



Yale-New Haven
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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2005 Volume III: History in the American Landscape: Place, Memory, Poetry

Memory and Place on the New Haven Green, 1638-1876

Guide for Curriculum Unit 05.03.04
by Ralph E. Russo

This unit will utilize New Haven's most historic site to provide students with an interdisciplinary and experiential learning experience. As Fellows in Dolores Hayden's seminar, my colleagues and I broadened our understanding of the importance of place memory, public history, and public art in the built urban environment. The New Haven Green is an excellent subject of focus because it has more or less retained its status as a center of spiritual, economic, and social activity in New Haven over a considerable period of time. In 1638, the founders of the New Haven Colony planned a community based on a grid of nine squares. The planners set aside the central square of nine squares as common lands. Unlike most other colonial and federal period greens, which have disappeared or have been significantly altered, the Green has developed over time as New Haven has evolved. Yet, while the architecture around the Green reflects the eras of change that have washed over New Haven in the last three centuries, the function and character of the Green has changed little since the early 19th century. Today, the Green serves as a place for public gatherings, for entertainment, worship, and recreation. In the past, it has also served as the town market place, burial ground, and the location for the town's first government. The Green survived urban development, including a plan to build a parking garage beneath it. Today it remains the central landmark in downtown New Haven. The Green's survival has something to say about the communal sense of place in New Haven. Everyone who has visited downtown has a memory of the Green.

(Recommended for U.S. History I, grade 10.)

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