

Introduction

Halfway Homeowners

Eviction day at Silver Sands Mobile Home Park. It was the final day the residents of Silver Sands could remain in the community where many had lived for decades. Every resident of Silver Sands owned his or her mobile home. Every resident rented—rather than owned—the lot under that home in a century-old land-lease model that has made the mobile home park a primary mode of affordable housing in the United States. That same land-lease model has also made the mobile home park one of the fastest-growing, most lucrative real estate investment tools for park property owners and one of the most precarious modes of housing for low-income residents.

Along the nine narrow streets of a hundred singlewides and doublewides that made up Silver Sands Mobile Home Park, the eviction process had begun.¹ The bare concrete foundations where homes had been hauled away stuck out like wounds in a green South Florida landscape. Remaining mobile homes stood in various states of readiness to be transported. Screened porches and wooden decks, additions made over many years to expand and enhance the homes, were torn off so that only the bodies of the trailers remained. Years of careful landscaping were uprooted to clear a path for a semi-truck to back in and hook up to the triangular hitch positioned at the front end of every mobile home. Skirting was torn away to reveal homes' metal transport axles and long-since-rotted tires, an undercarriage that embodies the central tension between mobility and rootedness that lies at the heart of the mobile home. Denuded homes waited to be strapped with a "Wide Load" banner and hauled to a new park if the homeowners were lucky, or to the dump if they were not.

Randall, a wiry, long-haired, 61-year-old resident of Silver Sands, was one such unlucky homeowner. His 1981 trailer, his pride and joy, was deemed too old to survive a relocation and would have to be abandoned in

the park. The morning of the final day of tenancy at Silver Sands, I found Randall sitting with a pile of his belongings inside the screened-in porch that ran the length of my singlewide. He had showed up early at Labor Finders, the local day labor agency where he found work, but he was not sent out for a job: "I couldn't. I was crying . . . My manager saw me and said I'm not gonna send you out today. I said, I can't go out today. I think reality just fucking set in . . . God, look at me. I've never shook like this before . . . I still couldn't find a room this morning." The previous night, in preparation for the final day of the eviction period, Randall had slept in an abandoned building where he found a small pile of mats and used them as a bed. He insisted, "I'll adjust to it after a while. I figure I've got to find a room in the next month."

But Randall had been looking for a room for months, ever since he heard that Silver Sands Mobile Home Park had been bought by a development company and would close. On his long daily walks to and from Labor Finders he took circular routes in search of a For Rent sign. Without a car he asked for rides around town on scouting missions. He walked over to the only publicly subsidized housing project in the town, where the waiting list was two years long and not accepting new applicants. He scoured the local paper. He made calls to numbers from the only resource he had, a dog-eared and worn volume of organizations assisting low-income people that he had found in the park's laundry room. He sought out help from every contact in his small social circle, from fellow day laborers to regulars at a nearby bar. He fought embarrassment and asked for help checking listings online since he had never before used a computer. He dutifully followed up on every potential lead, but his efforts did not produce a single apartment or room that he could afford and that was close enough to the city to allow him to continue walking to his job at Labor Finders, a job he clung to desperately. On a good week, he could earn \$240 if he were lucky enough to work 30 hours.

On the last day of the eviction Randall took the \$1,500 mobile home abandonment fee supplied by the state of Florida and paid for a storage unit where he moved the contents of his unmovable mobile home. He listed out the things he made sure to store safely, a house-worth of accumulated furnishings, treasured objects inherited from his parents, and the ashes of his mother, which he had long planned to scatter over the ocean. He bought a new pair of sneakers and a new pair of jeans and then put \$850 in cash into the storage unit and kept \$100 on him. After a night of sleeping in an abandoned building he returned to Silver Sands for no other reason than he didn't know where else to go. Randall steadied his shaking hands to smooth his shirt and asked, "Do I look bad or rough or anything like that?" He was

equally meticulous arranging and abandoning the home he had owned for three years. Knowing the home would likely be scrapped for metal, he still took care to make small repairs he had never gotten to while living in the home. He fixed the front door handle before he abandoned the home. He wanted the home to look “decent.”

Eleven months before eviction day, when I first met Randall, he had proudly stated he lived in mobile homes “all my life, I love them.” They were small, cheap, and he could work on them himself. He moved into Silver Sands after purchasing his used singlewide for \$3,000 and became a homeowner for the first time in his life. He paid \$250 each month to rent the lot under his home, an unmatched level of affordability in South Florida and most U.S. metro areas but still nearly half of his unpredictable monthly earnings. He offered a tour of his 1981 mobile home, pointing out his favorite features, like the parquet floors. He asked me to excuse the house which was “messy now” and I replied that, quite the contrary, it was spotless. He then admitted with a grin that he had actually just scrubbed the outside of all his cabinets.

During the four years after losing his home in the closure of Silver Sands, Randall would continue to experience homelessness. In the months after the park closed and neighbors were scattered in various directions, Randall’s phone was disconnected and he failed to pay his storage unit fee. The storage company repeatedly called me (Randall had listed me as the emergency contact), explaining they were disposing of the unit’s contents. I thought of the ashes of Randall’s mother in there along with every other thing Randall owned. Despite his continued searching Randall was unable to find a place he could afford near enough to the city that he could continue to walk to Labor Finders and be sent out on jobs, his only source of income until he turned 62 and could file for Social Security. Four years prior Randall was a proud homeowner. Now everything he owned fit in a duffel bag, which he kept tucked between his legs to guard against thieves as he slept on a mattress behind a strip mall only half a mile from where Silver Sands once stood.

MANUFACTURED HOUSING AND MANUFACTURED INSECURITY

Manufactured Insecurity explores the contemporary face of poverty housing and the tenuous right to place that is a lived reality for millions of low-income residents in mobile home parks in the United States. It examines the historical processes and contemporary policies that structure mobile home residents’ divided property rights and documents the consequences

of the risky housing tenure that results. It probes the social-legal-political construction of housing crises through an up-close, long-term account of the housing insecurity nakedly on display during mobile home park evictions in Texas and Florida, the two U.S. states with the largest mobile home populations. Finally, it analyzes the fallout, both for mobile home park residents and for all of those attempting to access and hold on to housing they can afford in an era of rising housing costs, falling and stagnant incomes, deepening cuts to federal housing assistance, and increasingly entrepreneurial urban development.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, manufactured housing, more often called mobile homes or trailers, was the fastest-growing form of new housing in the United States (Scommegna 2004).² Today mobile homes provide housing for about 18 million residents (U.S. Census Bureau 2016b). The prevalence of manufactured housing is largely due to its affordability. Mobile homes represent a significant, but often unacknowledged, portion of our nation's low-income housing supply (Beamish et al. 2001; Aman and Yarnal 2010; Dawkins and Koebel 2010). Indeed, manufactured housing provides the largest unsubsidized source of affordable housing in the United States (CFED 2015). Throughout the 1990s, manufactured housing was responsible for 66 percent of the new affordable housing produced in the country (Apgar et al. 2002). Nationally, 73 percent of households living in mobile homes earn less than \$50,000 a year, with a median annual household income of about \$30,000 in 2009 (CFED 2014). In short, mobile homes are a primary way that America's poor are housed.

The affordability of manufactured housing is the product of a unique form of land tenure: about one third of the nation's mobile homes are located in land-lease mobile home communities commonly called trailer parks, which are developed and owned by private landlords (Kochera 2001). Despite popular perceptions to the contrary, mobile home parks are an urban phenomenon, providing a crucial source of affordable housing in U.S. metro areas.³ In addition to affordable rental opportunities, mobile home parks provide a crucial site for the placement of owner-occupied units for low-income homeowners like Randall and Kathleen. In 2011, mobile homes accounted for 30 percent of all new homes sold under \$200,000, 50 percent of all new homes sold under \$150,000, and 71 percent of all new homes sold under \$125,000 (MHI 2012). A remarkable 80 percent of mobile home park residents own their homes, many of them outright (HAC 2011). These mobile homeowners are just that—homeowners. However, homeownership households living on privately owned land in mobile home parks are marked by “divided asset ownership,” which means that residents own

their mobile homes but rent the lots on which the homes sit (Hirsch and Rufolo 1999). Of the 80 percent of park residents who own their homes, only 14 percent also own the land beneath their homes (HAC 2011). This divided form of land tenure is fraught with risk.

Without rights to the land under their homes, mobile home park residents are *halfway homeowners*. Because of divided asset ownership, the housing security of mobile home residents depends on the decisions of private landlords to continue to maintain and operate mobile home parks. While living within mobile home parks, residents have few protections against excessive rent increases, inadequate park maintenance, and lack of written or long-term leases (Kochera 2001). Ultimately, mobile home park residents, even those who have long owned their homes, can legally be evicted at any time when parks are sold or closed.

Despite their misleading designation, “mobile” homes are quite *immobile*; once set in place their frames slacken and relocation can result in serious structural damage (Consumers Union 2001a). The Manufactured Housing Institute, the industry’s national trade organization, boasts that more than 90 percent of today’s manufactured homes never move from their original site. However, this estimate is misleading: when faced with park closure many homeowners are forced to abandon their homes, and for many of these homeowners their manufactured home is their primary asset. The cost of relocating a mobile home is prohibitive and can be more than the homeowner initially paid for the home. Estimates range from \$5,000 to \$10,000 with permitting and installation fees. According to one study, this represents five to seven years’ worth of accrued equity for mobile homeowners (CFED 2010). Legally, these residents are entitled to only 30 days’ eviction notice in most states. Meanwhile, the demand for affordable housing in mobile home parks means that new lot vacancies are hard to find. Vacancy rates are commonly in the single digits. A study of park closures in Oregon estimated it would take 14 years for local mobile home parks to accommodate the displaced homes from a single mobile home park closure (Sheehan and Colton 1994). Facing prohibitive relocation costs, short notice, and few vacancies, many homeowners sell their homes for a fraction of their appraised value or abandon them to park owners who collect additional profits by selling off deserted homes (Consumers Union 2001b).

All these factors limit choices for displaced homeowners like Randall who see their community, their equity, and their homes destroyed when parks are redeveloped for other uses. Despite their seeming attainment of the culturally cherished American Dream of homeownership, the social stability this dream implies remains beyond their reach. In mobile home

parks, precarious land tenure exempts low-income residents from the benefits of homeownership and disposes them to dispossession.

Eviction has been called America's "hidden housing problem," and housing scholars estimate several million residents are likely evicted from their homes each year in the United States (Hartman and Robinson 2003). Despite the focus on negative outcomes associated with both forced and voluntary residential relocation (Sluzki 1992; Hagan, MacMillan, and Wheaton 1996; Hoffman and Johnson 1998; Tucker, Marx, and Long 1998; Pribesh and Downey 1999; Haynie and South 2005), within sociology eviction remains "the most understudied process affecting the lives of the urban poor" (Desmond 2012: 90). Gretchen Purser (2016: 395) summarizes: "We thus have no reliable figures on how many people are evicted each year, no clear understanding of the underlying causes of eviction, no detailed picture of how and under what conditions evictions are actually carried out, and no comprehensive sense of what happens to individuals, families and communities in the wake of eviction." Forced relocation has long been a problem for the urban poor and evictions are likely increasing in the United States due to a triad of housing pressures: rising rents and utility costs, especially as a percentage of income; stagnant and falling incomes, especially for the poor; and a shortfall of federal housing assistance, as the budget for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has been slashed more than any other federal-level branch of government (Hackworth 2009). Meanwhile currently there is no state in the United States in which someone working full-time at minimum wage can afford a "fair market rent" two-bedroom apartment (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2017).

The nascent sociological study of eviction, which "represents a nearly unexplored area of research" (Pattillo 2013: 518), has argued that all those interested in fair housing access should focus "not only on the front end of the housing process—the freedom to *obtain* housing anywhere—but also on the back end: the freedom to *maintain* housing anywhere" (Desmond et al. 2013: 321). Sociologist Matthew Desmond's study of evicted renters in Milwaukee introduced the provocatively simple notion that eviction is a cause rather than condition of poverty, as residents themselves bear the costs of relocation, higher rents, and a mark on their tenant record (Desmond and Bell 2015; Desmond 2016). Yet eviction, and housing insecurity more generally, remain at the margins of the poverty debate. If sociologists are to understand not only *whether* but also *how* eviction acts to drive poverty, more research on various forms of housing insecurity is key.⁴

Housing is both a cultural object, a financial commodity, and a socio-legal artifact. The proliferation of mobile home parks in cities across the

United States is a material expression of broad shifts in U.S. housing policy that have occurred as part of welfare state retrenchment. Over the last four decades, housing has transformed threefold from a public institution (Mumford 1961), to a private commodity, to a complex financial instrument (Pattillo 2013). At the same time, under a cash-strapped and gutted system of direct federal aid, the provision of affordable housing has devolved from a responsibility of the social safety net to a resource for private investors. Only a tiny fraction, about two percent, of U.S. residents will ever access public housing and most will find a home in the properties of private providers. Exploring the political economy of the private poverty housing market is essential for understanding both the intersection of poverty and profit in the production of housing crises (Desmond 2016) and the lived experience of contemporary housing insecurity.

The ubiquity of the mobile home park in the American landscape and the insecure land tenure of its residents are both outgrowths of the expansion of this private poverty housing market. A budget crunch in federal housing assistance has been a financial boon for low-income housing in trailer parks where residents live “at the whim of property owners” (Consumers Union 2001a: 1). Attributing increased demand for space in parks to a lack of affordable housing elsewhere, a senior investment director at Marcus & Millichap boasted, “The demand right now for manufactured housing communities is at an all-time high.”⁵ Mobile home park owners have answered this demand in much the same way that inner-city landlords have capitalized on critical needs for rental housing in times of affordable housing scarcity. One of the nation’s largest mobile home park owners explained that the mobile home park industry thrives precisely because it capitalizes on a captive and needy population. Summarizing his industry’s capacity to wring profits from impoverished and effectively *immobile* mobile home park residents, he stated, “We’re like a Waffle House where everyone is chained to the booths.”⁶

LIFE INSIDE THE MOBILE HOME PARK

Walter, an 89-year-old World War II veteran and resident of Silver Sands, would bristle at the comparison between his mobile home park and a Waffle House. Instead, Walter nicknamed it Paradise. He pointed out, “We’ve got our own little slice of paradise right here.” Walter had lived in Silver Sands for 20 years with his wife, Mattie. The couple’s low monthly rent afforded them a slice of paradise on Walter’s fixed Social Security income and military benefits.

Walter lived immediately across from my rented singlewide from 2012–13. The first time we met, I introduced myself as I would about 180 times in the next two years to residents facing eviction in 32 different mobile home parks in Texas and Florida. Like many other residents in these parks, eviction was forefront in Walter’s mind on the day we met as neighbors.

By way of his own introduction, Walter gives me his name and immediately rattles off in a thick New England accent: “Well, I’m from Maine—a little island out off the coast of Maine. Well, I left there a little time ago. I was drafted into the army in 1942 and went to the war.” Walter gives me his long housing history, then he asks me directly: “So you’re gonna live over there for a while?”

Esther: “Yeah, I’m gonna live over there for a while, at least until we can’t live here anymore.”

Walter: “Well, ain’t that something huh? [He shakes his head.] I lived right here, in this park, in a trailer for 20 years. I’ve got two sons here. One, his house is right there and his house is right there, the other.” (He points to an RV right behind his own house and to a mobile home at the end of our street).

We wave to his great-granddaughter, who passes by and goes into his house to visit his wife, Mattie. His granddaughter is down visiting from Ohio and staying at his son’s house, about three homes away.

Walter shows me around the extensive garden he has planted on a second lot that he rents next door to his home just so that he can have room to garden [bringing his total monthly rent for two lots to \$350]. He uses the extra lot as a patio and spends much of his day out here, sitting or working in the shade. Mattie spends almost all of her time inside in her chair, since disabilities limit her mobility. Her chair is her “nest” where everything she needs for the day is tucked in a sleeve slung over the chair’s arm; it holds the remote, crossword books, and snacks, plus a call button that alerts Walter if there is an emergency and he is outside. Out on the patio, Walter takes me to his favorite shady corner, “It’s 20 degrees cooler over here.” When you’re in this spot, he insists, you’re really in paradise.

Walter: “Oh we hate to move, but what can we do? That’s the way it is.”

Walter continues to work on an eight-pound pork roast he is smoking for Fourth of July dinner later this night. All of his family from the park are coming over.

I ask him how he’s feeling about it, the move. Mainly, he says, it’s just Mattie that he’s worried about: “As long as she makes it through it,” he believes they will be all right. He says, “We have been around quite a bit. But this place here, you hate to leave it.”

The three generations of Walter and Mattie’s family that came for the pork roast that night all lived within three streets of each other in Silver

Sands. Their son Sammy, a 63-year-old, disabled, soft-spoken Vietnam veteran, lived in an RV on the lot directly behind Walter and Mattie's mobile home. Sammy's younger brother Mike, a big-rig truck driver, and his wife, Gail, who ran a stall at the local flea market, lived down the street and their own 24-year-old son, RJ, lived one street over with his girlfriend.

Walter's daughter-in-law, Gail, had adopted his title for the park; in a potted plant outside her singlewide she stuck a wooden sign that read "Welcome to Paradise." But as the family members already knew, paradise was being dismantled by a developer who bought the park to build a 350-apartment mixed-use development. As Walter and Gail began to search for housing, they scoffed at the design plans for the apartments that would replace Silver Sands, the rent for the select number of units that would be deemed "affordable," and the idea that these apartments were superior to their mobile homes:

Gail: "The way they have them built—I don't want to live in one of them. They are all stacked in there worse than sardines on top of one another. I don't want to live that way."

Plus, Walter points out, based on the plans, the portion of the apartments reserved for affordable housing (capped at 30 percent of income) is completely unaffordable for anyone in their family.

Walter: "They are going to take 30 percent of someone's income?! And if you make \$2,000 a month, that's \$600 a month!"

Gail: "That's right. You might as well go to the trailer park. At least you have a yard. At least you have a yard and your grandkids can come and visit and have a little bit of room."

The yard was exactly the piece of their homes that Gail and Walter did not own. As their park closed, every household in Walter's family was evicted and scattered to parks where they could find vacant lots to rent. These parks were miles away from each other in neighboring counties to the north and south. To their relief, Walter and Mattie's home was deemed structurally sound for relocation. However, Sammy, Mike, Gail, and RJ all lost their homes and scrambled to find second- and thirdhand RVs and mobile homes to replace them. Yet, the financial losses they endured were eclipsed by a deeper emotional loss as they, like Kathleen, Randall, and hundreds of other residents who took part in this study, were dispossessed not only of their homes and communities but of their sense of dignity and their rights as citizens.

The experiences of Kathleen, Randall, and Walter, like the experiences of all those recounted in this book, reveal the complex intermingling of pride, stigma, investment, and uncertainty that are central to life on the private

poverty housing market and in the mobile home park. There are no figures for how many residents are affected by the “epidemic of closures” (CFED 2011) occurring in mobile home parks. These closures likely impact a substantial number of low-income residents in a substantial range of community types. This ethnography was equally substantial, conducted among 180 evicted residents in 32 parks in two states: parks large and small, parks in city centers and on the urban fringe, parks filled with young families and parks filled with single men, parks where a majority of residents were elderly white retirees and parks where a majority of residents were undocumented Latino/a immigrants. Each of the residents who took part in this study faced eviction as their park was slated to close.⁷ These participants included 113 residents of Silver Sands (where I lived), Sawgrass Estates, and six other closing parks in Florida and 67 residents of Ramos y Ramos (where I lived), Twin Oaks, Trail’s End, and 21 other closing parks in Texas. A methodological appendix provides a description of how I found and took up residency in Silver Sands and Ramos y Ramos, details about the surrounding parks where I worked, descriptions of the participants, and reflections on my ethnographic approach.

In all cases I selected parks that were likely closing (which the residents knew) but where eviction notices had not yet been distributed. In that way I was able to enter parks and capture a picture of community life before it began to be dismantled. I then conducted ethnography over two consecutive years, including 17 months living within closing mobile home parks and being evicted alongside residents, and six months of follow-up visits with residents in new parks, family’s homes, and a number of precarious housing situations. Like Kathleen, Randall, and Walter, these residents allowed me to accompany them in the heightened and sometimes desperate moments when they managed the practical aspects of their forced removal and in the intimate moments when they reflected on the meaning of their home, their community, and their eviction. Over time, residents became accustomed to my daily presence in the park and to our perpetual companionship, a digital recorder on which I recorded every interaction we had. All field notes excerpts are pulled directly from transcriptions of those recordings and quoted passages are reproduced verbatim (see the methodological appendix for details of the collection and analysis of all data including the transcriptions of a thousand individual audio recordings from over three hundred hours of MP3 files).

During these years, I practiced a slow ethnography, waiting with residents to see how eviction would unfold. Residents knew me first as a researcher and only second as a neighbor. We all knew that when the final

day of the eviction came, I would go home or to another park to repeat the process. Although I spent years as the neighbor of the people in this book I would never suffer the same losses, face the same stigma, or endure the same hardships. Over these years I was never in the same position as my neighbors and I never tried to become like them, to fill their shoes. Instead I chose to walk beside them as they navigated a difficult terrain. This was not an ethnography of becoming, it was an ethnography of "being there" (Geertz 1988).⁸

In my first weeks living inside the first park where I took up residence, a woman came knocking at the door of my singlewide. She had her eight-year-old daughter in tow, at home sick from school, helping her mom hand out flyers for the mobile home trucking company where the woman worked. The woman had been sent door to door to drum up business for the trucking company, which exclusively moved homes out of closing parks. I had moved into the park to get evicted but I had never heard of such an eviction service; the woman listed several competitor companies in the area. I had spent the last year in a university lab using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to identify where park closures were occurring (see chapter 2); the woman rattled off half a dozen parks that were likely closing nearby. I peppered her with questions as if our encounter were a rare opportunity; she looked at me, off-put, busy, and slightly bemused as she explained she was only the first in a long line of movers and park owners that would be knocking on my door.

There is money to be made from poverty housing, and so in addition to following the paths of evicted mobile home residents, I followed the money and found, just as Kathleen had, that mobile home park evictions are transactional processes taking place within a field of interested actors. Kathleen had spent hours on the phone and the internet to map out these actors in a desperate search to find help rebuilding her ramp. I spent months and years tracing the web of actors, companies, and transactions involved in mobile home park evictions to understand their effects. As Kathleen's story illustrated, the closure of the park looked different from her perspective than from the perspective of the landlord who evicted her, the movers who moved her home, the city council who approved her park's closure, and the member of the board that set the policies for relocation in her state. This ethnography reconstructs evictions from these multiple perspectives, focusing on the configurations of relations that make up a mass eviction. Thus in addition to the fieldwork conducted alongside 180 evicted residents, ethnographic fieldwork included interactions with almost two dozen professional players in the mobile home marketplace. This included participant

observation and in-depth interviews with 15 expert key informants: park landlords, property developers, mobile home industry representatives, industry and public aid lawyers, and state officials. It included training at the for-profit Mobile Home University alongside 18 eager entrepreneurs seeking guidance in mobile home park investing. It also included days spent riding alongside and talking shop with 12 mobile home movers, installers, and company owners working with four different moving companies that split, hitched, and hauled mobile homes out of closing parks in both Florida and Texas.

It was this network of actors that shaped the byzantine process of dislocation that led Walter to ask powerlessly “what can we do?” as three generations of his family were evicted. In response to Walter’s question, his soft-spoken son Sammy summarized the treatment of his family and neighbors by stating blankly, “We’re trailer trash to them.”

SPATIAL STIGMA AND “SITE EFFECTS”

Trash. The word encapsulates the disposability of mobile home park residents and the communities they call home. It also encapsulates the economic and political justification for their displacement—the perpetual pursuit of “highest and best use” in the legal language of real estate analysts and city planners. Finally, it encapsulates broader social processes by which the priorities of urban policy, the politics of metropolitan growth regimes, and the regulatory tactics of state governments redefine public responsibility for the poor. The very process of urban redevelopment and revitalization is a process of taking out the trash, what sociologist Loïc Wacquant (2008b: 198) calls “the cleansing of the built environment and the streets from the physical and human detritus wrought by economic deregulation and welfare retrenchment.” Stigma is central in defining and then removing the “trash” from the urban environment. Processes of stigmatization are thus central to contemporary urban inequalities and, more generally, to the contemporary operation of power.

Tracing mobile home residents’ paths into and out of eviction requires separating myth from reality in the mobile home park and tracing the historical roots of the marginality and stigma that attaches itself to the places they live. Stigma is rooted in the very spaces where trailer park residents make their homes. Thus, I conceptualize trailer park stigma in terms of the “spatial oppositions” that Pierre Bourdieu argues are central to our understanding of social space.⁹ Social space organizes itself through hierarchical classifications and social distances that in turn are naturalized through the

inscription of social distinctions into the physical world (Bourdieu 1999). Theorizing the production of inequality in the ghetto and the lower-class *banlieue*, Bourdieu uses the concept of “site effects” to describe how physical space both signifies and reproduces social power. He argues that marginalized spaces (spaces much like the derided trailer park) are most often perceived “not [as] ‘realities’—largely unknown in any case to the people who rush to talk about them—but phantasms, which feed on emotional experiences stimulated by more or less uncontrolled words and images” (ibid., 123). The mobile home park demonstrates how these *subjective* images, narratives, and associations shape *objective* treatments of place, not only those that emerge in individual attitudes but those that are formalized in urban regulations and codified in law. The chapters that follow analyze “site effects” in the mobile home park by probing the relationship between spatial and social marginality, thereby “emplacing” marginalized space to understand how “the material and the interpretive, the physical and the semiotic . . . work autonomously *and* in a mutually dependent way” (Gieryn 2000: 467).

“Emplacing” place—borrowing phenomenological understandings of place from the fields of philosophy and human geography—helps us understand places as sources of identity (Relph 1976), as sources of security (Tuan 1977), and as sources of roots (Heidegger 1958). Emplacing place is one way to understand the real-life consequences that symbolic understandings of place can yield. The concept of place is *moralized* in value-laden understandings of home, hearth, and roots (see especially Cresswell 2001). These concepts are negatively reflected in the semantic distinction between a permanent community and a transitory mobile home “park.” The moralization of place, roots, and permanence goes hand in hand with the *socio-spatial stigma* that characterizes mobile home parks and their presumably mobile residents. Sociological theories of stigma refer to outward signs signifying a deficient or tainted moral status that discredits an individual and bars that person from full social participation (Goffman 1963). In Goffman’s theory, stigma manifests as a discrepancy between an “actual” social identity and a perceived or “virtual” social identity that nonetheless shapes all social interaction with the stigmatized (ibid., 3). Yet, Goffman’s theory only references individual disqualifying features of persons and never the disqualifying features of the places where they live.¹⁰

Wacquant (2016: 1078) updates Goffman and incorporates Bourdieu’s understanding of site effects to argue that *territorial stigmatization* is a primary mechanism through which urban outcasts are “selected, thrust and maintained in marginal locations” (see also Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira

2014). These processes are central to how advanced urban marginality is produced and maintained in the “hyperghettos” of the United States (Wacquant 2008a). The halfway homeownership of mobile home park residents is a product of similar processes. The mobile home has been thrust to the nether regions of both the American city and the American housing hierarchy, while the mobile home park is maintained in its secondary status by financing laws that define homes in parks as non-real estate, by zoning codes that prohibit parks in single-family residential areas, and by municipal regulations that require parks be “visually screened” from outside view, “set back” minimum distances from public roads, and “buffered,” fenced in, or walled off from the communities around them (Sanders 1986). Meanwhile, the same regulatory treatment of mobile home parks—their classification as a substandard land use, their spatial isolation in the urban fabric, and their lack of protection under current law—primes the pump for capital investment in park properties, contributing to their redevelopment.

In the reviled trailer park, territorial stigmatization and the moralization of place are flip sides of the same coin. In much the same way, the problem of manufactured insecurity is a double-sided dilemma. The visible trauma that unfolds when a park closes and an entire community is dismantled is only one side of a more constant, quotidian crisis—one in which an entire class of community members is effectively “zoned out” (Levine 2006) of collective metropolitan life. Much has been said about the social and semiotic processes that produce urban marginality and its spatial expression, territorial stigmatization (Wacquant 2009; Slater forthcoming). Less is written about the mutually constitutive relationship between the *perception* of place and the *regulation* of place, even while urban regulations provide a primary mechanism for establishing and maintaining spatial inequalities (Levine 2006; Rothwell and Massey 2010; Valverde 2012; Lens and Monkkonen 2016).

The process through which this occurs is intricately shaped by local and state laws. As the following chapters describe, the regulation of the private poverty housing market and regulatory responses to mobile home park evictions are characterized by a shift toward private-market solutions that characterize low-income housing policy specifically and poverty governance more generally. Mobile home parks, as the largest source of unsubsidized affordable housing and a lucrative, expanding U.S. industry, cannot be understood apart from this context. These private-market approaches are central to the program of contemporary neoliberalism.

In its most abridged form, neoliberalism is a term defined as a preference for free market exchange over government intervention (Centeno and

Cohen 2012). In its most expansive form, neoliberalism threatens to become “the next popular metaconcept in the social sciences” (Hackworth 2007: xi). In its most analytically useful form, neoliberalism describes techniques of national and urban governance that simultaneously dismantle redistributive public welfare policies (Greenhouse 2009) while constructing new policies, practices, and partnerships that sustain the functioning of private markets (Harvey 2005; Brown 2006; Hays 2003; Collins and Mayer 2010; Peck and Tickell 2012). It is in this final form that the concept of neoliberalism can be mobilized to understand the roles that the private poverty housing market and spatial stigmatization play in producing contemporary urban marginality.

These issues surrounding place, roots, power, and marginality come to the surface when parks are redeveloped and residents are removed, as the stories of Kathleen, Randall, and Walter begin to show. This book probes the relation between social and physical space, between social and physical marginalization. It explores how social and spatial stigma intersect to create a class of citizens for whom a precarious right to place is a daily reality.

“YOU WOULDN’T THINK IT WAS A TRAILER”

I met Tabitha for the first time when I was having lunch with her neighbor Betty and she insisted on bringing me along as she went to visit Tabitha in the singlewide next door. This was something Betty and Tabitha did often, as Tabitha’s poor health kept her inside her home. Almost daily, Betty dropped by to check in on her neighbor:

Betty insists I come with her next door and we walk about 15 feet to Tabitha’s front porch. Tabitha is a tiny, frail woman, maybe only five feet tall and 90 pounds. The neck of her shirt keeps slipping around her slender shoulder. The shoulder is bandaged up where she recently had surgery after a fall in her home.

Her house is immaculately clean. It feels very spacious inside, as Betty points out upon entering, telling me this is because the trailer is “so wide.” The home is an “extrawide,” which means it’s about two feet wider than standard singlewides. Tabitha is very proud of her house. She keeps it clean and gives me a slow and detailed guided tour of everything in the house, even the bathrooms. She points out the built-in storage and the space for washer and dryer inside the home. Every corner of the house is spotless and lavishly decorated with items related to one of two themes: carousel horses or flamingos. Outside the front door, in Tabitha’s screened-in porch, flamingos abound in the form of stuffed animals, yard ornaments, and hanging wind chimes.

Betty looks at me, nodding, during the tour to see if I appreciate the loveliness of Tabitha's home. She remarks, "It doesn't look like a trailer, it looks like a home."

Tabitha asks with earnestness, "You wouldn't think it was a trailer, would you?"

In her study of the effects of urban renewal on the cultural, economic, and emotional life of African American communities, Mindy Thompson Fullilove (2005: 20) emphasizes, "we cannot understand the losses unless we first appreciate what was there." Doing so in mobile home communities requires a picture of park life freed from the stigmatizing tropes that form the cultural effigy of the trailer park. Indeed the willingness, even eagerness, of residents like Tabitha to invite me inside, show me around, and discuss in detail the space of their home is both a product of deeply felt stigmatization and evidence of a conscious effort to counterpose the myths and realities of mobile home life. Tabitha's question, "You wouldn't think it was a trailer, would you?" exposes an attempt to dispel stigma or, to paraphrase Goffman (1963), to manage a spoiled identity. Tabitha's question also speaks to ambivalence over this stigma and knowledge of what is at stake in the symbolic representation of the home. The tainted and tainting image of the mobile home that produces this ambivalence originates in the complex history of manufactured housing as a uniquely American housing invention.

I explore the architectural and social history of the mobile home in chapter 1, which traces the historical roots of the mobile home as a techno-legal artifact and a national housing intervention. This architectural history introduces a central theme regarding the built-in tension between mobility and permanence that is fundamental to manufactured housing. The chapter highlights the adaptability and versatility that have made the mobile home an indispensable contribution to the American housing stock over the last century. The same versatility has contributed to the precipitous growth of manufactured housing in recent decades and to its current role as the largest form of unsubsidized low-income housing in the country. Yet, understanding the contemporary spread of manufactured housing also requires situating the housing form within an historic shift in the provision of affordable housing over the last four decades. This first chapter explores the past and recent history of the mobile home, illustrating that the spread of mobile home parks is a close contemporary of the retraction of the state from the provision of low-income housing under the neoliberal administration of the social security net.

Within mobile home parks, residents' housing insecurity is codified in housing regulations that make them halfway homeowners and in urban

development priorities that make them and their homes disposable. Chapter 2 analyzes how the *social stigmatization* of park residents is tied to the *spatial stigmatization* of park properties, which is maintained through local ordinances and state regulations that geographically seal off, segregate, and screen parks from the cities outside their walls. Here I expand the conventional sociological concept of stigma that focuses on interpersonal dynamics (Goffman 1986) to explore the ways social and spatial stigma intersect to create and maintain a secondary legal status for mobile home park residents.

Chapter 3 turns to life within parks and to detailed interactions with evicted residents who invited me inside their homes even as they prepared to be forced out of them. Contextualized in the history of housing stigma, these invitations should be seen in terms of residents' attempts (like Tabitha's) to dispel myths of mobile home life, but they were also part of a broader effort to enlist me to bear witness to a deep sense of unease over eviction. Time and again residents offered to lead tours before they began to box up their homes, disassemble their patios, and say goodbye to their gardens. They expressed gratitude toward the technologies of ethnographic record—pulling the recorder toward their voice, requesting and posing for photos with their homes, confirming “did you get that on your device?” Without knowing it, they were creating a record of a life they would never recover. In these months of waiting to be evicted, they could not imagine the great changes these relocations would bring, not simply in new damage to repair, new neighbors to meet, and new communities to navigate but in people's very understanding of their place in the world and their rights as citizens. These changes began even before the catalytic moments of upheaval when homes were hauled out of closing parks. As chapter 3 explores, this subjective shift was produced through a daily process of living under the threat of eviction, under the *specter of dislocation*. The specter of dislocation meant that long before she was ever evicted from her home Christy, like so many others, came to experience an increasing sense of powerlessness in the face of her forced removal.

Out on her deck, Christy lights up a cigarette. When asked if she has been smoking more since the relocation began, she answers, “Oh gosh yes, and drinking.” She used to drink a beer or two occasionally but now she will have a beer and chase it with a shot of liquor. She expects this increase in drinking is because she is out of pain medication—she used up her regular prescription early with the physical and mental stress of moving. She is actually out of all of her medications currently, including her blood pressure medication because she ran through them and can't afford to refill them right now. She's saving for the relocation.

She feels out of sorts and can't put her finger on exactly what's going on emotionally. It's many things. She sighs, as if trying to get a handle on how she feels, "I've been a basket case." Over the afternoon she cries several times when attempting to describe the feeling of waiting to be relocated, but then she sniffles and tries to pull herself together. In a defeated voice she says softly, "I am so tired . . . It *weighs* on you."

This *weight*, as Christy terms it, the load of daily life lived under the specter of dislocation, is brought to the fore in the frustration and inefficacy residents experienced during the actual relocation process. Chapter 4 describes the upheaval of mobile home park evictions from inside multiple parks in both Florida and Texas. This chapter pays special attention to the community-wide effects of eviction, especially to the sustained sense of collective indignation that extended beyond the immediate and individual losses of property. Through detail of residents' attempts to reconstruct their lives in the face of dislocation, it builds a picture of eviction as both individual and collective trauma.

Chapter 5 details the broader impacts of eviction from both inside and outside of parks. It does so by following the day-to-day preparations, expressed anxieties, searches for new housing, and strategies for relocating in multiple different households. It also examines the process of relocation from the standpoint of moving crews and relocation service providers. Ultimately the shape of these residents' evictions was determined not by the residents themselves and not by the workers who pulled their homes from their foundations. Rather, the experience of eviction was foremost a product of differing state housing policies meant to manage the mass evictions of park residents and administer (or not) relocation assistance. While the preceding chapters explore the shared experience of life under the specter of dislocation, this chapter focuses on the differing experiences of eviction under different state regulatory regimes in Texas and Florida. It explores distinctive iterations of contemporary neoliberal housing policy in the two states and analyzes the effects for evicted residents.

Chapter 6 returns to the central paradoxes at the heart of manufactured housing to understand how park residents' housing insecurity is shaped by market forces that wring economic value out of an otherwise devalued housing form. Examining the mobile home park marketplace at multiple scales, this chapter maps the field of economic transactions that shape housing processes in mobile home parks. From the operations of individual companies working within the closing parks where I lived, to the California resort where I enrolled alongside eager entrepreneurs in the for-profit

“Mobile Home University,” to the investment portfolios of some of the richest individuals in the United States, mobile home park housing insecurity is structured by forces far beyond individual closing parks. This chapter explores how the intersection between poverty and profit in the low-income housing market (Desmond 2016) operates well beyond the boundaries of individual neighborhoods or even cities and structures a national multibillion-dollar industry.

The conclusion outlines the broader picture painted by residents’ experience of eviction, a picture that provides a snapshot of contemporary housing insecurity in the United States. While the conclusion provides policy recommendations specific to mobile home parks, ultimately the deeply felt dislocations described in these pages call for more than mere policy prescriptions. They call for a critique of the role of housing policy in the production of housing crises. Within research on contemporary urban marginality, sociologists have become concerned with a “growing heteronomy of urban research” (Wacquant 2008b: 198), which produces research driven by the priorities of policymakers and city officials. Imagining a solution benefits from thinking across disciplines, as human geographers remind us that *policy-relevant* research should not necessarily be limited to *policy-driven* research (Wyly 2004). An analytic solution hinges upon critical inquiry constructed to interrogate the role of policy in the production of inequality rather than merely appending policy prescriptions as an unavoidable ancillary to the research (Slater 2010). In other words, as geographer Robert Lake (2003: 463) argues, “a less constraining alternative to policy relevance is *policy critique*.”

The crisis of mass eviction in mobile home parks is *produced through* and then *managed by* the laws and policies put in place to regulate manufactured housing and its residents. As the following chapters describe, state housing regulations and land use ordinances are not impersonal forces or purely technological artifacts, they are social objects. This analysis of poverty housing and the social production of crises in mobile home parks borrows from architectural history, planning theory, legal scholarship, and critical geography, putting the insights of these disciplines into conversation with sociological theories of power. Our very understanding of home and community, and our experience when homes and communities are dismantled, hinge on the ways we regulate those spaces. These regulations in turn comprise complex cultural narratives with deep historical roots. I begin by exploring how these historical roots inform contemporary understandings of the mobile home park and the people who live there.