

The Fillmore

Neighborhoods: The Hidden Cities of San Francisco

TITLE: Urban Renewal

GRADES: 11-12

SUBJECT AREA(S): American Democracy, Economics
US History (Twentieth Century)
Language Arts

OVERVIEW: How could public policies created to improve a neighborhood end up destroying its vital fabric? Urban renewal policies enacted in San Francisco's Fillmore district in the 1950s-60s provide a vivid case study in public policy, federal and local government, and citizen activism. This important history sheds light on present-day urban renewal policies, such as empowerment zones and welfare-to-work.

PROGRAM SEGMENTS:

- (1) 0:22-0:28 Conditions in the Fillmore after World War II; Urban Renewal Act of 1949
- (2) 0:35-0:43 incentives for local government to gain federal money; local political players
- (3) 0:43-0:52 A-1 plan; forced removal of residents (eminent domain); impact on the mostly Black community
- (4) 0:53-1:10 A-2; activism of WACO; first legal victory by community group in US history; promissory notes unused; lingering rage
- (5) 1:10-1:22 Herman's death; end result: Black Removal; no economic investment; Jim Jones and Jonestown

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will understand economic, cultural and political forces that undermined a thriving African American community.
- By examining the history of the Fillmore district, students will evaluate urban renewal policies, including: goals, constitutional rationale (eminent domain), cultural assumptions, economic strategies (including cost/benefit analysis and incentives), and impact
- Students will evaluate a current urban renewal policy and debate its strengths and weaknesses based on the lessons of history.

NATIONAL

STANDARDS: This lesson addresses the following national content standards found in the McRel Standards Database: www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks.

GradesK-12: United States History:
31. Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

Civics:

1. Understands ideas about civic life, politics and government.
14. Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life.

Language Arts:

Reading:

5. Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process.
7. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts.

Viewing:

9. Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

MATERIALS: The Fillmore, part 4 of The Neighborhoods of San Francisco

TIME: 3-4 class periods (60 min. each)

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

1. Write the following quote on the board or overhead and have a volunteer read aloud:
“Without adequate housing for the poor, critics will rightly condemn urban renewal as a land grab for the rich and a heartless push-out for the poor and non-whites.”
2. Have students write down their best guess at the meaning of “urban renewal.” Discuss answers. What do students guess are the goals of urban renewal? What are its dangers? According to the speaker, what provisions could make urban renewal a success? What urban renewal policies are in effect today?
3. Introduce *The Fillmore* documentary, explaining that this mostly Black neighborhood in San Francisco was targeted for urban renewal in 1949. [Note: If lesson #2 is noted used, it is advised to watch 0:22-0:34 of the video also.]

FOCUS FOR VIEWING:

1. Break students into groups of 2-3 students. Assign each group one of the following topics. If necessary, take a few minutes to define (some will be explained in the video). As they watch, they should make notes of everything they hear on that topic and be prepared to report to the class.
 - The goals of urban renewal
 - Incentives and criteria
 - Political players and residents
 - Eminent domain
 - Compensation
 - Phase A-1
 - Phase A-2
 - Consequences
 - WACO

VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

Pause the video after segment 1.

(after “...but it took 10 years, a critical delay during which a community put down roots.” - get exact quote)

1. Ask the teams to report any information gained. (Emphasize goals and players.)
2. Discuss Carlton Goodlet’s statement: “Experience has taught minorities if we don’t start outright, we may not end upright.” What does he mean? What examples from history support his point?

Pause the video after segment 2.

(after activist Mary Rogers says she didn’t like the worsening conditions)

1. Ask the teams to report new information.
2. Discuss the labels “slum” and “blight.” Review the idea of “incentives.” How was proof of “blight” an incentive for the city to gain federal dollars, and what were the criteria (including “non-white population”)? By contrast, why was the label “slum” a dis-incentive to owners to fix up their buildings?
3. Write key players on the board. Ask students to choose a player and take 5 minutes to do a quick-write on urban renewal from that person’s point of view (using “I”). Invite volunteers to read aloud. Now ask students to choose a player on the opposite side of the issue and repeat.
4. Discuss: If this urban renewal policy were taking place in your community today, how would you feel? What action could you, as a citizen, take?

Pause the video after segment 3.

(after “The Fillmore didn’t burn like Watts or Newark, but the rage ran just as hot.”)

1. Ask the teams to report new information.
2. Discuss: What was different about A-2? What was significant about WACO’s legal victory, both locally and nationwide?

Pause the video after segment 4.

1. Ask the teams to report new information.
2. Look back at the quote discussed before viewing. Who was the speaker? [Herman] In light of history, how is his statement ironic?
3. Discuss: According to Charles Collins, what was the missing piece in trying to revive the Fillmore neighborhood? [jobs] According to the video, why were people attracted to Jim Jones and the People’s Temple? What happened in 1978?

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

Have students stage a Mayor’s press conference announcing a new urban development plan for the Fillmore.

1. Give all students the following mock press release:
According to city assessment, the slums of the Fillmore district are the city’s first priority for urban renewal. As required by federal guidelines, the city has demonstrated blight measured by over-crowding, tuberculosis, traffic accidents, and the non-white population. Urban renewal will clear the slums of the Fillmore and take the city of San Francisco into a new era of prosperity for

all. The mayor will present this forward-looking plan to the public tomorrow at __ o'clock.

2. Assign roles on 3 teams. (Invent new roles or duplicate roles as needed so that each student has a specific role.)
 - (1) City and federal government officials
 - Federal Housing and Urban Development Official
 - Mayor of San Francisco
 - Director of the Redevelopment Agency
 - (2) Fillmore residents forced to evacuate
 - Black, White and Japanese American homeowners
 - High school student (of any race) who grew up in the neighborhood
 - Black ministers, shopkeepers, club owners, etc.
 - (3) The press
 - Reporters from *The Sun-Reporter* (a local Black-owned newspaper), *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, KRON TV, and others
3. Give students 20 minutes in their groups to prepare for the press conference. (This may also be assigned as homework with additional research.)
 - (1) City and federal government officials: Prepare a statement of the plan, the expected outcomes, and the federal and local government roles.
 - (2) Residents: Prepare a response to the mayor's proposal. Evaluate and critique the criteria listed above as reasons for the plan. Prepare your own plan for improving your community and questions for the officials.
 - (3) Journalists: Prepare questions for the government officials and/or residents. Consider your audiences. What will they want to know? Why does this case matter to other cities? What historical repercussions could it have?
4. Stage a 20 minute press conference. Give the governmental officials 5 minutes to present their plan, residents 5 minutes to respond, and journalists 10 minutes to ask questions.
5. For homework, have the journalists write articles about the plan. TV journalists could videotape their reports. Have the other students write a letter to the editor expressing their views on the plan. Collect the articles and copy for classmates to read. View TV reporters' accounts on video.

EXTENSIONS:

- The power of language:
 1. Identify key or repeated terms in the Housing Act of 1949 and public discourse. [e.g. slum clearance, blight, non-white population] Analyze and interpret this text. What are the connotations and denotations of these words? Or, what are the literal and figurative, or sub-textual, meanings? Who are the speakers using them? How do labels come to define issues, and how could different labels change the public's perceptions of the issues? How do the media either reinforce these labels or challenge them?
 2. Visit www.policy.com and click on Urban Renewal to read about current issues in urban redevelopment. Do a textual analysis of current discourse (key and repeated terms that define the issues). [e.g. welfare-to-work, empowerment zones, under-developed communities, inner city, tax obstacles, deteriorating neighborhoods.] How have the words changed and how have they stayed the same? What inferences can be made about cultural

shifts since the 1960s? What problems still remain in the language of policy for the people impacted by it?

- Current urban renewal policies:

1. Identify a community in San Francisco or other city facing dislocation similar to the Fillmore OR choose another present-day urban renewal policy [such as empowerment zones or welfare-to-work] to research at www.policy.com. Search newspapers for coverage of the issue and, if possible, find the text of the legislation that launched the policy.
2. Prepare a critique or defense of the policy based on the lessons learned in the Fillmore, addressing economic and social issues such as race, gender, and class. Present or debate to the class or online at www.voxcap.com.

- Incentive structures:

1. Analyze the economic incentive for San Francisco city government to prove “blight” in the Fillmore in order to receive federal dollars. Argue in favor or against this incentive structure as the best way to distribute federal dollars fairly to improve impoverished neighborhoods across the US. If in favor, support your arguments for why it was the best means to help the neighborhood; if opposed, offer a more progressive incentive-based program to distribute federal dollars fairly.
2. Debate tax-breaks for businesses as an incentive to attract economic development in communities like the Fillmore.

- Connections—Other neighborhoods and cities:

1. Locate Watts or Newark (mentioned in the video). Research what “burned” there and why, evaluating how economic, social or political policies in those cities contributed to the rage that erupted in those communities. Compare and contrast with the Fillmore in San Francisco.

ASSESSMENT:

1. Evaluate students’ participation in discussion.
2. Invite students to evaluate their own and peers’ written and oral arguments.
3. Encourage students to work in groups to conduct research and develop arguments, evaluating their contributions to the team effort.