Grounds for Eviction: Race, Mobility, and Policing in the Antelope Valley

Introduction

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program is the nation’s largest rental assistance program for low-income households. Although the program is meant to subsidize lower-income families renting in more affluent communities, this research study and book project examines mechanisms through which the HCV program has produced downward residential mobility and exposed tenants to hostile social contexts that create unstable housing conditions. In doing so, this research also examines how Black voucher holders interpret, experience, and navigate the HCV program, with a focus on how they maintain their housing and avoid eviction.

Findings

- White private renters and homeowners in Los Angeles County’s Antelope Valley (the study’s fieldsite) are widely hostile to Black voucher families and actively work to prevent social integration.
- Some residents of the Antelope Valley engage in participatory policing, whereby they surveil HCV tenants and deploy housing authority investigators and municipal code enforcement as a way to evict them from what was once an all-white neighborhood.
- Voucher tenants subject to surveillance and policing have found their personal lives, gender expression, romantic lives, and efforts to support family and community transformed into eviction liabilities. As a result, tenants have had to choose between supporting their family and staying in their current housing.
- The policing of HCV renters is critical to reproducing racial segregation, and these findings suggest that policing is a critical front in the fight for fair housing.

Recommendations

Housing Choice Voucher tenants face many barriers to safe, decent, and affordable housing in the neighborhoods of their choice. Among those barriers is racial hostility and its manifestation through policing. Policy makers can address these issues by protecting voucher tenants from source of income discrimination, eliminating nuisance ordinances that are easily weaponized into tools of eviction, preventing the use of specialized policing programs aimed at policing voucher tenants, and reforming program rules that turn family life into eviction liabilities and levy harsh penalties for drug infractions that are often decriminalized outside of the public housing and voucher contexts.