

HOUSING POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES

HISTORY AND PUBLIC POLICY BRIEFING PROGRAM NATIONAL HISTORY CENTER



“The Pruitt-Igoe Collapse,” 1972. Image courtesy of United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

[Institution]
[Course Name, Number]
[Instructor Name]
[Semester, Year]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Topic Overview	3
Assignments and Deadlines	5
Primary Sources	7
Secondary Sources	8
Grading Rubrics	10

INTRODUCTION

The History and Public Policy Briefing Program is designed to show students how to bring historical perspectives to contemporary policy issues. It provides a curricular model that educators can incorporate into their existing history classes to better illuminate the myriad ways we can learn from the past.

Understanding history is essential to effective policymaking. Every issue has a history and we make better policy decisions when we understand that history. Designed to be adaptable to many courses and teaching styles, the History and Public Policy Briefing Program provides a guide for history educators to develop and host briefings about the historical dimensions of current policy questions.

The History and Public Policy Briefing Program Overview

The History and Public Policy Briefing Program provides a guide to enable educators and students to craft a briefing on the historical background of a policy question at the local, state, or national level, following the National History Center's model.

At these briefings, students work as a team to (1) identify specific issues in relation to housing policy confronting policymakers at the local, state, or national level; (2) research the historical roots of the issue or some closely related issue that arose in the past; (3) prepare a briefing paper and presentation to an invited audience (from parents to local policymakers) that highlight the insights we can gain from an historical perspective on the present. Working both individually and collaboratively, students will engage in historical inquiry, research, and analysis as they investigate particular policy questions. They will also develop written and oral presentation skills as they prepare for and present the public briefing. Finally, they will deepen their civic knowledge and engagement, encouraging students to use history outside the classroom in order to foster responsible civic engagement.

The program is designed to be integrated by educators into existing history classes at the college or high school level. The policy briefings will not drive the course but rather will provide a fresh framework for addressing topics that already relate to the course material. Educators can integrate the program into their classrooms in several ways: from start to finish, it can serve as a capstone research project; broken into its component parts, it can be used to spur discussion or encourage student debate; if a wider audience is invited, it can be a way for student-historians to showcase the value of their history education.

Learning Outcomes

- Developing a methodological practice of gathering, sifting, analyzing, ordering, synthesizing, and interpreting evidence.
- Exploring the complexity of the human experience by evaluating a variety of historical sources for their credibility and perspective.
- Learning to value the study of the past for its contribution to lifelong learning and critical habits of the mind that are essential for effective and engaged citizenship.
- Engaging a diversity of viewpoints in a civil and constructive fashion as students apply historical knowledge and analysis to contemporary policy conversations.
- Building and improving upon oral and written skills essential to academic success.

HISTORY OF FEDERAL HOUSING POLICY OVERVIEW

Summary

The history of federal housing policy in the United States dates back to the Early Republic, when the new federal government awarded bounty lands to Continental Army veterans as payment for military service. As the United States grew in population and size, policies granting, regulating, and annexing lands to individuals and families for development and residency became commonplace. Over the course of the early and mid-nineteenth century, the process of federal subsidization and regulation allowed the United States to develop into the agrarian republic it was, in part, written to become.

The postbellum era saw a rise of urban settlement, one that coincided with, again, increasing population numbers as well as large influxes of immigrants. Though effective and affordable, urban housing establishments like tenements and slums caused health risks as well as ethnic, cultural, religious, and/or socioeconomic estrangement. By the turn of the century, the rising Progressive Party attempted housing-based reforms in Chicago, New York, and other major urban centers, many of which replaced existing problems of inequality and poor public health with new problems.

The early twentieth century was a period of steady home development in both rural and urban areas; roughly half of the population of the United States lived in one or the other. A large influx of unskilled laborers immigrated to urban areas, where they received training and employment in new industries requiring mass labor. Progressive policies helped bridge the economic and cultural gulf between rural and urban areas. When this partially unified economy collapsed with stock in the late 1920s, urban residents found themselves unemployed and/or incapable of obtaining financial assistance; in rural areas, these troubles were compounded by drought and erosion.

New Deal reforms ushered in a new era of housing policies that maximized the federal and state governments' roles in providing and protecting housing opportunities for Americans. The Public Works Administration Housing Division served as a precedent for the 1937 Wagner-Steagall Housing Act that established the first federal agency devoted solely to housing. The U.S. Housing Authority gradually expanded from low-income housing projects to middle-class development in suburban areas during World War II. Following World War II, Truman's Fair Deal included the Housing Act of 1949 that bolstered the Housing Authority's budget and capabilities, allowing the federal government to carry out larger urban renewal projects.

During the 1950s and 60s, suburban areas developed steadily as the American middle class grew in size. In low-income urban areas, federal and state governments displaced residents under the guise of urban renewal reforms. Due to the sheer size of public housing and the many issues associated with it, the federal government replaced the Housing Authority (and congressional authority) with the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1965. Despite some efforts from the federal government, voucher programs, predatory practices, and other harmful issues only worsened racial segregation and social, economic, and health and safety issues affecting low-income areas.

The federal government continued in attempts to alleviate intercity poverty and inequality. New programs redistributed authority and spending; through Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs), state and local governments found themselves more capable of lasting neighborhood reform and community development. Federal efforts subsided in the 1980s, until the launch of the HOPE VI program in 1992 and Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act in 1998, both designed

to help low-income families and individuals transition from public housing to private leasing or ownership.

Contemporary Application

The purpose of this policy packet is to allow students the opportunity to further explore the long, complicated history of federal housing policy in the United States. Despite centuries of reform, housing policy remains a major challenge for policy makers today. From historically marginalized intercity neighborhoods to the remotest rural areas, Americans continue to suffer from those housing policies that have not aged well over time. As of June 2018, midway through its second session, the 115th Congress has dealt with over 100 items of legislation devoted to housing and community development; 30 items of legislation relating explicitly to public housing; and thousands more of items of legislation including a clause on housing reform and/or urban development. In producing briefings, students will practice how to use history as a useful tool for meaningful and lasting policy reform.

Historiographical objectives

Often, the history of federal housing policy in the United States has coincided with major economic, social, political, and racial landmarks in American history. This project allows students to explore how housing policies have influenced or been influenced by other political forces, and how these influences inform housing policy today.

Historical Questions to Consider

How has federal housing policy shaped major moments or trends in American history (and vice versa)?

What is the current state of the historiography surrounding the history of housing policy? Where is there room for more research and literature?

Does federal or state housing policy seem to dictate or follow other social, political, or economic trends?

Where have federal and state efforts to reform housing coalesced and collided? Similarly, when has partisanship hindered housing reform, and how can policy makers avoid partisan deadlock over nonpartisan issues like housing?

ASSIGNMENTS AND DEADLINES

This sample schedule, drawn from the NHC's [History and Policy Education Program Guidebook](#), can help instructors in creating a syllabus and schedule designed specifically for their own class(es).

UNIT 1 | Getting Started

Week 1

Familiarize students with National History Center's Congressional Briefing program. Have them watch one of the NHC's briefing videos and read a summary of the one of the NHC's briefings. Videos of NHC briefings can be found [here](#); summaries of NHC briefings can be found [here](#).

Weeks 2 – 3

Students may begin conducting individual research at local institutions to refine research approach. By the end of week 3, each student should refine their research to one or two subtopics. These topics may include (but are not limited to): suburban development, rural housing, housing projects, racism,

UNIT 2 | Individual Research

Weeks 4 – 5

Have each student prepare and submit a **2-3 page paper** on their selected subtopic that outlines the history of the issue. Students can start preparing for an in-class presentation on the history of their subtopic and how it pertains to the larger legislative issue.

Week 6

Have students research which committee or subcommittee of the legislature or municipal government has jurisdiction over the legislative issue the class as a whole is considering. Have them identify which legislators sit on the committee and make initial contact with those policymakers' offices. In addition, students should draw up a list of other interested parties, such as representatives of non-profit organizations and journalists, to invite to the briefing (see page 8-9 of the [HPEP Guidebook](#)). If the instructor would like to hold the briefing in a room in a state legislative or municipal office building, the instructor and/or students should begin arranging for a room this week (see page 10 of the [HPEP Guidebook](#)).

Students should also continue preparing for individual presentations on their subtopics to present to the class during weeks 7-8.

UNIT 3 | Individual Presentations

Week 7 – 8

Have students present on their individually researched subtopics. Presentations need not exceed five minutes. Students should be prepared to give a brief history of the subtopic and how it influences the larger legislative issue today.

UNIT 4 | Preparing for the Class Briefing

Weeks 9 – 10

Working collaboratively in small groups, students prepare for the formal briefing. The three presenters coordinate and hone their presentations with feedback from other students. Different groups work on: crafting a **one-page briefing handout** that offers a succinct synopsis of the history of the topic; crafting and issuing **formal invitations**; pursuing a **social media campaign** to promote the briefing; and **arranging logistics** such as videography and audio-video equipment as needed.

Week 11

Dress rehearsal for formal briefing. The three presenters practice their presentations to the class. The other students stand in as audience members, asking questions during the question-and-answer portion.

UNIT 5 | The Briefing

Week 12

Formal briefing to state or local policymakers, journalists, student leaders, etc.

UNIT 6 | Reflection and Follow-Up

Week 13

Students submit a **1-to 2-page reflection** on the questions audience members raised at the briefing. In considering the discussion at the briefing, they may draw on material from weeks 4 - 5 and 7 - 8 that was not presented at the formal briefing.

You may submit a video recording of the event and/or a blog post about your experience with the History and Public Policy Briefing Program for possible inclusion in the National History Center's or American Historical Association's online or print publications.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Finding Primary Sources

The United States federal government – more specifically, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) – has provided and continues to publish reports, overviews, and data relating to housing policy and development. Primary resources provided publicly by the federal government can be accessed through the following sites:

- [Records of the Federal Housing Administration \(FHA\)](#)
- [United States Census Housing Data](#)

Online libraries, universities, and other academic and scholarly institutions maintain comprehensive primary source collections for easier research. These collections and other related resources can be accessed through the following sites:

- [The Great Depression and the 1930s: Housing](#), Christopher Newport University
 - [Primary Sources in African-American History: Housing](#), University of Missouri
 - [Housing Law](#), Santa Clara University
 - [Postwar Rise of the Suburbs](#), Digital Public Library of America
 - [Settlement Houses in the Progressive Era](#), PBS Learning Media
-

Sample Primary Sources

[1937 Housing \(Wagner-Steagall\) Act](#)

This piece of New Deal legislation established the United States Housing Administration, responsible for building publicly subsidized housing. The Act required that for each new public housing unit created, a unit of substandard quality must be removed. This one-to-one policy ensured that the federal program would increase the quality of housing, but not the quantity.

[1968 Fair Housing Act](#)

The Civil Rights Act of 1968, (enacted April 11, 1968) is a landmark piece of legislation in the United States that provided for equal housing opportunities regardless of race, creed, or national origin.

[Village of Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development Corp](#)

A real estate developer, which had contracted to purchase tract of land in order to build racially integrated low- and moderate-income housing, met constitutional standing requirements in its suit charging that local authorities, in refusing to rezone tract from single-family to multiple-family classification, engaged in racial discrimination in violation of Fourteenth Amendment and Fair Housing Act of 1968.

[Department of Housing and Urban Development Strategic Plan 2014-2018](#)

This report, published during the Obama Administration's HUD department in April 2014, summarizes the short- and long-term objectives of HUD, many of which were designed to help Americans recover

from the 2008-9 financial and housing crisis and begin to implement policies intended to prevent another financial and/or housing crisis.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Finding Secondary Sources

These and other useful referential sources issued by the federal government can be found using the following online resources:

- [HUD History](#)
- [HUD Historical Timeline](#)
- [HUD History of Fair Housing](#)

Multiple universities have programs devoted to the study of federal housing policy in the United States. These resources can be found at the following sites:

- [The Cleveland Memory Project](#), Cleveland State University
- [Institute for Housing Studies](#), DePaul University
- [Joint Center for Housing Studies](#), Harvard University
- [Center for Urban Policy Research](#), Rutgers University

Multiple academic journals focused on debates over housing policy can be publicly accessed here:

- [Housing Policy Debate](#)
 - [Housing Studies](#)
 - [Journal of Housing Research](#)
 - [International Journal of Urban and Regional Research](#)
-

Sample Secondary Sources

Bauman, John F. and Biles, Roger (eds.). [From Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth Century America](#). University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.

Bratt, Rachel, Michael Stone, Chester Hartmann (eds.). [A Right to Housing: Foundation for a New Social Agenda](#). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006.

Fritz, Marie J. ["Rethinking Gender in U.S. Housing Policy."](#) *The Good Society* 18, 2 (2009): 62-68.

Listokin, David. ["Federal Housing Policy and Preservation: Historical Evolution, Patterns, and Implications."](#) *Housing Policy Debate* 2, 2: 157-185.

Marcuse, Peter. ["Interpreting "Public Housing" History."](#) *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 12, 3 (1995): 240-258.

Poterba, James. "[Public Policy and Housing in the United States](#)," in Yukio Noguchi and James Poterba (eds.) *Housing Markets in the U.S. and Japan*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994: 239-256.

Rothstein, Richard. [The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America](#). New York, NY: Liveright, 2017.

Von Hoffman, Alexander. "[History Lessons for Today's Housing Policy: The Political Processes of Making Low-Income Housing Policy](#)," published electronically by and for the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, 2012.

Wright, Gwendolyn. [Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America](#). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983.

GRADING RUBRIC(S)

Final Presentation Rubric:

Mock Policy Components	Excellent 4	Good 3	Fair 2	Poor 1	Students Score	Comments
Visual Aids						
Was the handout clear and concise?						
Was the PowerPoint (or other presentation aid) easy to follow?						
Presentation Delivery						
Did presenters organize and present information clearly and effectively?						
Did presenters speak clearly?						
Were speakers engaging?						
Historical Content						
Did the historical content help the audience understand the current issue?						
Question and Answer Session						
Did presenters answer questions clearly?						
Did presenters demonstrate knowledge about the history?						
Did presenters manage the session effectively?			1 0			