

**Reading Tips and Study Questions:
Planning as social reform by expert design—October 1st**

Required reading:

1. pp.76-78 only in John Friedmann, *Planning in the Public Domain* (Princeton: Princeton, 1987).
2. *RPT* (Chapter 1) **Robert Fishman**, "Urban Utopias: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier."
3. **Peter Marcuse**, "Interpreting 'Public Housing' History," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 12, 3 (Autumn 1995), pp. 240-258.
4. **Lawrence J. Vale**, "Standardizing Public Housing," in *Regulating Place: Standards and the Shaping of Urban America*, eds. Eran Ben-Joseph and Terry Szold (Routledge, 2005). Read pp. 67-81 and skim pp. 82-99.

Tips and questions

This session kicks off **Unit C: Planning History and Theory**. The unit uses a variety of cases, some over more than one session, to examine key questions in planning history and theory. It culminates in a take-home midterm exam of three essay questions. The exam will enable you to synthesize the readings in the form of arguments that address major questions that confront the practice of planning.

The first case draws on years of fieldwork in Boston by our own Department Head, Prof. Larry Vale, who spans the CDD and HCED groups. The reading load is as heavy for this case as any we'll require this semester, but the case comes with a special opportunity: to visit the focal sites, which are convenient to the Red Line T (see below).

Case background. Public Housing in the United States began in the 1930s as the first major effort by the federal government to provide for the housing needs of low-income households—i.e., to provide "social housing." According to some observers, it was classic modernist planning in the social reform mode.

The approach included construction of rental housing developments (“projects”) to be owned and managed by government. In Boston, as in many cities, public housing enjoyed more than two decades of initial success followed by severe decline can conflict over how to respond. These challenges have echoes in many parts of the world where social housing has become a source of conflict, as well as a focus for reform efforts, resident-led movements, and more, from France to India, Cuba to the UK, and beyond.

This first session focuses on the early period, examining the ways that the design and site planning of public housing exemplified high modernist ideals, ideals that encompassed *both* physical design and social behavior.

The October 1 session will draw principally on two post-war public housing examples in Boston, the West Broadway (“D Street”) project in South Boston, and the Columbia Point project in Dorchester, both of which can be visited from T stops along the Red Line.

1. **Friedmann** calls social reform the “grand tradition” in modern planning. What role does it assume for planning?
2. According to **Fishman**, what urban problems did the utopian planners identify in cities of their day, and how did they defend their utopian conceptions as scientific or otherwise desirable? They represent the apex of planning as experts leading society to “the good city” and therefore the good society.
3. **Marcuse** contends that the “reformer’s program” was but one iteration of public housing. Is his argument persuasive, and if so, what cautions does it imply planners should have when using government to reform social problems?
4. How, according to **Vale**, did ideology and other factors play into the origins of site planning for neighborhood units, including public housing areas? His “postscript on public housing redevelopment” serves as a direct lead-in to our next session, which examines the efforts by planners and community leaders to reclaim public housing after it underwent severe social and physical decline.