



# History of the American Home

## COURSE GUIDE

History 325

Fall 2005

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Hours: Tues./Thurs 2:00-3:00  
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\*Please note: the quickest way to communicate with me is through **email** rather than through my office phone.

### 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

Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. New York: Basic Books, 1985.

Hayden, Dolores. *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*. New York: Pantheon, 2003.

### Journal Articles and Book Chapters

"Houses and Gardens." In *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, pp. 100-138. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. [ereserves]

Bushman, Richard. "The Comforts of Home" In *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, pp. 238-279. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. [ereserves].

Cohen, Elizabeth. "Embellishing a Life of Labor." In Dell Upton and John Vlach, eds. *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986. [ereserves]

Grier, Katherine C. "The Decline of the Parlor after 1890." In Foy, Jessica H. and Thomas J. Schlereth. *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992. [ereserves]

Pogue, Dennis J. "The Domestic Architecture of Slavery at George Washington's Mount Vernon," *Winterthur Portfolio*. Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 2002): 3-22. [JSTOR]

Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. "Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labor in Eighteenth-Century New England" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 55, No. 1. (Jan., 1998), pp. 3-38. [JSTOR]

Volz, Candace M. "The Modern Look of the Early Twentieth-Century House." In Foy, Jessica H. and Thomas J. Schlereth. *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992. [ereserves]

## 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  
**Read:** Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. "Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labor in Eighteenth-Century New England" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 55, No. 1. (Jan., 1998), pp. 3-38. [JSTOR]

**6 September** Living at Mt. Vernon  
**Read:** Pogue, Dennis J. "The Domestic Architecture of Slavery at George Washington's Mount Vernon," *Winterthur Portfolio*. Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 2002): 3-22.

**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  
**Read:** Bushman, "The Comforts of Home" pp. 238-279.

**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  
**Read:** Candace M. Volz, "The Modern Look of the Early Twentieth-Century House"

**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  
**Read:** Cohen, Lizabeth. "Embellishing a Life of Labor."

**25 October** Twentieth-Century Changes in Household Technology  
**Read:** Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, chapter 4, pp. 69-101.

**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  
**Read:** Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, Ch. 7, "Sitcom Suburbs," pp. 128-153.

**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  
**Read:** Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, Chs. 10-11: "The Next Suburbs," pp. 201-248.

**1 December** Domestic Magazine Research Portfolio due