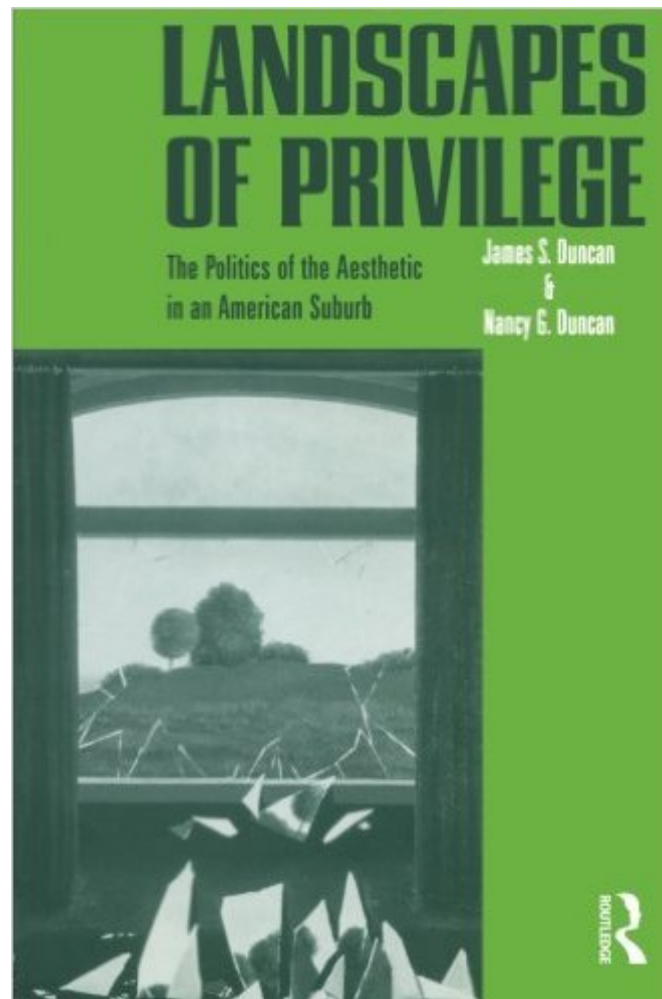


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Landscapes Of Privilege: The Politics Of The Aesthetic In An American Suburb



Synopsis

James and Nancy Duncan look at how the aesthetics of physical landscapes are fully enmeshed in producing the American class system. Focusing on an archetypal upper class American suburb-Bedford in Westchester County, NY-they show how the physical presentation of a place carries with it a range of markers of inclusion and exclusion.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this book, Nancy and James Duncan probe deeply into the landscape of the affluent town of Bedford Village, New York to expose its role in the production and "performance" of the townspeople's identity and the attendant social ramifications. The authors assert that class and status are at the heart of a series of struggles for control of Bedford Village's landscape. By insisting upon the retention of a particular aesthetic for the town, enforced through laws, zoning, advisory boards, and social pressure, the people of Bedford Village are for the most part able to successfully cloak class, race, and power struggles in aesthetic terms that are less volatile and seemingly apolitical. By this they manage to create and sustain a place-based identity that isn't always savory, although--and this is an important point--this would surprise the residents of Bedford as much as it would surprise many others who took such a hard look at where and how they live. The Duncans rightly place class at the center of Bedford's issues and, with almost equal force, money. This seems right as it pertains to Bedford, where houses cost up to millions of dollars and yet where there are long-time residents who, while living much more modestly, engage just as strenuously in

the pressure to sustain the particular pastoral character of the town's landscape. But maintaining the "look" of the land masks other issues. In Chapter Two the Duncans assert that "[i]n capitalist societies...where identity is linked to possessions, the aesthetic often plays an important role in depoliticizing class relations" (p. 25).

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