



**ROBERT F.
KENNEDY
HUMAN
RIGHTS**

SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER

**HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS WHO
ARE CHANGING
OUR WORLD**

**BEDFORD STUYVESANT RESTORATION
CORPORATION AND RAMI NASHASHIBI: A LEGACY
OF COMBATING URBAN POVERTY**



BEDFORD-STUYVESANT

Bedford-Stuyvesant, the historic Brooklyn neighborhood of brownstones, cultural diversity, restoration, and renewal, has anchored New York City's Black community for nearly a century.

A study of the problems facing Bedford-Stuyvesant was launched in 1967, and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy subsequently announced an action plan that would involve leaders of the business community and serve as a national model. With the help of activists, the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation was formed.

RFK's original vision of a flourishing community—one of respect, equality, and inclusion—continues to inform Restoration's relentless pursuits:

HOUSING. Supplying 2,300 units of affordable housing, façade repairs, and mortgage financing to nearly 1,500 homeowners.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. An agent for business growth and opportunities, attracting over \$600 million in investments and hundreds of jobs.

FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT AND YOUTH SERVICES. Job placement, financial counseling, and asset building programs. College test-prep and counseling for high school students.

HEALTH AND FITNESS. Promotes access to healthy food and physical activity with a farmers market, a Farm to Early Care initiative, free exercise programs, and more.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS. Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) provides energy conservation services for low-income residents.

ARTS AND CULTURE. Youth Arts Academy offers comprehensive arts education to over 400 students.

SMALL-BUSINESS SERVICES. Business planning, sales and marketing, access to capital, and low-cost professional and legal services.



RAMI NASHASHIBI

(HE/HIM/HIS)

Rami Nashashibi was born in Amman, Jordan. At age 19, he moved to Chicago, where he earned a B.A. from DePaul University in 1995 and a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Chicago in 2010.

Nashashibi is a MacArthur Fellow and the founder and executive director of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), a nonprofit organization, headquartered on Chicago's South Side, that fosters health and wellness and uses graffiti, calligraphy, and hip-hop as healing forces. Supporting IMAN's initiatives and services for vulnerable South Side residents is a unique coalition of constituencies—most notably, African American Muslims and Muslim immigrant communities in both low-income urban areas and wealthier suburbs. Through his leadership, Nashashibi has succeeded in unifying them around a shared focus on social justice.

Nashashibi has lectured around the world, and he was a visiting professor of the Sociology of Religion and Muslim Studies at the Chicago Theological Seminary. In 2020, he made his debut as musician, songwriter, and executive producer of the soul-stirring album "This Love Thing." With his music, leadership, and powerful community activism, Nashashibi continues to counter xenophobic misperceptions of immigrants and demonstrate how Islamic spiritual ideals enrich American culture.

A LEGACY OF COMBATING URBAN POVERTY

As both a citizen and politician, Robert F. Kennedy had a real affinity for the hurt people of the world. In cities throughout the United States, he showed this dedication to equality through his commitment to alleviating urban poverty. Guiding his work was a belief in the power of community organizing, a process that would allow members of affected communities to play a role in creating change and provide both resources and political influence to communities that had been excluded. In Bedford-Stuyvesant, a section of Brooklyn in which the poor and the extremely affluent were close neighbors, Kennedy convened a group of politicians and business leaders to implement action plans that would address poverty in Black communities.

In this lesson plan, we explore Robert F. Kennedy's legacy of urban economic justice. As we build a bridge between the past and the present and reflect on the work of the advocates of then and now, we should keep one question in mind: What do we do next?

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

- **ARTICLE 25:** Right to quality living standards
- **ARTICLE 27:** Right to cultural participation

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What does “economic justice” mean?
- What are the effects of urban poverty?
- Do you believe that the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation has been effective?

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Identify factors contributing to urban poverty.
- Reflect on how partnerships across public and private sectors, like the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, can help solve other issues.
- Compare and contrast the work of Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, Youth in Action, and Rami Nashashibi.

CONCEPTS

- Poverty
- Economic inequality

VOCABULARY

- Community
- Community organizer
- Structural injustices
- Systemic injustices

GETTING FROM THEN TO NOW: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND URBAN POVERTY

1964

Office of Economic Opportunity

The Office of Economic Opportunity was the federal manifestation of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. It focused on employment and education opportunities, specifically for young people.

[Learn More](#)

1967

Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation

The Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation provides better opportunities and improved standards of living for members of Brooklyn communities. It is still in existence today, and it continues to have a strong connection with Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights.

[Learn More](#)

2013

Promise Zones Initiative

The Promise Zones Initiative aims to improve relationships between federal agencies and community-based organizations with a focus on many aspects of economic and social life for the middle class.

[Learn More](#)

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

UNDERSTANDING THE DEFENDER

- Have students review the primary sources, then answer the following questions. Some questions may require additional research.
 - What about Youth in Action stands out to you? What about Rami Nashashibi as a person stands out to you?
 - Who were some of the people who influenced Youth in Action? Who were some of the people who influenced Nashashibi?
 - How has Nashashibi's journey from childhood to leader inspired his community and affected the movement to end poverty?
 - What was the primary problem that Youth in Action addressed? What is the primary cause that Nashashibi addresses?
 - What were/are some of the specific issues?
 - What was Youth in Action's desired outcome? What is Nashashibi's desired outcome?
 - What tactics did Youth in Action use to seek resolution? What tactics does Nashashibi use to seek resolution?
 - What was the political/social context in which YIA worked? What are the political/social contexts in which Nashashibi works? Think locally and nationally, if applicable.
- Identify three compelling aspects of the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, Youth in Action, and Rami Nashashibi.

ACTIVITY 2

PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

- Have students explore the [Geography of Poverty section entitled Big City](#) to increase their understanding of the issue of urban poverty.
- Divide the class into three groups and assign

each group one of the timeline events presented in the section entitled [Big City](#).

- Have students research their respective events, answering the following questions:
 - Who were the key players in the event?
 - What was the political/social/economic context in which this event took place?
 - How does the work of Youth in Action and/or Nashashibi relate to this event?
 - How did the event/legislation help or hinder progress on this issue?
 - What was the aftermath of this event?
- Have students present their findings to the rest of the class, then moderate a discussion about how the issue has evolved over time. Use the following questions as a guide:
 - How do these events fit together?
 - Did one event affect or lay the groundwork for another?
 - What common threads or themes are present in each of these events?
 - How has the issue evolved over time?
 - What do you believe are some of the causes of urban poverty? How do they differ from the causes of rural poverty?
 - What do you believe needs to happen now to create change in this area?

ACTIVITY 3

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

- Building on what students have learned about the three defenders and the context in which they worked or are working, have them create a visual representation that answers/addressess the following questions:
 - How does Youth in Action's work intersect with that of RFK? How does Nashashibi's

work intersect with that of RFK? Which aspects of RFK's legacy are present in the work of each of these defenders?

- Analyze the similarities and differences in the tactics and approaches of Youth in Action and Nashashibi. Why do you think these similarities/differences exist?
- How did the activism of Youth in Action pave the way for present-day defenders such as Nashashibi?
- What are the similarities and differences between the political/social/economic contexts in which Youth in Action and Nashashibi worked?
- Do you believe this issue is still a problem, and if so, why?

ACTIVITY 4

CONTINUING THE LEGACY

- This activity is designed to help students think about how they can contribute to efforts to alleviate urban poverty. The key to becoming effective human rights defenders is to turn what we find interesting, what resonates with us, and what we consider to be our assets into our own personal vehicles for change.
 - Have students make a list of their skills, passions, or hobbies.
 - For each activity or skill on their list, have them create a plan of action that uses that activity or skill to help bring about change in the area of urban poverty.
 - Ask each student to choose and complete one of those plans.



INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

The **UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS** was adopted in 1948 following World War II and stems from the Charter of the United Nations. This document articulates the rights and freedoms to which every person is entitled. Although not legally binding, it is the framework for both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

This particular lesson plan relates directly to:

- **ARTICLE 25:** Right to quality living standards
- **ARTICLE 27:** Right to cultural participation.

For more information, visit the United Nations website: www.un.org/en/udhrbook/.

The **INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS** (ICESCR) expands on the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights by ensuring that people can live with dignity. This legally binding document has been signed by 169 parties. It protects labor rights; the right to family life, education, and health; and cultural rights.

For more information, visit: www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx.

The **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS** (SDGs) are a group of 17 goals set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 that aim to improve social and economic development in a variety of areas, including poverty, education, gender equality, and the environment. The SDGs offer a global plan to combat systemic problems and provide indicators to help track their successes.

The SDGs relevant to this lesson plan are:

- **GOAL 1:** No poverty.
- **GOAL 3:** Good health and well-being.
- **GOAL 8:** Decent work and economic growth.
- **GOAL 10:** Reduced inequalities.
- **GOAL 11:** Sustainable cities and communities.
- **GOAL 16:** Peace, justice, and strong institutions.

For more information, visit the United Nations website: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>.

BECOMING A DEFENDER

Below are suggested activities that show students how they can become human rights defenders in their classroom and beyond

- Choose one of the following topics: health, education, employment, housing. Research the status of these areas in a large city (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, etc.) or in your own community. Then organize a group of your classmates to design an intervention that will address one of these issues.
- Volunteer with an organization that focuses on urban poverty.
- Organize a benefit concert to raise money to support Rami Nashashibi's work.
- Host a book drive and donate books to underfunded schools in your community or in a city such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, or Washington.