

**POSTCARDS FROM AMERICA:
A Geographer's View of Changing Landscapes**

DISCUSSION PAPER ASSIGNMENT

(Exam Replacement for Geography and other Social Science MA Students)

- ❖ **A discussion paper is an essay that looks at a question, a point of view, or findings about a situation - past, present or future. Its purpose is to consider and mull over a situation and to get dialog going.**
- **It is NOT** a detailed research report, a broad summary of the topic, a collection of questions or observations, a criticism of a point of view or situation, or your personal feeling (e.g., off the top of your head) about the topic.
Pros and cons need to be addressed.
- **For this class the focus is on an aspect of the visible landscape.** Present landscape development within the framework of the five fundamental themes of geography. You may focus on just one or two themes. In addition, address the topic within the physical, cultural, political, economic and/or social context that it is found.
- **Begin by identifying a topic;** then research it. Summarize and discuss the major findings already in print, citing these references within the body of the paper. Present them simply and in an easily understandable manner; use footnotes. (Many times the abstract of a professional paper provides this for you.)
- **Describe why the findings are important or meaningful or distressing or encouraging.** This is an opportunity to interject what the results mean to you and what they contribute to both the specific area of study and the bigger picture. It also becomes the catalyst for discussion.
- **Think critically.** Discuss the limitations and alternative explanations for the results you found or the actual appearance of the landscape. No study is perfect.
- **End by indicating future directions for discussion/investigation** or what you would like to see studied. This is a good way to finish the written discussion and to get a verbal discussion going. **Include two questions to start the discussion AND explain why they are pertinent questions.**

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- a. **Read** “*The Place of Landscape: Concepts, Contexts, Studies*” edited by Jeff Malpas.
- b. **Select** any two of Malpas’ three sections as the basis of your discussion. Use one section for the first paper and the other for the second paper. Be sure to reference the section in your introductory remarks.
- c. **Use content** from other books on the syllabus, especially Colten and Buckley “*North American Odyssey: Historical Geographies for the Twenty-first Century*” and any of the “landscape” titles to enhance your discussion.
- d. **Do the following for each paper.**

1. **Identify** for Discussion Paper 1 a local or regional **physical** landscape and for Discussion Paper 2 a local or regional **cultural** landscape.
2. **Select** an aspect of it for analysis. (Use the readings as a guide.)
3. **State** this in the form of a hypothesis, thesis statement, observation or “talking point” within the first paragraph of the essay.
4. **Research** the subject to find material that is appropriate to your topic. (Each book on the reading list has a bibliography.) These can be classics or recent studies or current events articles.
5. **Present** the information/scenario to the reader. (Photographs/images, maps and diagrams may be helpful to you in presenting your discussion.)
6. **Comment** upon the situation in discussion format **within 7-9 pages of text**. This can be from your point of view or that of the geographic community or a field of experts. *No discussion is wrong*. All discussions have at least two points of view. However, any statement made needs to be backed by facts and presented in a logical way. Grading is based on this.
7. **End with two pertinent questions.** (*If used in class these would start a discussion of your classmates’ perceptions of the topic.*)
8. **Include** a bibliography of works consulted on a separate page. (Remember to use footnotes or endnotes within the text.)
9. **Grading** will take into account the written presentation, logic of discussion and supporting material. The papers are due no later than the day of the undergraduate exams; late submissions will be penalized.

+++For Extra Credit you may want to present the essence of one of your papers to the class after consultation with me. The request must be made by middle April to schedule a May presentation. PowerPoint slides and/or handouts can support your presentation (15-20 minutes total). Provide me with a copy of any material used in the classroom presentation including the PowerPoint slides.