Chapter 1 -- Cultural Landscape Analysis

Cultural landscapes would seem to be so obvious. As soon as we step outside, we are surrounded by elements of cultural landscapes -- roads, sidewalks, houses, lawns, parks, signs, billboards, stores, shopping malls, graffiti, office parks, factories. Yet, mostly, we are only aware of a few places -- our home, work place, school, place of worship, shops, and the few landmarks that we need to navigate on the way to these places. Like friends and relatives, we take landscapes largely for granted. We need to learn to see the obvious and the not so obvious; indeed, to see the “invisible” is often the most important aspect of understanding ourselves and others. Seeing is the start to understanding and appreciating each other as people and the places we create and inhabit. Yet, we need to go beyond the “mere” looking and reading of cultural landscapes to consider the social processes which shaped them. Critical analysis is fundamental to landscape analysis. Ideas and behaviors, as they manifest themselves in material and spatial forms, are critical to this illustrated field guide of some of the most important cultural landscapes of North America.

Landscape analysis and appreciation are similar to music and art appreciation; they are holistic attempts to stretch minds and senses beyond the obvious. We need to see beyond our most “practical” needs, to admire things other than the big, the new, or the historically famous. Too often, "foreign" or "exotic" places (which are unknown to us) are simply ignored or consumed as another kind of commodity. Societal characteristics -- racial and ethnic categories, gender roles, and economic classes -- express themselves in the material world of cultural landscapes. Cultural landscapes express ideas and behaviors which have been committed to material reality. Believing in ideas takes less effort than acting on them and it takes even more effort (time and resources) to create material objects to express ideas, and finally, the most work is needed to create cultural landscapes. As a result, reading cultural landscapes tells us the most important ideas and behaviors of large numbers of people who identify as one culture. Cultural landscapes are better evidence of the way the world is organized than reading books, listening to speeches, or watching people’s behavior. The visual and permanent nature of cultural landscapes allows for a fuller and more honest analysis of culture than the temporary phenomenon of speeches and behaviors. If you are not there to hear and see events, you can not know them. Written records provide permanent evidence about cultures but they express the views of either only individuals or institutions -- both of which often espouse the ideal more than reveal the real. For example, the U.S. Constitution does not mention slavery, yet slavery as an institution was a salient feature, in law and practice, and resulted in distinctive cultural landscapes which persist to this day. Furthermore, race continues to play a significant and distinctive role in the social fabric of the United States.

The United States is the focus of this book, while aspects of Canada and Mexico complement the themes developed for the USA. Collectively these three countries constitute North America where we explore the cultural landscapes in two critically different ways: 1) critical as pivotal or significant cultural places on this continent, and 2) critical as critiques of the dominant ideologies and institutions of control and conformity which result in tensions and contradictions between groups and places. We explore the various (conflicting and contradictory) meanings of individualism, democracy, and liberty as played out in North American cultures. Jazz, a quintessential U.S. art form, is a good metaphor for all three North American culture areas and the resulting landscapes: individual musicians collaborating with others to create unique music. Or as Philip Wagner says "Culture develops through dialog [or the absence of it] distributed spatially" (Wagner 1996).

What does the author bring to this project? He was trained as a cultural geographer at the University of Toronto and the University of Minnesota. As a German-born Canadian visiting his relatives frequently, he learned about the German school of Landschaft studies which he applied to his undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate research in North America. He has been reading, thinking, publishing, and teaching on the topics of this book over the last 40 years. His extensive travels and photography in Canada, USA, and Mexico are reflected in these pages.

To understand, appreciate, and even to enjoy the diverse cultural landscapes of North America, this book has five objectives:
1) Define the concept of culture.
2) Know the components of cultural landscapes.
3) Document the interrelationships between human ideals, fantasies, behaviors, and human-created landscapes for religious, ethnic, and racial groups.
4) Understand how social, political, and economic institutions are expressed in landscape forms.
5) Identify the salient features of landscape forms of oppression, by race and sex.

The first two objectives are developed in this chapter. Subsequent chapters will deal with the other objectives.
Part I. Culture Defined

Culture is mostly easily defined as "learned behavior." As people communicate and interact in space they create specific, purposeful, rule-following, and rule-making principles which distinguish one group from another. Aspects of culture are always being created, negotiated, imposed, and resisted. Nevertheless, several critical elements differentiate cultural groups: language, religion, race and ethnicity, food, clothing, and politics.

Language

Language is the systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized sounds, gestures, and signs -- all of which have shared meanings in a specific community. Language is the most important definer of cultural groups' identities and the territories they occupy and claim. Dominant language groups often take their common language, such as U.S. English, for granted; whereas smaller language groups, such as the Germans in the late nineteenth century and Hmong in the early twenty-first century, are very aware of their language heritage.

Although greatly diminished from the past, except in Quebec and Mexico, native and European-origin peoples throughout North America continue to speak their respective languages. Germans and Scandinavians were major ethnic groups among the original European settlers who settled in the Upper Midwest. Today Germans represent 14 percent of the U.S. population and German speakers are still concentrated in the Midwest, as shown in Figure 1-1.

As in the past, the presence of specific language groups from abroad express political turmoil in their homeland. During the U.S. Vietnam War, the Hmong fought for the U.S. military forces, but after the U.S. lost this war, many of the Hmong from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia fled to refugee camps in Thailand. Since the 1980s, the U.S. government has allowed large numbers of these political refugees to immigrate to the USA. The Hmong settled mainly on the West Coast and in the Upper Midwest, where Hmong speakers are concentrated (Figure 1-2).

The first and earliest people to arrive in an area named the places such as rivers, hills, and settlements that were important to them with their own languages and meanings. Hence, Indian place names, e.g., Illinois which in Algonquin means "tribe of superior men," occur throughout the Americas. When the earliest Europeans arrived, they replaced Indian place names and added their own language names for places, such as Eau Claire (French for "clear water"), New England, New Berlin, and El Paso (Spanish for "passage"). Subsequent later arrivals, whether European, Asian, or African immigrants, however, settled in already named places and did not have the power to re-name places as the earliest European immigrants did. Hence, the presence of these later language groups is absent on the landscape compared with those of the initial European immigrants who did label places.

The dominance of one cultural group determines the use of a particular language in public institutions but current minority groups that earlier had a strong presence and power still retain their languages, often
in resistance to the dominant language. In Quebec, many of the dominant French speakers feel threatened by the use of the English language in the province. The provincial governments and separatists have attempted many times to purge Quebec of English language usage (Figure 1-3). Nationally, the French ancestry group represents 34 percent of Canada’s total population versus 26 percent for the English ancestry group.

In another example, Spanish and Spanish-English business and church signs are characteristics of large concentrations of Hispanic/Latino communities, not only in the historic Hispanic regions of the Southwest but also in the “new” Latino communities in the rest of the United States -- be it in Cleveland, OH (Benedict and Kent 2004), or in Reno, NV (Berry 2004).

Language, in its many forms, is expressed in the landscape through signs of all sorts (mailboxes, roads, streets, highways, commercial, and billboards), place names (along highways leading into settlements and on topographic maps), and murals.

**Figure 1-3.** This stop sign in Montreal indicates the importance of language in group identity. Even with the French word “Arrêt” on top, Quebec separatists oppose the usage of English words on public signs. Language is often related to religion, as the Roman Catholic church in the background shows. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

**Religion**

Religion has played a critical and peculiar role in the United States, much less so in Canada, and differently in Mexico with its historically homogenous Roman Catholicism. In the United States, the importance of religion is expressed in many ways. “In God we trust” is printed on U.S. money and Christian bibles are used in courthouses for swearing-in witnesses and provided in hotel rooms. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees religious freedom: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” European immigrants of varying religious denominations felt particularly drawn to a country in which religious freedom was explicitly and legally expressed. That no one religion could be established by governments, which was the norm in Europe, was critical in assuring the legal acceptance of religious diversities. No such guarantees were made in Canada or Mexico at the time of their independence.

Religion plays a far more important role in public life in the United States than in Canada. According to Gallup polls, 44 percent of the USA population believes in strict biblical creationism whereas only 10 percent (or 30 million, which is more than the number of Roman Catholics and Baptists combined) say they hold a secular, scientific evolutionist view of the world. About 2,000 different religious denominations and cults are found in the United States, which support more than 200 Christian TV channels and 1,500 Christian radio stations. And, unlike other rich countries including Canada, the USA is three times more religious today than at the start of the republic, measured by church attendance! Yet, the U.S. Census does not collect data on religion, but private groups such as the well-known Glenmary Research Center (2005) do.

Figure 1-4 shows that Roman Catholics in the United States today are highly concentrated in the Northeast, Midwest, and Southwest. Catholics are also associated with specific ethnic groups: Italians, Poles, southern Germans, Cajuns, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Mexicans -- to name only a few of the largest Catholic groups. In Canada, French Canadians and Eastern Europeans are predominately Roman Catholics. And despite recent inroads by evangelical Protestants, Mexico remains overwhelmingly Roman Catholic.

**Religion is expressed in the landscape through houses of worship** (meeting halls, churches, chapels, synagogues, mosques, and temples), burial grounds (denominational and public cemeteries), private and public shrines, signs, murals, and place names. Figure 1-5 illustrates the recognizable material form (architecture) of one particular religion even outside of its European origin.
Critical Cultural Landscapes

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Figure 1-5. This Portuguese Roman Catholic church in Cochin, South India, is immediately recognizable as a Christian church. Aside from the main church, the walled component has a school (buildings on the left), shrines, chapel, cemetery, and housing for the priests. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

Race and Ethnicity

Race is culturally defined by biological features, e.g., skin color, nose size and shape, hair color and characteristics, body size, etc., whereas its sub-category, ethnicity, is defined by such cultural traits as national origin, language, and religion of groups away from their homeland. For example, Germans in the U.S. are an ethnic group, but those living in Germany are not. They have a nationality, which is defined as a cultural group occupying and controlling a specific political territory or nation-state (culture-country). Ultimately, both biological and ethnic characteristics are culturally defined by different groups and vary over time. Which human traits we deem important are culturally, not biologically, determined. No culture classifies people by the shape of their ear lobes. Why then is skin color any more meaningful?

Governments reflect societal racial groupings by whether or not and how they collect data on the topic. The U.S. Census Bureau collects self-reported information for the racial categories of White, Black or African-American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and other races. For the first time, the 2000 Census allowed individuals to select more than one racial category, resulting in 63 possible combinations! The Census also has an Hispanic category which is divided into the racial categories of White, Black, Indian, Asian, and by country of origin.

Racial minorities continue to be highly regionalized in the United States, reflecting historical and contemporary institutional practices and resulting in distinctive cultural landscapes. Figure 1-6 shows the concentration of Blacks, by counties, in the United States. Specific racial minorities are now codified by U.S. civil rights laws and affirmative action programs. In contrast, the Canadian government does not collect racial data; instead, it asks people for their country of birth. So people born in Jamaica, for example, could be White, Black or any combination of these racial groups.
As a percentage of the total county population, Blacks predominate in the Southern USA where they were concentrated during slavery. Outside the South, they are mostly concentrated in the inner cities of metropolitan areas.

The U.S. Census also collects information on aspects of ethnicity in the form of ability to speak English, foreign language spoken, ancestry, and place of birth. Figure 1-7 shows the degree to which different language groups speak English well. The Bureau’s web site (U.S. Census Bureau 2005) provides data and maps at various scales on these and other population characteristics.

Ethnicity and religion are often related, but not always. Some ethnic groups are associated with various religions. Historically and even today, Norwegians belong to varies denominations of Lutheranism (Figure 1-8); Germans are either Lutherans or Roman Catholics; Irish, Italians, Poles, and most other Eastern Europeans are Roman Catholics; Greeks and other Eastern Europeans are Orthodox Catholics. Jews think of themselves and are often classified by others as an ethnic group, even though they have many national origins or ethnicities. Technically, Jews are a religious group, but even secular Jews frequently view themselves as distinctive. Yet some religions have never been associated with particular ethnic groups such as the Shakers and Oneida historically, and the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses today.

Race and ethnicity are expressed in the landscape through advertisement signs, murals (Figure 1-9), place names, specialized buildings (civil rights and ethnic museums), and historic parks.
Food

Food is very expressive of religion and race/ethnicity. Many religions have food taboos and/or symbolic forms and uses of food. For Christians, bread and wine are symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Historically, Roman Catholics ate only fish ("not meat") on Fridays. Although the Church has lifted this restriction, restaurants in the Midwest, at least, continue to offer fish specials on Fridays.

A simple food staple like bread reflects geographical immigrant origins. Yeast-based breads are associated with Europeans, whereas most other bread-eating peoples eat different forms of flatbreads. Each bread culture prefers different ingredients and forms. For example, Eastern Europeans prefer heavier crusty rye-based breads with poppy and caraway seeds (Figure 1.10); Southern Europeans prefer wheat-based breads and pastas.

Food preferences vary across the USA, regardless of ethnicity. On the Harvard Dialect Survey web site, respondents answered the question: What do you call the long sandwich that contains cold cuts, lettuce, and so on? Over 10,000 respondents said sub (77.15%), hoagie (6.98%), hero (5.18%), grinder (2.87%), poor boy (1.77%), Italian sandwich (0.46%), baguette (0.25%), sarney (0.03%), bomber (0.01%), no word for this (0.91%), and other terms (4.41%). Figure 1.11 and 1.12 show the most regionalized of these terms: hoagie and grinder (Harvard Dialect Survey 2005).

Who we are as a cultural group is profoundly expressed in our diets -- what we do and do not eat. Food avoidance or taboos are found among some conservative religious communities. Orthodox Jews and Muslims don’t eat pork; Hindus avoid beef. Indeed, Orthodox Jews, regardless of their multi-national origins, use kosher rules to maintain the strictest and most complicated food restrictions of any religion. Kosher meat products must come from animals that have split hooves and chew their cud (such as cattle). Animals such as pigs and rabbits are not kosher. Kosher birds cannot be those listed in the Torah as unclean, usually birds of prey, but chicken, turkeys, and ducks are kosher (Figure 1.13).
Kosher fish must have both fins and scales (such as salmon or tuna). Shellfish, turtles, and swordfish are examples of non-kosher seafood. In addition, kosher food dishes may not include a mixture of dairy and meat and/or fowl products. Separate cooking utensils and dishware are used to prevent foods from symbolically touching each other even when they have been washed. And animals must be slaughtered in accordance with prescribed Jewish ritual, shehitch. Ashkenazi Jews generally soak and salt all meat, and Sephardic Jews omit this practice if meat is broiled.

Regardless of religion, the country of origin of immigrants (ethnicity) reflects food preferences: for example, to name only a few, raw fish (sushi) for Japanese; rye bread, poppy seeds, and smoked and pickled foods for Northern and Eastern Europeans; pasta, olives, and wines for Southern Europeans; corn-based foods, chilies, and plantains for Mexicans; and flat breads and humus (garbanzo beans) for West Asians. In northern cities, soul food is associated with Blacks who brought this cuisine from the Deep South where these foods are associated with their slave history. But for both Blacks and Whites, Southern cooking is distinctive for its fried chicken, biscuits, grits, black-
eye peas, black beans, collard and mustard greens, and okra, coleslaw, and sweetened ice tea (Shortridge 2005).

Food is expressed in the landscape through store signs, food stores, restaurants, billboards, specialized farm buildings (dairy barns, feedlots, smoke houses, potato cellars, tobacco sheds), and agricultural land uses (crops grown such as wheat, sugar cane, tomatoes; and animals raised such as cattle, pigs, guinea pigs, horses, chickens, ducks, and fish).

Clothing

Clothing continues to be an important cultural marker, not so much an expression of religion and ethnicity, but of generation, class, and rural-urban differences. Certain young cultural groups express themselves through haircuts (“Mohawks”), hair color (bright orange, blue, and green), and body piercing, just as the hippies were distinguished from their middle class cohorts by bell-bottoms, tie-dye T-shirts, long-hair for men, and bra-less women during the counterculture of the late 1960s and 1970s. Culturally conservative Christian groups dress plainly. Among the Old Order Amish and Mennonites throughout North America, men wear straw hats, beards (but no mustaches), and dark-colored jackets and pants; women wear long, plain dresses, head coverings, no make-up, and straight, long hair. As Orthodox Jews, Hasidic men typically wear dark suits, skullcaps, broad-brimmed black hats, and untrimmed beards. Married women wear wigs or kerchiefs to cover their hair. They also do not work or drive cars on the Sabbath (Saturday).

The clergy of almost all religions wear distinctive clothing, at least during services; monks and nuns can often be identified by their “habits.” Clothing is also important for rites of religious passage, particularly for baptisms, marriages, and funerals (Figure 1-14). The common phrases of “dressing for success” and “getting dressed-up” reflect the importance of clothing in defining the behavior of specific cultural groups at important events.

Clothing is worn by individuals; hence, clothing is associated more with human behavior than with landscape features, although billboards, clothing stores, and particular agricultural land uses (cotton and flax for linen) are visible in the landscape.

Politics

Politics are no longer associated with particular ethnic and religious groups in the United States and Canada, as was common in the past. In contrast to Europe, political parties and political discourse in USA and Canada have been particularly devoid of ethnic, religious, and even class divisions. The Mexican revolution had a strong religious (anti-cleric attitude towards the Roman Catholic Church) and class (pro-peasant) component.

Today in the United States, conservative and born-again Christian churches are exerting their political power on issues such as abortion, stem-cell research, gay marriages, TV and movie content, welfare reform, the war on terrorism, and tax policies. Religion and ethnicity have never played important roles in defining political issues in Canada, except for the important case of Quebec.

Figure 1-14. Four distinctive types of clothing are represented at this wedding in Accra, Ghana: 1) the groom is a Christian minister; 2) the bride is wearing a Western Christian bridal dress; 3) the parents, on either side of the groom and bride, and other members of the family are dressed in African clothing; and 4) a few men are wearing Western-style shirts and pants. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

Politics are expressed in the landscape through political and highway signs (Figure 1-15), billboards, specialized buildings (courthouses, county seats, jails, state and federal buildings, military bases), and urban, agricultural, and natural land uses (transportation routes, military bases; crops which receive federal crop subsidies, e.g., cotton, sugar cane and sugar beets, tobacco; and county, state, and national forests and parks).
Part II. Cultures, Material Cultures, and Cultural Landscapes

Cultures are foremost about beliefs and ideas which are turned into actions. Such adjectives as "social," "political," "economic," and even "historical," suggest a link to human actions -- individuals and groups. Collective behaviors by cultural groups frequently result in material expressions, in the form of individual objects such as books, shoes, and tools. At another level, cultural values and preferences are expressed on grand spatial scales. Hilltops are removed to make space for houses; plants and animals are selected and reproduced on farms; and cities are built. We manipulate livestock and “harness” the wind (Figures 1-16 and 1-17). Through these and other actions, we create cultural landscapes.

The term "spatial" or "landscape" typically evokes something physical and external to social contexts. Traditionally, space is a context for society -- containers or surfaces -- rather than places created by groups.

Cultures encompass a broader range of topics than do cultural landscapes because not all aspects of cultures are manifested in cultural landscapes. Yet, three aspects of cultures are interrelated:

1) eternal, abstract, and invisible ideas and ideals as cultural meanings and messages,
2) temporary but concrete and dynamic human activities or human behaviors, and
3) permanent, concrete, and static physical forms or cultural landscapes (Figure 1-18).
Figure 1-17. Wind mills once pumped water to the surface to allow European agriculturalists to settle the dry Great Plains, but now diesel pumps have replaced wind mills. Modern technology diminishes visible landscape features; thus, rendering increasingly the sameness of places. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

Figure 1-18. Beliefs, behaviors, and cultural landscapes interact in mutually re-enforcing cause and effect linkages. Source: Ingolf Vogeler.

Each component affects the others sequentially, which in turn modifies each of the other components in continual dialectical loops of cause and effect, effect and cause. Cultural landscapes express human behaviors which in turn are manifestations of human ideas. A traditional way of saying this is that "Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result" (Sauer 1963: 343). For Dear and Wolch (1990), the social and spatial are invariably linked dialectically. For example, Christian churches express the belief that God must be worshiped in specifically-designated places, if not in distinctively-designed buildings (with steeples, bell towers, and stained windows) in which certain distinctive behaviors are practiced, such as praying, singing, sermons, baptism, and marriage and funeral ceremonies, with specific material objects (holy books, water, candles, incense, icons).

Cultural landscape elements are markers that announce and display the presence of a cultural group's most cherished ideals to their own members and to outsiders. Cultural landscapes reflect the power relationships between dominant and minority groups. These markers, symbols, and artifacts in the cultural landscapes maintain collectively conditioned place consciousness. In other words, people incorporate the character of places, and places reflect the character of people. In a city, for example, buildings and streets are seen directly and indirectly on air photos and topographic maps; human activities are seen as pedestrians and traffic; and finally, people evaluate cities in general, and more commonly, neighborhoods as familiar or unfamiliar, beautiful or ugly, safe or dangerous. Despite our best efforts, cultural landscapes can only be understood by outsiders, as travelers, from a distance -- culturally and existentially.

Part III. Components of Cultural Landscapes

Nature is cultural, and culture is natural. Human values and perceptions define the "real" world. What we commonly call "nature" or the "physical environment" is actually a cultural category, defined in particular ways by different cultural groups. All cultural groups, thus, create cultural landscapes. What are the distinctive components of cultural landscapes? All cultural landscapes have four common parts: topography, vegetation, structures, and settlement patterns.

Topography

Topography represents the environmental surface features of
places. Humans modify relief to fit their needs. If there is a shortage of flat land for new housing developments, hill tops are leveled (Figure 1-19). Elsewhere, dams are built to generate electricity, to create boating opportunities, and, in dry regions, to supply water for agriculture and cities (Figure 1-20).

![Figure 1-19. Hill tops are leveled to make flat spaces for housing developments in San Francisco, California. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.](image)

![Figure 1-20. With the construction of dam, engineers use topography to alter the flow of water. By profoundly changing environmental conditions, cultural landscapes reflect cultural value, technologies, and living standards. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.](image)

The “destruction” of places is sometimes dialectically related to creating beautiful places. Even environmental “eye sores” can occasionally become more beautiful sites than before their destruction. Starting in 1904, the Butchart Gardens in Victoria, British Columbia (Figure 1-21), were created in a 55-acre worked-out Portland cement quarry and now attracts over a million visitors each year (Butchart Gardens 2005).

![Figure 1-21. Only the chimney from the former cement factory remains in the Butchart Gardens, Victoria, Canada, one of the best known gardens in North America. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.](image)

Topographic maps show elevational variations or relief. Relief is important in its own right and also because it affects the drainage of water. Blue is used on topographic maps to show water: intermittent streams, year-round streams, lakes, and swamps. Even in the same historical periods, cultural groups assess topographic or environmental features differently depending on their ideas and behaviors. As a collectively land-owning community reflecting the European pattern of villages, the Amana Colonies in Iowa settled in nucleated villages at the interface between the low-lying pasture and hay lands and the higher-lying croplands with the steepest slopes left in forests (see Chapter 2). Specifically, the village of High Amana lies on the 750-foot contour between the lowlands of the Iowa River and the forested uplands over 800 feet (Figure 1-22).

**Vegetation**

Vegetation represents all the plants that cover the earth’s surface. Cultural groups appraise plants as useful or useless: the former are called crops and timber; the latter are called weeds, whether of the non-woody (grass) or woody (tree) varieties. Traditionally, in the Deep South trees were referred to as weeds! Tellingly, cartographers show fields as white areas undifferentiated from “forested” waste lands on topographic maps.
On these maps, the green color is reserved for woody vegetation regardless of the type of vegetation. On German topographic maps, deciduous and coniferous trees are differentiated by \( \checkmark \) and \( \bullet \), respectively.

![Map of High Amana, Iowa](image)

**Figure 1-22.** The compact settlement pattern in High Amana, Iowa, of this utopian community illustrates the importance of topography. The houses are clustered around a meetinghouse (shown with a cross) and communal buildings (bakery and smoke house) on the uplands. The barns (outlined shapes) are clustered together at lower elevations, south of the highway. Source: Amana Quad, 1:24,000.

Cultural groups determine the destiny of plants. Sometimes woody plants are allowed to grow in areas less valued such as swampy areas, steep slopes, and mountains. Yet trees are also planted by cultural groups for specific purposes: wind breaks around farmsteads on the prairies (Figure 1-23), decorations around houses and in cemeteries (Figure 1-24), and as Christmas trees, orchards, and vineyards. Preferred ground plants are even irrigated and fertilized to enhance their productivity, while weeds are exterminated where they are not wanted.

![Rows of trees in the Minnesota River Valley](image)

**Figure 1-23.** Rows of trees enclose fields, called shelter belts, in the Minnesota River Valley, Minnesota, to protect plowed fields from wind erosion on the prairies. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

Human disregard of environmental processes frequently leads to so-called “natural disasters,” better labeled cultural disasters. When trees are cut from slopes and land is planted in row crops, rains cannot be absorbed as they once were. Spring floods in the Northeast and Midwest and mud slides in the West result in the destruction of properties and, often even, of lives. People and communities who disregard environmental constraints, however, are quick to claim assistance from federal emergency relief agencies and financial support for these “natural” castrophies.
Humans set aside natural and vegetative areas as local, state, and federal parks and nature preserves. These areas are rarely representative of nature but of oddities of nature that cultural groups find fascinating. The Grand Canyon National Park owes its existence to erosional features which ordinarily would be considered environmental degradation, yet the canyon is celebrated as one of the wonders of Nature and as such it is one of the most visited places on earth, with more than 5 million visitors in 2004. Almost all (95 percent) of the visitors experience this natural wonder from “afar” -- from the convenience of the rim rather than making the effort to hike into the canyon itself (azcentral.com 2005). The popularity of Yellowstone National Park, and particularly the Old Faithful geyser, reflects Western technological obsessions with timeliness, short attention spans, and spectacular shows. According to the National Park Service (2005), “Old Faithful erupts more frequently than any of the other big geysers, although it is not the largest or most regular geyser in the park. Its average interval between eruptions is about 91 minutes, varying from 65 - 92 minutes. An eruption lasts 1.5 to 5 minutes, expels 3,700 - 8,400 gallons (14,000 - 32,000 liters) of boiling water, and reaches heights of 106 - 184 feet (30 - 55m).”

The concept of “wilderness” is culturally determined and re-defined over time. The extensive national parks of the USA and Canada represent minimal cultural landscapes but even here areas are identified and designated for visitors to understand and enjoy. Park rangers and brochures explain the scenery along the well-marked trails (Figure 1-25). While no rocks, plants, or animals can be removed, fishing is allowed in the parks!

**Structures**

Structures are all the buildings for people, animals, and crops that groups construct to express their cultural values. Building traditions vary over time and space. The earliest Europeans used log construction which was replaced by hewn timber construction which in turn was replaced by balloon framing during the second half of the nineteenth century. Although these technological changes in building techniques were characteristic of all cultural groups, different groups built different kinds of structures in distinctive spatial arrangements to express their visions and needs. Mennonites, for example, brought house styles from southern Russia to Manitoba, Canada, in the 1870s. Houses with the ridge
poles perpendicular to roads and attached to barns became their ethnic markers (Figure 1-26).

Settlement Patterns

Settlement patterns are the sum of the previously mentioned landscape features. How is the built-environment of houses, barns, fences, roads, canals, and railroads related to topography (flat, rolling, or hilly land; streams and rivers) and vegetation (fields, forests, swamps)? Take one example. German Mennonites in Manitoba, Canada, created elongated street-villages (in German, Strassendörfer) when they arrived from Russia in the 1870s and 1880s. On the Canadian topographic map, the village of Blumenfeld (German for "flower field") shows that the houses and barns are aligned along a 0.6 mile stretch of road (Figure 1-27). Their shared German heritage and Anabaptists religion encouraged strong social cohesion, which was expressed in compact settlement patterns, while farmers cultivated individually-owned quarter sections beyond the villages (Mennonite Historical Society of Canada 2005).

In contrast, loosely-knit communities of nuclear families, even with common ethnic, language, and religious similarities, settled in scattered individual farmsteads throughout Canada and the USA. Behaviorally, whether farmers lived in compact villages or scattered farmsteads, they helped each other in neighborly fashion for barn raisings and threshing bees. Figure 1-28 shows such a scattered settlement pattern. The U.S. topographic map shows five farmsteads -- each with a farm house (solid black square) and a barn (outlined square) -- in one-square mile (outlined by roads), or one 640-acre section. In the U.S. Midwest, the number of farms per section reflects the U.S. Homestead Act of 1862 which allowed farmers to claim up to 160 acres, or four farms per section. Most of Canada was similarly settled. The rural contemporary settlements of Mexico, on the other hand, resemble the traditions of Indian and Spanish villages.

Explanatory Framework

Theories describe and explain human ideas and behaviors and their associated manifestations. These theories reflect different assumptions about the nature of humans and societal forces. In this book, we use a dialectical materialist perspective to read and understand some of the cultural landscapes that are critical to understanding North American societies. “Dialectics” means to resolve disagreements through rational discussions and “materialist” means the physical empirical world.
Within societies, groups have a series of contexts at a variety of spatial scales to express themselves, depending upon how much political and financial power they have. The poor and working classes have an impact upon the immediate context of their neighborhoods whereas the rich and upper classes also leave their marks at the national, or even international, levels. The very essence of cultural meaning, as individuals and groups, is choice. Choice is more limited for the powerless than the powerful, for the poor than the affluent. Regardless of the power of different cultural groups, however, all groups create cultural landscapes and interpret them from their own perspectives. This gives rise to tensions and contradictions between groups, invariably expressed in landscape forms as well.

Social and spatial relationships are dialectically interactive and interdependent. Cultural landscapes reflect social relations and institutions, and they shape subsequent social relations. In the past, and continuing today, capitalist economies in various forms (whether Canadian, USA, or Mexican in different ways) and sympathetic national and local governments have actively created and intensified regional or spatial inequalities (e.g., Indian reservations, internment camps for Japanese, Black and Hispanic ghettos). At the same time, the continuing expansion, spatially and non-spatially, of market forces is accompanied by countervailing tendencies toward increasing spatial homogenization and the reduction of geographical differences (e.g., placelessness, shopping malls, suburbs, disneylands). While elites create spatial inequalities and homogeneity simultaneously through their hegemony, non-elites create counter-hegemonic landscapes that reflect their own values. Behavioral resistance to the dominant culture leads to distinctive cultural landscapes; for example: cultural retention and revival on Indian reservations, past and present alternative communal and utopian communities, cultural resistance by French Canadians, and locally expressive murals and graffiti in inner cities.

Indeed, the dominant ideologies -- religious, political, economic, ethnic, and racial -- continually (re)define "deviance" or "otherness" to
maintain their power and landscapes of dominance. **Space and place are key factors in the definition of order and propriety and of deviance.** Tim Cresswell (1969) puts it this way: "the 'out-of-place' serves to highlight and define the 'in-place'." We examine "deviant" groups (defined, of course, by elite ideologies), in the past and present, that provide(d) alternative visions and cultural landscapes to the dominant visions and landscapes. These dialectical processes transform the very meanings that are being imposed. Cresswell provides the example of how graffiti can be interpreted as either "deviance" or "high culture." On the street, graffiti is reviled by authorities as dirt or pollution, and a challenge to public order. Just as dirt becomes dirty according to its context; when graffiti is displayed in art galleries, its meaning changes. When appropriated and commodified (bought and sold for money) by the art world, graffiti changes to art and so is monetarily valued by elites: "Crime becomes creativity, madness becomes insight, and dirt becomes something to hang over the fireplace" (Cresswell 1969). The former major of New York City, Rudy Giuliani, said that graffiti defaced walls and revealed the proto-criminal disposition of these artists. Of course, he did not object to company advertisements with their boldfaced lies plast(ering the city’s walls (The Progressive 2001).

We also look at landscapes of homogenization, often disguised as unique places in mass culture. The peculiar and uniquely U.S. cultural ideals of individualism, “The American Way of Life,” and “The American Dream” give rise to particularly rich examples of “flatscapes.” Las Vegas, Hollywood, Disneyland, and Western ghost towns as tourist destinations represent a continuum of uniquely placeless landscapes which contrast with historically-evolved authentic landscapes of religious, ethnic, and racial groups. Figure 1-30 illustrates the difference between real and synthetic landscapes and the critical values imbedded within each vision.

In summary then, the dynamic and complex nature of cultural landscapes allows geographers to **conceptualize landscape as text** (a postmodern way of saying it), which, like a book, is written and read by individuals and groups for very different purposes and with many different interpretations. The messages embedded in the landscape can be read as signs about values, beliefs, and practices from various perspectives, e.g., European colonizers and Native peoples; the White middle class in the suburbs and the Black underclass in the ghetto; Midwestern main streets and Disneyland’s Main Street; and so on. Landscapes both produce and communicate meanings which we will read and understand in all their complexities and contradictions.

Contradictions over ethnic, religious, and linguistic identifications abound in all three countries of North America. In the United States, the dominant institutions have always promoted a Melting Pot metaphor for how distinctive immigrants should assimilate into the larger English-speaking country (Figure 1-31). Ethnic intolerance has been particularly pronounced during times of military conflicts. For example, during World War I, many towns dropped German-languages courses, burning German
books, tried to ban German-language religious services, and harassed German immigrants, many of whom Anglicized their German names. In the last ten years, several states and even the U.S. Congress tried to pass English-only laws. Simultaneously, foreign languages are being promoted in high schools and universities to prepare young people to be competitive in the global economy. Repeatedly throughout U.S. history, some groups have seen ethnic and religious identities as tantamount to being un-American.

Canadian governments, on the other hand, have been less demanding of immigrants to assimilate, often even officially celebrating cultural diversity in its many forms. Unique to rich countries, a large majority of Canadians continue to welcome immigration in contrast to the United States where strong opposition to immigration exists, while depending on it for cheap and skilled labor. Diversity and tolerance in Canada has again been expressed recently (2005) when gay marriages became legal -- an unheard proposition among mainstream religious and political groups in the United States.

In Mexico, governments and people have always been divided by their Spanish colonial and Indian identifications. Historically, the elites were of Spanish descent and so everything Indian was de-valued, but with the Mexican Revolution, mestizo (mixed blood) culture was valued. At least since the 1960s, revivals in Indian cultures (music, dance, crafts, and architecture) have characterized much of public life in Mexico, its tourism, exported art, and entertainment abroad.

The immigrant settler societies of Canada and the United States provided opportunities for Europeans to start over in the “New World.” All kinds of individuals and groups wanted to escape economic hardship and social and religious persecution in Europe. While mainstream historical and political accounts stress the individualism of settler empires, others came to continue or create alternative or utopian visions in Canada and the United States. These nineteenth-century utopian communities illustrate the most comprehensive view of culture. Counter-cultural groups answered the fundamental issues of life (work, property, family relations, sex, power) in profoundly different ways from the dominant societies in Europe and North America alike. The study of intentional or utopian groups leads to critical reflection on the nature and purpose of all cultural groups. “Marginal” or “alternative” groups force us to re-think the values of dominant cultural values, behaviors, and institutions and to appreciate the rich and borrowed cultures that we all embrace in some way or another, often hidden or unknown to us. In the next chapter, we examine past and present utopian groups.