

This PDF includes a chapter from the following book:

Just Housing

The Moral Foundations of American Housing Policy

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Conclusion

Charity begins at home, and justice begins next door.

—Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1908 [1844], 462)

Tigg Montague was wrong.¹ Justice begins at home, the place of refuge, reflection, repair, and repose, where flourishing lives take root. When next doors disappear, and neighbors have no place to call home, justice moves next door. Housing justice is an architect's plan for a property regime that delivers shelter in accordance with fundamental moral values. This book constructed a conception of housing justice from housing's distinctive contextual features, the social meanings of the American home, the material ingredients of social citizenship, and America's federal housing policy framework. In this final chapter, I recap the book's main arguments by revisiting several questions about housing justice that were introduced in part I.

What is housing justice? Housing justice is an application of distributive justice that addresses moral questions about the production, distribution, occupancy, and ownership of housing. Conceptions of housing justice differ according to how each assembles the materials of justice—conceptions of value, principles, grounds, and bases—to account for housing's moral significance. Nineteenth-century land reformers proposed that everyone has a natural right to enough privately owned land to establish a functioning homestead, and this idea echoed through generations, culminating in the homeownership tier of the federal housing policy apparatus. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century progressive and utilitarian reformers rejected right-based approaches to housing justice in favor of regulatory

reforms designed to promote collective goals. Franklin D. Roosevelt tried to reconstruct a right-based conception of social citizenship from the fragments of liberalism and progressivism, but in the end, social rights became secondary to the goals of expanding access to homeownership and providing a “decent home and suitable living environment” (Housing Act of 1949, 42 U.S.C. § 1441) for a small proportion of America’s low-income renters. Right-based reforms returned with renewed force during the 1960s, but by this time the moral foundations of the rights being asserted rested on new claims to positive freedoms and collective self-determination. The right-based social movements of the 1960s coevolved during the contemporary neoliberal era, at times clashing over the issues of gentrification and racial segregation. The right-based conception of housing justice offered in part III of this book embodies the spirit of Roosevelt’s unrealized social right to housing, the right-based egalitarianism of the radical land reform tradition, the pragmatism of the Progressive Era, and the republican emphasis on freedom from domination.

Why is housing “special” from a moral standpoint? Certain contextual features of housing influence how it is distributed and valued, and these features call for an approach to justice that considers housing’s unique moral qualities. American housing has a distinctive social meaning, but this meaning has been contested throughout American history, and the social meaning of housing does not tell us how housing should be distributed. At the same time, the social meaning of American housing, particularly as embodied in the ideal of the owned single-family detached home, has been evoked in defense of a variety of American housing reforms. I argued in this book that housing’s moral significance ultimately stems from its connection to social citizenship. Housing provides access to America’s common culture and has come to define what it means to live a dignified and civilized life. To the extent that American citizenship and social status have been defined in terms of access to decent housing, denying adequate shelter is to deny what is equally owed to everyone by right.

What are the grounds of housing justice? The grounds of housing justice provide the reasons that individuals and government agents should support institutions that deliver housing in particular ways. This book proposed a conception of housing justice that appeals to the ground of citizenship. Compared

to other grounds, citizenship does not require an appeal to a controversial view of human nature or human excellence. Instead, it grounds a practical, relational conception of what citizens owe one another as moral equals. I defended a liberal-republican conception of citizenship that acknowledges the morally significant link between housing and social citizenship, is right based rather than virtue based, values a physical and deliberative distinction between the public and private realms, and values equality of civic freedom. I also defined citizenship broadly and inclusively, arguing that everyone living on US soil has a right to be housed justly, regardless of their legal citizenship status.

What moral principles regulate the distribution of housing? Social citizenship, as I understand it, can be expressed in terms of the principles of moral equality and relational equality, which together constitute the ideal of civic equality. Moral equality refers to the commitment to show equal concern and equal respect for all citizens. Relational equality implies a commitment to policies designed to ensure that all citizens view one another as equal participants in the social order. These two principles are complementary but are in tension with moral equality's emphasis on state neutrality, which constrains the scope of state actions and the morally acceptable justifications for them.

Civic equality's two moral principles support a pluralist distributive ideal that combines sufficientarianism with egalitarianism. At the most basic level, civic equality is consistent with a distribution of housing where everyone has access to shelter that would be recognized by society as providing a minimum level of security and comfort. This sufficientarian aim can be understood as a goal that is lexically prior to the realization of other distributive goals. This means that if federal housing resources are scarce, the aim of alleviating homelessness should be prioritized over the goal of reducing the cost burdens or improving the housing quality of those who are currently housed.

Above the floor of sufficiency, civic equality has procedural and substantive implications for the distribution of housing. Procedurally, civic equality requires that housing be distributed in a manner that respects the variety of ways that individuals value and assign meaning to housing. Civic equality is consistent with policies designed to promote a variety of housing styles and living arrangements and is inconsistent with policies that

promote certain housing styles on the basis of the moral superiority of particular ways of living. Civic equality is also consistent with the procedural aim of ensuring that public policies and private housing market agents do not unfairly discriminate against particular racial or ethnic groups. Substantively, civic equality calls for measures that reduce extreme housing inequalities, even if everyone's basic housing needs are met.

What is the right to housing? This book offered a right-based conception of housing justice. In contrast to other bases, rights structure democratic deliberation, shape expectations and incentives, and give official recognition to a nation's constitutive commitments to its citizens. The right to housing, defined in this book as the right to secure tenure, is an individual right that is constitutive of, structures, and provides a justification for the right to own private property. If the private property regime is not structured to deliver secure residential tenure to everyone, private property fails to function in accordance with its most compelling justification. The right to housing is a right that is constitutive of a private property regime that delivers tenure security to all, allows the incidents of private property to be flexibly assembled to promote tenure security, and creates incentives that are compatible with the tenure security justification for private property.

What are the implications of housing justice for US federal housing policy reform? The ideal of civic equality and public justification for private property provide the materials to defend a secure tenure property regime that is structured around the primary aim of securing and extending the right to housing and the secondary aim of reducing housing inequality through the taxation of housing consumption and housing wealth accumulation. The proposed negative housing tax can be implemented through the federal income tax code by treating income spent on owner occupancy and rental occupancy equivalently. The proceeds from the tax would fund a guaranteed monthly housing allowance and a supplemental block grant designed to reduce spatial inequalities in housing costs.

The conception of housing justice offered in this book has implications for racial justice and the fight against gentrification. Civic equality is consistent with proactive measures designed to reduce racial and ethnic inequalities arising from housing injustices, but housing justice does not necessarily require that neighborhoods be integrated by race or ethnicity.

Civic equality is consistent with various antigentrification measures, but given that the right to housing I have defended is an individual right, antigentrification measures that appeal to collective rights to the city may conflict with the right to housing. When the two collide, I argued that the right to housing should be prioritized over the right to the city.

The policy proposals discussed on the preceding pages are offered as hypotheses to be tested in the real world of policy reform and implementation. Much empirical, theoretical, and advocacy work remains to determine whether private property and the right to housing can coexist alongside a housing policy infrastructure designed to reduce housing inequality. I conclude with a call to the next generation of housing justice theorists and practitioners to investigate the lingering questions that remain while transforming the American dream into a just American reality.

Housing justice should nurture, not neglect, social justice. More work is needed to understand the relationship between housing justice and social justice writ large. Housing's special moral significance does not mean that housing occupies an autonomous distributive sphere that is isolated from the distribution of other goods and resources. Housing directly distributes access to social and economic opportunities, natural amenities, and local public goods. Principles of justice that are too narrowly tailored to the in-kind distribution of housing risk ignoring the trade-offs that households make to consume their most preferred bundle of goods. Housing justice is also intimately connected to racial justice, spatial justice, and environmental justice. I have scratched the surface of these connections, but more work remains to elucidate the relationships among different spheres of justice. Several important questions about housing justice still need answers. I hope that the conception of housing justice introduced in this book provides a place to begin the search.

