

READING PASSAGE 3

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 27-40**, which are based on Reading Passage 3 below.

Book Reviews:

***Architecture in the United States* by Dell Upton**

As its title suggests, *Architecture in the United States* is an ambitious work, and there are few scholars as qualified to undertake such a project as Dell Upton, a distinguished scholar of American architectural history who, having a background in American studies, is as knowledgeable in vernacular architecture as high style. The book is structured into five themes: Community, Nature, Technology, Money, and Art. The usefulness of this technique becomes apparent as one progresses through the book and realizes that Upton discusses not only houses and farm and commercial buildings but also landscape architecture, gardens, bridges, public sculpture, and whole cities. His thematic structure is also well coordinated with his intention to examine architecture not primarily as a form of art but as an integral part of social and economic history.



The first chapter, “An American Icon,” is devoted to the house. Upton’s discussion of this elemental unit of architecture and its importance per the primary social structure of the family is an effective introduction to the broad topic of architecture in relationship to society. While much of the chapter focuses on examples of elite houses, in particular Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello, Upton incorporates much essential information about folk houses into his interpretations. This chapter, like the succeeding five, follows a loose chronological orientation in its analysis of several examples of homes from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, while integrating discussion of form and style with social and economic processes.

Chapter 2, "Community," examines monumental architecture ranging from Native American earthworks and courthouse square models to state and federal capitols, memorials, and other public buildings, connecting them to issues such as the metaphor of the ancestral homeland, the Colonial Revival, planned communities, and other architectural definitions of community. In chapter 3, "Nature," Upton posits a theological role for nature with respect to American architecture because of the enormous influence of the wilderness on the identity of the country. From first settlement onwards, architecture "was an ally against nature" (p. 107). He contrasts this attitude, and its reflection in architecture, with that of Native Americans and their built environment. By the nineteenth century, the dynamic relationship between nature and culture was expressed in the creation of urban parks, suburban homes and movements such as the Picturesque, Primitivism, and Arts and Crafts, whose most notable product was the ubiquitous bungalow.

Chapter 4, "Technology," begins with a description of traditional timber framing and its evolution in the nineteenth century into balloon framing and prefabrication. Upton neglects those muddy realms of interest to the folk architecture scholar, such as why many farmers still built heavy, timber-frame, pegged barns well into the twentieth century. He moves quickly to discussion of industrial buildings and bridges, connecting Americans' fascination with technology to the aesthetic category of the Sublime. Finally, Upton analyzes Utopianism and Consumerism in architecture and their connection to industrial design and notable architects such as Buckminster Fuller. Chapter 5, "Money," segues naturally from the previous chapter: after an elaborate discussion of Pueblo Indian towns and their relationship to their society and economy, Upton describes the growth of major American cities and the role of commerce in that growth. This "cultural construction of economic life" (p. 207) culminated in the skyscraper and is intricately connected to what Upton calls "the moral authority of Capitalism" (p. 223). From there he moves to an architectural interpretation of shopping malls and markets.

The concluding chapter, "Art," begins by examining the historical conception of architecture. American architecture as a profession began in the nineteenth century and, as the century progressed, the architect's role became increasingly divorced from that of the builder. Upton connects this progression to "the growing separation of head-work from handwork in all segments of the American economy" (p. 254). However, architecture as a profession had inherited a special status, like art, from its role as a vehicle of social identity: "Architects claimed superiority to builders based on their taste, cultivated through special training, socialization, and immersion in architecture. . . . The new architects were manufactured gentlemen who in turn sold their tastes in a consumer economy" (p. 255). The folklorist will recognize here many of the attributes used to distinguish elite culture from popular or folk culture. Upton continues with a discussion of the concept of "style" and its importance to the field of architecture: style is basically a visual vocabulary used to denote what is fashionable and was useful for claiming social place as well as contributing to professional standardization. Upton ends the chapter with the significant subtitle "Beyond Art": "Every architect and every building belongs to several overlapping 'high' and 'vernacular' circles of architectural knowledge," he says. "These circles of architectural knowledge encompass

technologies, social ideas, and meanings that are unaccounted for in, and often antagonistic to, art-architectural traditions” (p. 189).

My only complaint about this masterful work is that it neglects one facet of American architecture that is essentially connected to American history, society, and economy, and that is the farmstead. The vast majority of built structures in this country until the twentieth century were of folk architectural origins, but the importance of the family farmstead to the construction of American society is often neglected nowadays. *Architecture in the United States* has a bias toward the urban and elite over the rural or folk in terms of its coverage, but the fact that it knowledgeably includes any discussion of folk architecture at all is a testament to the tremendous progress that field has made in the past thirty years. In this beautifully written and illustrated book, Upton displays his commanding expertise in all areas of architecture.

References

Alice Reed Morrison. *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 116, no. 459, 2003, pp. 116–17.
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