### History of the American Home

**COURSE GUIDE**

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<th>History 325</th>
<th>Fall 2005</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. L. Tolbert</td>
<td>Office: McIver 210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Phone: 334-4646</td>
<td>Hours: Tues./Thurs 2:00-3:00 and by appointment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email address: <a href="mailto:lctolber@uncg.edu">lctolber@uncg.edu</a></td>
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<td><em>Please note: the quickest way to communicate with me is through email rather than through my office phone.</em></td>
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### Scope of this Course

From the frontier log cabin to the suburban cottage, the single-family home has long served as one of the most powerful symbols of American culture and American identity. While homeownership has often been a central goal in the fulfillment of the "American Dream," Americans have experimented with and reinvented their houses in a variety of ways that offer a deeper and more complex understanding of American life than the simplicity of the "Dream" might suggest. This course will take you from the colonial period through the twentieth century as we study houses as historical evidence of social change. Rather than a descriptive focus on stylistic or aesthetic changes in American house design, emphasis will be on analysis of the home as an idea, and houses as physical and material spaces. How, for example, did the invention of the parlor document new ideas about private life, new gender roles, and developments in commerce and technology related to the home? As the semester unfolds, we will explore such subjects as the symbolism and politics of domesticity, the evolving functions of particular rooms and spaces, new technologies that reshaped houses, and the diversity of American homes based on region, ethnicity, and class.
Learning Goals of this Course

The student who successfully completes this course should be able to:

- Describe and evaluate key changes in American housing from the colonial period to the twentieth century.
- Assess the range of housing options over time based on region and social class.
- Evaluate the impact of cultural factors such as gender roles and ethnicity on the form and function of American housing.
- Explain how major technological changes reshaped American houses in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
- Use floor plans and other kinds of architectural evidence to analyze social change over time.
- Use a variety of primary source documents as historical evidence for studying the development of American housing.
- Develop research skills for studying the history of American housing including defining a research problem, developing a meaningful research bibliography, and using images as evidence for studying American housing.

Required Reading

Books


Journal Articles and Book Chapters


Evaluation

Participation 10%
Research and Primary Source Exercises 90%

**Participation (10%)**
This assessment will be based on three criteria:

1. Consistent attendance—This is not a traditional lecture course. We will be critically evaluating the content of the assigned readings and practicing the application of analytical skills during each class period. You will not be able to make up for your absences by copying someone else's notes. For this reason, consistent attendance is essential to your learning in this course.

2. Thorough preparation for class—readings must be completed before class and assignments must be turned in on time. There will be a penalty for late assignments and no assignments that are more than one week late will be accepted for credit. You should make arrangements with me in advance of a due date if you have a conflict for meeting a deadline.

3. Regular contributions to class discussions—the success of this course for your learning depends on active intellectual engagement with your peers. Discussions will take place during every class meeting in both small group exercises and as a whole class.

**Research Exercises (90%)**

**Probate Inventory Analysis (30%)**
You will work as a research team to evaluate a probate inventory in appropriate historical context. Due 13 September

**Comparative Floor Plan Analysis (30%)**
You will compare and contrast floorplans from two different eras and evaluate the use of space in appropriate historical context. Due 13 October

**Domestic Magazine Research Portfolio (30%)**
This assignment requires several research elements including comparative selection of primary source data from domestic magazines representing change over time in American houses during the twentieth century, as well as development of a scholarly research bibliography. Due 1 December.
Class Schedule

16 August  Introductions

Unit 1: Early American Homes: Genteel and Vernacular

18 August  Lifestyles of the rich (if not necessarily famous)
Read: Bushman, "Houses and Gardens" (Seventeenth Century), pp. 100-110

23 August  Lifestyles of the rich (if not necessarily famous)
Read: Bushman, "Houses and Gardens" (Eighteenth Century), pp. 110-138

25 August  Pre-Industrial Housewifery
Read: Cowan, More Work for Mother, chapters 1-2, pp. 3-39.

30 August  Probate Inventory Workshop I

1 September  Housewifery, part II

6 September  Living at Mt. Vernon

8 September  Probate Inventory Workshop II

13 September  Probate inventories due

Unit 2: Evaluating the Single-Family Home

15 September  Housing the Middle Class in the Nineteenth Century

20 September  Inventing Housework
Read: Cowan, More Work for Mother, chapter 3, pp. 40-68.
22 September Suburbia and the Single-Family House Ideal
Read: Hayden, Building Suburbia, Chs. 1-3, pp. 3-44.

27 September Suburbia and the Single Family House Ideal
Read: Hayden, Building Suburbia, Ch. 4, pp. 45-70.

29 September Modernizing the Single-Family Ideal
Read: Katherine C. Grier, “The Decline of the Parlor after 1890”

4 October Floor plan analysis workshop

6 October Modernizing the Single-Family Ideal

11 October Fall Break

13 October Floorplan analysis due

**Unit 3: Becoming Modern:**
Technology Redefines "Home"

18 October Suburban Expansion
Read: Hayden, Building Suburbia, Ch. 5: “Streetcar Buildouts,” pp. 71-96.

20 October How the Other Half Lived

25 October Twentieth-Century Changes in Household Technology

27 October Alternatives to the Single Family Home
Read: Cowan, More Work for Mother, chapter 5, pp. 102-150.

1 November Research Workshop I

3 November Mass-marketing Suburbia
Read: Hayden, Building Suburbia, Ch. 6, “Mail-Order and Self-Built Suburbs,” pp. 97-127.
8 November  Housework and Household Technology, 1900-1940  
Read: Cowan, More Work for Mother, chapter 6 pp. 151-191.

10 November  The Postwar Years  
Read: Cowan, More Work for Mother, chapter 7, pp. 192-219.

15 November  Suburbia in the Late Twentieth Century  

17 November  Research Workshop II

22 November  Suburbia in the Late Twentieth Century  
Read: Hayden, Building Suburbia, Chs. 8-9, “Edge Nodes” and “Rural Fringes,” pp. 154-197.

24 November  Thanksgiving Holiday

29 November  Suburbia in the Late Twentieth Century  

1 December  Domestic Magazine Research Portfolio due