

SOCI-223: Public Housing: Theory & Practice



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Course Meeting: Wednesday from 2:00 – 4:30

Office Hours: Monday 11:00 – 12:30 @ MUG (ICC)

Course Introduction: The term *public housing* often brings to mind images of high-rise developments in poor neighborhoods, but most Americans living in publicly-subsidized housing do not live in these types of units. In fact, public housing refers to a broad set of initiatives to create safe, affordable housing opportunities for low-income Americans. Many of these policies emerged in response to the perceived failures of large-scale public housing in the mid-twentieth century. This course examines the array of policies designed to provide housing assistance to poor families in the United States. To do so, it interrogates the relationship between theory and practice – namely, how disciplines throughout the social sciences, including economics, sociology, government and urban planning, have informed the assumptions made by policymakers in their pursuit of better housing policies. After tracing the history of large-scale public housing developments, the course centers on contemporary policies, including housing vouchers and the creation of mixed-income communities, that attempt to de-concentrate poverty and create opportunities for poor Americans.

Learning Goals: This course serves as an introduction to public housing policy in the United States. There are three distinct learning goals:

- Students will develop a better understanding the ways that the government works to provide housing to low-income Americans. We will consider policies and practices implemented by federal, state and local governments to understand the multi-scalar nature of housing policy. The course will link policy changes to broader shifts in the American welfare state to investigate housing as a central piece of the social safety net. By the end of the course, students should be proficient in identifying the core programs and ideas in contemporary low-income housing policy.
- Students will develop skills to link social science research to the formation of housing policy. They will identify multiple methods of social research, including ethnographic studies and analyses of administrative datasets. Through the lens of affordable housing policy, students will evaluate how research shapes public policy and consider the challenges of conducting high-quality, policy-relevant research. This focus on research evaluation will enable students to link the field of housing policy to other policy arenas, including criminal justice, education and health care policy.
- Students will develop an independent vision for improving the provision of housing assistance to low-income families. Acknowledging the stated goal of achieving a decent, affordable home for all Americans, students will work to articulate their own vision for a more equitable, fair set of housing policies. This vision will acknowledge the competing goals of federal housing policies, including efforts to create economic opportunities, provide decent shelter and expand neighborhood choice.

Assignments: Advanced seminars rely on the active, engaged participation of students in the course. Students are expected to attend *every* course meeting, actively participate in classroom discussions, and complete *all* assignments. Any unexcused absence from class will result in a half-letter grade deduction from the student's final grade in the course. Late assignments will not be accepted, and will receive zero points. All assignments *must* be submitted on the course Canvas site.

- *Course Participation:* Students will be expected to participate actively in classroom discussions. This includes both responding to the instructor's prompts *and* bringing their own unique ideas to the course. Participation is worth 15 points.

- *Weekly Responses:* Students will submit a weekly response to the course readings through *Canvas*. Responses must be submitted by midnight the day before class. To receive credit, your response should not exceed a single page. Typically, a single, succinct paragraph is sufficient. Your response should raise any issues that you would like to address during the discussion in class, including specific questions about the readings or points of clarification. This is *not* a summary of the readings. Together, these weekly responses are worth 15 points.
- *Public Housing Authority Case Study:* Students are required to complete a short case study of a public housing authority. The case study will highlight current initiatives and issues in the public housing authority. You will be expected to find original information by drawing on several sources, including reports from the housing authority, newspaper articles and, if appropriate, interviews with an agency official. Students are welcome to select any public housing in the United States *except* the District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA). The case study should be 8 – 10 pages in length, excluding any charts, images, or figures. The assignments must be submitted by midnight on Tuesday, October 15 through *Canvas*. Additional information on the assignment is posted at the end of the syllabus. The case study is worth 20 points.
- *Research Paper or Policy Brief:* Students will complete a final paper or policy brief on a topic related to public housing in the United States. Each student is expected to meet with Professor McCabe during his office hours before November 6 to discuss a topic. This assignment has three components.
 - By midnight on Tuesday, November 5, students will submit a one-page proposal explaining the topic of their paper or policy brief. This submission must also include an annotated bibliography with *at least* six sources. If students are writing a traditional paper, the proposal should identify the topic of the paper and the specific research question(s) being addressed. If students are writing a policy brief, the proposal should identify the specific policy being addressed and the plan for analysis. The proposal is worth 5 points.
 - Students will do a short presentation about their paper. Presentations will be strictly limited to six minutes! Short presentations require extra planning to ensure that presenters stay on-track and convey only the most important information. Six-slide Powerpoint presentations must be uploaded to *Canvas* by midnight on Tuesday, December 3. The presentation is worth 5 points.
 - The final paper is due on Friday, December 13 at 5 p.m. It should be submitted through *Canvas*. Additional details on the style of the final paper are included at the end of the syllabus. The final paper is worth forty points.

Course Material: This course will draw on book-length manuscripts, policy reports, journal articles and documentary films to provide an account of public housing policy in the United States. Four required books are available in the Georgetown University Bookstore and on-line. Journal articles and policy reports listed on the syllabus are available on the course *Canvas* page. The books are:

- *High-Risers: Cabrini Green and the Fate of American Public Housing* by Ben Austen.
- *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* by Richard Rothstein.

- *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in an American City* by Matt Desmond.

Odds & Ends: The following information provides some guidelines and resources for students in the course.

- **Late Coursework:** Late assignments will *not* be accepted except with the written permission of the Dean.
- **Electronic Devices:** We will not be using laptops during the semester. Please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices during class.
- **Plagiarism:** Students are required to adhere to the Academic Honor Code, and should review the [Undergraduate Honor Council statement on plagiarism](#). Any student caught plagiarizing will automatically receive a failing grade for the course.
- **How to Read for this Course:** Because these readings are often dense, they will require you to pay careful attention. As a result, I will encourage you to develop a reading strategy that enables you to *read and think without distraction*. Pick out two blocks of time – two or three hours each should be sufficient – devoted exclusively to reading for this course. Use the rest of that time to summarize the readings and draw out themes relevant to the course.
- **Office Hours:** Office hours are an opportunity for me to meet you, and for you to meet me. Students often think they need a *reason* to come to office hours – a problem with the course, a question about the reading, etc. In this course (and in your college career more generally), I want you to think differently about office hours. Come tell me about what you're interested in studying. Ask me about my research. Share your experiences of Georgetown, or tell me ways that you've been engaging with course material. And, of course, if you have questions about the course, or you want to clarify the lectures or readings, then you're welcome to come to office hours. To pass the course, I will expect every student to come by my office hours *at least once* during the semester.

Course Schedule:

September 4: Housing in America: Debating Social Policy and Affordable Housing

This course is about the provision of safe, decent affordable housing, but what does that mean? What makes housing affordable? What role does – or should – the government play in providing housing to low-income Americans? How do government- and market-based solutions intersect to provide for affordable housing? How does housing fit into the federal safety net? Should housing be a social right? In addition to these questions, we will think about the benefits of stable, secure housing. Why is housing so important? What other social outcomes (e.g., health, educational attainment, lifetime earnings, etc.) are influenced by housing conditions? To frame the course, we will brainstorm some of these issues, including the definition(s) of affordability, the basic challenges of housing as both a commodity and a necessity, and competing ideological perspectives on issues of affordability. This class will lay the groundwork for the course by both identifying specific policies and conceptualizing larger questions that motivate our inquiry.

Read: Patillo, Mary. 2013. "Housing: Commodity versus Right." *Annual Review of Sociology*.

Read: Vale, Lawrence and Yonah Freemark. 2012. "From Public Housing to Public-Private Housing: 75 Years of American Social Experimentation." *Journal of the American Planning Association*.

September 11: The Foundations: A History of Public Housing in the United States

*Public housing has a complicated history in the United States. Its origins date to the Wagner Act (1937) when federally-funded housing programs were approved as part of the New Deal efforts. This week, we will think about the origins of public housing in the United States. Who was public housing designed to serve? Who are the stakeholders involved in the construction and maintenance of public housing? How does the idea of federally-funded housing fit into American identity or ideals? How does this compare to government-funded housing in other countries? What types of social relationships were formed in public housing developments? (We will watch *Housing in Our Times* (1937) during class.)*

Read: Ben Austen. *High-Risers: Cabrini-Green and the Fate of American Public Housing*. Parts 1 and 2.

September 18: Cracks in the Walls: Creative Destruction and the Failure of Public Housing

*The Pruitt-Igoe development in St. Louis was among the most infamous public housing developments ever built in the United States. The construction of Pruitt-Igoe underscored the promise of federally-funded housing for low-income Americans, and its decline came to symbolize, for many people, everything that was wrong with high-rise housing complexes. Studying Pruitt-Igoe is a window into many of the themes we will discuss this semester – the history of public housing, the social life inside of it, and the challenges we face in providing safe, decent and affordable housing to the poor. Alongside our study of Cabrini-Green, we will watch a documentary about the Pruitt-Igoe housing development and consider the radical transformation in the stock of public housing in the United States. (We will watch the film *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* together as a class.)*

Read: Ben Austen. *High-Risers: Cabrini-Green and the Fate of American Public Housing*. Part 3.

September 25: Segregation by Design: Federal Policies and the Architecture of Racial Segregation

As racially homogenous public housing was built in poor neighborhoods, public housing contributed to the concentration of poverty and racial segregation in American cities. Yet, public housing policy was not the only way that the federal government contributed to racial segregation in the United States. Specifically, through practices of redlining, the federal government created and maintained durable forms of segregation that would persist throughout the twentieth century. We will consider the active role of the government in creating racial segregation, both through public housing policies and other housing policies, and the reasons that segregation has proven so intractable in the United States. While the government took an active role in segregating communities, we will also consider efforts to maintain segregation and prevent racial integration in the United States at the local level. This is often done by homeowners who express concern about the impacts of affordable housing. We will continue to think about opposition to racial integration and affordable housing construction, including the way that homeowners engage in the politics of exclusion that prohibit the construction of affordable housing and limit opportunities for racial integration.

Read: Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America.*

October 2: Building New Communities: HOPE VI and the Promise of Mixed-Income Neighborhoods

As the backbone of federal efforts to redevelop so-called severely-distressed public housing units, the federal government launched the HOPE VI program in 1992. The program (and other that emerged from it) led to the destruction of public housing and the redevelopment of mixed-income communities. Critics charge that HOPE VI spurred gentrification, displaced poor citizens and failed to acknowledge the social capital inherent in these communities. Proponents point to improved housing quality, rising housing prices and the principles of social mixing as evidence that HOPE VI succeeded. This week, we will read about the transformation of public housing through the HOPE VI program. In doing so, we will begin to consider some of the social, political and economic challenges of creating mixed-income communities.

Read: Tach, Laura. “More than Bricks and Mortar: Neighborhood Frames, Social Processes, and the Mixed-Income Redevelopment of a Public Housing Project.”

Read: Chaskin, Robert J. and Mark L. Joseph. “Positive Gentrification, Social Control and the Right to the City in Mixed-Income Communities: Uses and Expectations of Space and Place.”

Read: Urban Institute. *A Decade of HOPE VI: Research Findings and Policy Challenges.* (Skim through the report to deepen your understanding of the program and the challenges that it faced.)

October 9: Moving to Opportunity: Housing Mobility and the Promise of High-Opportunity Neighborhoods

In the mid-1990s, the Department of Housing and Urban Development launched the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program to evaluate the impact of neighborhood conditions on life outcomes. MTO was part of a wider set of mobility studies designed to test the impact of vouchers on social outcomes, including health, well-being, labor market success and educational attainment. Do vouchers lead to better neighborhood outcomes? Is the movement of voucher recipients into a neighborhood associated with higher crime? Do voucher holders access better schools? We will read about the Moving to Opportunity program as we begin to consider how social science research informs public housing policy. Specifically, what does this research tell us about the benefits of living in high-opportunity neighborhoods? In addition to studying the Moving to Opportunity program, we will also study a new

program, Creating Moves to Opportunity (CMTO), designed to assist families in their neighborhood moves. As part of this analysis, we will consider the methodological challenges of studying housing vouchers and linking them to social policy.

Read: Briggs, Xavier de Souza and Susan J. Popkin. *Moving to Opportunity: The Story of an American Experiment to Fight Ghetto Poverty.* Chapters 1, 3 and 4.

Read: Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, and Lawrence Katz. “The Evidence of Exposure to Better Neighborhoods on Children: New Evidence from the Moving to Opportunity Experiment.” *American Economic Review.*

October 16: The Housing Choice Voucher Program: Landlords, Neighborhoods and the Limited Promise of Mobility.

The primary federal program designed to provide safe, affordable housing to low-income Americans is the Housing Choice Voucher Program (sometimes referred to as Section 8). Today, housing vouchers provide housing assistance to more than 2.2 million families in the United States – nearly double the number of households assisted by traditional, place-based public housing. We will spend this week digging into the fundamentals of the voucher program. How does the program work? What led to this shift in federal housing policies? Who benefits from the voucher program? What are the challenges of administering the voucher program? Should we understand the voucher program as a cornerstone of the American welfare state? Although the Housing Choice Voucher program was designed to create opportunities for residential choice, research suggests that voucher holders continue to concentrate in particular neighborhoods, and these neighborhoods are typically not the high-opportunity communities imagined by policymakers. We will think about the role of landlords in sorting tenants, and the constraints that housing voucher holders face in their efforts to move to high-opportunity neighborhoods, including the role of source of income discrimination.

Read: Moore, Kathleen. “Lists and Lotteries: Rationing in the Housing Choice Voucher Program.”

Read: DeLuca, Stefanie, Philip Garboden and Peter Rosenblatt. “Segregating Shelter: How Housing Policies Shape the Residential Locations of Low Income Minority Families.”

Read: Rosen, Eva. “Rigging the Rules of the Game: How Landlords Geographically Sort Low-Income Renters.”

Read: McClure, Kirk, Alex F. Schwartz and Lydia B. Taghavi. “Housing Choice Voucher Location Patterns a Decade Later.”

October 23: Instability and Precariousness in the Rental Market: Eviction and the Reproduction of Urban Poverty

*Each year, millions of American families are evicted from their homes. This process is felt disproportionately across the population, as African-American, female-headed households are substantially more likely to face eviction. Sociologist Matt Desmond points to eviction as not only a consequence of poverty, but also a cause of it. Yet, eviction is not the only form of housing insecurity or precarity. Squatting, doubling-up and homelessness also lead to housing insecurity, and their effects are broadly felt by millions of poor families. This week, we will read Desmond’s Pulitzer Prize-winning book on *Eviction in the United States* to think more about eviction as both a cause and consequence of poverty.*

Read: Desmond, Matthew. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in an American City*.

October 30: Loosening Supply Constraints: The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, Inclusionary Zoning and the Production of Affordable Housing

Increasing the production of affordable housing can help to resolve the crisis of affordable housing by creating more housing units and easing pressure on the housing market. Economists refer to these efforts to build more housing – and specifically, more affordable housing – as increasing the supply of affordable housing by loosening the supply constraints. This could occur through zoning changes or local policies, like inclusionary zoning, that mandate the production of affordable units. Alternatively, these could be subsidized through federal programs, like the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program. This week, we will focus on the supply of affordable housing, including several federal and local programs designed to increase the number of units available to low- and moderate-income families.

Read: Cummings, Jean L. and Denise DiPasquale. “The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit: An Analysis of the First Ten Years.”

Read: Hanlon, James. “The Origins of the Rental Demonstration Program and the End of Public Housing.” *Housing Policy Debates*.

November 6: The Future of Fair Housing: Housing Discrimination and the Politics of Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing

With the Civil Rights Act, Congress specifically outlawed discrimination in housing and mortgage markets. Landlords, realtors and other actors in the housing market were prohibited from discrimination on the basis of race (and other characteristics) in housing markets. However, fair housing legislation has been poorly enforced and racial gaps in housing opportunity persist. We will discuss the evolution of fair housing legislation this week, including the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rules from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. We will examine how racial discrimination persists in housing today, and the way housing research can impact patterns of discrimination. This will include discussions of the disparate impact standard and rules about criminal convictions and public housing. (We will watch A Matter of Place, which was produced by the Fair Housing Justice Center, and listen to This American Life: House Rules (Nov. 22, 2103) during class.)

Read: Hannah-Jones, Nikole. “Living Apart: How the Government Betrayed a Landmarks Civil Rights Law.”

Read: Office of Policy Development and Research, Department of Housing and Urban Development. “Housing Discrimination Against Racial and Ethnic Minorities.” (Skim through sections to get an understanding of the report.)

Read: Bostic, Raphael and Arthur Acolin. “Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing: The Mandate to End Segregation.”

November 13: Combatting Homelessness: Housing First and the Expansion of Homelessness

Rising housing prices and a limited supply of housing have exacerbated the problem of homelessness in the United States. In this class, we will ask about the systems and policies designed to end homelessness. To do so, we will think about the institutions that regulate homelessness, including the system of temporary shelters and policing strategies. One of the dominant models for combatting homelessness is a Housing First model. This model offer

permanent, supportive housing without preconditions. What other innovative ways are cities and states addressing homelessness? What challenges come with a Housing First model? As we discuss the contemporary challenges of homelessness, we will evaluate the benefits and limitations of these types of programs.

Read: Stuart, Forrest. "From Rabble Management to Recovery Management: Policing Homelessness in Marginal Urban Spaces."

Read: Herring, Chris. "The New Logics of Homeless Seclusion: Homeless Encampments in America's West Coast Cities."

November 20: Housing as a Social Right? Perspectives on the Fight for Affordable Housing

In this class, we will begin to reflect back on the bigger themes of the course, linking changes in public housing policies to broader changes in the American social and economic structure. Framed around the idea of a right to housing, we will use this class as an opportunity to reimagine the current system of public housing in the United States. How can public housing policies more effectively serve low-income Americans? Should housing be provided as an entitlement program? What is the most effective, fair way to distribute housing vouchers? How has the commodification of housing transformed public housing developments? What is the appropriate balance between market-based solutions and government-led policies? As part of our efforts to understand the city where we live, Professor McCabe will lead a 'deep dive' into the system of public housing in Washington, DC and the surrounding communities.

Read: Urban Institute. "Affordable Housing Needs Assessment for the District of Columbia." (Skim sections of the report.)

Read: Hartmann, Chester. "The Case for a Right to Housing."

Read: Herbert, Claire W. "Squatting for Survival: Precarious Housing in a Declining U.S. City."

November 27: Thanksgiving Recess (No Class)

December 4: An Afternoon with Housing Policy Practitioners and Researchers

As we conclude our course, we will use the final class period to hear from four local housing policy practitioners and researchers. Consistent with the goal of integrating theory and practice, I have invited for housing policy researchers from across Washington, DC to talk about their work.

Student Presentations (Date: TBD)

Students will give a six-minute presentation of their final paper. This fast-paced presentation style will require students to write a concise presentation and rehearse their presentation before coming to class.

Assignment #1:
Public Housing Authority Case Study

Instructions: Each student is required to do an in-depth case study of a public housing authority in the United States. For this project, you should draw on local materials (e.g., administrative documents, newspaper articles, reports from the housing authority, etc.) to provide an overview of the public housing program in your jurisdiction. As you research and write your case study, you should consider the following questions.

- **History and Mission:** What is the history of this public housing authority? What is the organization's mission? How does the organization relate to the rest of the city or county government?
- **Geography and Demographics:** What is the jurisdiction (e.g., county, city) being served by the public housing authority? What is the demographic breakdown of the jurisdiction? How many families are eligible for housing assistance? What is the demographic composition of the jurisdiction (e.g., racial, economic, etc.)? How does it compare to surrounding communities?
- **Programs:** What types of programs are administered by the housing authority? Does it run both housing vouchers and public housing programs? What are the details of these programs? Are they involved in any other programs through the Department of Housing and Urban Development? Does it administer any locally-funded programs?
- **Controversies and Debates:** Are there any notable controversies surrounding public housing in your jurisdiction? What are flashpoints? How have they been resolved? What role has the housing authority played in these debates? What types of issues of gentrification, housing affordability or economic development are currently being discussed in the community?

Your case study should be ~ 2,000 – 3,000 words (~ 8 – 12 page, double-spaced). You are invited to include additional information, including maps, tables, photographs, etc. that help you tell the story of your public housing authority. Your project should aim to contextualize your case study within the broader array of policies, programs and debates discussed in the course.

**Assignment #2:
Research Paper or Policy Brief**

Instructions: Your final paper is an opportunity for you to do an in-depth exploration of the topic of your choice. If you're writing a research paper, you should be sure to clearly articulate your thesis or position; develop a series of arguments to support your thesis; and offer evidence in support of your claims. For a policy brief, you should be clear about the policy you are addressing and your proposal for improving it. Essays should be *at least* fifteen double-spaced pages with standard 1-inch margins and 11- or 12-point font. (All the extras – works cited pages, charts and graphs, title page, etc. do not count toward this word limit.)

Grading Criteria: Your paper will be scored on four areas: originality, research, writing and argumentation.

- **Originality.** Does the paper present novel, original insight about a topic? Does it show creativity on the part of the researcher to synthesize material and develop new ideas? Does the author demonstrate intellectual depth and curiosity in selecting a topic, conducting research and presenting information?
- **Research.** Is the paper grounded in careful research about the topic? Does the author demonstrate sufficient background knowledge of the subject by referencing key ideas, policies and authors? Is the scope of research significant? Does the paper go beyond the material from the course to introduce additional research?
- **Writing.** Does the author pay careful attention to the craft of writing? Is the prose lucid and clear? Is the paper well-organized? Are each of the sections clearly laid out? Is the writing free of jargon, typos and grammatical mistakes? Are citations done correctly?
- **Argumentation.** Does the author use the writing to tell a convincing story? Do the arguments build clearly on one another? Can the readers easily follow the argument and identify momentum building in the paper? Does the introduction provide a useful roadmap for the entire paper?

References: All references, including material cited from the course syllabus, should be cited in a consistent format used by social scientists. Although I recommend using the APA Citation Style, I am primarily concerned that your references are consistent through the paper. Within text citations typically take two forms.

As McCabe (2013) argues, homeowners are more likely to engage in particular types of civic activities, including voting and attending town meetings.

or

Homeowners are more likely to engage in particular types of civic activities, including voting and attending town meetings (McCabe 2013).

Additional Instructions: Here are a couple additional pieces of information – some rules of thumb, some hard-and-fast rules – to guide your writing.

- **Make an outline:** Creating an outline helps to structure your essay, allowing you to shift around ideas before committing them to paper. Often, you will find the process of writing a paper to be easier (or less frustrating) when you start with a detailed outline.
- **No pull-quotes:** Do not use pull quotes from books and articles you're reading. You should summarize and reference the ideas, but you are prohibited from directly quoting secondary sources.
- **Focus on the quality your writing:** This is an opportunity to improve your skills as a writer – likely, the most important skill you will develop at Georgetown. Strong writing helps to convey smart ideas, and thinking carefully about the craft of writing will help you write a better essay.
- **Read your essay aloud:** Before you submit your paper, read it aloud to yourself. Listen to your own voice as a writer. If they're willing to listen, read it to your roommates and friends. This will help you to write a stronger essay.
- **Don't confuse the vague for the profound:** Be as specific as possible in your argument. Vague claims and abstract ideas do not make for strong essays.
- **Don't use the thesaurus:** It is surprisingly easy to identify words that students wrote using the built-in thesaurus. Think about what you want to say. Spend time coming up with the right word(s) on your own.
- **Don't plagiarize:** Before you start writing, review the Georgetown Honor Code and guidelines for plagiarism. It's always helpful to refresh your memory – even if you think you know what plagiarism is.
- **Read other things:** If you get stuck while writing or you find yourself having trouble organizing your ideas, stop writing and start reading. The world is full of good writing, and it's often helpful to read before you continue to write.
- **Make this the best paper of your college career:** When you apply to internships, graduate school or jobs after college, prospective employers and schools will ask for a writing sample. If you make this the best paper you've written at Georgetown, it will be an easy one to use when you're asked for a writing sample in the future.