Picture windows, patios and barbecues, power lawn mowers, the problems of commuting, and the armies of children manning their mechanized vehicles down the sidewalks, are only secondarily facts; primarily they are symbols whose function is to evoke an image of a way of life….Suburbia is the locus of gadgetry, shopping centers, and “station wagon culture”; its grass grows greener, its chrome shines brighter, its lines are clean and new and modern. Suburbia is America in its drip-dry Sunday clothes, standing before the bar of history fulfilled, waiting for its judgment.

– Bennett Berger, “The Myth of Suburbia”

**Course description.** This seminar examines the history of the suburbs in the United States since the mid-19th century, with special attention to gender as it interacts with race, space, and class. Topics include domesticity, ranch houses, segregation, car culture, malls, soccer moms, and teenage boredom. Students will plan and complete a major research project using primary sources and recent secondary sources. Please note that this course counts as an elective for the Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies major.

**Objectives.**

- Complete a 15-page independent research project based on original primary research.
  - Read and contextualize primary sources.
  - Analyze and use secondary sources.
  - Frame an inventive historical argument and support it convincingly.
- Communicate research ideas in written and spoken presentations.
- Contribute to the community of the classroom through discussion, posting, and feedback.
- Understand and problematize the suburbs, particularly as they interact with gender.
- Engage as citizens with contemporary and historical issues.

**Required texts.**

- Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: Gender, Housing and Family Life* (Revised edition, 2002)
- Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*

Additional readings will be posted to the course web site and are also available as library reserves. Please read all assigned reading carefully and critically, and come to class prepared for discussion. Since we will refer to specific examples in the monographs and texts, you must bring the required reading to class.
Assignments.

- **Active, thoughtful, and engaged participation** (determines borderline grades): including a weekly, two-paragraph reading response, posted to the course website by Tuesday at noon.
- **Original research project**: A 15-page research paper on gender and the suburbs, topic subject to my approval. The following assignments are due as postings or emailed soft copies:
  - MON FEB 11, NOON: Suggest three possible paper topics (post)
  - MON FEB 18, NOON: Propose your research question (post)
  - SUN MAR 3, 8 PM: Share a primary document (post)
  - THU MAR 21, 5 PM: Primary and secondary source bibliography (email; 10% of grade)
  - THU APR 11, 5 PM: Introduction and detailed outline (email; 10% of grade)
  - SUN APR 21, 8 PM: Good rough draft for peer review (email; 10% of grade)
  - TUE APR 30 and TUE MAY 7: 10-minute student presentations (in class; 10% of grade)
  - MON MAY 13, 9 AM: Final project (email; 60% of grade)

Additional details:

- Academic honesty. Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are unacceptable, and easy to avoid. Familiarize yourself with Oberlin's [Honor Code](#), and ask me to clarify if you have any questions; ignorance is not an excuse. Per Oberlin honor code requirements, I will refer all suspected academic dishonesty to the appropriate dean. Offenders will receive a zero on the assignment and an F in the class.
- Accommodations. Please let me know about any issues or accommodations (activities, disability, religious, etc) during the first two weeks of class.
- Attendance. You are expected to attend every class session. You must inform me in a timely way if you have an excused absence, including religious holidays or extended/severe illness, which requires a note from the appropriate dean’s office. Unexcused absences will result in a penalty of 1/3 grade against your overall grade.
- Communicating with the professor. Office hours are Wednesday, 9:30 AM to 11:30 AM. I am also available to chat immediately after class on Tuesdays. I respond to emails as quickly as possible, and at least once a day during the week. I do not check email regularly on weekends, vacations, or holidays. Email should be treated as business correspondence and composed accordingly.
- Drafts. I am happy to meet with you at any stage of the paper writing process, and will review drafts until the first day of student presentations. I also encourage you to consult with peers and the Writing Center early and often!
- Sources. You may only use academic secondary sources, and may not use Wikipedia-like sources in your essays. Please consult with me if you have questions about a source.
- Technology. There is no “connecting” in class: no phone calls, texts, email or other internet use, or the like. The first infraction will cost 5 percentage points from your overall grade; the second costs an additional 10 percentage points; and so on. If you want to use a computer in class, please request permission from me.

Other policies, including assignment details, will be discussed in class.
Course schedule

Week of Feb 3: The Suburbs: An American _____?
- Becky Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese, eds., *The Suburb Reader*, Introduction, pp 1-10
- *Mary and Russel Wright's Guide to Easier Living* (New Revised Edition), Ch 1, “Home Sweet Home” (pp 1-10); Ch 2, “Room to Relax” (pp 11-27); Ch 3, “The Vanishing Dining Room” (pp 28-49), Ch 7, “The Housewife-Engineer” (pp 124-26 and 136-45); “The New Hospitality” (pp 164-68)

Week of Feb 10: Roots of the Suburbs
- **Assignment due, MON FEB 11, Noon: Suggest three possible paper topics (post)**
- Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*

Week of Feb 17: Gendering the Suburbs
- **Assignment due, MON FEB 18, Noon: Propose your research question (post)**
- Dolores Hayden. *Redesigning the American Dream*

Week of Feb 24: Racing the Suburbs
- **In class: Source discussion with Jen Starkey, Oberlin Libraries**
- Andrew Wiese, Ch 3, “Places of Their Own: An African American Suburban Dream,” pp 67-93, in *Places of Their Own*
- James Wolfinger, “The American Dream – For All Americans: Race, Politics, and the Campaign to Desegregate Levittown,” *Journal of Urban History* 38:3 (May 2012), pp 430-51
- Timothy Fong, Ch 28, “The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California,” pp 369-80 in Peter Kivisto and Georganne Rundblad, eds., *Multiculturalism in the United States*

Week of Mar 3: Making a Home
- **Assignment due, SUN MAR 3, 8 PM: Share a primary document (post)**
Week of Mar 10: Consuming the Suburbs

- Lizabeth Cohen, “From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America,” *American Historical Review* 101:4 (Oct 1996), 1050-81
- Walter Hixson, Ch 6, “From the Summit to the Model Kitchen: The Cultural Agreement and the Moscow Fair,” pp 151-184, in *Parting the Curtain*

- Optional: Christine Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, Sections I-III

Week of March 17: Imagining the Suburbs

- **Assignment due, THU MAR 21, 5 PM: Primary and secondary source bibliography (email)**
- Eric Hodgins, *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*, “Possession”
- WD Wetherell, *The Man Who Loved Levittown*, excerpt
- John Cheever, “O Youth and Beauty!”
- Richard Ford, *Independence Day*, excerpt
- JK Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, excerpt
- Stephanie Coontz, “‘Leave It to Beaver’ and ‘Ozzie and Harriet’: American Families in the 1950s,” in *The Way We Never Were*

Week of Mar 24: SPRING BREAK

Week of Mar 31: Classing the Suburbs

- Dean Bakopoulos, *Please Don’t Come Back from the Moon*, Ch 1 (pp 1-25), Ch 2 (pp 27-31), Ch 3 (pp 33-49), Ch 5 (pp 75-78)
Week of Apr 7: Critiquing the Suburbs

- **Assignment due, THU APR 11, 5 PM: Introduction and detailed outline (email)**
- From Becky Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese, eds., *The Suburb Reader*, pp 295-97 and 300-05:
  - William Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 1956 (excerpt)
  - Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963 (excerpt)
  - “The Trapped Suburban Mother,” 1961 (image)

Week of Apr 14: Politicizing the Suburbs


Week of Apr 21: LA Story

- **Assignment due, SUN APR 21, 8 PM: Good rough draft for peer review**
- Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*
- *Optional:* Guy Debord, “The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy”

Week of Apr 28: Student presentations (in class)

Week of May 5: Student presentations (in class)

FINAL PROJECT DUE MON MAY 13, 9 AM (email)