The privately owned, single-family home epitomizes the American dream. This ideal persists despite longstanding disparities in housing access and equity. For example, according to the U.S. Census Bureau only 46 percent of blacks and 48 percent of Hispanics currently own their own homes, whereas Caucasian homeownership remains steady at 75 percent (Callis and Cavanaugh 8). Homeownership rates for Asians are slightly higher than for other minorities, 59 percent, but still well below whites (Kochhar i). Black householders, furthermore, have a median net worth of only $5,446, and without home equity, $1,102; in comparison, non-Hispanic white householders’ median net worth is $87,056, and without home equity, $19,079 (Gottschalck 13). Additionally, only 25 percent of female-headed households could afford a modestly priced house in 2004; in contrast, 36 percent of male-headed households and 70 percent of married couples could afford the same moderately priced home (Savage 4). Finally, the downturn in the American housing market and the rise in nationwide foreclosures since 2005 have had disproportionate effects on minorities, erasing gains made in the previous ten years: “From 1995 through the middle of this decade, homeownership rates rose more rapidly among all minorities than among whites. But since the start of the housing bust in 2005, rates have fallen more steeply for two of the nation’s largest minority groups—blacks and native-born Latinos—than for the rest of the population” (Kochhar i).
These discrepancies and the rising foreclosure rates suggest the need to remodel America’s “domestic geographies,” the multifaceted territories that compose American housing and domestic ideology. As an emblem of American success (especially in terms of financial stability) and as a prime location for identity formation, the material and ideological American home presents a critical site for feminist redefinitions and activism. *Neodomestic American Fiction* explores how novels written after 1980 responded to and shaped America’s understanding of home in the midst of the recent boom and bust housing market. In traditional American literary history, women generally write “domestic fiction,” a term that conventionally refers to nineteenth-century novels written by and for women, novels in which the dramatic action focuses on homemaking. *The Oxford Companion to Women’s Writing in the United States* clarifies that domestic fiction is “didactic and exemplary fiction centered in the ‘women’s sphere’ and focusing on the concerns of women’s lives” (Forcey 253). *Neodomestic American Fiction* explores the extent to which writing about the home remains women’s work in the twenty-first century and how the generic and political practices of contemporary American novelists are defined within the domestic sphere. This book defines and analyzes a critical mass of late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century novels that renovate the ideal home’s usual depiction by positioning instability—as opposed to stability—as a key structure of quotidian American home life.

When authors, critics, and general readers label a text “domestic fiction,” political questions are in play. The genre’s shifting terms speak to its contested terrain. The collection of nineteenth-century women’s novels that are generally defined as domestic fiction may also be labeled “women’s fiction,” “family romance,” “domestic romance,” “domestic sentimentalism,” and “sentimental fiction.” Today “chick lit” joins the generic labels used to describe and define a range of texts, including domestic fictions. Looking at twentieth-century literature, Deborah Philips crafts a definition of the “Aga-Saga” that sharpens our understanding of domesticity’s gendered contours. As Philips explains, the Aga-Saga’s “generic requirements . . . are that it should center on a female protagonist (middle- or upper middle-class, and middle-aged), that the domestic is fore-grounded and, as in most romantic fiction, that the setting should be rural” (48). Susan J. Schenk’s article “Protest or Pathology: The Politics of Madness in Contemporary Domestic Fiction” likewise connects domestic fiction with women’s experiences. She defines contemporary domestic fiction as “the ‘mad housewife’ novel [that] explores the ways in which this very flexible label is applied to the female protagonists who deviate from social norms” (231).
Domestic novels authored by or focused on men are also assigned various labels (“romances,” “social novels,” and “suburban fictions”). Conspicuously absent from the men’s list is the label “domestic fiction.” While domestic genres are often divided according to the author’s and/or the protagonist’s gender, there are some exceptions. If the story—whether written by or focused on a man or a woman—features a haunted house, the narrative generally falls under the rubric of “gothic fiction.” These generic descriptors, as Michael Kowalski argues about the terms “domestic romance” and “domestic fiction,” are sometimes used interchangeably while they also describe specific genres with unique characteristics.

*Neodomestic American Fiction* sorts various genres and subgenres, selecting novels that feature domestic spaces and protagonists who are concerned with the processes of making home. Whereas traditionally only those novels written by and focused on women are labeled “domestic fiction,” *Neodomestic American Fiction* revises this custom and identifies a new subgenre, neodomestic fiction, which has distinctive spatial characteristics. I use the term “neodomestic fiction” to differentiate from earlier fiction about the home this related but distinct collection of post-1980 novels that exhibit unconventional domestic topographies.

A list of major neodomestic authors and novels is included in the appendix. I found Frederick Barthelme’s use of the term “neodomestic” in *Natural Selection* (1990) after using the term and drafting the bulk of this project. The narrator in this suburban novel remarks, “Either way, I guessed this could be called cultural progress, the new day as played out in neo-domestic neo-realism across the land” (60; emphasis in original). While I do not necessarily relate neodomesticity to “cultural progress,” the narrator and I both utilize the term to mark a new age for domesticity.

Neodomesticity’s distinctive spatiality marks a new era and ideology for the genre of domestic fiction while simultaneously recognizing its dynamic connections to earlier domestic literatures and traditions. Both domestic and neodomestic novels feature a self-consciousness about the home’s physical space and the project of homemaking, highlighting domestic instability in positive and negative ways; however, neodomestic fiction—emerging after second-wave feminism and responding to a return to “family values”—marks a paradigm shift: neodomestic fiction advances a politics of domestic instability, particularly emphasized through its distinctive domestic spaces and conclusions. Neodomestic novels intentionally demonstrate the exclusions associated with the single-family, privately-owned home. While nineteenth- and early twentieth-century domestic fiction also invokes domestic uncertainty and works to elicit social change on issues as diverse as women's
civic and private roles, slavery, and temperance, its didactic and spatial politics—which are tied to its own sociohistorical domestic culture—demand separate consideration. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues, “It is the project of twentieth-century women writers to . . . replace the alternate endings in marriage and death that are their cultural legacy from nineteenth-century life and letters by offering a different set of choices” (4). Post-1980 neodomestic novels continue this project in ways that are distinct from their predecessors.

Explicating neodomestic fiction’s distinct spatial narrative is especially important to establishing and understanding this neo-genre. In Henri Lefebvre’s terms, “a revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential” (54). The neodomestic novel’s spatiality specifically exhibits three features: (1) relational (as opposed to oppositional) domestic space, which self-consciously emphasizes the home’s connection to “outside” environments; (2) domestic mobility, which is the notion that home, as both an ideology and a physical space, can occupy and blur the boundaries of multiple domestic locations; and (3) domestic renovation and redesign of the conventional material and ideological model home, which refers to the privately owned single family structure that represents financial, physical, and psychological security to its owners. In short, neodomestic fiction interrogates and expands on the nineteenth-century domestic novel’s legacies.

Neodomestic fictions’ distinct spatiality and frequently inconclusive endings especially revise the genre’s conventional politics. In Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel, Nancy Armstrong clarifies domestic fiction’s traditional politics: “I believe it [eighteenth- and nineteenth-century domestic fiction] helped to formulate the ordered space we now recognize as the household, made that space totally functional, and used it as the context for representing normal behavior” (23–24). Michael Kowalski agrees, suggesting that the domestic romance often worked at “cross purposes: the arousal of sentiments for change and the reassurance of cosmic justice, social criticism, and the affirmation of the status quo” (65). Domestic fiction, in other words, largely works its revolution from within the confines of what Audre Lorde calls the “master’s house.” Conversely, neodomestic fiction represents and promotes a politics of instability and heterogeneity. It is not so much situated outside the master’s house. Rather, it attempts to occupy—as I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter—an ideological and physical space defined by various contemporary cultural critics: what bell hooks calls the “margin,” what Toni Morrison describes as being “both snug and wide open” and having “a doorway never needing to be closed” (“Home” 9), what Homi Bhabha labels a “third space,” what Michel Foucault describes as “heterotopia,” and what feminist geographers frequently describe as “relational space.”
While Armstrong’s claim focuses on English literature and other scholars have since complicated her arguments, her analysis that the development of the ideal or model home constitutes a stable, normative, and protected location remains the dominant rhetorical model. The rise and development of the domestic novel and of conduct and household manuals in the nineteenth century supports Armstrong’s thesis that nineteenth-century domestic texts helped establish the conventional model of American domesticity as white, Protestant, middle class, and heterosexual. The reinforcement of the heteronormative aspects of home and family continues today in much domestic literature and culture; multimedia empires such as Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia continue to sell a model of American domesticity that is predominantly white, conservative, middle class, and privately owned. Today’s representations of the American home often present a narrow model that nonetheless enjoys as strong of a cultural currency now as it did a hundred years ago. The dream houses featured on Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, for example, can be read as supersized versions of the ideal cottage described in 1869 by Harriet Beecher Stowe and Catharine E. Beecher’s the American Woman’s Home.

Given the model’s powerful longevity, what accounts for the renewed attention to and attempts to renovate model domesticity in the 1980s? Michael A. Griffith clarifies what the revitalized interest implies: “What returned to fashion in 1984 was not the family, but ‘The Family.’ Reaganite conservatism had ushered ‘Family’ back into prominence as a political catchword, and evangelists had adopted the (presumed) disintegration of ‘traditional family values’ as a rallying cry” (94). Important novels focus on the home and homemaking in order to illustrate the ways in which the model fails the protagonists. These neodomestic stories challenge the conventional politics of American culture and the novel. While Ann Hulbert has suggested that the novel’s form itself encourages conservatism—that the novel strengthens “the bourgeois institution of the family”—neodomestic novels complicate, if not refute, Hulbert’s suggestion about the novel’s form (Hulbert 36). Homeownership is likewise associated with more conservative political practices. Richard Harris and Chris Hamnett report, “Most of the rather limited evidence . . . does indicate that an association between ownership and conservatism is the general rule” (175). The following chapters map how domestic and neodomestic fiction resolve tensions surrounding homeownership differently. Building on the domestic fiction that precedes it, neodomestic fiction recycles domestic tensions and structures to produce alternative geographies of home.

Neodomestic American Fiction recognizes that in the nineteenth century
a range of authors appropriated conventional domestic ideals and complicated, if not challenged outright, the model home and domestic fiction’s gendered definition, broadening both to include such outsiders as men, single women, and nonwhites. Counterhegemonic spaces encoded in nineteenth-century women’s fiction include Harriet Jacobs’s “loopholes of retreat” (437–40), Louisa May Alcott’s domestic performance spaces in Little Women, and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman’s churches and barns. We see the appropriation of domestic space by nineteenth-century male writers in novels such as Moby-Dick, The House of Seven Gables, Walden, The House Behind the Cedars, and Washington Square. Significantly, as Lora Romero points out in Home Fronts, these male-authored and male-focused novels are not generally considered domestic fiction. This double standard reveals domestic fiction’s gendered definitions. The spatial definition of domestic fiction mapped in this project joins Romero and other recent scholarship in questioning this literary history that largely excludes male writers and protagonists. Furthermore, my spatial definition opens new doors for scholars who are reconsidering the genre’s earlier incarnations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Recent modernist studies of domestic fiction also emphasize domestic multiplicity and instability: “Mobility, agency, and mutability were central to urban homes in ways that the literary historical narrative of separate spheres has obscured” (Klimasmith 8). In the modern period, writers such as Gertrude Stein, following the call to “make it new,” crafted new modes of representing domesticity. Nevertheless, the impetus to stabilize the domestic environment—to produce a stable home or to escape a domestic trap—spans the literature through much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Betsy Klimasmith’s study of urban domesticity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reveals, for example, how the novel during that period “became a testing ground for examining relationships between urban spaces and the development of an unsettled and unsettling modern subjectivity” (5). Yet, while the urban domestic literature of this early modern period challenges the separate spheres of a male public and a female private (domestic) space and stability, the home continues to be “deployed rhetorically, linguistically, and physically to help order the potential chaos” (Klimasmith 7–8). Thus, both nineteenth- and twentieth-century domestic fictions often ultimately resolve domestic instability. Stability remains the American home’s dominant, idealized feature in domestic literature, space, and culture.

Neodomestic fiction intensifies attempts to theorize or model alternatives to the stable home. The exploration of the literary and cultural significance of this shift from traditional stability to a “productive instability” is this book’s central project. As I have begun to suggest, neodomestic fiction
does not represent a full break from its literary predecessors. Neodomestic fiction is a recycled or revised neo-genre, not a completely different form. The analysis of the literary and cultural domestic histories in the chapters that follow reveals that neodomestic novels represent an *intensification* and *rearrangement* of tensions and characteristics present at the time of domestic fiction’s inception in the nineteenth century and its continued development in the twentieth century.

Neodomestic fiction’s revisions rearrange domestic fiction’s conventional boundaries. Consequently, this book remaps the generic study of domestic fiction in three ways: (1) it extends the genre’s time period through the twentieth century and establishes a significant revision of and resurgence in domestic fiction beginning in the 1980s, (2) it includes male as well as female authors, and (3) it provides a primarily spatial rather than plot- or character-based analysis. Utilizing a spatial analysis more readily extends domestic fiction through the twentieth century and to authors and stories focused on men as well as women. Domestic fiction particularly concentrates on the home’s geography and homemaking processes—“spatial narratives” that focus on place and the practices that define location. This analysis of domestic geographies, thus, includes the home’s material and nonmaterial borders and the processes involved in establishing and maintaining this space. Following the lead of cultural geographers such as David Harvey, I read domestic space as a social process. This methodology allows me to address not only what constitutes a “house,” but also what practices and social forces make a “home.”

In addition to covering expanded territory, this study of neodomestic fiction also reveals entrenched boundaries. Men especially constitute the subject matter of this contested terrain. This revised map of domestic fiction adds to recent separate sphere scholarship that questions the strict boundaries between private/public and feminine/masculine spaces. While significant research has been completed that problematizes the so-called separate spheres, little discussion has taken place about how such reevaluations of gendered, classed, and raced space influence the construction and evaluation of literary genres. Domestic fiction in particular continues to reflect a strict separate spheres mentality—there is women’s fiction and there is men’s fiction. According to this conventional generic definition, men in particular do not write domestic fiction or serve as domestic fiction’s protagonists.

Upon closer examination we see that two distinctly gendered traditions exist in both contemporary and nineteenth-century domestic fiction. Briefly, the distinguishing characteristics include discrete views of the home’s spiritual geography and distinctive homemaking habits, or the particular prac-
tices deemed necessary to keep the home functioning within the domestic novel. *Masculine* domestic fictions, for example, frequently build their narratives from property relations and disputes and focus on a male protagonist. *Feminine* domestic fictions tend to de-emphasize ownership or property disputes and focus on a female protagonist. Masculine and feminine domestic fictions also frequently carry distinct social currencies in the public sphere.

As much as these two gendered traditions clash, they simultaneously produce what Jennifer Haytock has described in relation to modernist domestic and war fiction as “a system of literary interdependence” (Haytock xviii). Romero makes a similar point in reference to the nineteenth century’s celebratory and antidomestic cultures (1–8). Neodomestic fiction contends with America’s gendered domestic contexts and frequently mixes these gendered literary and cultural traditions, reflecting both changing gender roles and longstanding gendered divisions in American culture. Milette Shamir describes this split in nineteenth-century fiction in terms of “divided plots.” Shamir argues, “The example of the domestic division plot shows the romance and sentimental traditions to be competing over the same space [the home], albeit from different angles and perspectives” (431). Shamir’s description of the romance (masculine) and the sentimental (feminine) novel offers another way to characterize the gendered spatial tensions among the masculine and feminine domestic fictions that I map in the following chapters. However, I do not use these frequently gendered literary traditions (the romance and the sentimental novel) as synonymous with domestic fiction because not all romances and sentimental novels are spatial narratives. For example, a romance might not qualify as a spatial narrative to the same degree as a work of (neo)domestic fiction, which sustains an intense focus on the physical home and homemaking. As a result, geography—particularly feminist geography—provides the crucial mapping tool for this highly spatial literature.

Geography, like literary studies, wrestles with the interpretation of the economic, racial, and gendered forces that produce America’s inequitable domestic geographies, such as those outlined at the beginning of this introduction. This project also takes seriously Harvey’s suggestion in *Spaces of Hope* that the novel provides a valuable space for exploring social change and his recognition of the significant number of female authors doing this work (189). Cultural geography helps us to gauge literary constructions of domestic space by providing tools to (re)design literary discourse so that it moves between fictional spaces and the real worlds that men and women inhabit. It is particularly helpful in narrowing the range of novels that fall under neodomesticity’s rubric.
While I am interested in a range of domestic geographies, I am not suggesting that every contemporary novel that features the home and homemaking could be or should be labeled neodomestic fiction. The spatial novels included in this study posit the home as a key location for narrative action and feature homemaking as a central component of the plot. As the following chapters explore in greater detail, neodomestic fiction's three characteristics (mobility, relational space, and renovation) frame a distinctive neo-genre. In subtle and obvious ways, neodomestic fiction emphasizes that place shapes the characters as much as the characters shape place. The home in neodomestic fiction may speak or otherwise interact with the characters, as in the haunted house in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and the talking island at the conclusion of Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988). Such elements emphasize that domestic geographies are not neutral or mere reflections of characters' traits or desires. In feminist geographer Doreen Massey's terms, neodomestic space is relational; its identity “derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with ‘the outside’” (Massey 169). As Sister Salt describes in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*, walls do not define a house (438). Home is a space determined by the interaction between “inside” and “outside.”

Like the neodomestic novels that we will encounter in the following pages, feminist geographers do not insist on an isolated, stable definition of home. That is, rather than studying home as a place that is not public, feminist geographers understand the private home and public space in “relational” terms, where public and private space interact and are not mutually exclusive: “Rather than a static site, home may be conceptualized in relation to other places (for example, offices), and the social relations appropriate to different places analyzed in terms of power and authority” (Al-Hindi 154). Relational space rejects “negative counterposition” (Massey 169) and “forces us to recognize our interconnectedness” (Massey 170). Neodomestic fiction likewise uses relational space to present a distinctive architecture of the American home.

Feminist geographers' argument for a relational understanding of space parallels in many respects the questions that historical and literary studies have posed about whether the public and private spheres are actually separate. That is, a relational view of space sees that a home may be physically separate yet not discursively isolated. Feminist geographer Linda McDowell clarifies in *Gender, Identity, and Place* how relational space specifically affects the domestic sphere: “a focus on the social relations within a domestic space crosses the boundary between the private and the public, between the particular and the general, and is not, as often incorrectly asserted, a focus on the
‘merely’ domestic or the private sphere’ (72–73). For instance, Loida Maritza Pérez’s *Geographies of Home* (1999) subtly highlights the neodomestic home’s unique physical and ideological structure with passages that describe the home’s physical state and the characters’ psychological connections and reactions to the home’s changing structure and appearance.

Iliana’s mother in Pérez’s *Geographies of Home* observes that her home, fashioned after the middle-class ideal, actually embodies instability, not stability:

Stepping from the couch, she noticed that one of the floor’s marble tiles had cracked. She then imagined that the slightest disturbance might topple furniture, collapse shelves, detach the chandelier. That she and her husband had managed to purchase all these things as well as their own home had often been offered as proof to their children of the stability in their lives. Only now did she concede that nothing was stable—nothing. The earth itself might give out under their feet, their house burn down, madness take root, evil unfold into their lives. (Pérez 293)

The home’s cracked tile provokes this reverie. Iliana’s mother concedes in this passage that the American dream, which is represented by material possessions and especially the home, hardly provides stability for her Dominican American family: nothing is secure. This instability is home.

Possessions, in particular, do not assure solidity. In an age when Americans are told by their president to go shopping when faced with national tragedy and insecurity, *Geographies of Home* exposes the instability of America’s consumer culture. How the characters arrive at and cope with this realization in *Geographies of Home* composes much of the novel’s plot. Thus, *Geographies of Home* provides one example, with a particularly appropriate title, of late twentieth-century neodomestic writing that destabilizes the conventional home, questioning and refashioning its economic and social worth. Its politics also distinguishes neodominicity from neoliberalism, which has developed during the same period but thwarts rather than advances the “downward redistribution of economic, political, and cultural resources” (Duggan 40). Unlike neoliberalism, neodominicity seeks “A sustainable opposition . . . [that] connect[s] culture, politics, and economics; identity politics and class politics; universalist rhetoric and particular issues and interests; intellectual and material resources” (Duggan 41). Neodominic fiction engages in this project by exploring rather than quelling domestic instability.

The novels included in this study survey a range of genders, sexualities, ethnicities, races, and classes. These neodominic novels literally and/or
symbolically remodel the conventional home’s material and social structures, incorporating instability and individual and social histories as part of the fictional homes’ physical designs. The home’s (in)stability, specifically in regard to the model white, middle-class, Protestant home, is a central concern. This criterion for neodomestic fiction is key because, although they are not the focus of this study, more traditional versions of domestic fiction continue to be written. Contemporary conventional domestic novels, such as Robert Morgan’s *Gap Creek* (1999), are not included in the following chapters because they frequently reproduce and romanticize the traditional domestic geography of the single-family, heterosexual, patriarchal home rather than attempt to redesign and destabilize its singular dominance within the American landscape. I have intentionally selected fiction that represents a wide range of domesticities in order to explore this shared instability while recognizing historical, material, and social differences among the narratives and the cultures from which they emerge.

While domestic fiction’s extensions, migrations, and transformations since 1980 form my primary focus, this investigation of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century domestic fiction still addresses key concerns that Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher’s edited collection *No More Separate Spheres!* raises in regard to moving “beyond the separate spheres,” apprehensions relevant to nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century studies of American literature and culture broadly and domestic and women’s fiction in particular. Specifically, my analysis demonstrates how opening the genre to both male and female authors and protagonists still provides “a potent organizing metaphor” and “a source within the dominant culture for legitimizing” interest in women’s history and literature, while it simultaneously “complicate[s] the binary model of men versus women” (Davidson and Hatcher 9; 11–12). While female protagonists and such women writers as Toni Morrison, Barbara Kingsolver, and Leslie Marmon Silko dominate neodomestic fiction, male protagonists and authors are increasingly—even if, as Jonathan Franzen demonstrates, sometimes reluctantly—redefining our understanding of the domestic sphere and literature.

Although *Neodomestic American Fiction* focuses on the American home’s post-1980 fictional geographies, physical homes play a key role, too. Like Nancy Armstrong, I “regard fiction . . . both as the document and as the agency of cultural history” (*Desire* 23). Grounded in an awareness of America’s twentieth-century housing discrepancies and histories, *Neodomestic American Fiction* addresses literature’s presentation of and intervention in this crisis. Following the model of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the literature, in other words, serves representational (aesthetic),
political, and theoretical ends. My methodology draws specifically from David Harvey’s paradigm described in Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference, in which an understanding of spatial tactics necessarily involves two basic assumptions: categories like the home are social constructions and thus unstable, and the politics of space involve three equally interrelated spheres—materiality, representation, and imagination (320–24). As a result, the following chapters analyze the interrelated realms of material history, the home’s representations in fiction, and domesticity’s physical manifestations and theoretical models. Thus, this feminist literary and cultural study of the American home seeks to accomplish what domestic fiction’s didacticism and much interdisciplinary work in American literature and women’s studies aims to do: revitalize individual disciplines and gain support for initiatives that can affect American’s lives, especially the lives of American women.

Key to Neodomestic American Fiction
Chapter Overviews

Chapter 1, “Remapping Domestic Fiction: Neodomestic Geographies,” outlines the project’s theoretical and historical parameters: it traces and extends domestic fiction’s time period into the twenty-first century; it identifies the spatial lens with which to define and interpret this genre, providing an alternative to the plot or character-based definition of the fiction; and finally, it redefines the genre to include male as well as female authors and protagonists. This chapter also explains a shift in the politics of home from stability to instability. I locate this shift in the 1980s, pointing to the threshold neodomestic novels Housekeeping (Marilynne Robinson) and The House on Mango Street (Sandra Cisneros) as landmark works that mark neodomestic fiction’s emergence out of both the feminist movement and significant housing changes.

Chapter 2, “Recycling Feminine Domesticity: Rewriting Conventional Domestic Fiction,” features neodomestic novels that self-consciously rewrite nineteenth-century domestic fiction and what Amy Kaplan terms “manifest domesticity.” The chapter includes extended close readings of Leslie Marmon Silko’s Gardens in the Dunes and Barbara Kingsolver’s The Poisonwood Bible, which I have chosen for their extensive revisions of the genre. I open the chapter with Gardens in the Dunes to explore neodomestic fiction’s three primary characteristics: mobility, home renovation or redesign, and relational domestic space. The section that follows examines how neodomestic novels self-consciously invoke and revise nineteenth-century domestic fic-
tion's tropes, particularly those of mobility, the stable home, and the selfless woman.

Chapter 3, “Remodeling Home: Redesigning Conventional Domestic Space,” demonstrates that rather than ultimately constructing the home as a trap or a haven, neodomestic fiction deconstructs, recycles, and finally explodes the conventional house-home dichotomy, enacting neodomestic ideology through its experimentation with an elusive but productive domestic instability. I examine various homes’ geopolitics, especially residents’ gendered and raced housekeeping styles and renovations. African American spatial politics as defined by bell hooks and John Michael Vlach ground my spatial analysis of several representative domestic locations in Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Paradise*.

The next two chapters focus more exclusively on domestic masculinity in fiction by writers such as Michael Cunningham, Richard Ford, and Jane Smiley. Chapter 4, “Mapping Gendered Genres: Domestic Masculinity, Suburban Fiction, and the Antidomestic,” continues the argument presented in the introduction that masculinity has always been and remains a key component within domestic fiction. This chapter primarily focuses on the antidomestic tradition, in which suburban literature frequently falls, and on the neodomestic novels that are especially engaged in recycling these conventionally masculine features. The chapter briefly defines conventional domestic masculinity vis-à-vis Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” and William Dean Howells’s *Suburban Sketches*. Mark Twain’s portrayal of “lighting out for the territory” in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* also provides a key trope for defining conventional domestic masculinity’s “beset manhood” (Baym 130). This largely antidomestic tradition is compared and contrasted with several contemporary suburban novels, such as John Edgar Wideman’s Homewood trilogy, Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, Ford’s *Independence Day*, and Andre Dubus III’s *House of Sand and Fog*. While the antidomestic tradition is still very much alive in contemporary fiction, this chapter focuses on the novels attempting to rework the complexly gendered structures undergirding the domestic novel.

Chapter 5, “Performing Domesticity: Anxious Masculinity and Queer Homes,” primarily examines Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections*, Michael Cunningham’s *A Home at the End of the World*, and Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* for the unique ways they recycle the domestic novel. The chapter features the cultural and literary reception of *The Corrections* in order to examine the role of white, domestic masculinity in the American public sphere. An extended reading of queer domesticities, both literal (as seen in such novels as *A Home at the End of the World*) and figurative (as seen in such novels
as *A Gesture Life*), concludes this chapter, bringing home my argument that neodomestic novels do not erase gender distinctions but rather attempt to “trouble”—in the Judith Butler sense—their stability.

Chapter 6, “Conclusions: The Territory Ahead,” provides more in-depth commentary on (neo)domestic texts other than the novel, such as artwork by photographer Clarissa Sligh, innovative design work by the Rural Studio at Auburn University, and the popular ABC reality television program *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. This chapter connects literary representations of American domesticity to other types of houses and attitudes about home and family that have appeared in the late twentieth century.

Thus, this study maps the development of American domestic fiction written by women and men after 1980 and its resonance with earlier domestic novels. Following Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher’s model from *No More Separate Spheres!* I seek to demonstrate “how domesticity is saturated by and dependent on a range of factors, terms, and agents imagined to lie outside its domain” (18). Masculinity, including male-authored and male-focused novels, along with the ideological and physical constructions of the “nation” and the “foreign,” are key agents generally considered outside American domestic fiction. Therefore, my work also contributes to the conversation about American domesticity as set out by Amy Kaplan’s essay “Manifest Domesticity” and her larger work *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (2002). Neodomestic fiction seeks to avoid reproducing “manifest domesticities.”

The following chapters emphasize the intimate connections between “foreign” and “domestic” as well as between “masculinity” and “femininity.” The individual chapter divisions reflect American domestic culture’s gendered structures while the chapters simultaneously relate to and bleed across these physical and ideological distinctions. The chapters, like relational space, converse with one another, demarcating physical and ideological boundaries that are in constant negotiation. This relational methodology and organization seeks to underscore my overall argument about the study of neodomestic fiction: the key to understanding neodomestic fiction and its radical project of recycling and reinventing American domesticity is to recognize such seemingly separate, “foreign” entities—like masculine and queer domesticities—as members of the family.