

Center for Urban Research and Education (CURE) and
the Office of Civic Engagement Joint Seminar Series

“The Social and Political Exclusion of Renters: Preliminary Ideas”

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Tuesday, February 26, 12:20pm
Location: Executive Dining Room, Campus Center

Lunch will be provided

In the wake of the recent housing crisis, many Americans will be renters for longer periods of time than previously anticipated. Homeownership will eventually make its return as the quintessential goal of housing policy. But until then, people will rent. In light of this, there may be a window through which it becomes possible to analyze and advocacy for changes in ideas about renting and rental housing policy. This paper is an incremental step in this direction. Currently, renting is viewed as undesirable form of land use. Renters are not considered to be community members. Renters are virtual housing and community pariahs in American society. The only apparent cure for this alleged renting malady is homeownership. To this end, policy has focused on low income homeowner, ultimately trapping poor families within the grip of the predatory housing market. For the typical middle class homeowner, the last several years of crisis have been a trial. But for low income families, the housing crisis has been a complete disaster. Renters comprise almost half of all households in the U.S. But they are written off as virtual political outsiders. Rather than pushing homeownership as the cure for whatever ails the rental housing market and its constituents, policy should be working on increasing the status of renting and on working with landlords, advocates and policy makers to make renting a quality housing alternative to homeownership.

This paper is an ideological analysis of renting. It looks at renting as a social category, renters as non-citizens, poor renters, student renters, and renter discrimination. The social, economic, political and physical dimensions of renting need rethinking. Renting or some non-owning variant needs to be reconfigured as positive and desirable and as a legitimate housing choice. The implications of the housing status quo are evaluated for families, students and the poor.