
Affordable Housing

Videos:

“How Socialists Solved the Housing Crisis”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVu CZML eWko> (8:59 minutes)

“NIMBYism vs. Gentrification: The Truth About the Housing Crisis”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5cyvU_7YLM (17:25 minutes)

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. In the Gravel Institute video, Zohran Mamdani said that minimum wage workers cannot afford to rent a one-bedroom apartment on their own in 95% of all U.S. counties. Is this a big problem? Should minimum wage workers be able to afford a one-bedroom apartment on their own? Why/Why not?
3. The Learn Liberty video used the terms “NIMBY” and “YIMBY.” What do these terms mean?
4. Zohran Mamdani said that in America, “housing is treated as a commodity, not a right.” What did he mean by this? Is housing a right? Why/Why not?
5. In the Learn Liberty video, Trevor Kraus argued that lobbying the government can be a form of coercion, saying it’s “not actual violence, but the threat of governmental force.” Do you agree with this? Is using government authority to get your way akin to violence? Is it a form of coercion? Why/Why not?
6. Zohran Mamdani said that “housing people is not the primary goal of developers or landlords.” What did he mean by this?
7. In the Learn Liberty video, Nolan Gray argued that zoning laws “have made the U.S. city uniquely dysfunctional.” What are zoning laws? Should the government be allowed to tell citizens how they can and cannot use their own land? Why/Why not?

8. Zohran Mamdani said that “housing doesn’t need to be seen as a market at all.” What did he mean by this? Is it a mistake to view housing as a market? Why/Why not?
9. Trevor Kraus said that high prices can be a great thing. Why is this, and what caveat did he give for it?
10. Zohran Mamdani said that in Vienna, public housing was “designed to be both beautiful to look at, and beautiful to live in, fostering a sense of shared community among the people who lived there.” Why was this important? How is it different from public housing in America?
11. Nolan Gray said: “If we had had zoning adopted a hundred years earlier, New York City doesn’t exist.” What did he mean by this?
12. Zohran Mamdani said that in Vienna, everyone outside of the 20% richest people in the population are eligible for public housing. What impact might this have? How does it affect the way public housing is viewed in Vienna?
13. Nolan Gray said: “But when you...look at the history of these rules, there’s actually not really a lot of research that went into them. In many cases, they were pursuing objectives that we wouldn’t even agree with today, right? Explicitly segregating the city or explicitly trying to increase housing costs....” If the motives behind these restrictions are unpopular today, why do you think the laws haven’t been repealed?
14. Zohran Mamdani said the solution for housing has to be “moving toward the full decommodification of housing.” What did he mean by this? Is decommodification the only path to solving the housing crisis? Why/Why not?
15. Trevor Kraus said: “No doubt the [political] right makes it too difficult for folks from other places to enter their countries, but the NIMBYs in big cities—usually on the political left—do the same thing in the same way, by leveraging government authority to keep people out of their neighborhoods.” Is this a fair comparison? Why/Why not?
16. One of the solutions Zohran Mamdani proposed was to establish community land trusts (nonprofit, community-based organizations) to buy up housing on the private market and convert it to community-owned housing. Do you think this is a viable solution? Is it practical? Why/Why not?
17. Nolan Gray said that while many people blame homelessness on drug addiction and mental illness, “the vast majority of people struggling with homelessness are normal people who under normal context would be able to afford a home.” Does this impact your view of homelessness? Why/Why not?
18. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?

19. Zohran Mamdani said that Vienna’s public housing was paid for by taxes on the rich. You can look deeper into this topic with another Both Sides of the Issue pairing, “Does America Need a Wealth Tax?” <https://stosselintheclassroom.org/2020/02/23/both-sides-does-america-need-a-wealth-tax/>
20. The Learn Liberty video talked about the law of supply and demand. In basic terms, what is the law of supply and demand?
21. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from either video that affects your views of this topic?
22. What could you learn about the housing shortage that might affect your view of this debate?
23. What else would you like to learn about this topic?