

***Divided Highways* Writing Assignment**

Using the documentary, *Divided Highways*, as your primary source, write a two to three page paper addressing the following general question:

Was the Interstate system ultimately good for the United States? Why?

You may focus on this general question or focus on a subtopic from within the movie (such as freeway revolts, method of financing, displacement of people, etc.). Make no mistake, this is an **OPINION** paper. I want to hear your opinions. In your writing, make sure you comment not only on the actual physical items that were built but also how they were built and the social and environmental implications of design and policy decisions. Some things you might want to consider are:

- The decision to build freeways through major cities.
- The freeway revolts in San Francisco, New Orleans and elsewhere.
- Mobility and how it is achieved.
- The method of financing the Interstate system.

This is a fairly freeform writing assignment whose purpose is twofold:

1. **Allow you to reflect on engineering's social and environmental implications.** Often, we overlook this in favor of learning and discussing design techniques, equations, physical processes, etc.
2. **Present you with an opportunity to display your communication skills by writing a concise, articulate paper.** In general, clear and concise is more valued than long and verbose.

You will not be graded on your opinions – there is no “right” or “wrong” answer. Rather, you will be graded on the quality of your writing. I expect your writing to be more technical than artistic. For instance, whereas a surprise ending is often good in a fiction book, it is generally not good in a technical article. Specific things I will look for are:

- **Introduction.** Are your thoughts organized and presented in a concise overview at the beginning of the paper? Does it give me an idea of what is to come?
- **Body.** Are your thoughts organized in a logical manner? Do they flow from one to the next? Are your opinions substantiated by evidence? Are you expressing your thoughts or just restating what you saw in the video?
- **Conclusion.** Does it summarize your thoughts? Can your conclusion logically be made from your thoughts discussed in the body? Do you refrain from introducing new subject material in the conclusion?

Further Reading:

Lewis, Tom. (1997). *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life*. Penguin Books, New York, NY.