking up things to share with the class or looking up terms and phrases (or translating if English is not your first language), it can be distracting if activity is unrelated to learning. I reserve the right to request that you put electronic devices away if I feel that your use is problematic.

ASSIGNMENTS

Reading Responses

You are required to submit reading responses for 5 of the sets of readings this semester. You can select the primary books, the essays or both, but you must identify a significant theme from the reading(s) and relate it to some aspect of contemporary American life (that is, show why the historic examples are relevant today). Responses should be 300-600 words long, typed in Times New Roman 12-point font and double-spaced. They are due the week the reading is assigned, at the beginning of class. It may be useful to select the week for which you are presenting the readings for one of your responses.

Leading Class Discussion

You are responsible for leading one class discussion, with assignments made in Week 1. When it is your turn, give a presentation (15 minutes) about the readings. Provide an overview of the major historic themes in the readings, notable buildings or designers covered, and any questions you still have about the readings. You are encouraged to be creative, argumentative, satiric – just have a clear stake in your readings. In addition to this presentation, come prepared with at least three questions to facilitate class discussion. Important issues to consider include analytical and theoretical framing, argument and evidence, and ethical and practical concerns. Feel free to circulate discussion questions or other materials to the class before the presentation.

Morgantown Building Presentations

You will select a building in Morgantown (including WVU campus buildings) – and by Morgantown this could be within a 25 mile radius of downtown – that embodies a style, material, use or theme that we have studied in the first half of the semester. You will research the building’s history and create a short 15-minute presentation to be delivered in Weeks 7 and 8 as well as a 1,000 word paper that presents the history as well as your argument for why that building relates to the course readings. Essays should be typed in Times New Roman, 12-point font and single-spaced.

Final Project

For the final project, you will research either an architect, building type, style or material selected from a list distributed in Week 4 on a worksheet that will also explain the Final Project Proposal and other requirements. You should frame a research question around your topic, which you will submit in Week 9. While assigned texts will support some of the research, additional research will be required, as well as your own analysis and critical thinking. The deliverables will be a final paper as well as a brief presentation (10-15 minutes) about the project on the final course session. The paper should be a minimum of 2,500 words long and should be typed in Times New Roman, 12-point font and single-spaced.

Late Work/Extensions

Late work will be reduced by half a letter grade (5 percentage points) for each day that it is late. Extensions will be granted on a case by case basis, without judgment. I encourage you to reach out if you anticipate failing to make a deadline, as it is best for both of us to know that in advance (and for you to get an extension).

Grading Scale

A+ 98-100%	B 83-86%	C- 70-72%	F 59-0%
A 93-97%	B- 80-82%	D+ 67-69%	
A- 90-92%	C+ 77-79%	D 63-66%	
B+ 87-89%	C 73-76%	D- 60-62%	

READINGS

Articles and web resources will be posted on eCampus.

Required Texts

Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II and Mabel O. Wilson, eds, *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020); eBook available via WVU Library.

Alexandra Lange, *Meet Me by the Fountain: An Inside History of the Mall* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).

Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces of the New American Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1977).

Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge The MIT Press, 1981).

Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (2010); eBook available via WVU Library.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (August 27): Introduction

Week 2 (September 3): Classicism and Symbolism

Readings:

Leland Roth, "A New Architecture for a New Nation, 1785-1820: Searching for Symbols of Democracy," *American Architecture: A History* (London: Routledge, 2015).

Mabel O. Wilson, "Notes on the Virginia Capitol: Nation, Race and Slavery in Jefferson's America," *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

Peter Minosh, "American Architecture in the Black Atlantic: William Thornton's Design for the United States Capitol," *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

Week 3 (September 10): The Architecture of a New Republic

Readings:

Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): chapters 1, 2 and 3.

Andrew Jackson Downing, "Rural Adaptation," *Roots of American Contemporary Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972).

Week 4 (September 17): Modernity and Professional Practice

Readings:

Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Marianna Griswold Van Rensselaer, "Client and Architect," *Roots of American Contemporary Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972).

Louis Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," *The Inland Architect* (1896).

Week 5 (September 24): Inclusions and Exclusions

Readings:

Adrienne Brown, "Erecting the Skyscraper, Erasing Race," *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

Reinhold Martin, "Drawing the Color Line: Silence and Civilization from Jefferson to Mumford," *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

Lewis Mumford, "A Backward Glance," *Roots of American Contemporary Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972).

Diane Harris, "Modeling Race and Class: Architectural Photography and the U.S. Gypsum Research Village, 1952-55," *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

Week 6 (October 1): American Urbanism

Readings:

Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces of the New American Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008): chapters 1, 3, 4, 6-10, 12

Chester Liebs, "Main Street to Miracle Mile," *Main Street to Miracle Mile* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

Week 7 (October 8): American Shelter

Morgantown Building Presentations – Round 1

Readings:

Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge The MIT Press, 1981), chapters 1-8.

Week 8 (October 15): Housing as Social Reform

Morgantown Building Presentations – Round 2

Readings:

Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge The MIT Press, 1981), chapters 9-14.

Rhonda Y. Williams, "Myth #10: Public Housing Tenants Are Powerless," *Public Housing Myths: Perception, Reality and Social Policy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015).

Due: Morgantown Building Essay

Week 9 (October 22): Optional Session

The instructor is giving a virtual lecture:

“A New Museum of the Built Environment for Our Age: The National Building Arts Center,” for the Society of Architectural Historians-St. Louis Chapter/Steadman Library Lecture Series; St. Louis, Missouri

<https://slpl.bibliocommons.com/events/65ccf9adbcca942f0028b6fe>

Five bonus points on the overall course grade for attendance.

Due: Final Project Proposal

Week 10 (October 29): Urban Renewal and the Changing American City

Readings:

Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (2010), chapters 2-5 (chapter 1 suggested).

Jane Jacobs, “The Generators of Diversity,” *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House Books, 1961).

Cheryl J. Fish, “Place, Emotion, and Environmental Justice in Harlem: June Jordan and Buckminster Fuller's 1965 ‘Architextual’ Collaboration,” *Discourse*, 29.2/3 (Spring & Fall 2007).

Suggested Readings:

Hillary Ballon, “Robert Moses and Urban Renewal,” *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

Peter Laurence, “A New System of Thought,” *Becoming Jane Jacobs* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

Week 11 (November 5): No Class, University Closed

Week 12 (November 12): The Ordinary, the Extraordinary and Postmodernism

Virtual Guest: Elizabeth Blasius, Principal, Preservation Futures

Readings:

Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1977).

Zach Mortice, “Revisit: James R Thompson Center in Chicago, US by Helmut Jahn,” *The Architectural Review* (May 20, 2024).

<https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/revisit/revisit-james-r-thompson-centre-in-chicago-us-by-helmut-jahn>

Stewart Brand, “Flow” and “Vernacular,” *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

Week 13 (November 19): The Shopping Mall as Public Space

Virtual Guest: Alexandra Lange, author and design critic

Reading:

Alexandra Lange, *Meet Me by the Fountain An Inside History of the Mall* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).

Week 14 (November 26): No Class, Fall Recess

Week 15 (December 3): Conclusions

Final Project Presentations

Week 16 (December 10): No Class, Instructor Away

Week 17 (December 16 - Monday): Final Work Due, No Class Meeting

DUE: Final Project