

## **Background Information about The Joint Center for Housing Studies**

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For over four decades, the Joint Center for Housing Studies has informed and convened academics, government officials and industry leaders in an effort to exchange ideas and open new avenues for policy research. The Center's special position among diverse academic venues at Harvard allows it to draw upon the expertise of faculty and researchers in a wide variety of relevant fields.

Originally formed in 1959 as The Joint Center for Urban Studies of Harvard and MIT, the Center was created to address intellectual and policy issues confronting a nation experiencing widespread demographic, economic and social change. Its research was based on the premise that the resolution of these issues called for imaginative interdisciplinary approaches to the study of urban problems and issues, and required cooperation among universities, government and industry.

During the decade after its inception, when urban studies programs were not yet established at Harvard or MIT, the Center concentrated on building a bridge between multidisciplinary research and policy applications. Research activities were deliberately flexible and exploratory.

In the 1970's the Center consolidated its research around a core of subjects relating to housing. The Center's analysis of U.S. housing policy reflected the national debate over the government's responsibility to ensure a decent home and suitable living environment for all its citizens. Early in this period the Center recognized the need to supplement housing analysis with research in related fields. By 1975 the center had incorporated research in regional and urban economies, demographic trends, and social policy into its program.

In 1971 the Policy Advisory Board (PAB) was established by the Center. The PAB, a diverse group of leaders in the housing sector, provides support and guidance for the Center and its activities. The board gathers three times each year to discuss the Center's research agenda and to exchange views with leaders in the private sector, government, and the academic community.

During the 1980's the Center underwent a variety of changes. To reflect the Center's growing focus on housing, in 1985, the Joint Center for Urban Studies officially become the Joint Center for Housing Studies. In 1988, the Center became based solely at

Harvard and jointly affiliated with the Graduate School of Design and Kennedy School of Government.

The Center's signature report *The State of the Nation's Housing* was launched in 1988, and continues to provide a current assessment of the country's housing trends. Prior to its inception the information was released in separate reports that explored pertinent issues. *The State of the Nation's Housing* and its predecessors have consistently served as standard references for public policy makers and private decision makers in the housing industry. The Ford Foundation provides principal funding for *The State of the Nation's Housing* report. Each year a press conference is held to announce the findings of this study.

The John T. Dunlop Professorship for Housing Studies was established by the Joint Center in 1991. It is Harvard University's first endowed professorship in housing studies. The Professorship honors John T. Dunlop, Lamont University Professor *Emeritus*. Professor Dunlop has had a distinguished career at Harvard, in government, and with many industries in the private sector. He served as US Secretary of Labor during the Ford Administration, Director of the Cost of Living Council from 1973-1974 and has held many positions in labor-management relations. From 1969 to 1973 he also served as the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard. The professorship helps to promote collaborative research on housing among faculty members throughout Harvard.

The Center launched the Remodeling Futures Program in 1995. As a collaborative undertaking involving university researchers, government officials, and industry analysts, the program seeks to answer basic questions of industry size and definition, and to assess how remodeling fits into the broader economy and reacts to standard business cycle influences. Secondly, the program analyzes the expenditures of drivers of the remodeling industry, including demographic trends, housing and tenure characteristics, regional factors, and mobility. The third component is to evaluate the structure of the industry, the changing characteristics of remodelers and remodeling contractors, and the evolving structure of the building materials industry.

In 1998, the Remodeling Futures Program developed the *Remodeling Activity Indicator* (RAI). As an indicator, the RAI is an annual figure released quarterly that is derived from four components: manufactures' shipments of floor and wall tile products; retail sales at building materials and supply stores; sales of existing one-family homes; and the bank prime loan rate. Prior to the RAI, a measurement of these homeowner expenditures was limited to the Commerce Department's quarterly *Expenditures for Remodeling Improvements and Repairs*.

In 2000, the Center undertook an extensive research study of the *Community Reinvestment Act* (CRA). This research, funded by the Ford Foundation, looked at the 25 years of the Act and its impact over time. The report examines CRA in the context of the changing structure of the mortgage lending and banking industries, the growth of affordable lending tools, and the resulting changes in the provision of credit to lower-

income households and communities. When completed in spring 2002, the report was presented by the Joint Center at a briefing for the Federal Reserve.

The Joint Center for Housing Studies continues to expand its knowledge through a series of symposia for academics and policy analysts. In November of 2000, the Joint Center, with support from the Ford Foundation, sponsored a national symposium entitled *Low-Income Homeownership as an Asset Building Strategy*. The symposium brought together approximately seventy leading scholars, policy makers, and industry leaders to frame and facilitate a discussion on a key public policy issue on the cutting edge of housing research. In June 2002, the Brookings Institution Press published the symposium papers in a book entitled, *Low Income Homeownership: Examining the Unexamined Goal*.

In early 2002, the Joint Center launched its new comprehensive website at [www.jchs.harvard.edu](http://www.jchs.harvard.edu). The website allows researchers and policy makers to download the Center's latest research findings. It will also facilitate the dissemination of nationally important information about housing to a broader audience.

From the beginning, the Center has offered technical and financial support to students completing their dissertation or master's thesis on issues relating to the Center's research priorities. The current fellowship programs are *The Emerging Leaders in Community and Economic Development Fellowship* co-sponsored by the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation and *The John R. Meyer Dissertation Fellowship*. *The Emerging Leaders Fellowship Program* is a competitive master's level program for students in all the professional schools (business, design, education, law, public policy) and the related academic departments of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University. *The John R. Meyer Dissertation Fellowship* is named in honor of Dr. John R. Meyer, Professor of Capital Formation and Economic Growth, *Emeritus*, of the John F. Kennedy School of Government. Professor Meyer is a leading expert in urban economics and his work has been related to the Center's activities for many years. He served as Interim Director of the Center from 1996 to 1998.

The current Director of the Joint Center is Nicolas P. Retsinas. Mr. Retsinas was appointed Director in 1998. Prior to his Harvard appointment, Mr. Retsinas served as Assistant Secretary for Housing-Federal Housing Commissioner at the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. President Clinton also appointed Retsinas to serve as Director of the Office of Thrift Supervision. Previous Directors of the Joint Center include: Martin Meyerson, 1959-1963; James Q. Wilson, 1963-1966; Daniel P. Moynihan, 1966-1969; Robert C. Wood 1969-1970, Bernard J. Frieden, 1971-1975; Arthur P. Solomon, 1975-1980; David T. Kresge, 1980-1982; and H. James Brown, 1982-1996.

Today, the Joint Center continues to serve as a clearinghouse for information about trends in housing. The Center is distinguished by its focus on housing as a contribution to the world of ideas and policy formulation. Research and publications emanating from the Center have challenged traditional thinking, furnished the intellectual basis for legislative and regulatory actions, and supplied information to support public and private planning.