Urban Planning and Policy Development Program, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers University

Studio: Planning Rural Decline: Mapping the Buffalo Commons, 34:970:511:06, Spring 2011, 3 credits

Wednesday, 1:10-3:50, Room 168, Civic Square Building

Taught by Frank J. Popper, Room 535, Civic Square Building, 732-932-4009, X689, fpopper@rutgers.edu, fpopper@princeton.edu

Office hours: Thursday morning, 9-12, plus before or after class, or by appointment


In 1987 I and my wife, Deborah Popper, then a graduate student at Rutgers’ Geography Department, now a professor at the College of Staten Island/City University of New York and Princeton University, published an article in Planning on the environmental history and likely future of the rural Great Plains region of the United States. (Parts of the Plains extend into Canada and Mexico.) Our piece aroused a controversy that persists to this day, mainly because it predicted that large stretches of the region would become what we called the Buffalo Commons, a new set of sustainability-focused land uses that lay between traditional extractive agriculture and total wilderness.

The last generation has on the whole seen growing feasibility and political support for the Buffalo Commons, though it remains a minority opinion in the Plains. The nation per capita eats less beef, which the region produces, and more chicken and fish, which it does not. The Cold War’s end reduced military investment in the region’s Air Force bases and missile silos. Many Plains Indian tribes and some politicians and newspapers endorsed the Buffalo Commons, and several nonprofits emerged to make it happen.

The studio’s early sessions explore the Great Plains as a region and the Buffalo Commons as an idea. The later sessions examine different mapping possibilities and then create the maps and their narrative explanations. A late session presents the maps to the studio’s client, which for now will be me. The studio, which you should regard as a small research group to which you are responsible, may not meet every week as scheduled, but may also have subgroup meetings not on the schedule. Deborah Popper will participate in our meetings where possible.

One goal of the studio is to teach you about the Great Plains in particular and regional mapping in general. Another is to produce a polished, plausible map of the projected Buffalo Commons. Yet another is to produce at least one publishable academic paper mapping the Buffalo Commons.
The studio’s success depends heavily on all of you pulling your weight. I expect you to attend all classes, do the reading for them carefully and be prepared to discuss it. The quality of your contributions will probably be evident to everyone in the class. Better individual contributions improve the class and your individual grades.

Schedule

January 24  Introduction.


February 7  The Buffalo Commons: Matthews, entire book.

February 14  The implications: selected Popper papers.

February 21  Mapping meeting 1.

February 28  Mapping meeting 2.

March 7  Evaluation meeting: What have we done? What’s next?

March 14  No class: spring vacation.

March 21  Editorial meeting 1.

March 28  Editorial meeting 2.

April 4  Evaluation meeting 2: What have we done? What’s next? Beginnings of rehearsal

April 11  Rehearsal meeting.

April 18  Presentation to client.

April 25  Evaluation meeting 3: What have we done? What’s next?

May 2  To be announced.