



Suburban Landscapes: Culture and Politics in a New York Metropolitan Community (American Moment)

Paul H. Mattingly

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Most Americans today live in the suburbs. Yet suburban voices remain largely unheard in sociological and cultural studies of these same communities. In *Suburban Landscapes: Culture and Politics in a New York Metropolitan Community*, Paul Mattingly provides a new model for understanding suburban development through his narrative history of Leonia, New Jersey, an early commuter suburb of New York City.

Although Leonia is a relatively small suburb, a study of this kind has national significance because most of America's suburbs began as rural communities, with histories that predated the arrival of commuters and real estate developers. Examining the dynamics of community cultural formation, Mattingly contests the prevailing urban and suburban dichotomy. In doing so, he offers a respite from journalistic clichés and scholarly bias about the American suburb, providing instead an insightful, nuanced look at the integrative history of a region.

Mattingly examines Leonia's politics and culture through three eras of growth and change (1859-94, 1894-1920, and 1920-60). A major part of Leonia's history, Mattingly reveals, was its role as an attractive community for artists and writers, many contributors to national magazines, who created a 'suburban' aesthetic. The work done by generations of Leonias' artists provides an important vantage and a wonderful set of tools for exploring evolving notions of suburban culture and landscape, which have broad implications and applications. Oral histories, census records, and the extensive work of Leonia's many artists and writers come together to trace not only the community's socially diverse history, but to show how residents viewed the growth and transformation of Leonia as well.

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