Course Description

“The most remarkable fact about cities is that the way buildings and people are arranged in space is not capricious.”

This statement by urban sociologist Janet Abu-Lughod appropriately characterizes the underlying theme of the course. Housing, as a key component of the built environment, embodies American social values and reflects our social structure. It is a complex and fascinating topic, largely because it is so fundamental to many aspects of social and economic life: it is at once a form of artistic expression, shelter, home, economic investment, market commodity, and status symbol. Its location influences a person’s access to goods and services and can therefore affect life chances. This course focuses on the relationship between housing and social structure in the United States using historical, sociological, and political-economic perspectives. We will examine the actors and institutions involved in housing development and provision (builders, real estate and mortgage brokers, the federal government, welfare capitalists, architects, urban planners, politicians, etc.) and the ideas, events, policies, and programs that have resulted in contemporary housing and land use patterns. We will focus on the history of federal housing policy and explore the meaning and implication of the “American Dream”. Finally, we will examine various housing issues (affordability, discrimination, gentrification, homelessness) and attempts to address them.

Course Requirements

A combination of lectures, discussions, and films are used to cover the material. There will be two take-home exams (short answer). You will also present a short research paper on a topic related to housing affordability or housing discrimination. Please communicate with me via email (gibsonk@pdx.edu) if you anticipate any issues with the class. Computer usage may not be allowed if it proves distracting.

Assignments: Pct. Dates:
Midterm Exam 35% May 5
Research Paper 30% May 28
Final Exam 35% June 10
100%

Required Texts:

Schedule of Topics and Readings

March 31  Introduction

April 2  American Dreams vs. American Social Reality


April 7  Dreams and Nightmares: Housing and Social Structure
Building the Dream, Introduction and Chapters 1-3


April 9  Housing Factory Workers and Farmers
Building the Dream, Chapters 4-5

Joint Center for Housing Studies. *The State of the Nation’s Housing, 2014*. Read sections: Executive Summary and Housing Challenges. [http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/research/state_nations_housing](http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/research/state_nations_housing)
Panel Discussion of Report: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeR0XEUpbRo&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeR0XEUpbRo&feature=youtu.be)

April 14  Environment and Behavior: Suburban and Urban Dwellings
Building the Dream, Chapters 6-8

Tenements to Taylor Homes, Introduction & Chapter 1

April 16  Good and Evil Housing: The Movement to Stop Multi-Family Housing

April 21  Housing Workers, Controlling Workers
Building the Dream, Chapter 10

Tenements to Taylor Homes, Chapter 3

April 23  Better Homes: The Single Family Home and the Suburban Ideal
Building the Dream, Chapter 9, 11

Tenements to Taylor Homes, Chapter 4

April 28  The Depression Era Housing Crisis and the New Deal Experiment
Building the Dream, Chapter 12

Tenements to Taylor Homes, Chapter 5
*Film: The Great Depression: New Deal/New York*
Schedule of Topics and Readings

April 30  Federal Housing Policies: Defense Housing and Post-War Suburbanization
Tenements to Taylor Homes, Chapter 6


May 5  Suburban Expansion during the Post-War Era
Building the Dream, Chapter 13

Tenements to Taylor Homes, Chapter 8

May 7  Central City Disinvestment during the Post-War Era

Film: The Fillmore

May 12  The Mechanics of Residential Segregation

May 14  Urban Redevelopment: Slum Clearance, Urban Renewal, and Public Housing
Tenements to Taylor Homes, Chapter 7


May 19  Transportation and Regional Development: The Interstate Highway System
Tenements to Taylor Homes, Chapter 11

Film: Divided Highways

May 21  Urban Housing Crisis and Response in the Post-War Era


GUEST SPEAKER: Brad Schmidt, Oregonian Reporter

May 26  Gentrification Concepts I

May 28  Gentrification Concepts II
Building the Dream, Chapter 14

June 2  Student Presentations

June 4  Student Presentations
June 10  Final Exam Due by 5:00 p.m. in Urban Studies Office, Third Floor, Urban Center