

NEW DEAL EXCERPTS FROM LECTURE REVIEW NOTES AMERICAN CULTURAL LANDSCAPES, 1900 TO THE PRESENT

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Note that these are rough notes, based on a variety of sources, sometimes hastily consulted. Hence, information here should not be taken as gospel truth; for more definitive information, see the sources listed in “Going Further” at the end of this document.

The initial versions for these lectures were written by Adjunct Professor John Brinckerhoff Jackson, Department of Landscape Architecture, in the 1970s. Since then, guest lecturers and teaching assistants in the course have also helped to develop the lectures. Material for the urban lecture, in particular, was developed by former teaching assistant (then a graduate student in the Department of City and Regional Planning), Todd W. Bressi.

These are heavily illustrated lectures. Many of the slides used were taken in the 1940s and 1950s by faculty of the Department of Landscape Architecture, particularly Leland Vaughn, Garrett Eckbo, and Robert Tetlow; most of these images are available in the Visual Resources Collection (VRC) of the College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley.

LECTURE 17 (SECOND HALF): REGIONAL LANDSCAPES OF THE 1930s DEPRESSION ERA

B. RURAL DECLINE OF THE 1920s AND 1930s—AND FINALLY AN URBAN DEPRESSION, TOO

1. **Farm economy declines especially after 1925.** Initially, the increase in rural poverty was hard for town and city people to see, but farm owners and farm workers suffered serious economic decline beginning in 1925 due to:
 - Debt created during expensive wartime expansion.
 - Foreign competition--increased after the war, especially in staples such as wheat, cotton and corn.
 - Overproduction--in the face of shrinking markets, farm prices went soft.
 - Weather problems--drought through the 1920s, very bad in 1929 (and worst in 1934 and 1937), in devastating hurricanes in south and east in 1926.
2. **Other pockets of hard times:**

- New England's cotton textile mill towns
- Coal mining in the Upland South (esp. Kentucky and West Virginia)

3. **By the time of the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), the whole U.S. was in an economic depression—still called “THE Depression.”** When FDR took office in 1933, the country was suffering from *financial crashes*, first in the stock market, then also in farm prices. Also from *unemployment*--12 million were unemployed (25% of the work force), and *forced mobility*, caused as people moved about seeking work. Many people pooled resources and moved in with relatives. The *burgeoning of skid row and rooming house districts* was obvious, as they became the last resort of the displaced and discouraged.

C. THE BEGINNING OF FDR'S “NEW DEAL” ADMINISTRATION

New Deal period: 1933 to 1941, from the heady first 100 days of FDR's administration in 1933 to U.S. entry into World War II at the END of 1941. (Remember that the Pearl Harbor attack was on December 7, 1941.)

Overview of three New Deal lectures:

- Today: Regional
- Next lecture: Recreation and rural landscapes
- Third New Deal lecture: Urban landscapes

The New Deal was not so much economic planning as planned economic experimentation. Herbert Hoover's presidential administration, 1929-1933, had decided to let deflation "run its course"; FDR's administration takes much more drastic and immediate action. Changes in human relations, often wrought by government action, effected enormous changes in the spatial organization of the landscape.

As the landscape architecture historian Phoebe Cutler puts it, "The New Deal effectively shaped the public landscape of the U.S. more than any period before or since."

D. REGIONAL LANDSCAPE EFFECTS OF THE NEW DEAL

1. *Rural and regional highway network is finished.* Federal authorities helped coordinate and support state efforts to create a highway system that had begun in the 1920s. By 1935, the initial elements (engineering, design, grading, surfacing, etc.) of almost a whole system was in place, and work continued as part of the WW II effort.
2. *Widespread resource management.* Surge in gathering information and creating local management of wetlands, water resources, and so forth. Closely related to Soil Conservation Service (see Rural lecture).
3. *Laborers sent in large numbers out to rural and wilderness areas.* Most notably, this was through the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Between 1933 and 1941 the CCC trained almost 3 million unemployed youth. Their work affected the rural landscape in projects such as reforestation, fire prevention, road and dam construction, river stabilization and mosquito control. In national parks, a handcrafted look

characterized the built projects because time and labor was plentiful; human efficiency was less important than keeping people employed, even at only \$30 a month.

4. *The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)*. The TVA had been planned and proposed repeatedly by public agencies and Congress before the New Deal. Although it was delayed for 12 years by vetoes from previous presidents, FDR finally authorized the TVA, giving it broad powers to restructure the land for the benefit of the people. Multiple goals:

- buy, build, operate dams
- generate and sell electric power
- plan reforestation and flood control
- withdraw marginal lands from cultivation and resettle the people
- provide fertilizer for eroded farmlands

The TVA was a socially oriented project, headed by civil engineers, which remade nature into an efficient machine. The project covered 40,000 square miles and provided cheap rural electricity, which also kept private electricity rates low through competition.

5. *Widespread boost to electrical power generation and distribution*. Other New Deal hydroelectric projects provided widespread electrification (e.g., Grand Coulee, Bonneville, Hoover), but did not involve TVA's broad social program.

LECTURE 18. RECREATIONAL AND RURAL LANDSCAPES OF THE NEW DEAL

A. TRADITIONAL VACATION PATTERNS BEFORE THE NEW DEAL

The rich set the style of appropriately rustic vacation settings: an “official” way of seeing nature. In the late nineteenth century, two- or three-month summer vacations were for the very wealthy, who spent the hot months of the year at their country estates, or at beach and lake houses, or at large exclusive seaside or mountain resort hotels, or group-owned “rustic” lodges or Adirondack “camps.” (*Rustic* and *camps* are in quotations, because the style of these Adirondack lodges was indeed rustic—featuring log construction, woody details, and probably decorations of animal antlers and skins—but these homes were luxurious settings with all the modern amenities and a large staff of servants. A nearby example was the Del Monte Hotel near Monterey, California.

Most of these places were reached by railroad; ideally the most wealthy went there by private rail car or private yacht. The women and children of a wealthy family might spend all summer; the male bread-winners might spend a few weeks.

For people in the upper middle class, a few weeks for the family might be spent at a mid-priced resort (in Berkeley, the Claremont Hotel of 1915 was one such place), and by the

1910s and 1920s, visits to commercial and national park Adirondack-style lodges were affordable.

Commercial camp grounds in the woods. For the “middle” middle class, families might rent a tent or simple small cabin for a week or two in a commercial campground or commercial resort, with meals and entertainments provided in a central dining hall.

More overtly commercial, and much cheaper recreation settings were available to people for day excursions—affordable by lower-middle class and some blue-collar working class people:

Amusement parks and dance pavilions, at the edges of the urban region, were special day trips for workers (a blue-collar family might go only one day a summer), and for single people (who, if they were well-employed, might go more often).

Day trips by rail and eventually in private autos. Church groups, social clubs, or unions often sponsored one-day Sunday streetcar excursions to the edges of town, often to small amusement parks or commercial picnic grounds. The hearty young might put together all-day Sunday “century rides”—one hundred mile trips—by bicycle out from the city.

As more people owned private cars and as rural roads became better mapped and paved, Sunday drives out into the countryside were more common (1920s and on), similar to Sunday carriage drives of earlier decades.

By the 1920s: the addition of new clumps of small, cheap cottages for people with automobile access. For middle class folks with autos, relatively inexpensive small lots—often jammed close together, like the commercial camp grounds of the 1890s to 1910s, were developed by rural land owners. People built very simple cottages.

These settings usually did NOT visually conform to official, Adirondack-style, rustic architecture; the point was just to get away from the city, cheaply, for several months. Bread-winners came up only on weekends.

Classic examples: Dillon’s Beach, in Marin County north of San Francisco; or Carpenter’s Beach Meadows at Matunuck Beach, in Connecticut. In a sense, these commercial, fairly low-brow settings were a reaction or alternative to the official, rarefied ways of communing with nature set by the rich in Adirondack-style camps.

Changes in the 1930s which brought leisure time into focus and recreation into the foreground of New Deal public policy planning:

--The New Deal brought the 8-hour day and 40-hour work week—which unions had been advocating for over 30 years—into reach for a great number of Americans.

--Suddenly, in the 1930s, MANY people had a “weekend” of two days, not one day.

--For the middle class, automobile ownership continued to rise.

--The New Deal planners forged public health policies that emphasized outdoor life, fresh air, and exercise as the way to spend the new-found leisure time.

--New Deal policy makers at state and federal levels also saw public investments in leisure time as a way to promote "public" feelings, and a unitary national culture.

B. NEW DEAL RECREATION DEVELOPMENT

Making a new landscape of public recreation. With CCC and other work programs, New Deal planners and landscape architects, often working through states and counties, created a vast network of public camping grounds, state parks, county parks, public beaches, boat docks, walkways, and promenades in addition to the national parks. Often assumed for urban users, at relatively remote sites. Relied on new use of car and highway for recreation.

Essentially, process of transferring formerly private amenities into the public realm (or amenities like those of the private realm, made more public.). In the 1920s, developed lakes and beaches were zones of private interest and privilege. But by end of WW II, a great number of people now had public access to such recreation.

With the transformation of recreation, a jump in the number of commercial roadside shrines to nature: official (Blue Ridge Parkway, Humboldt Redwoods State Park) versus unofficial (drive-through logs, curio shops, coffee shops).

C. THE EFFECTS OF THE NEW DEAL ON RURAL LANDSCAPES

1. **Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA)**, rationing production to stop over-production and help stabilize farm prices. Declared unconstitutional in 1936
2. **Soil Conservation Acts (1936, 1938)**. Emphasized means of relieving farmers' distress:
 - storage of bumper crops
 - increased fertilization of soil
 - conservation
 - erosion control by "shelter belts" of trees, contour plowing, and strip-planting
 - prevention of overgrazing
 - building more stock ponds (which also prevent water erosion of soil)
3. **Resettlement Administration (1935)**. Provided government loans to farmers and aided in setting up farm co-operatives.
4. **Rural electrification**. Often with cooperative associations. The county road gains power lines as an element, in addition to telephone and telegraph lines.
5. **Problem of continued migration**. Federal measures helped farm owners but not farm tenants, sharecroppers or hired help. Large numbers of people left depressed rural areas and migrated to cities.

LECTURE 19. THE URBAN NEW DEAL AND ITS HOUSING IDEAS

A. URBAN LANDSCAPE PROGRAMS OF THE NEW DEAL

The experimentation and new social relationships developed in rural American had direct counterparts in towns and cities. Where City Beautiful projects were often suggested or directed by private booster organizations, New Deal projects were political injections of reform—a new politically enforced social consciousness governed the outlay of capital and labor investments.

Two agencies of note (with overlapping responsibilities):

PWA (Public Works Administration): Involved capital-intensive projects using skilled labor. It was pump-priming rather than relief, and paid private companies to construct public structures such as bridges, dams, sewers, hospitals.

WPA (Works Project Administration): Involved labor-intensive, public-directed employment, often accused of being "make-work" projects. This Federal effort employed 8 million people in over 250,000 projects which included park construction, slum clearance, planting street trees, arts projects (murals, photo documentation), and research projects such as local histories.

These two agencies have left a multitude of distinct landscape elements:

1. **Street and highway paving projects.**
2. **Urban bridges and viaducts over railroads.** Part of the national highway system. The urban counterpart of rural road building had many expressions: viaducts, bridges, by-passes, through-roads and railroad overpasses.
3. **Highway by-passes.** State highway departments plan routes *around* towns (hence the term, "by-pass") to save through-travelers time and to cut down on traffic inside town.
4. **Urban parks and park improvements:** rose gardens, beach retaining walls, restroom structures.
5. **New urban recreation facilities:** for active recreation that could help people forget the hard times (or fill unemployed hours): playing fields, tennis courts, stadiums with bleachers, night lighting of play fields. Golf courses. Emphasis on group activities, getting people away from home and out into social contact—to foster better public spirit and more positive social associations with what government could bring to the people.
6. **Public buildings:** especially schools and post offices, as well as other government buildings.

7. **Infrastructure projects:** often additions to the urban infrastructure of sewer systems, water supply systems, battleships.

Parallel with these publicly planned and funded activities were private fix-up programs. In keeping with the New Deal spirit and continuing effects of boosterism, many Chamber of Commerce leaders and business owners spruced up main street buildings. Ladies Garden Clubs sponsored lawn and garden programs; Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops planted trees on Arbor Day. The 1930s was a heyday for building downtown movie theaters, often very large. The motion picture industry was one private industry that was doing financially well and expanding rapidly during the Depression.

B. HOME-BUILDING PROGRAMS

One approach: public housing

The problem: In the 1910s and 1920s, as urban housing codes and inspections (and better profits to be made on suburban developments) made tenements more difficult and expensive to build, new construction of homes for the low-income families in the center of city almost came to a complete halt. Some New Deal housing projects aimed at balancing this center-city housing shortage, using PWA funds in large cities, and FSA in small towns or rural roads at the edges of some cities.

Typical early New Deal project done *before* the USHA is established: Techwood Homes in Atlanta; note most public housing of this period is 2 or 3 stories; regional differences meant to match local contexts, often handsome design (not like later "project" look). Also, these early programs had buildings that were very well built; high construction standards meant lower maintenance costs in the years ahead. Based, in part, on experiments with WWI skilled-worker housing projects done for the U.S. Shipping Board (ship builders). Publicly-built housing was ferociously fought by Savings and Loan interests and other people in the property industry.

U. S. Housing Authority (USHA) established in 1937 by Congress to provide guidelines and loan funds to local housing authorities. By 1940, 350 USHA projects underway (many of them keyed to industrial workers' needs for WW II build-up. USHA projects usually had a racial bias: not located in suburbs; kept poor and racial minorities in center city.

However, about half of the New Deal's directly-government-built units were actually built at the edge of town, many of them single-family houses, although usually on small lots. One active agency, Resettlement Administration.

Another approach: experimental new towns (the "greenbelt towns")

Rexford Tugwell of the Resettlement Administration proposed a whole series (20+) of towns. Again, the property industry put up sharp opposition in Congress, and only three Greenbelt towns were actually funded and built: Greenbelt, Maryland (just outside today's beltway in Washington DC, which was then out in the country); Green Hills, Ohio, near Cincinnati; and Green Dale, Wisconsin (on the south side of Milwaukee).

Most significant: supporting private single-family house building--the HOLC and FHA

The Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) refinanced and repackaged old short-term loans (say, 7-9 years with a balloon payment due at the end) and replaced them with the best kind of mortgages we still use today: long-term (25-30 year) self-amortizing mortgages with uniform payments for the life of the debt. On the positive side, the HOLC perfected and proved the feasibility of these new loans. But insuring that the loans were good (or rather, reducing their risk to a minimum) created the underside of red-lining (moving zoning assumptions into the realm of finance). HOLC appraisers would classify whole cities in four color codes--green for best, red for worst. Maps often secret bank documents. Reasons for red-lining included mixture of any kind: racial minorities, offices and stores, or the presence of crowded neighborhoods (old center city areas). If HOLC had "red-lined" an area, then typically no banks would make a housing loan in that area.

The property industry and congressional policy continued red-lining practices as congress set up the *FHA (Federal Housing Administration)* in 1934. The FHA took over the work of the HOLC, and remains important today in insuring loans for low- and middle-income home buyers and for housing developers.

GOING FURTHER : READINGS, TRAVEL, WEB SITES, AND MOVIES

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Geog C160B / ED C169B / Am Studies C112B

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Asterisks (* or **) indicate an important source for the lecture, or a particularly good starting place to explore the subject. Double slash marks (//) indicate incomplete areas awaiting attention.

Remember that these are not complete lists; rather, they provide a few user-friendly places to start reading on your own. Articles in the course reader are not always repeated here, but bear in mind that the citations contained in the footnotes of reader articles are other good places to look for more information about topics addresses in the course.

17. Family Farms of the 1920s and Regional Landscapes of the 1930s Depression Era

Politics and Landscapes of the New Deal Period

Marguerite D. Bloxom, compiler, *Pickaxe and Pencil: References for the Study of the WPA* (1982)

W. E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (1963)

- * Lawrence W. Levine and Cornelia R. Levine, *The People and the President: America's Conversation with FDR* (2002) Not about landscape, per se, but a wonderfully personal look at how FDR connected to the American public

- * Lawrence W. Levine, "American Culture and the Great Depression," *Yale Review* 74 (Winter 1983)

Bruce E. Seely, *Building the American Highway System: Engineers as Policy Makers* (1987)

Traffic Quarterly (professional journal)

See Annual Meetings of the *Transportation Forum*

18. Recreational and Rural Landscapes of the New Deal

Recreation and vacations, before and after the New Deal

- ** Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the U. S.* (1999)

- * Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (1982) [see esp. chs. 2-3]

Bryant Franklin Tolles, *Summer Cottages in the White Mountains: The Architecture of Leisure and Recreation, 1870-1930* (1999)

Rural landscapes of the New Deal

- * James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

- ** Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*
Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (1987)
- * Carl Fleischhauer and Beverly W. Brannan, eds., *Documenting America: 1935-1943* (1988)
[on the WPA photograph collection, both urban and rural]
- * Greg Hise, "Model Communities for Migrant Workers," in Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (1997)
- Vance Johnson, *Heaven's Tableland: The Story of the Dustbowl* (1947)
- Walter L. Creese, *TVA's Public Planning: The Vision, the Reality* (1990)
- ** Pheobe Cutler, *The Public Landscape of the New Deal* (1985)

Place to visit: Arthurdale (in Preston County, near Morgantown, West Virginia) which bills itself as the nation's first New Deal rural homestead community, founded in 1934 for displaced coal miners. Public buildings and museum open year round. Info: www.arthurdaleheritage.org

19. The Urban New Deal and Its Housing Ideas

A new area of towns and cities: the commercial highway strips of the 1920s and 1930s

Austin, F. Macdonald, , ed., *Planning for City Traffic*, special number of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 133 (Sept. 1927)

- * Richard Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941* (1999)
- * Chester Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (1985)

New Deal housing programs

- * Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era*, (1996)
- Catherine Bauer *Modern Housing* (1934) [The author, Catherine Bauer Wurster, is one of the people for whom Wurster Hall is named]