

Racial Justice



The face of manufactured home parks is changing dramatically.

Across the nation, we have witnessed a dramatic change in racial demographics. Many demographers estimate that by 2050, white people will no longer be the majority in the United States. These changes in demographics are very clearly seen in manufactured home communities. According to the U.S. Census, parks in Minnesota have become strikingly more racially diverse in the last 15 years. Here the percentage of people of color living in parks has more than quadrupled, and in some parks people of color make up 95% or more of the population. Similar trends have been seen in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Iowa, and most other states.

As demographics shift, racial disparities in manufactured home communities have emerged—and they are devastating.

Abuse of authority against park residents has impacted all races. However, many times these abuses fall disproportionately on people of color. For example, in the state of Minnesota 54% of the residents who have been displaced by park closings are people of color, even though they represent only 10% of park residents in the state. This means that there is a huge racial disparity in terms of who is being forced out of their homes.

Racism is part of the historical legacy of institutions that put park residents “in their place.”

Conditions in manufactured home parks are not the result of individual behavior. They are the result of systemic failings on the part of a variety of institutions. These institutions such as banks, cities, the criminal justice system and government agencies keep park residents “in their place.” Unfortunately, racism is part of the historical legacy of many of these same institutions. Long before there were manufactured home parks and park prejudice there was institutional racism. Confronting this legacy and demanding change is key to achieving mobile justice.

People of color are an asset to our communities. Racism is the problem.

Immigrants and people of color bring their culture, diversity, and history to manufactured home communities. They are vital to preserving the economic viability of many parks. Even more parks would close down if it were not for the large numbers of diverse families that have moved in to fill vacancies. Park residents of color face all the stereotypes of park prejudice; however they also face racial scapegoating and stereotyping in parks. This is a tactic to divide parks residents. We reject this. Everyone is entitled to equal rights and fair treatment.

Park owners and government officials have an obligation to promote racial justice in manufactured home parks, but in many instances they have failed to do so.

Parks have become racially segregated in many communities where people of color are living in the worst conditions – bad roads, unsafe water, lack of storm shelters. It is not uncommon to see both a “white park” and a “Latino park” in the same city. The living conditions vary greatly from one park to the other, even though people of color may pay the same or more rent than white residents. Again, these disparities are not a consequence of individual behavior, but rather the result of systemic inequality perpetuated by multiple actors such as state agencies, municipalities, and park management.

Real solutions exist, but organized people are necessary to create political will.

There is a lot that can be done to challenge racism in manufactured home parks. Organized people have a lot power to push for changes. When institutions are held accountable for racism they will be forced to change.

Racial Justice is an essential part of Mobile Justice, meaning that everyone will benefit.

Racial Justice is in the interest of every manufactured homeowner regardless of race. Racism within parks only strengthens park owners, developers and public officials in their efforts to undermine our community. If they are able to get away with injustice against one group of people they will likely do the same to another. Whereas, if we are successful in uniting across racial lines to organize against racial injustice the power we build together can be used for the benefit of all.

Level	Definition	Examples
Individual Racism	Individual racism exists within an individual, in the form of thoughts, fears and biases, both conscious and unconscious.	<p>White People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Believing that negative stereotypes are true ▪ Holding prejudiced thoughts and attitudes ▪ Internalized privilege, feelings of entitlement <p>People of Color</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feeling inferior because of internalized racism ▪ Feeling hopeless, that nothing can be done
Interpersonal Racism	Interpersonal Racism takes place between individuals. It is carried out as specific actions from one person to another.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Harassing or making fun of someone because of their race ▪ Using racial slurs ▪ Telling racist jokes
Institutional Racism	Institutional Racism takes place when that acts of a political, community, financial, or other institution acts to the detrimental impact people of color.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discriminating against people of color who apply to live in parks ▪ Steering people of color to live in less desirable sections of a park ▪ Efforts by institutions to eliminate parks predominantly composed of people of color
Systemic Racism	Systemic Racism takes place across systems (legal, political, cultural, educational, economic, etc.). This happens when the acts of a variety of institutions and systems detrimental impact people of color. It is also tied to history.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Racial disparities - park closings disproportionately impact people of color ▪ Patterns of segregation—People of color are often forced to live in worse conditions than whites. ▪ Immigration status creates fear of retaliation if residents stand up for their rights.

Narrator: Mr. and Mrs. Perez are a young married couple moving to southern Minnesota. They have 2 kids. They both grew up in Texas, the children of migrant workers. They have saved up money to purchase a manufactured home and are out looking at options. The Rainbow Sunrise Mobile Home Park seems like the best option. It is close to work, and affordable. There are no other affordable homeownership options nearby. On Monday afternoon after work, they stop in to see the park manager to ask about living there.

Mr. Perez: Hello, we are looking to purchase a home here in the park. Are you the one we should speak to?

Manager: Yes I am, we have some older single wides available towards the back of the park. Would you like me to show them to you?

Mrs. Perez: We were actually hoping for something a little newer and with more space.

Manager: Oh I'm sorry, I don't think I can show you any of those homes, there are some for sale but I just don't think that someone in your situation would be able to afford them. Why don't you get back into your car and follow me to the back of the park and I'll show what we have.

Narrator: So Mr. and Mrs. Perez got back into their car and followed the park manager to the back of the park. They were optimistic, because the park seemed to be in good shape, lots of nice new homes with big lots. There was a new laundry room and a playground right next to the park office where the mailboxes were located. But as they drove further and further away, they arrived at an older section of the park. There were more potholes, the lots were smaller and most of the homes were older homes.

Mrs. Perez: I don't like the looks of this. Why do we have to go all the way to the back of the park? We saved up a lot of money, I'll bet we can afford to live in one of those new homes by the office. Look around, all the families in this part of the park are Latino like us. At the front of the park I only saw white families. Is this discrimination?

Mr. Perez: Maybe. This seems unfair, but there isn't really anything we can do about it. This is the only place in town for us to live, we can't afford to upset the manager and risk having to go live in another park 30 miles away. It's best just to keep quiet and stay out of trouble.

Narrator: So even though they weren't happy about it, the Perez family decided to purchase an older home in the back of the park. They went back to the office to fill out the application.

Manager: Here's the application, now make sure you put down three character references here in Minnesota, along with your social security numbers.

Mrs. Perez: I'm sorry but we only just moved here. We don't really know anyone here who could be a character reference. Could we give you references from Texas?

Manager: I guess so, as long as they speak English. I don't want anybody calling me speaking Spanish. The main reason for the character reference is just because there's been complaints of gang activity here in town so I have to be careful with who I let in here. I would prefer someone from Minnesota but I guess I'll have to use whatever you can give me.

Mr. Perez: I'm confused. I don't see where on the application form you are supposed to put down the references. Also it doesn't ask for a social security number.

Manager: Just put it on the back, we don't usually ask it of everybody just from people who may be illegal. I'm sure you understand.

Narrator: The Perez family was accepted to live in the park. The residents of the new section of the park generally didn't interact with the Latino families who lived in the older section of park, although occasionally racial slurs were shouted at the Latino families by a few white homeowners. Over time, the living conditions on their side of the park became worse. Rumors began to spread that the city was moving to shut the park down. Mrs. Perez went to City Hall to talk with the city planner.

City Planner: What can I do for you?

Mrs. Perez: I want to know what you are planning to do over at Rainbow Sunrise.

City Planner: Oh you mean the trailer park? Well a lot of people are scared that we are shutting down the park. The resident association has been spreading misinformation to folks, we are only looking to take out the older trailers near the highway.

Mrs. Perez: But that's where my family lives! There are a lot of families over there, we don't want to lose our homes!

City Planner: Well, I know it may be hard for some folks, but really it's for the best. That part of the park has gotten so run down that we have no choice but to get rid of it. Plus you people don't do nearly enough to keep the park clean. I guess when you used to living in such bad conditions where you come from in your home country, you just don't care about your place looking nice.

Mrs. Perez: I was born in Texas!

City Planner: Okay, okay. Fine, but the point is the trailer park is not the best use of that land. A lot of developers have expressed interest in it, which will bring in a new tax base for the city. I'm surprised the resident association hasn't explained this you.

Mrs. Perez: I didn't even know we had a resident association. No one has ever talked to me about any of this and I've been living there for 3 years!

City Planner: Well that's too bad. Shortly we will be having a public meeting to let all of you know what you will be getting for relocation compensation. We could use your help, because we don't have anyone here at the city who speaks Spanish. I might need you to translate.

Narrator: Several months later the 20 homes along the highway in Rainbow Sunrise were taken out, and the Latino families were all displaced. After the homes were taken out, the park owner raised rents of the remaining families to make up for lost revenue, and less maintenance was done in the park to cut costs. But the park lord was never able to pull in the same profits as before, and decided to close the park two years later for redevelopment.

Reflection Questions

1. Identify the different levels of racism in this story (individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic).
2. How were Latino residents affected by institutional racism?
3. How were white residents affected by institutional racism?
4. What was the role of the resident association in the story? What should it have done differently?
5. Can you think of any real-life examples of these kinds of racism in your own community?

A lot of the abuses that you refer to as racist are happening to white people too. Is this really about race?

Calling attention to racism does not mean that we are saying that people of color are the only ones impacted by abuses against residents. However, in the event that abuses are falling disproportionately on people of color, we have a moral duty to denounce these abuses and reveal the racial disparities behind them. Racism is bigger than just one or two personal experiences. The impact of racism is community wide and exists on many different levels.

You said that the city is not doing enough to promote racial justice. Does that mean the mayor is a racist?

The individual attitudes or prejudices of certain decision makers aren't the point. Personal intent is irrelevant and hard to prove. We need to hold decision makers accountable for the impact of their actions on communities of color, regardless of their intent. When talking about racism, the motivations of individuals tend to be over-emphasized. We should be focusing on the real problem: institutional racism.

Racism is not the only form of discrimination that takes place in parks; what about discrimination based on gender, disability or public assistance status?

It is important that all forms of discrimination that take place in parks are addressed, however racism has to be a priority. Racism has been well documented and the results are devastating. While other forms of discrimination tend to manifest themselves on an individual basis, racism is a community wide issue. Additionally, while there is general acceptance about addressing other forms of discrimination, there is a reluctance to talk about racism. It is up to us to break this culture of silence.

Isn't the real reason that conditions are bad in predominantly Latino parks because they don't care if their neighborhood looks nice?

Park conditions as a whole are not the result of individual resident behavior but rather the result of multiple institutional factors. Ultimately, park conditions are the responsibility of management. Every month each resident pays lot rent, and part of that rent should go to maintenance of the park. The problem is that residents aren't getting what they are paying for as slumlords pocket the money at the community's expense. In segregated communities, Latino park residents often pay the same or more than residents in predominantly white parks, but the conditions vary dramatically. People want to be proud of where they live, regardless of their race. Additionally, lack of access to financing for purchasing and repairing homes often leads to deteriorating conditions.

People of color are only a minority of the population living in manufactured home parks. Why should our work be biased in their favor?

People of color are the majority of the population in many manufactured home parks. We are not asking for special rights or privileges for anyone. People of color deserve the same rights and treatment as everyone else. We want a level playing field: race equity. Mobile Justice cannot exclusively benefit white park residents. Besides, if parks owners or the government are able to get away with abusing one group of people, they will likely try to do the same with another group of people. This "divide and conquer" strategy will only succeed if we allow it to.

Park Prejudice and Racism: Similarities and Differences

Park Prejudice: A system of attitudes and actions that marginalize manufactured home park residents to someone else's benefit

Racism: Power + Racial Prejudice. A system that uniquely advantages whites to the detriment of people of color

A good starting point for a conversation on racial justice work in manufactured home parks is a look at the relationship between racism and park prejudice. It is important to recognize the similarities, but critical to recognize the differences between racism and park prejudice.

Similarities	Explanation
They exist on different levels	Park Prejudice and Racism exist on different levels: Individual, Interpersonal, Institutional, and Systemic. In both cases, decision makers often conceal the institutional and systemic causes.
They are the result of fear and ignorance	People often avoid interactions with people or neighborhoods based on their fear. Their opinions about groups of people based on what they see in the media.
People blame the entire community for the actions of a few	For example, if someone has committed a crime and appears on the news, people will notice either their race or housing type and assume everyone like them is a criminal.
They take our power away	Racism and Park Prejudice promote systemic forms of privilege that benefit a few at the expense of many.
They are enshrined in our laws, business practices and general culture.	They are self-perpetuating. They don't necessarily require someone to carry them out because they have become embedded in society. They are caused as much by inaction as they are by overt acts of hatred or bigotry.
They should be measured by impact, not intent.	Many times people are reluctant to expose racism and prejudice because they believe people's intentions to be good. However, intent is meaningless. The impact of decisions, actions and inactions is what matters.

Differences	Explanation
The scope of Park Prejudice and Racism are different.	Park prejudice is fairly limited in scope and mostly pertains to housing issues in manufactured home parks. Racism exists in all forms of housing. It can also be seen in a much broader context: education, employment, immigration, criminal justice, etc.
The impact of racism in the U.S. has been far more drastic.	Impact of park prejudice: park closings, rent increases, unfair laws and rules, etc. Contemporary impact of racism: lack of access to health and education, racial profiling, deportations, workplace and housing discrimination, etc. Historical impact of racism: slavery, genocide, segregation, lynching, etc.
Park Identity is fluid. Race is not.	When someone leaves a manufactured home park, they have a choice of how they identify themselves, whereas race follows you wherever you go and can't be changed.
History	Racism has existed for thousands of years. Manufactured home parks have only been around for half a century.
Racism is not officially tolerated, park prejudice often is	Even though racism continues to exist, the idea that racism is wrong is widely accepted. When a public figure uses racial slurs it sparks outrage. However, using terms like "trailer trash" is still considered acceptable.

We need to have a conversation about racism, even if it is sometimes uncomfortable. It is important when addressing issues of race in your organizing that you are standing for something positive.

Racial Justice is a complex idea. Similar to concepts such as “mobile justice” or “social justice,” people may have differing ideas of what racial justice looks like. While you have many options, here are just a few practical ideas for creating racial justice in manufactured home communities:

1. Everyone should have equal access to safe and affordable housing. End racial discrimination towards applicants when they apply to live in parks.
2. Park residents of color have a right to the same living conditions as white residents. End segregation within cities, as well as “steering” practices that segregate people within parks.
3. Respect everyone in the community - no racist stereotyping or scape-goating by management or residents.
4. Park management should be culturally competent, meaning they know how to communicate effectively with all of the residents in their park, including those that don't speak English.
5. Resident associations, cooperatives and statewide organizations should reflect the diversity within the parks in their leadership and membership.
6. End exploitation and scape-goating of immigrants within the parks. No institution should use a family's immigration status to avoid accountability for violating people's rights.
7. Government agencies, elected officials, park management, community developers, and non-profit organizations need to be proactive in facilitating real solutions to eliminate racial disparities.
8. Governing bodies, law enforcement, park personnel, and businesses must benefit everyone equally in their services, without discrimination.
9. Everyone has a right to stability, no more demolition of diverse neighborhoods to build mansions, strip malls, Wal-Mart's etc. Preserve these neighborhoods so that park closings don't disproportionately impact people of color.
10. White park residents will be constructive allies in the struggle for racial justice.

