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The Struggle for Sufficient Housing in Santa Clara County

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THE STRUGGLE FOR SUFFICIENT HOUSING IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Justice Studies

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Science

By

Robert Musallam

December 2010

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

THE STRUGGLE FOR SUFFICIENT HOUSING IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

by

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December 2010

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ABSTRACT

THE STRUGGLE FOR SUFFICIENT HOUSING IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

This study examined the role systemic racism plays in shaping people's ability to acquire sufficient housing in Santa Clara County. The purpose of this study was to identify historical and contemporary forms of institutional racism through the narratives of residents or former residents of the San Jose Family Homeless Shelter [SJFS] in San Jose, California. Of particular interest is evidence of housing discrimination and what Neubeck and Cazenave (2001) call "welfare racism." Clients of the SJFS represent those directly affected by welfare reform and least protected from oppressive housing policies or practices.

Through semi-structured open-ended interviews with former residents of the SJFS and several key informants, the process of how obtaining housing manifests "on the ground," identifying the barriers to finding sufficient housing, and discussions on the respondents' inability to find units that fit their own definitions of sufficient housing were explored. The paper concludes by suggesting that these narratives identify a need to explore sufficient housing more specifically. Furthermore, the need to inform our collective efforts to resist systemic racism and create more equitable housing policies/practices in Santa Clara County is critical and must be addressed.

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Chapter I: Introduction

According to Article 25 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including housing...” (UN, 1948). More than one billion people around the world, mostly in “underdeveloped” countries, are currently living in less than sufficient housing (Kabir, 2002), which I define as a unit or dwelling that is secure and sanitary, able to reasonably support a person’s physical and psychological well-being (Ytrehus, 2001; Kabir, 2002). Although sufficient housing is often referred to as one of the most pressing needs in contemporary society, we know little about the experience of obtaining it (Murdie, 2003).

Historically in the United States, populations constructed as white have been able to access¹ sufficient housing far more easily than populations of color, who were often excluded from mainstream options, and forced to find alternative means (Feagin, 2001). While it is commonly assumed that all people have the opportunity to live where they wish or can afford, people of color have commonly faced racial discrimination, primarily in the form of real estate brokers who were unwilling to show available properties to non-white families in white neighborhoods (a practice called “steering”) (Feagin, 2001; Wilson, 1996), and lenders who set unreasonable rates for home loans for non-white buyers (mortgage discrimination, also called “red-lining”). As a partial result of such racial discrimination, people of color have been placed at a disadvantage when trying to obtain sufficient housing. Racial discrimination and the broader connection between opportunity structures and race might be better

¹ Shapiro (2001) discusses the advantages of accumulated wealth vs. the earning of income. Wealth is an individual’s total assets—income plus the value of any other commodity that has a value (a home, for example). A person with a significant amount of wealth can provide themselves—and their families—a very privileged lifestyle where all their satisfactions are met. An individual’s income may provide similar things; however, income is typically used to provide shelter, food, clothing, etc. Furthermore, the access to wealth—and its inherent privileges—may be limited due to a low or non-existent income.

understood in the context of what has been called contemporary systemic racism or “color-blind” racism in the post-civil rights era.

Systemic racism refers to the process and structural form of racial privilege and domination that has shaped the U.S. since its inception. As scholars such as Joe Feagin (2001) argue, systemic racism has been embedded in nearly all social institutions and practices (Feagin, 2001) in the U.S. “to their core.” Institutional racism, a facet of systemic racism, is the effective use of policy and practice within a particular institution that covertly places non-white populations at a disadvantage. Specific institutions of interest here would include the state—particularly state policies concerning housing and housing related welfare policies, and the political-economy—particularly as it structures the distribution of resources used to obtain housing and the availability of credit (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2001). Critical race theorists (Wilson, 1996; Feagin, 2001, 2006; Neubeck and Cazenave, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Armaline, 2007, among others) argue that racism is a system of racial oppression that reproduces and sustains the political, economic, and ideological influence of whites, specifically the white owning class. Further, “post-civil rights era” racism no longer requires the actions of conscious racial bigots, since its institutionalization is masked by “color-blind” ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Lawrence, 1987). In other words, whereas prior to the civil rights era, discrimination in housing—as in several other fields of social life—was overt, it is now hidden within institutional policies and practices (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). While many deny racism still exists, institutional forms of racism persist, continuously evolve, and as I will discuss, prevents people of color from obtaining sufficient housing.

Previous research on housing discrimination tends to focus on era and historical effects of legal, racial segregation in the U.S. (Cevero and Duncan, 2004; Massey and Denton,

1988; Charles, 2003; Strahilevitz, 2006). While most of these studies highlight the ways that various forms of discrimination (subprime lending, red-lining, landlord discrimination, etc.) have forced certain populations to live in “worse” neighborhoods than others (Wilson, 1991; Cervero and Duncan, 2004; Aalbers, 2006), they rarely illustrate the actual processes through which a person (or persons—families) came to live there. Furthermore, previous studies have not addressed the potential effects of institutional racism on the procurement of sufficient housing in a given community.

This study takes a first step in examining the process of negotiating sufficient housing through research conducted with former residents of the San Jose Family Shelter (SJFS), a live-in housing unit for homeless families. In brief, I explore the following questions concerning racism and housing: How, and to what extent, does institutional racism shape people's ability to access sufficient housing in Santa Clara County? What role do historical and contemporary forms of state-sanctioned racial discrimination via (for example) specific, restrictive welfare reforms and housing policies play in limiting access to sufficient housing? Finally, what do people of color recognize as the major barriers to and strategies for attaining sufficient housing in Santa Clara County?

I will begin by offering a more thorough conceptualization of “sufficient housing,” followed by a discussion of how others have come to characterize systemic and institutional racism as it pertains to sufficient housing. Chapter two illustrates the impact of housing and welfare reforms, specifically the evolution of “welfare racism” on populations such as those residing in the SJFS. Chapter three outlines my methods for data collection and analysis. In chapter four I analyze the interviews conducted with residents of the SJFS and several key informants. In conclusion, I will review the conceptual definition of sufficient housing and

attempt to describe the process through which the transitionally homeless, mainly of color, population are systematically excluded from accessing it.

Chapter II: Theory

Chapter two will begin with an overview of the key theoretical concepts used to help explain the lack of acceptable housing practices in Santa Clara County. First, by clearly defining sufficient housing as it is defined in the literature. Next, I introduce the concept of ‘Systemic Racism’ as a rational explanation for the systemic abuse of people of color as it relates to housing in Santa Clara County. Finally, I discuss what Neubeck and Cazenave (2001) describe as ‘Welfare Racism;’ specifically, the colorblind effect on people of color trying to find housing is discussed.

Sufficient Housing

I define sufficient housing as a unit or dwelling that is secure and sanitary, able to reasonably support a person’s physical and psychological well-being (Ytrehus, 2001; Kabir, 2002). Where some physical needs might be obvious (such as access to clean water), research suggests the need to consider the psychological impact² of insufficient housing for the poor. However, no research has attempted to combine and implement what are typically identified as “core” psychological needs into a single definition of sufficient housing. Three core psychological needs—needs that seem to determine minimum psychological health—that are typically discussed in relevant literature include access to basic support services, reasonable physical space, and affordability.

Access to basic services such as clean water, privacy, health, education, and community participation, are vital to the mental and physical growth of an individual (Kabir, 2002; Mulroy & Ewalt, 1996, Thiele, 2002). Adequate physical and mental health is essential to obtaining and sustaining employment, relationships with family and friends, and housing

² See, for example: Kabir, 2002; Mbonda, 2004; Goodchild, 2003; Murdie, 2003; Aalbers, 2006; Ytrehus, 2001; Gove, Hughes, & Galle, 1979.

(Phinney, Danziger, Pollack, & Seefeldt, 2007). Family instability, coupled with housing instability has shown to be a cause of first time homelessness (Lehmann, Kass, Drake, & Nichols, 2007). Furthermore, the instability of housing among groups that experience homelessness has been shown to increase the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness multiple times over their lifetime (Phinney et al., 2007). These effects may concentrate disproportionately along socially constructed lines of race and socioeconomic status.

Satisfying the spatial need for housing generally requires an appropriate³ amount of space for all individuals living in a particular unit. However, physical space is also a documented psychological need (Gove et al., 1979, Kabir, 2002). According to Gove et al. (1979), overcrowding⁴, defined as a high number of persons per room, is significantly related to the following issues: lack of effective planning behavior, feeling of psychological withdrawal, poor mental health, poor social relationships inside and outside the home, and poor physical health. Overcrowding typically occurs when occupants are unable to afford⁵ to rent a unit that satisfies their spatial needs and must resort to extra-legal options to house themselves or their families (Mulroy and Ewalt, 1996). Part of the problem also results from

³ Ytrehus (2001) discusses several different approaches for developing standards for what she considers “necessary and sufficient” housing. Her spatial, physical-normative approach is most defensible in that the satisfaction of the human need for housing is defined by what she calls experts. These experts would set the standard for the minimum amount of space required to meet a specific family’s needs. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development currently offers minimum occupancy requirements, which supports the state’s own definition of sufficient when applied to criminal law, child and family services, and landlords but is not relevant to any social rights.

⁴ The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development uses occupancy limits to avoid overcrowding in cheaper, slum neighborhoods but may also be responsible for such living conditions due to budget cuts and the general lack of affordable housing (Mulroy and Ewalt, 1996; CQ Researcher, 2004).

⁵ There are other reasons besides affordability that would cause someone to live in an overcrowded environment. Poor credit/rental history, landlord discrimination, and the lack of documentation—social security card, driver’s license—may play a huge role in the legality of renting a unit.

the lack of available housing in the private market, the individual or group's resource level, and most importantly, the landlords, who allow the occupants to live in such conditions (Myers and Baer, 1996).

Mulroy and Ewalt (1996) define housing affordability as the ratio of a household's housing costs to the dweller's income, noting that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] typically considers housing affordable when it costs 30% or less of a household's income. However, since private owners, not HUD, set the market rate, finding affordable housing is often difficult⁶. Free market supporters will argue that the market should dictate the value of housing. Furthermore, with the wide variety of housing options available, those with even minimal resources should be able to choose between dwellings.

However, social justice advocates, such as Bengtsson (2001), agree that housing must have a value but are quick to point out that the government should play a role in making housing affordable. The current effort by the federal government to "bail out" homeowners in the mortgage crisis might serve as a contemporary example of such a perspective. Due to the mortgage crisis, many former home owners have now become renters. Due to the sudden increase in renters and the limited housing stock available to rent, rental prices have increased. In San Jose, rent can increase by a maximum of 8% per year without the city's permission (SJ Housing, 2010). However, a recent insurgency in the city of Los Angeles over the reversal of a rent freeze ordinance⁷ might suggest that rental prices are unaffordable as they are (LA Times, 2010).

⁶ The difficulty lies in its (un)availability. Housing complexes that rent under the term "low-income" tend to attract an enormous amount of applicants. Typically, these complexes have waiting lists that extend over several years making it next to impossible to secure sufficient housing in the short term. A prospective tenant must apply and wait for his/her name to reach the top of the list.

⁷ It should be noted that the rent freeze ordinance would have only prevented a 3% increase.

The failure to provide sufficient housing for everyone is one of the many international human rights violations the United States (historically and currently) continues to ignore. The U.S. has failed in providing varying, significant populations equal access to basic services such as clean water, education, privacy, physical space, and affordable housing (Ytrehus, 2001; Kabir, 2002). Furthermore, contemporary housing and welfare reforms, such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, continue the trend of color-blind policies that adversely affect people of color, thus limiting their ability to obtain sufficient housing (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

Systemic Racism

As previously suggested, racial discrimination is best understood as part of a broader system of privilege and oppression. I will outline several elements of systemic racism below to demonstrate why contemporary racism theory is the most appropriate theoretical framework for interpreting racial disparities in gaining access to sufficient housing:

(1) The development of the suburbs from the 1940's-1960's influenced a demographic change in many U.S cities. New housing developments started a massive movement of whites⁸ from cities to suburbs, leaving poorer populations behind in inner city neighborhoods. "Racial covenants"⁹ were used to exclude black citizens from accessing sufficient housing in the new suburbs and to maintain racially segregated neighborhoods. Despite the fact that racial covenants were declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1948, their effects—and the continuation of practices like redlining and steering—continued well into the

⁸ This was commonly referred to as "White flight" or the structural process by which suburbanization helped to segregate the white suburbs from the colored inner city (Cheng, 2006). Inflated housing prices, steering, redlining, and the lack of suburban low income housing units, denied many people of color the opportunity to access sufficient housing in the suburbs (McGrew, 2001).

⁹ Racial covenants were clauses in deeds which prohibited white homeowners from reselling to African Americans (McGrew, 2001).

second half of the 20th century. Thus, the pattern of neighborhood segregation continued despite the lack of direct discrimination (McGrew, 2001). An intricate characteristic of systemic racism is its evolution from overt discrimination to its covert maintenance through institutional practices and policies, which have kept the functioning racial state (Goldberg, 2002) intact and continue to operate as the political arm of white racial hegemony¹⁰ (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001).

(2) In conjunction with a command on the political, Feagin (2001) describes systemic racism as having an immense economic impact on populations of color. In spite of vast social changes in the U.S. between the late 19th and mid 20th century, namely the New Deal and civil rights movement, racial and economic inequality remained a constant in the U.S (Conley, 1999; Feagin, 2001; Wilson, 1996). Economic exploitation of labor and the unequal distribution of other goods, namely housing, have served to create a split in opportunity structure along socially constructed lines of race. This split in opportunity structure has granted white populations primary access to sufficient housing.

Historically, housing legislation has directly benefited¹¹ white populations and continues to perpetuate the domination of racialized others. As a result of this economic advantage, white populations have been able to purchase more property, thus widening the disparity in wealth that has been accumulating over centuries (Feagin, 2006; Denton, 2001).

¹⁰ White racial hegemony is the notion that whites are superior to other (inferior) races/ethnicities and, thus, must maintain their dominance over them by using social, political, economic and ideological means (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001).

¹¹ A historical example is the 1862 Federal Homestead Act allowed the U.S government to distribute over 240 million acres of land at practically no cost to the recipients. Because of the nature of discrimination, and general antiblack sentiment at the time, the large majority of the recipients were European Americans (Feagin, 2006). The amount of wealth gained through the Homestead Act is incalculable and it was primarily given to European Americans. Very little, if any, people of color were given access to this invaluable resource. The manipulation of institutions has allowed for the disparity in wealth between European Americans and people of color in the U.S. to become entrenched.

During the post-civil rights era, housing laws—and subsequently, the way people search for sufficient housing—have adapted to subjugating poorer populations of color to the primarily white, property-owning, middle and upper classes.

(3) Bonilla-Silva (2003) illustrates that contemporary systemic racism contains an ideological component—often referred to as “color-blind racism.” This ideology is the belief that (a) racism no longer exists, (b) inequalities among racial lines are caused by individual or personal flaws, and (c) white populations, specifically policy makers and the privileged elite, “no longer ‘see’ race and are ‘color-blind’ in action and thought” (Armaline, 2007, pp. 30). Therefore, my focus on contemporary housing and welfare policy will not yield examples of overtly racist language (e.g., “No Blacks allowed”), but will emphasize the discriminatory outcomes of color-blind practices (Armaline, 2007). Several of these outcomes are described below.

Contemporary housing laws allow Section 8 landlords, and other federally assisted low-income housing units, to exclude any individual who has a criminal record. Similarly, the Housing Opportunity Program Extension Act of 1996 and the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998 created harsher provisions, especially for people with drug related criminal backgrounds. The 1996 law allowed the U.S. Department of Urban Development (HUD) to create their “One Strike and You’re Out” initiative. This initiative provided the legal basis to evict tenants (or to deny them admission to subsidized housing in the first place) on the ground of a criminal offense committed by any individual on or near the housing unit in question (Rubenstein & Mukamal, 2002).

The color-blind nature of these policies is identifiable by the lack of racially explicit language and the inherent omission of the impact these policies may have on different

populations. Furthermore, they do not take into account the effect of discrimination in the criminal justice system, which has been extensively researched (Western, 2007; Mosher, 2001; Gordon, 2007) and which is directly related to the lack of sufficient housing for populations of color. Another instance of discriminatory practices is the increased police presence¹² in low income neighborhoods, which has led to disproportionate rates of arrest, conviction, and incarceration for people of color (Schanzenbach & Yaeger, 2006); in turn, this disproportionate involvement with the criminal justice system disqualifies growing sections of the population from sufficient housing.

Soon after these policies were enacted, the number of people barred from low income housing because of a drug or criminal background nearly doubled. In addition, because of the strict nature of these policies, even families already living in low income housing cannot allow a family member who was released from prison to stay with them for risk of eviction. Without access to sufficient housing, an ex-offenders' chances of obtaining employment and living "crime free" are severely diminished. Furthermore, low income housing is the primary way—due to increasing costs in the private housing markets—poorer populations will be able to access sufficient housing (Rubenstein & Mukamal, 2002).

As previously discussed, systemic racism is unique in its ability to transform over time and by social context. For instance, racism on the East Coast may be experienced differently than on the West Coast or other regions of the country. Of particular interest here is the fact that California is a border state. Therefore, a majority of its citizens are of "Hispanic" or "Latin" descent, as is the case with Santa Clara County. However, while racism has historically been viewed in a white/black dynamic, Latinos still fall closer to African

¹² The intensive police surveillance can be construed as a form of institutional racism that defines crime as an inner city problem (Mosher, 2001).

Americans in the U.S. racial hierarchy (Feagin, 2001, 2006). Therefore, as I begin to discuss the elements of systemic racism, welfare racism, and institutional racism, it must be stressed that the Hispanic and Latino communities share similar experiences as African American communities in particular areas of geographic importance, such as the Pacific Southwest in the context of rather draconian measures to police “illegal immigration.”

A recent example of the color-blind racial practices experienced by the Hispanic and Latin communities is Arizona’s new immigration bill (SB-1070). This new law would allow police officers to stop any individual who does not look like an American citizen and ask them for proof of legal residence in the United States. Opponents of the new law have convincingly argued that this provision will increase discriminatory practices against the Hispanic and Latino communities. This is just one example of how, like African Americans, Hispanic and Latino communities continue to be the privileged targets of systemic racism.

Welfare Racism

In the 1980’s and 1990’s color-blind racism manifested in welfare reform, defined by Neubeck and Cazenave (2001) as “welfare racism:” “the organization of racialized public assistance attitudes, policy making, and administrative practices (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2001, pp. 36)” that uses stereotypes to enhance public fears of providing assistance to the poor and creates reactionary welfare legislation that is color-blind in nature. In addition, welfare racism offers status to the dominant (white) population, political power to careerist politicians, and economic advantages over a vulnerable, low income population. Most importantly, welfare racism—one manifestation of systemic racism—continuously evolves and has had a deleterious effect on populations of color trying to obtain sufficient housing (Omi & Winant, 1986).

In the 1980s, Republican presidential nominee Ronald Reagan used racially charged stereotypes as the foundation of his campaign for the Presidency in 1980 and 1984. Reagan helped reinforce the American belief system that poverty is a reflection of the poor's insufficiencies and not an issue of social concern (Wilson, 1991). He popularized such terms as "welfare queen," a stereotype of an unmarried woman who lives luxuriously off of welfare by having as many children as possible. Although race was not always explicitly invoked—a facet of color-blind racism, the "welfare queen" stereotype was clearly and consistently racially coded as an African American woman (Williams, 1991). Reagan was able to use the country's racialized fears of welfare dependents, in part, to become President of the U.S. and employ a particular domestic policy agenda that included, among other things, the decimation of the public sector.

Malicious stereotypes, against all people of color, serve to reduce serious social problems to the result of individual choices or flaws. Such stereotypes maintain white supremacy by projecting negative images of people of color to the general population (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). A contemporary example can be found during the mid-twentieth century, when the country's poor became increasingly dependent on public assistance (Wilson, 1987). In response, politicians used stereotypes to create welfare policies that restrict people of color from accessing welfare and sufficient housing by denying them the necessary resources to survive (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). In addition, politicians have not taken into account the color-blind effects welfare policies may have on a family trying to obtain sufficient housing. Welfare was originally presented as a social safety net for society's "deserving" poor (Daguerre, 2008), but it has become an institution that, among other things,

constructs the racialized other as lazy, unwilling to work, and therefore, undeserving of resource and respect (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2001).

In 1996, Bill Clinton proclaimed that he would “end welfare as we know it (Daguerre, 2008, pp.336).” During his presidency, Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) that replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF created a five year time limit for receiving welfare benefits, and created a “work first” approach that attempted to reduce the overall welfare caseload by requiring recipients to enroll into federally mandated work programs where the recipients had to engage in work for no less than 30 hours a week (Daguerre, 2008).

TANF is also an example of welfare racism in that it attempts to maintain white supremacy by denying poor immigrants access to previously or otherwise available services, further disenfranchising populations of color, and providing massive pools of low wage workers for the white owning class in the current service economy. These impoverished individuals are more likely to experience labor exploitation than those on welfare. Furthermore, they are less likely able to obtain and maintain sufficient housing since the quality and stability of their employment is typically very limited. This form of immigration control allows for white populations to maintain their dominance over people of color (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). In all these respects, TANF is a color-blind policy with detrimental social consequences, which integrates multiple human rights violations, including the right to sufficient housing. Welfare has become a system that deprives the needy and punishes them for their supposed deficiencies instead of a program meant to help obtain sufficient housing.

Populations who live on welfare are not provided enough resources to obtain sufficient housing (Gilliom, 2001). This is particularly true in areas with a high cost of living, such as the greater Bay Area in California. While a low household income suggests that a family will be living in a lower income community, it does not inherently suggest that they will experience discrimination when searching for housing (Cervero and Duncan, 2004). This study is designed to help gauge the nature and extent of the racial discrimination experienced by individuals receiving welfare and to explore, at an intimate qualitative level, how families with a low income negotiate the process of finding sufficient housing.

Chapter III: Research Method(s)

Family Supportive Housing is a non-profit organization that maintains the San Jose Family Shelter (SJFS), an on-site daycare facility, a transitional housing program, and an aftercare program. Data for this study was collected from semi-structured interviews with current and formerly homeless adults¹³ who either reside at the San Jose Family Shelter or who are now in the shelter's aftercare program.

While the shelter provides a diverse sample population with whom to work, there are many differences between the homeless at this shelter and other homeless people in Santa Clara County. In order to reside in this shelter, the head of the household must have at least one child in his/her legal custody. Thus, residents at the shelter may differ from other homeless families in that the latter may not have a child in their custody. Furthermore, the shelter residents all must submit to and pass a urinalysis test that screens for drugs. If one fails the drug test then he/she is not admitted to the program. Therefore, the residents of the shelter may differ from other homeless populations in regard to drug use or dependency. In addition, the residents of the shelter may differ from other homeless families in their attitudes, outlook, worldview, or responses to authority. That is, those willing to abide by shelter rules may differ in important ways from those who would refuse to accede to such restrictions. Finally, shelter residents may differ from other homeless families in knowledge and resources, either in regard to the availability of shelters and the process of applying to reside there, or in regard to other options that enable families to avoid shelters if they choose. To qualify for aftercare, families must first prove that they have moved into some sort of housing unit (a

¹³ Clients of the San Jose Family Homeless Shelter are relatively diverse. The shelter houses people of different races, different family configurations (single mother, single fathers, and two parent families) and diverse incomes (\$0-1800 per month) (Roschelle, 2008). Income sources vary, and include welfare, unemployment, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and wages.

room or garage is adequate). Second, they must show through a detailed budget that they can afford the unit in addition to other living expenses. Third, they must have paid their program fees¹⁴ in full, before exiting the shelter program.

The requirements for SJFS residents do have an effect on the generalizability of my sample and this study. The shelter requirements exclude families who would not qualify for shelter residence due to their lack of child custody, drug use, and those who (whether or not they might qualify) do not apply for residence, for any particular reason. The aftercare requirements limit the sample to families who have lived at the shelter before, already found a unit, shown they have a consistent income, and have paid their program fees to the shelter. However, these limitations on the generalizability of my sample do not preclude the potential to gather important data on the effects of institutional racism in Santa Clara County.

Ultimately, the shelter requirements will automatically control the data for families (1) that do not have a child in their custody, (2) who are currently using and/or addicted to drugs, (3) who are currently without housing or never applied at SJFS, and (4) for families who have stayed at SJFS but were unable to achieve one or all of the following: housing, consistent income, or employment. Therefore, any conclusive findings of racial discrimination cannot be minimized to perceived individual or personal flaws along these lines (e.g., “They weren’t denied because they’re black. They were denied because they’re illicit drug users.”)

To properly explore housing discrimination and welfare racism, I explored the narratives of the population who experience these realities (Morrow & Smith, 1995). Semi-structured, tape recorded interviews allowed me to assess a perspective that I may have

¹⁴ Each client had to pay \$150 a month in program fees. The fee included a room, six meals a day, access to child care, and plenty of personal services designed to assist them transition from the shelter to their own unit.

otherwise missed¹⁵ or dismissed. Fourteen 35-60 minute interviews were conducted with ten current or former residents and four key informants. These interviews allowed me to find commonalities among their narratives and helped to forge an understanding of the true struggle to accessing sufficient housing (DeVault, 1999). While no standard has been set as to the number of interviews needed to ensure proper data collection, Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006) found that, when using semi-structured interviews, after analyzing 12 interviews, new themes rarely appeared and became even more infrequent as the sample size grew. However, due to certain constraints: (1) I was only allowed to conduct interviews when the residents did not have a scheduled class to attend (about once a week), (2) due to a constant work schedule and long commute from San Francisco every day, I could only schedule interviews during the week at the same time, and (3) no weekend access to the residents was permitted. As a result, it became increasingly difficult to find research participants willing to spend their valuable time away from a scheduled class to conduct an interview. Furthermore, residents in aftercare were very hard to contact and schedule. Many did not follow through on their commitment to participate.¹⁶ Conducting more interviews became beyond the scope of this thesis and impossible given that the aftercare program and shelter contain approximately 40 families each at any given time.

Although the interviews were completely voluntary, participant(s) had every right to withdraw from the interview at any point or to refuse to answer any particular question(s). Further, interview participants had the right to review the interview data and ask to have

¹⁵ This is known as epistemic privilege—the notion that marginalized populations has access to perceptions that others (whites) miss (DeVault, 1999).

¹⁶ I would like to note that despite some of these potential respondents cancelling or “flaking” on me, that I would very much like to thank them for taking the time to acknowledge me and discuss—albeit briefly—something that is very personal to them.

certain portions of her/his interview withheld from use in the final report¹⁷ (Seidman, 1998). Participants were informed of each of these rights verbally at the beginning of each interview, as well as with the informed consent form each participant signed.¹⁸

The data was transcribed for qualitative analysis and each interview was coded for common themes. The codes assigned depended heavily on the responses to the interview questions¹⁹ and other unintended themes or similarities that present themselves during the course of analysis (Ewick & Silby, 1998, Gilliom, 2001). The following codes were used to interpret the data: Any mention of (1) perceived color-blind, welfare, or institutional racism, (2) affordability, physical space, psychological state, or unsanitary living conditions, (3) barriers to obtaining sufficient housing, and (4) predatory landlord practices. Since the interview questions dealt with subtle forms of racism, assumptions, and concepts that are often difficult to quantify, the qualitative methods I employed are most appropriate here (Holmes, 2006; Armaline, 2005).

¹⁷ I kept in touch with several of the respondents afterwards and none asked to have anything removed from the record.

¹⁸ See Appendix A.

¹⁹ See Appendix B.

Chapter IV: Analysis

In this chapter I draw from the narratives of residents of the San Jose Family Shelter (SJFS), all currently or formerly homeless, to interpret how they navigate the search for sufficient housing in Santa Clara County, and to illustrate some of the barriers they commonly face in such pursuits. Interviews with four key informants were also conducted to gauge differences—if any—in how these barriers are viewed and potentially experienced. These narratives focus on the potential color blind effects of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) that are clearly over looked by politicians and policy makers. SJFS residents, including those interviewed here, were primarily people of color. Their narratives allude to the effects of color-blind racism as described by Neubeck and Cazenave (2001). While PRWORA (1996) does not specifically invoke race (a facet of color-blind racism), its purpose and language can be traced to racially charged stereotypes of poor people of color. One of the main consequences of this process is that the residents will be unlikely to benefit from the very policies aimed to assist them. As mentioned earlier, the color-blind nature of PRWORA (1996) has produced harshly discriminatory outcomes that affect populations of color disproportionately (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). These outcomes, as described in the narratives, directly correlate to and effectively suggest that the lack of sufficient housing and/or access to such housing is a result of what Feagin (2001, 2006)²⁰ describes as contemporary systemic racism.

Second, material benefits such as money and/or access to earned income play a critical role in the access to sufficient housing. The lack of these resources is the main barrier often faced by poor people of color in this process. However, again, I must reiterate that direct

²⁰ Among others, see theory section for a more comprehensive list of authors and a more thorough definition of Systemic Racism.

access to these resources has been limited or prevented through a mix of institutional practices and policies that Neubeck and Cazenave (2001) have defined as “welfare racism.” For this reason, I discuss these separately below; (1) to explain the institutional barrier of obtaining employment and (2) to address that as a result of the barrier to employment, the subsequent lack of earned income limits the respondent’s ability to obtain sufficient housing.

Finally, the narratives allude to a very disturbing reality in relation to sufficient housing in that (1) homeless and formerly homeless residents’ individual conceptualizations of sufficient housing—what people should reasonably expect for a dignified and healthy existence—were surprisingly meager and arguably insufficient and (2) most of the participants had never found a unit that met their individual definition of sufficient housing. I found that all of the narratives revealed previous housing arrangements that did not meet the minimum standards of “sufficient housing” (as previously defined) and that most, if not all respondents, would settle for something similar again just to have shelter.

As previously discussed, dominant ideology reflects color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), which purports that racism no longer exists and thus essentially reduces social problems to individual choices or flaws (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2001). However, the narratives of the homeless or formerly homeless respondents suggest that racism does exist, specifically through the effective manipulation of stereotypes and the implementation of policies such as PRWORA (1996). Further, the racism they experience has a significant impact on their ability to sustain work, shelter, and adequate mental health. While mainstream society strives and believes they are part of an equal opportunity society, these narratives, again, suggest that they are not. The blatant violations of equal opportunity, and, arguably, human rights (as we will see), are reason enough to warrant a closer look at the

disparity in treatment amongst a population of seemingly “free” people and, more importantly, to account for any larger disparities among them.

To begin this task here, respondents’ narratives will be explored in what follows, not only to point out the obvious overrepresentation of Latino/as amongst the homeless population in Santa Clara County, but to illustrate how (1) PRWORA (1996) adversely impacts populations of color and (2) geographically steers them into insufficient housing.

Social Safety Net

As examined by Neubeck and Cazenave (2001), PRWORA (1996) provides evidence of welfare racism. First, the stereotypical descriptions of the “welfare queen,” widespread throughout the 1980s and 1990s, have been translated into policy through the provisions that exclude out of wedlock births from receiving aid. The “welfare queen” stereotype was instrumental in inspiring the 1996 legislation by manipulating public fears of single mothers having children and increasing their aid. The inclusion of such a provision has adversely affected my interview respondents. Second and introduced briefly, Neubeck and Cazenave (2001) and Roberts (1997) describe such provisions of this kind as a form of population control²¹. By placing these limits on aid, policy makers are hoping to limit the number of children born during a family’s stay on welfare. At first, it may seem reasonable to some to reduce the number of children born into poverty by discouraging pregnancies while on public assistance. But we must recall that such welfare policies were sold on racist imagery, in an effort to politically and economically exploit the poor (overrepresented in populations of color), and reinforce the social control populations of color—particularly, but not exclusively

²¹ It’s actually mentioned on the official TANF website under “preventing out of wedlock pregnancies.”

African Americans (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Pivon & Cloward, 1993). In my interviews I asked every shelter resident the following questions:

“Are you currently or have you ever received public assistance? If so, what forms of assistance?”

The answers were consistent in that all of my respondents had at one point been on public assistance, mainly TANF²² and food stamps. Most of them had been denied full assistance at some point. Under PRWORA (1996) an individual cannot receive additional cash aid benefits²³ for a newborn if the child was born while an existing welfare case was open (Daguerre, 2008). All but one²⁴ of the participants who were restricted from receiving the full amount of aid was deemed ineligible for this reason.

As an example of such effects, consider the following excerpt from Vera²⁵, a first generation Mexican American and a single mother of two children who had just left the shelter a year ago before her interview:

ME: Are you receiving aid for all of your children?

Vera (Early 30's, L): Cash aid for my son, food stamps for...I can't get cash aid for [my daughter].

Me: Why?

Vera: Cause when I had her I was already on cash aid and you can't add another child unless you stop getting cash aid for two months in a row. And then you can add them. But if not, then you can't ever add her. They only give you food stamp, that's it, and medi-cal.

ME: How do you feel about that?

Vera: I wish they would have explained it to me instead of just giving me all the papers saying sign this, sign this, sign this.

²² Some had also received General Assistance, disability, and had applied for Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

²³ They do receive additional food stamps.

²⁴ The only other one was denied due to his daughter being in custody of the Department of Family and Child Services.

²⁵ All names are pseudonyms chosen by the author.

ME: Any impressions upon hearing how much aid your family would be given?

Vera: Not very much. You can't really live off [of] that.

Unfortunately, she was forced back to the shelter due to a fire that burned down the studio she was renting. She lost all of her possessions and, subsequently thereafter, her job. Since the first time she received welfare she had found a job, secured a place to live, and seemingly started a new life for her family. Unfortunately, due to the series of events, she was in need of welfare assistance again and was subjected to the provision that banned her from a full subsidy since her daughter, now 2 years old, was born while Vera was originally receiving welfare. So, how much does welfare provide her?

Vera: I have two children and myself, so total, three. The cash aid, I get \$326 just for one child. Then for food stamps I get \$476 every month and Medi-cal for the kids.

This means that for a family of three attempting to move out of a homeless shelter into a place of their own, Vera must find a unit that, at most, costs \$326 a month, including utilities.

However, a unit at this price would ultimately leave her with no additional funds for transportation, diapers, or anything else that would not be covered by her food stamp benefits.

Commonly, when asked how they felt about the amount of aid they received, respondents began to discuss the difficulty they had in finding a place to live. Many mentioned that the amount of benefits received was not enough to find *any* place to live, let alone a desired unit. Here, these respondents allude to the irony of the "social safety net" in that the TANF benefits they are eligible to receive do not provide them enough to survive:

Danielle (Early 30's, H): It's not enough to afford to sustain permanent housing and take care of the, you know, necessities that we need like new shoes, or clothes, new clothes or whatever, when it comes to school for my older son...that's just rent alone, pretty much. Or not even that.

Lula (Early 50's, H): They don't give you enough (laughs). They don't! To make, for the size that we have, to make it. There's no way.

Hilda (Early 30's, W): Well I think that's a very low amount. Its not enough to survive that's for sure. I wish it was more but it's the system and there's nothing I can do to change it.

ME: How does that make you feel?

Hilda: Well it makes me feel kind of helpless. Hopeless, frustrated. Just makes every day living a challenge, basically.

Survival is commonly referenced in the narratives. Many, like Hilda, simply felt frustrated by a welfare system seemingly designed to assist her, and yet unable to provide her with a decent standard of living. In addition to not providing a decent standard of living, several provisions aim to reduce benefits or to exclude particular populations from access to them.

Certain provisions in PRWORA (1996) allow the state to deny welfare aid to applicants who have ever been convicted of a felony drug offense or a violent crime. With the overwhelming literature that exists suggesting the poor (Reiman & Leighton, 2009) and people of color (Berndt, 2003; Bushway & Piehl, 2001; and Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2000, Alexander, 2010) are disproportionately targeted and sanctioned via the criminal justice system, we begin to see how institutional forms of welfare racism (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001), overlap with institutional forms of racial discrimination via the criminal justice system (see also Roberts, 2002; Ayres, 1998; Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008) as a broader manifestation of contemporary systemic racism (Feagin, 2001; Feagin & Vera, 2001). In other words, targeted and sanctioned discrimination in the criminal justice system and welfare racism clearly overlap here by providing an avenue to limit benefits to populations of color, thus making it difficult for them to find sufficient housing.

The point here is not that TANF needs to provide *more* money—and it may, but rather that the provisions that allow the state to restrict the amount of aid given to an individual or family disproportionately restricts aid to people of color. This process is reinforced by the color-blind discourse outlined by Bonilla-Silva (2003) and Neubeck and Cazenave (2001).

For instance, since one of the seemingly race-neutral categories used to exclude people from TANF is that of criminal convictions, PRWORA (1996) creates the illusion of color-blindness since it excludes people based on their unlawful behavior. Again, contemporary systemic racism is not expressed in racially explicit terms (“whites only”); instead it’s often masked by apparently neutral institutional policies and practices that ultimately create disproportionate outcomes that adversely affect people of color and privilege those constructed as white.

An example of a racially disproportionate outcome from seemingly race-neutral policy can be seen in the following narratives as we discuss the notion of sufficient living. Sufficient living reflects the things respondents felt they needed to be comfortable in a unit. For instance, adequate income from employment and food would be one example of living sufficiently. In order to determine if PRWORA (1996) truly excludes its beneficiaries from achieving sufficient housing, I first wanted to see what their definition of sufficient *living* was. Not surprisingly, both sufficient housing and sufficient living are obviously interconnected but each respondent had a unique interpretation of both. For instance, Marlene, a White, single mother in her mid 20’s, who has lived at the shelter for only a couple weeks, describes her definition of sufficient living:

Marlene: Having a roof, having the electricity always on, having the water always running. Sufficient living would be us in a room like here. [The Shelter] is sufficient living. I’m ok with this. If this lasted longer I would be ok doing this for longer. It’s having enough to keep CPS off your back and to keep your kids fed and warm.

Marlene’s narrative is indicative of a few things. First, her definition of sufficient living essentially describes a fully functioning unit. Second, Marlene says that living at a homeless shelter would be sufficient for her. Her definition is especially telling since she claims the shelter is enough to keep Child Protective Services (CPS) from investigating her, which again alludes to the need for a sufficient place to live. As I will discuss in the section on sufficient housing, the need for sufficiency is very common. According to the definition of sufficient

housing I offered earlier (see Kabul, 2002), affordability and functionality are a part of what makes a unit sufficient. Marlene's definition of what amounts to "sufficient" is so narrow that it describes a unit that is meager and arguably insufficient.

ME: Do you believe (state assistance) fulfills your definition of sufficient living?

Marlene: No, because even here at the shelter, for my family size, my income is not enough to even get help with transitional housing. We're too poor to get help at the homeless shelter. So obviously it's not enough. We could barely rent a room in this county and renting a room would be between \$350 and \$400 a month. I know, I've looked into it. And that would be for the three of us. And that's not counting buying diapers [or] anything else. That's just a roof.

Marlene does not believe her TANF benefits can fulfill her definition of sufficient living. She uses transitional housing²⁶, a rental assistance program, as an example. In order to receive transitional housing the head of household must be employed but as Marlene explained earlier, she is receiving TANF and is therefore ineligible. Despite many stereotypes accusing people of color of being lazy and content being on aid (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2003), when asked about sufficient standards of living most made reference to being able to *earn* enough money, and not simply receiving it through state assistance. The lack of affordable housing combined with the need to provide for her family will ultimately leave Marlene no choice but to simply accept whatever unit will take her family in. This unit will more than likely be insufficient by Marlene's own definition.

Danielle is a Hispanic mother of two children in her 30's who lives with her fiancé, an African American, at the shelter. Due to unforeseen circumstances, this is Danielle's second stay at the shelter.

ME: What is your definition of sufficient living?

Danielle: Being able to afford to pay for an apartment or house, whatever is accommodating to your family. Have the necessities instead of having to struggle and figure out where you're going to pull that money. If it's going to be from somebody else or somebody giving you money, like, randomly. You know whatever. Or, if I was employed getting extra hours to make up for that. .

²⁶ A more thorough explanation of the Transitional Housing Program (THP) is provided below.

Danielle strongly connects affordability and survival. Danielle not only believes that a unit should be affordable but that in order to live sufficiently her income must be consistent. In other words, temporary and inconsistent employment will not help her family find a decent place to live. As a result of the lack of a consistent income, Danielle describes a constant struggle to provide her family with the bare necessities. This would support the notion that living on welfare is not as lavish as Ronald Reagan made it out to be as he demonized the welfare recipients during his run for presidency.

ME: Do you believe (state assistance) fulfills your definition of sufficient living?

Danielle: No because it's not enough to support a family of four. Even with well educated²⁷ parents, cause I'm having problem sustaining permanent employment.

Again, with her family size, TANF does not fulfill her definition of sufficient living. Even while receiving TANF, Danielle believes day-to-day life is a struggle. As Danielle—and most of the other narratives—indicated, the need for an affordable, fully functioning unit is essential to living sufficiently. In fact, all but one person claimed that the TANF they received fails to fulfill their definition of sufficient living primarily because it does not provide enough to sustain a unit but also because of the stigma that receiving welfare imposes (I will discuss this in detail below). This suggests that populations receiving TANF benefits are not often able to use their benefits to find or sustain a place to live, and directly contradicts one of the main goals listed on the official TANF website that claims [the state is] “[assist] needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes.” TANF aims to help families stay in their own homes yet willingly restricts benefits necessary to acquire or maintain a place to live.

²⁷ Danielle had completed vocational training as a dental assistant. She has been working as a dental assistant for over five years before losing her job.

These definitions also draw attention to very powerful notions of social control. When asked to provide a definition of sufficient living or housing, respondents typically identified conditions that would appear meager if not insufficient by common standards. By limiting benefits to the poor (and poverty is disproportionately experienced by populations of color) we are arguably steering them into the least desirable areas of society and they are left with fewer options when it comes to housing themselves or their families. Also, by limiting benefits we are lowering the bar on what most would consider a “good” unit or living situation would be. In effect, this process arguably conditions the poor to accept inferior living conditions. As a result, options like the SJFS, other available shelters, or below-standard housing arrangements are most of what is left to choose from.

In addition to enforcing this subtle form of social control, PRWORA (1996) gives landlords the right to deny an individual the opportunity to secure housing if they have a drug related felony or a violent crime on their record²⁸. As a consequence of the war on drugs, whose repressive policies have disproportionately targeted populations of color, these sectors of the population have been selectively affected by the punitive policies of the last three decades (Alexander, 2010). Thus, people of color are more often subject to negative interactions with the police (Gordon, 2007), more likely to be incarcerated for felony crimes (Agnew, 1999), and more likely to be excluded from sufficient housing as a consequence of these contacts with the criminal justice system. As Selma, an employee at the San Jose Family shelter explains it, more likely to look for insufficient housing just to find shelter.

Selma (Mid 20’s, W): [Major barriers would be] finding a landlord who will rent and allow a family, a mother with her children or a mother and father with children—the children are the part that makes it difficult—allow them to move into a small space. There is a lot of slum lords out there that will fill every room with as many bodies as possible as long they’re making the rent. So, you could be living in a three bedroom apartment, that’s 800 sq ft, and have 12 people in there. So you have to find the right landlord and then the living environment that you’re putting your children in is a huge limitation.

²⁸ Often referred to as the “One Strike and You’re Out” initiative.

Selma discusses the stark reality of her position as an employee at the SJFS in that she is often unable to provide each client with a long list of housing options from which to choose from. One particular difficulty for her is the fact that many of her clients are not working and have children. Therefore, she must look to room rentals—within a larger house, apartment, or garage—to find shelter. Often overlooked in the search is the need to find a safe environment for each family. Safety is a necessary component of sufficient housing. As Selma explains it, client safety is not a high priority for the landlords who are willing to rent rooms. In fact, neighborhood or housing safety is not even discussed prior to her clients moving out of the shelter, mainly because clients are aware of what type of housing their limited income will provide them.

While most of her clients struggle to find work in the three months that they have to live at SJFS, many are forced to search for housing with the minimal benefits that TANF provides. This makes for a ticking clock, forcing them to take anything they can while they can. After their three months expire, they are forced to leave the shelter. Some exceptions are granted²⁹ but few people make it past the three month time limit. Bianca, a mid 20's Hispanic single mother and current member of the shelter, supplements Selma's narrative by voicing her own frustration with a system that does not give her many options and, thus, steers her and others like her to choose from the least desirable units:

ME: Do you believe your welfare can fulfill your definition of sufficient housing?

Bianca: Yeah, if I could find a renter that would actually rent to me, yeah. Cause I do actually work part time, so the amount of money that I get with cash assistance would be sufficient to help me pay my rent for at least a one bedroom...I would have to say, some landlords are a bit, I want to say, hesitant to rent to someone whose, at least half of my income, for rent, would come from my welfare. And I think that for some reason they look down upon that. So it's really hard to find somebody to rent to you when, on your application, most of your rent

²⁹ If a client's exit date is somewhere in the middle of the month and they provide an intent to rent—a letter from their prospective landlord—saying they will be moving in on a date that is after their shelter exit date, the shelter will extend them until that date.

money would come from welfare. I've noticed that a lot of the places that landlords do accept, you know, section 8 housing or, you know, they don't have a problem with welfare being part of the payment for rent has been limited to, I don't want to say ghetto places (laughs), but they're not the nicest neighborhoods. A lot of them, I think, consist, in like, in mainly Hispanic areas of Sunnyvale. I've rented out in there. East San Jose is a really big part of it. But other than that, I haven't been able to find, you know, a decent place, like, where I'd ideally like to live in Santa Clara.

Bianca touches on a few issues of importance. First, she describes how her welfare benefits actually prevent her from being considered for housing because the income they provide is not the preferred income source for most landlords. This is particularly interesting because she is not only receiving welfare, but earned income as well. Despite being a working citizen, she is steered to housing in less than desirable areas to landlords who will overlook the welfare issue. Second, she describes the areas to which she is steered to as "ghetto" and "mainly Hispanic." Bianca has rented in areas similar to East San Jose in the past, claiming she lived in Watsonville, which prepared her for what she has experienced on the "East Side". However, the shelter is what brought her to East San Jose and is the only reason she would choose to live in East San Jose. She explains one of the reasons she dislikes the "East Side" is because:

Bianca: it's really constantly patrolled by the police department, I've noticed. There's always police officers around here and I'm not sure why.

ME: Well, why do you think?

Bianca: Why do I think? Well, I think, mainly, because the people that live around here are mainly Hispanic and they feel like there's an issue with gangs and all of that stuff...associated with, with, with what most people associate with Hispanics. Gang activity, illegal activity and stuff like that. So, I think that's mainly the reason they patrol here. I don't think it's, you know, to keep the people safe or to make us feel safe. I think it's just because they're trying to find somebody doing something wrong.

Bianca offers an explanation for the over-policing of the "ghetto" and expresses the grand irony of the police force in that, to populations of color, police are viewed as a potential threat rather than a protective force (Gilliom, 2001). Bianca's narratives emphasize how PRWORA's neutral intentions are institutionalized and stripped of all racial discourse. The

following narrative by Hilda, a White, single mother in her early 30's, offers support to Bianca's arguments:

Hilda: Ghettoish would be run down, older units, broken down, cars parked, people kind of just hanging out, music maybe at an inappropriate level. A lot of garbage around...A lot of crime and police activity, helicopters around, that would be ghettoish to me.

ME: How did you feel living in a ghettoish community?

Hilda: The first place that I lived was pretty bad. I didn't feel very safe at times. So the landlord wouldn't do anything so I reinforced the door myself. I had it locked down and latches and stuff, so I felt more comfortable with the door. Cause it just had, it didn't even have a deadbolt. I mean, someone could just kick it in and you know...But anyways I fixed all that myself. I felt ok once I kind of got to know the neighbors but you know sometimes when it rains it pours and of course I was the only white person, so I kind of got, you know...

ME: Why was that difficult?

Hilda: Well, because being the only white person you can be kind of like feel most prejudiced on, you know. Cause it was primarily black or Mexican. I was the only white person.

Again, we see the term “ghetto” used to describe the areas in which low income populations are steered into. The “ghetto” has come to symbolize the area in a city where highly concentrated populations of people of color live. It has also become a way racial stereotypes are covertly spread through mainstream public discourse (Conley, 1999). Here, Hilda refers to the lack of landlord assistance with security issues as the primary reason she didn't feel safe but also makes reference to the fact that the “ghetto” is oversaturated with people of color when she describes herself as the only white person. I don't assume this was inadvertent. Historically, whites have stereotyped people of color as delinquent “super-predators” (Feagin, 2001; Alexander, 2010) and her comments here suggest that she may have stereotypical views of the people of color in her neighborhood. Hilda, with relatively little TANF aid per month, is forced to search for housing in areas that will accept her and as a consequence must put her own stereotypical fears—and her own internalization of welfare racism³⁰—aside in order to shelter her family. As we previously discussed, welfare racism

³⁰ More evidence of Welfare Racism is evident here as she attributes the creation of PRWORA to “so many other people just kept having babies just to get the money. I think that it was abused in that way.”

uses stereotypes to enhance public fears related to the provision of assistance to the poor (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). However, Hilda, a white single mother who also receives TANF benefits has internalized the very same anti-welfare fears as those who despise her and wish to restrict her access to welfare benefits. The irony of her narrative should not be overstated but it allows us to refer back to the notion of superiority that white culture has constructed (Feagin, 2010). Hilda believes she is more entitled to her TANF benefits because she has not been abusing the welfare system the way other recipients have. Yet, when asked whether she knew of anyone abusing the system, Hilda claimed she did not. However, Hilda's stereotypical views of the system have allowed her to situate herself above the average welfare recipient.

However illusory Hilda's views might be, they seem to reflect what Joe Feagin (2010) describes as the "white racial frame." The "white racial frame" is the general view that whites are superior in every aspect—social, political, economic—of social life. Furthermore, the "white racial frame" serves to enhance the notion of privilege and entitlement that has been common for centuries. Again, Hilda believes she is more entitled to welfare benefits because she does not abuse TANF the way others have. These types of divisive claims negatively reinforce stereotypes that contribute to reproduce the subjugation of people of color. Yet, as the "white racial frame" suggests, the internalization of viewpoints such as Hilda's is not uncommon. In fact, internalization is a key component of the "white racial frame," specifically, and of systemic racism more broadly (Feagin, 2001; 2010).

In fact, as more and more people of color are forced to pay the civil penalties that follow incarceration, society will continue to experience how seemingly neutral policies and practices can perpetuate systemic racism. In turn, this will effectively steer low income and

marginalized populations into insufficient housing. While Bianca and Hilda's narratives reveal how TANF benefits primarily limited their ability to find housing, others like Danielle feel that discrimination was the primary source.

ME: Are there any limitations on where you can live? Can you describe some of the limitations?

Danielle: The law says I [can live wherever I want] but I don't feel like that's how it really is.

ME: why?

Danielle: Because of discrimination. Because me and my finance are an interracial couple. So once they see that he's African American, it's like, the whole tone changes. Like their attitude changes once they see him. Cause I purposely don't come with him, not because I'm embarrassed of him but because I know how, like, other people can think. Or because of their diverse cultures they don't accept them as much as they do they're own. That's just natural for anybody, pretty much. You would befriend, you know, if you're Filipino, you're going to befriend them before you befriend a stranger outside your culture.

Due to losing their jobs, Danielle and her fiancé are living at the shelter for the second time in over a year. Danielle understands that proving racism is extremely difficult because it is impossible to know a person's true intentions as that person follows policy and procedure—once again, a facet of color-blind racism. However, Danielle is not shy in admitting she does not initially take her fiancé, an African American, with her to look for a unit because his racial background can hurt their chances of acquiring the unit. While we cannot definitively say whether their misfortune is due to their lack of good credit, income, or employment history, we may be able to use Danielle's emotional gauge to explain this outcome. She claims that on occasions where she and her boyfriend went together to search for a unit, she sensed a change in attitude once her fiancé was introduced to the prospective landlord, from when they first connected on the phone. As Feagin (2001) argues, racial attitudes can change with some type of visual cue, most commonly skin color. In Danielle's case, her fiancé is, as she describes him, a "dark" African American. Again, this is not to infer that all of her negative interactions with landlords are related to the fact that her fiancé is African American, but rather to point

out that the negative interaction she has consistently had in her search for housing is substantiated by the literature.

Danielle also believes the law restricts her from freely choosing where to live. She claims the best year of her life was when she was living in a Transitional Housing³¹ unit in Cupertino, California but realizes that due to her current unemployment and TANF assistance, she will not be able to find a unit there or in any other neighborhoods she might prefer over the “East Side.” Instead, because of her need to secure housing before her three months expire at the shelter, she will be forced to take any unit she can find.

These narratives suggest that PRWORA (1996) leaves its beneficiaries with very few alternatives when it comes to securing housing. By creating provisions that restrict aid, TANF steers its recipients towards unsafe and undesirable neighborhoods. Furthermore, as an agent of social control, it limits the rental pool to mainly undesirable units, allowing the standard for “good” to be set lower than it should to be. As we will see later in our discussion of sufficient housing, this reorientation of the perceptions, definitions, and expectations of poor people of color may arguably be the most significant consequence of PRWORA’s color-blind dynamic. However, on a more substantial level, what tends to be unrecognized is the frustratingly hard time people of color have in obtaining employment. So to discuss how PRWORA (1996) adversely affects its beneficiaries we must first discuss why so many of them are on the program in the first place. Of particular importance here are the barriers people of color face in earning a living, especially when the same laws governing access to TANF influence who may be hired for a job.

Second Class Status

³¹ Transitional Housing is a program very similar to Section 8 housing in that a tenant will rent a unit and regardless of the contract rent will only pay 30% of their income as rent.

Nabil says he is no stranger to discrimination. He grew up on the “East Side” and was involved in gangs until 1999, when he was arrested for felony assault. After spending a year in prison³² he came out with a renewed sense of self. He soon married his current wife and became a father figure to her only daughter. However, despite paying his civil debt to society he finds it hard to change public perceptions about him:

Nabil (Early 40’s, H): I understand that there are a lot of young people my age that might look like me that are doing criminal [activities] for whatever reasons they have. But not everybody. Not everybody is like that so they don’t have to look at every Hispanic or every black person. Even white people or Asians that dress a certain way or just cause look a certain way, they don’t have to look at everyone of us like that just because a few of them that are dressed the way they dress or look how they look that are doing things that are illegal.

Nabil discusses the stereotypical Hispanic as looking like a “gangster” but claims that although he chooses to dress this way he is in no way involved in any gang activity. He acknowledges the reality that a lot of Hispanics reside in San Jose—particularly on the East Side—and that some are involved in gang activity. In particular, he maintains that his appearance makes him an easy target for unwarranted discrimination. Take, for example, this interaction he had with the police at 4:00 a.m. as he was walking home:

Nabil: [They told me] you’re under the influence. Man, I was just coming from a brother’s house and he’s a Christian, I [was] actually being honest and legit with these guys and they’re not [having it]...after an hour and a half [they make me] take my socks off. [Take] my socks off and then [they told me], ‘I’m going to take you down to the station.’ Well take me down but can you give me a ride back? I ain’t got no other way [back], its four o’clock in the morning, I’m just walking home. I’m not under the influence, they can’t prove I’m under the influence but they still harass. I’ve had that a couple times, saying I match people’s description but for no reason. Just because of the way I look people fear. I feel because they think ‘oh wait, he’s young and he’s Hispanic, he’s on the east side of San José, I mean hold on, he might be guilty of something.’ I have been pulled over and I’m not going to lie to you [told] ‘you match the description of someone that just killed somebody else.’ And they tried to throw gang relation into it. I’ve had that twice from cops.

Nabil’s narrative is emblematic of the reason’s police are often considered as a threat in low income neighborhoods. In areas such as the “East Side,” residents feel that the police have ulterior motives other than to serve and protect. Here, Nabil clearly describes a case of racial profiling, which could have had disastrous consequences on his future ability to become

³² He was sentenced to two years but was released in one because of good behavior.

employed or sustain a current position should the police have attempted to charge him with a crime. However, it is the targeted sanction of interactions such as these that is particularly troubling. By targeting low income neighborhoods for constant police presence, a disproportionate amount of the residents the police will interact with will be people of color. In effect, residents of the targeted neighborhoods will be more likely to be charged with a crime than residents of a higher income neighborhood; this in turn will further affect their ability to obtain or sustain employment and, by extension, sufficient housing.

In addition, Nabil references a major ideological component of contemporary systemic racism with his mention of fear (Feagin, 2001). Typically, men of color—mainly, but not exclusively African Americans—are stereotyped as violent, super predators in the mass media, and indeed, in the American mainstream. Specifically, because of the significant Hispanic presence in Santa Clara County, men such as Nabil are more often victim to this stereotype in San Jose. In his narrative, Nabil discusses harassment from police officers while walking home, all based on, according to him, the way he looked. He is not alone. Danielle has also witnessed similar treatment from law enforcement. She believes that since she is Hispanic and her fiancé is African American, they are more likely to experience discrimination. Here she describes the harassment she and her boyfriend experienced one night:

Danielle: You know I've seen it with just law enforcement, that he was stopped for no reason like he was just reaching in the car getting something. And then another officer pulled up and they were like 'oh, well, he's clean he's good to go.' It was a female officer that said that, she pulled up last. And the male officer was still looking for reasons to take him or whatever. Just bother him when his kids were there and I was there. I don't know, it just really bothers me to see him...he's not really, he tries to, I don't know how...he doesn't act ghetto, like the typical stereotype. He talks really proper and is really knowledgeable. It just because of his skin color and the tone of it is darker...

Danielle and Nabil allude to a few issues here, first and foremost the seemingly unwarranted interactions they had with the police. Both scenarios relate in that the

interviewees describe how the police were trying to force an arrest on them without having any probable cause to do so. Nabil talks about how the officers could not find a legitimate reason to arrest him, yet they still wanted to arrest him under suspicion of being under the influence. Danielle discusses how the male officer who initially stopped them continued trying to find a reason to arrest her fiancé even after a second officer had cleared them to leave.

The second issue involves their individual references to racial stereotypes. Both felt that their outlook played a significant role in their interactions with the police and both incidents are examples of how contemporary systemic racism has been institutionalized. Stereotyped fears of people of color have allowed the state to over-police concentrated areas of poverty, which results in a huge disparity in incarceration for the mainly Hispanic and African American population that resides on the East Side. While Nabil and Danielle do not provide us with specific details that may bring truth to why they were each stopped that night, these narratives and, specifically, these types of negative experiences have been well documented in previous research (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Feagin, 2006, 2001; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). Most importantly, we need to recognize the life-long impact such police tactics may have on people of color, particularly in regard to civil penalties suffered by convicted felons (Alexander, 2010).

As Alexander (2010) notes, a felony conviction implies a potential lifelong legal discrimination, which in turn relegates entire populations to second class status. Specifically, a felony will prevent individuals from obtaining any type of public housing, allow discrimination by private landlords, make persons ineligible for TANF and food stamps, prevent ex-felons from accessing some educational programs and, most importantly as it

pertains to sufficient housing, require them to identify and explain their felony whenever they apply for a job. While committing a felony is a serious offense, the narratives above describe scenarios where the police were more than willing to arrest and charge for what seemed to amount to anything they possibly could—no probable cause or reasonable suspicion required.

Again, it is important to note that discrimination is not simply limited to the criminal justice system. However, the police do have a tremendous impact on people of color's ability to find employment. But, as Alexander (2010) explains, being convicted of a felony could have more to do with the lack of resources available in the justice system, such as lack of proper indigent defense, than with actually paying the price for the crime committed. But, in essence, the mainly African American and Hispanic population disproportionately overpays. They are branded for life for what may amount to a minimal drug offense, and it is these people who disproportionately seek, and often never find, suitable employment and sufficient housing.

Nevertheless, places like San Jose Family Shelter exist to assist those who need a second chance.³³ And as we will see, their struggles, frustrations, and most importantly for some, their victories are all to achieve normalcy in a world where the deck has been stacked against them.

Institutional Barrier

One of the two main goals at SJFS is to find employment—the other is to find housing. For most residents the biggest problem they have is being able to find someone to hire them. Nabil's narrative confirms this and as our discussion shifted to discrimination he described many instances where he felt stereotyped against when trying to obtain

³³ SJFS does not conduct a criminal background check prior to entry. However, clients are asked about their criminal background at entry, only to identify potential hurdles clients and case managers must overcome.

employment. It is important here to recognize that in the era of colorblindness instances of direct discrimination tend to become less frequent and visible, but this is exactly what Nabil was referring to as our discussion continued on. Here is a narrative of Nabil's recent job interview:

Nabil: It went pretty good, they said they'd call but you never know if they're going to call or not. I went to an interview last Friday...and they said they would call us in a week. I really don't call it an interview because they interviewed us, I went with a friend of mine, they interviewed us in the lobby. I really don't call that an interview. Basically, I don't know. I can't call it but it's not going to stop me from trying...

Nabil kept using the phrase "can't call it" to describe his interaction with this potential employer. At one point he started to actually feel bad because he felt as if he was making up an excuse. But it becomes clear what his phrase means as he continues his story:

Nabil: [W]e both were in the lobby, it was an Asian place that we got from the internet for a packaging worker. So we went in person to go fill out the application like it asked but it was you know an Asian atmosphere. As soon as we got in there they told us, you know, you got to take the applications home. Fine, we took them across the street—[Friend] even asked them is it ok if we take them across the street instead of coming back home cause we're nowhere near the shelter here³⁴. So we went across the street, they said it was fine. We come back in and there is people sitting in the lobby filling out their applications that are Asian. That's the first part. Second part is they said you get to sit down for an interview [on the job posting]. I guess everyone is getting interviewed. They take in the Asian people in the back and they stayed back there with them 5-10 minutes, right. No way. They interviewed both of us at the same time in the lobby and it was under three minutes.

What Nabil "can't call" is the explicit discrimination he felt as he was applying for the job. Nabil clearly experienced overt discrimination and claimed this had been the case on several other occasions. What Nabil does not mention here directly is that he has over 14 years of warehouse experience, making him more than qualified for this and many other positions he's applied to. Yet, he feels lost when trying to explain how he has been unemployed for over two years now. Again, he is not alone in his experiences as over 30% of the unemployed in California are either Hispanic or African American (Salinas, 2010; Glantz, 2010; US Department of Labor Statistics, 2010).

³⁴ Shelter rules prohibit residents from being at the shelter from 8:30am to 3pm.

As the data indicates, a disproportionate percentage of the unemployed are people of color. Alexander (2010) explains that since the 1970's, blue-collar jobs have slowly been lost to globalization (which implies that a non-union worker in a foreign country will perform the same job at a fraction of the cost) or to more efficient technology that has reduced the need for low-skilled workers, primarily at the expense of a lower-class, unskilled labor force. In addition, many of these jobs were based in the inner city, where many of its inhabitants had easy access to work. However, with the shift to suburbanization came the opportunity to relocate many jobs to the more spacious suburbs. Rosenbaum and Popkin (1991, see also Wilson, 1991) conducted a study to compare the employment experiences of a group of low income African Americans who had been assigned apartments in the suburbs with a control group of the same demographic who had been assigned apartments in the inner city. The findings indicate that those who moved to the suburbs were significantly more likely to find a job than those still living in the city. When asked to explain why it might be easier to find work in the suburbs, nearly all responded that it was due to the availability of jobs³⁵.

While living at the shelter, the respondents are faced with a similar dilemma. They are expected to find employment but need to travel long distances to obtain it. San Jose's east side is not ripe with employment opportunities, leaving many people to travel to the West side, which is an hour by bus at minimum. With little or no transportation available this can be very difficult and, most importantly, expensive. In addition, as mentioned before, many of the clients are receiving TANF and must comply with its requirements to continue receiving their subsidy or risk being sanctioned. Here Selma provides a very general breakdown of the requirements:

³⁵ While Rosenbaum and Popkin use African Americans for their study, it could be similarly applicable to Hispanics living in San Jose due to their status as the dominant ethnic group. Furthermore, San Jose is an ideal example of urban sprawl, with city itself being ___ square miles.

Selma: [Recipients] need to participate in 32 hours a week at minimum of work readiness. You can be receiving CALWORKS if you're working no more than, what is it, 111 hours a month, something like that, which basically whittles down to 32 hours a week. So, if you're working more than that, unfortunately, you don't qualify for CALWORKS. If you're working less than that, you will be filling your time working at least 32 hours a week—you may be required to participate in job readiness.

Selma points out the need for each recipient to participate in at least 32 hours a week in CALWORKS, a work readiness program required by the state. However, she does not mention that CALWORKS is not mandatory for all TANF recipients. Since welfare dollars now come in the form of block grants from the federal government, the government in return asks the states to comply with certain criteria or risk losing their grant money. One of the criteria is that a certain percentage of TANF recipients, per state, must be enrolled in a state funded jobs program, in this case called CALWORKS. California is required to have 30% of its recipients attend CALWORKS but it sends closer to 50% (Daguerre, 2008). This undoubtedly leaves many recipients without the proper support needed to find employment.

Selma also points out that even if someone were to find employment, in order to continue receiving welfare you must work less than 32 hours a week. Unfortunately, in order to continue receiving welfare while employed part-time, you must continue to attend CALWORKS if you are among the 50% assigned to the program. If you find a full time job, even at minimum wage, you will be removed from the program. However, for some families, working part time and receiving welfare benefits may not even be worth the trouble given how meager the benefits are.

ME: Any impressions upon hearing how much aid your family receives?

Selma: Well, it's definitely way too low to sustain the number of people in the families, especially if the parents, if the adults, have been receiving aid, have been on a case for more than five years then they only receiving [aid] for the kids. Which is, it cuts down the amount significantly. Its not enough to even raise one child on.

ME: How does that limit what you try to do for them at the shelter?

Selma: I don't really think of it as limiting. I think its motivating to try to get them off of aid. That's what we focus on. Getting them a job, hopefully a full time job, so that they can support their family without having to rely on anyone else but themselves.

Selma briefly mentions TANF's five-year time limit, saying it significantly limits the amount of money a family at the shelter would have to raise their family on. Even though Selma agrees with the general view that the amount given is not enough to support a family, she indicates that she is not necessarily against the time limit when she describes it as a motivating³⁶ factor. It may be that, perhaps, Selma has reason to believe that those on TANF should be motivated by the restrictive time limit. Unfortunately, what Selma neglects is the fact that many of the residents are convicted felons and will not be allowed to receive benefits for themselves, only for their dependents. Therefore, in order to comply with TANF, many will be sent to CALWORKS daily, using resources that are already dwindled to attend, and then must deal with potentially having to overcome felony status in order to find employment. While she sees it as motivating, it might also be characterized as demeaning. This is not to say it is impossible, but I mention it because it may take an individual more than five years to get their life back together, especially considering that most employers use a seven year time limit when considering felonies. Arguably, the welfare system is setting this population up for failure by failing to account for these inconsistencies.

First, by granting employers a seven year time limit to consider felonies, the welfare system has made it especially difficult to obtain employment during those seven years. Despite paying the civil debt to society by serving the time an individual was sentenced, the individual could be held accountable for the entire seven years or longer. Second, by restricting TANF aid to ex-felons, the system significantly undermines these individuals'

³⁶ Racial stereotypes have often designated welfare recipients as lazy and unwilling to look for work while the state continues to subsidize them. Unfortunately, I did not catch this when I originally asked the question and it was all I could think about when I later analyzed this comment. Therefore, no follow up question was asked. However, there were other comments I later came to highlight that showed exactly how the "white racial frame" acts and thinks (Feagin, 2009).

chances of succeeding. The already diminished prospects of finding employment, coupled with the minimal aid provided by TANF for dependents only, forces individuals to find alternative means of income to support themselves and/or their families. In some cases, this could lead to illegal activity.

Many folks, like Albert, have a better understanding of the system they are forced to live with. Having a criminal record has precluded him from obtaining employment for years and he is not reticent to explain why:

Albert: I tried to do the work thing and it just wasn't happening for some reason.

ME: Why did you think it wasn't happening?

Albert: Well, I know why it wasn't happening?

ME: Why did you think it wasn't happening?

Albert: Because, um, of my past. And my criminal background, I had the experience, you know. I have qualifications. I went in and took their little computer tests and passed with flying colors. But as soon as the criminal background came up, it was not under consideration. Now, more so now, I feel that, maybe the fact that I had a criminal background and the fact that I was Hispanic, the two consolidated a little bigger exposure than it would for most people.

Albert is referring to the embedded discrimination in employment. As a felon, he is not subject to the same discrimination laws as non-felons. Even if he files a lawsuit, Albert will not be able to effectively argue his case in court unless he can prove that he did not get hired based on an individual, discursively explicit act of racial discrimination. Since these acts of explicit racism are rare in the era of colorblindness, he is somewhat helpless when it comes to legal options against a system that is comfortable letting him fail. How is he, as a man who wishes to do right by his family, supposed to earn a living and provide food and shelter, if he is continually overlooked because of his past? In addition, what Albert doesn't mention here is that his latest felony occurred more than seven years ago. He served his full prison term, paid full restitution to the victim, wrote her a letter of apology—of which she responded by accepting his apology and for him to use her letter on job applications—and completed

multiple drug abuse rehabilitation programs. Yet his status as a felon has prevented him from obtaining a job. However, despite all of this Albert says it hurts more knowing that he did not get the job for which he was arguably the most qualified.

TANF provisions hurt families like Albert's the most. Since Albert has a felony drug offense on his record, he is ineligible to receive any assistance. Since his last felony over seven years ago, he has only been receiving cash aid for his daughters. His wife, Lula, is also ineligible due to being on the program over five years. As his oldest daughter reaches the age of 18, slowly their benefit amount has begun to creep up to a respectable \$726 a month—a significant amount by TANF standards for two dependent children. But this underscores the importance of earned income: this is simply not enough to raise, shelter, and feed a family.

Another case illustrating TANF's limiting provisions is Dustin. Dustin is a white male about 40 years old and this is his second time at the San Jose Family Shelter. He has an eight year old son that he recently regained custody of about two years ago—about the time he first came to the shelter—and whom he credits as the reason for his rebirth. For five years prior to his first stay at the shelter, Dustin had been addicted to Methamphetamines and was not caring for his son at all. He would routinely leave his son with his mother, who was on Section 8, and go out and do whatever was possible to score Meth. Dustin claims to be an excellent mechanic, saying it was one of the ways he would score drugs. Doing work under the table provided the cash he needed. He even mentioned being paid in Meth for some of his services. Not surprisingly, either, was to hear that he used much of his original welfare money on Meth instead of his son as it was intended.

ME: How long have you been on public assistance?

Dustin (M, 40's, W): Total, probably like three or four years, something like that. They don't give it to me, I don't get it for me. They give me food stamps and cash aid for my son, that's it. They give me \$300 cash and \$190 for food stamps.

ME: Any impressions upon hearing how much aid your family would be given?

Dustin: I don't know. You hear a lot of people they get 6, 7, 8, 900 dollars in food stamps. They get \$800 in cash for two or three or one kid two adults. My son eats that much in a week. He's a growing boy, he eats that much in a week. I take it anyways but it really doesn't do anything. It helps me pay my rent here so I can go look for work in other places.

Dustin is aware that his complaints about the amount of money he receives are a bit misguided since his actions are the reason for the sanction. But he does not accept the fact that his growing son is only able to receive such a minimal amount considering he is in his father's custody. Additionally, he is confused by how the system is attempting to support him when they insist he complete tasks that are not relevant to his success. For instance, here he discusses the issue he had with having to comply with CALWORKS:

Dustin: Last year when I was on it [TANF] they wanted me to do the CALWORKS program. But the case wasn't for me it was for my son. But they want me to go to this CALWORKS program because my name was on it and I never did [attend]. So that was another reason they dropped [me from welfare]. I tried talking to my worker, telling her the money was not for me, I'm not on the case, its just for my son, why do I have to do this? And so they just cut me off after I didn't fill out the report. This time when I got it, I went to the interview for the CALWORKS and they told me 'oh, you can't do it.' Ok, six months ago you cut me off cause I wouldn't do it. But now you're telling me I can't do it? I didn't understand it and I still don't.

Dustin mentions that he is not really literate, let alone computer literate, which makes his attendance at CALWORKS, or other similar programs, nearly useless to him. He simply would not be able to function. His ability to earn a living is tied to him being able to use his hands but unfortunately, many such jobs have disappeared or have a requirement of a clean criminal background. Either way, he does not see a very bright future for his child if he cannot find employment.

Furthermore, a bit of a paradox exists here. First, Dustin is a two-time drug offender. He was convicted of possession with intent to distribute Methamphetamines. However, meth does not carry a similar mandatory minimum the way crack cocaine does and therefore does not generate disproportionately harsh punishments a selected category of perceived "habitual users" as the crack v. powder cocaine differential does within the African American

community. As a result, Dustin is able to commit the same offense twice and be out of prison within a matter of years. However, had he been using crack cocaine, he would have been subjected to the harsh ten year mandatory minimum that disproportionately targets African Americans. Second, Dustin's own admissions are telling. He admits to using his welfare dollars to purchase drugs, which, by most, is commonly associated with the welfare fraud committed by people of color. I thought it was interesting that out of all the criminal activity that was discussed during these interviews, everyone described their crimes as necessitated by survival, except Dustin. He also happened to be the only white male interviewed.³⁷ In this regard, it is important to remember, as Michelle Alexander reminds us in her book (Alexander, 2010), that although African Americans and Hispanics have been disproportionately victimized by the war on drugs, poor whites were also among its privileged targets.

As I have argued following critical race theory, racism is now systemic, and its institutional entrenchment is predicated on color-blind policies and practices that greatly influence the lives of people of color. These policies, such as PRWORA (1996), though neutral on paper, have created a selective system by which mainly people of color must navigate in order to find sufficient housing. Specifically, as I will argue below, the inability to earn money greatly diminishes any chance you have to obtaining sufficient housing.

Show Me The Money

Being employed plays a particularly huge roll in obtaining a place to live. All landlords require you to provide some amount of money up front to show you are interested in

³⁷ This paragraph may seem extremely harsh on Dustin. However, I felt it was necessary to discuss the paradox that exists between being white and being the "other." I also must note that I have an enormous amount of respect for Dustin. He was very sincere in his responses and genuinely wants to do right by his son. Something that isn't always on top of a former absentee father's priority list.

a unit, along with proof you can continue to afford the unit. However, what is sometimes lost with the transitioning homeless population is the difficulty some have in obtaining the money.³⁸ Here I will discuss the importance of earned income in relation to obtaining sufficient housing.

ME: What would you say are the major barriers to finding housing?

Selma: Money, money, money, money, money! Evictions, you know and bad credit, I don't really think is a barrier right now. Like a lot of people think that it is but landlords are really willing to work with people. I find that full disclosure is the best thing. When a person has bad credit the landlord just charges them a ridiculously high move in deposit, which then is a barrier, because they might not necessarily have the money to move in. So, I would say, that the major barriers are the evictions on your record, that's a big one, and adequate income.

Adequate income is the key to finding a place to live. However, as is the case with many of the interviewees, they do not possess the resources necessary to find a unit that satisfies their needs. Several possible reasons for the lack of income have already been discussed³⁹. Here, however, I will discuss the impact as it pertains to finding housing.

The inability to find employment, for whatever reason, has led many people to search for alternative means of income, mainly welfare and the underground economy. While welfare hardly provides a steady stream of income, it does provide some stability to those who are compliant with the program. Among recipients, however, it has become an issue for those searching for housing. As previously mentioned people on welfare carry a stigma that is often unexpressed but heavily present when trying to rent a unit. Bianca attested to this when she mentioned she could not rent a unit because welfare was not the optimal source of income among landlords. The issue is clear: the welfare system is arguably set up to limit people of color from obtaining employment and steers them to obtain alternative sources of income, such as welfare. Then, the very welfare assistance they need in order to survive is used

³⁸ As I continue the discussion of systemic racism, I must refer to the effect employment discrimination may have on this population's ability to access sufficient housing.

³⁹ See above for a more in depth discussion of systemic racism and employment discrimination.

against them when trying to obtain housing. So, how is this population supposed to obtain sufficient housing? The answer to this question is that they are not supposed to. Nabil discusses the reality of his situation when describing what is preventing him from renting a unit:

Nabil: Landlords don't discriminate if you have money. Money talks and BS walks. We had a one bedroom apartment on Reed [Ave] and we had another studio on 24th St and we got both of those by flashing money. [Landlords] fear what they fear, that's in themselves. Landlords [just want] cash, they don't care about your situation, they don't care if you're out on the street. I mean if you have the money, fine, if you don't, get the hell out.

ME: So how does that prevent people in your position from getting a place?

Nabil: Right now with the way the economy is and work, it's preventing us pretty well. But with landlords, you need a job in order to keep a place. That's anywhere. With the economy the way it is, I don't have a high school diploma, I'm not educated. It makes it even harder for me.

The obvious importance of money is a guarantee that an individual can sustain the costs of a unit. Nabil has a felony, poor credit, and a questionable rental history, yet he knows that he could find a place to live as long as he was earning money.⁴⁰ Yet it's the lack of employment that continues to haunt him since his TANF subsidy does not provide him enough to afford *any* place to live. This, of course, was not uncommon amongst the respondents.

Marlene: All I've looked for is a room because I can't afford an apartment...When you email a person back or call them up and they ask you 'what's your income?' And I say 'welfare from the state' so, you know, its steady. They say, 'oh, well, no. If you're not working, no.' 'Oh, you have two kids, no.' It's a lot of no's...Oh, we can take you in but it's going to be more money.

ME: How does that make you feel?

Marlene: It's very discouraging and makes me feel like a bad mom (crying). Sorry.

Marlene supplements Bianca's narrative about the stigma of being on welfare. That even if she could afford the unit with a TANF subsidy, a landlord would not rent to her because she is not gainfully employed. In addition—and what is very common among this population—Marlene is not renting for just herself, she has two children as well. This means that what

⁴⁰It is important to note that he is not talking about sufficient housing, simply housing. The distinction is very important and will be discussed below.

Marlene would like to rent, such as a studio or even a room rental, will cost more for the same amount of space but with less space per person, due to the fact that landlords will almost always increase the price of the unit if there is more than one or two people. Further, as Marlene continues to be denied access to a unit, she is left with fewer and fewer options from which to choose from, which essentially force her to choose amongst the least desirable units in areas where landlords are comfortable placing multiple people in smaller units.

Alex, a white female employee at SFJS in her mid-thirties, supports this perspective: being employed is crucial.

ME: What would you say are the major barriers to finding housing?

Alex: Well, I think the fact that my clients don't have, sometimes don't have, a solid work history or enough money—you know when you rent an apartment and sometimes they're like your credits iffy, throw a little bit money at it and you can get an apartment. Well my clients don't have that option. And so they have sometimes iffy or non-existing credit. They've got sometimes spotty work history and I think it's difficult to find people who are willing to give that person a chance. When you throw a non profit in the middle of it, people are willing to work with it. They see it as doing a good deed. But when it was just you or me trying to get it done, me being someone who's population, I don't think they'd have the same luck.

Alex's role at the San Jose Family Shelter is to administer one part of the transitional housing program [THP]. THP takes individuals who would not otherwise qualify for housing and offer them monthly rental assistance. These individuals must come from a homeless shelter or be referred by an agency that currently provides homeless assistance. Income requirements are necessary but at minimum the prospective client must be working. Criminal background and credit checks are not required, which is one of the reasons this program is so popular amongst the transitional homeless population. In her narrative, Alex also alludes to another reason her program is so popular: it provides clients the legitimacy they need to obtain a place to live. During her interview, Alex attempted to tiptoe around my requests to provide reasoning behind certain sociological phenomena, such as why her clients couldn't simply find housing on their own.

ME: is it possible for your clients to go out and find housing on their own after your program?

Alex: No, I don't think it's impossible. I think what worries me is that we have one client who was really taken advantage of by this landlord, who kind of preyed on the fact that she didn't have good credit or she didn't have established work history even though she was working at the time. And essentially she ended up stealing her security deposit from her with which is how she ended up homeless. So, I think that it helps that we're there but I think that they can do it but I just worry sometimes that people take advantage of this population.

On face value, Alex is correct. It is not impossible to find *some* type of housing. However, she alludes to the reality of the housing market for people of color in that it contains many predatory landlords waiting to take advantage of a population they feel have no rights⁴¹, or an inability to defend such rights. In this case, Alex's client was employed yet still managed to become homeless after their experience with a predatory landlord. Again, Alex's job is to provide her clients with the legitimacy they need to obtain a unit they otherwise would not be able to obtain. So, I continued the interview by suggesting she describe the environment her clients would experience if her program did not exist:

Alex: [Landlords] that don't care, the ones that don't care about any kind of renting history or work history. The ones that will take your money and basically turn away. And it doesn't matter about the apartment, if you get a leak in the faucet or a pipe burst, you know they don't care unless they're forced to fix the apartment, they won't.

Here, Alex stresses the importance of employment by clearly stating that her clients will have to look for units that are not safe from predatory landlords, and not proven efficient, functional apartments. Having the resources to obtain a unit of their choosing is not something many of her clients have ever experienced before. Therefore, most, if not all of Alex's clients have lived in less than desirable situations in the past. However, even though Alex's clients ultimately chose to live in less desirable units, minimizing the decision to do so as a result of individual flaw is irresponsible. Recall the chapter on systemic racism: the decisions made by Alex's clients are a result of social, economic, political, and ideological

⁴¹ A fact furthered by the lack of leases or contracts signed among tenants and landlords in these types of living situations. Everything (Rent amount, rules, etc...) is all by the landlord's word. Meaning, a landlord cannot be held liable in court for a contract that was never signed.

forces. Some of which her clients could control, most of which has been controlled for them. However, as I was speaking to Alex, I became curious to know just exactly what population she served. I was aware that she assists the transitional homeless population but that is a wide variety of individuals, so I sought answers for specifics.

ME: And how would you describe your population demographically? Race/ethnicity/age?

Alex: Ok so I have everyone from, actually, I have a younger grouping, my youngest is 19 and my oldest client is, trying to think of my oldest client, 35. So you know between that age group almost 100% Latin or Hispanic and African American.

Alex notes that almost 100% of her clients are people of color. She would also go on to mention that all of her clients were receiving welfare assistance. Some were employed and were receiving less welfare support than the others. But she seems to avoid answering the questions that I am most interested in, why are almost all her referrals people of color? Her narrative is telling.

ME: Why do you think that almost 100% of your group is Latin or African American?

Alex: yeah, I don't, yeah I couldn't even hazard a guess. Those are the referrals that we got. So I don't know, I can't speculate as to why it just fell out like that.

First, she couldn't hazard a guess; they are simply the referrals she received. Her response seemed suspiciously ambiguous. Perhaps Alex was trying to be diplomatic in her response. However, recall that in the era of color-blindness, dominant ideology denies the existence of racism. Alex may have unintentionally contributed to that theory by refusing to discuss the reason behind the disproportionate amount of people of color in her program. One thing is for sure, Alex clearly avoided a legitimate opportunity to express her thoughts on a very important issue that should be at the forefront of discourse in her profession.

ME: Do you feel like these populations are being steered towards these types of housing situations?

Alex: I think that they all come from shelters and so just by virtue of being in a shelter they are being steered towards THP. I mean we can only get referrals from people who have gone through some type of case management for homelessness. So I don't think it has anything to do with anything else I think it's just literally, they come in contact, everyone always wants to talk about THP and where you can get people in.

Here is where it becomes truly ambiguous. Alex has acknowledged that almost all of her referrals are people of color. She then introduces the circumstance that all referrals come from some type of case management for homelessness, which suggests that the people who are receiving homeless services in Santa Clara County are predominately people of color. Yet, her narrative implies that these referrals are simply unsystematic, and that, in theory the next group of referrals could contain no people of color. Alex again reproduces color-blind logic here by refusing to at least mention the thought that serious social or economic problems could be the reasons behind such a disproportionate amount of referrals for people of color.

Below, I will begin to discuss the reason why so many people are talking about THP and other housing programs. The lack of sufficient housing in Santa Clara County is startling. As I have already discussed, systemic racism is arguably responsible for steering people of color into these decrepit environments. But the narratives that follow will highlight just exactly how foul some of the units are. More importantly, they will explain what living in units such as these will do to an individual or family. In addition, a look back at my definition of sufficient housing is warranted, with a comparative analysis of how the literature's definition matches that of the narratives.

Sufficient Housing

In chapter one, I defined sufficient housing as a unit or dwelling that is secure and sanitary, able to reasonably support a person's physical and psychological well-being (Ytrehus, 2001; Kabir, 2002). Throughout this work, I have argued that systemic racism, through specific welfare reform, has prevented people of color from obtaining sufficient housing. Here I will examine what residents of the SJFS have defined for themselves as sufficient housing and compare it to the definition found in the literature. The narratives will

provide evidence that suggests not only that the units the respondents obtain are largely insufficient but that their own conceptualizations of sufficient housing—what people should reasonably expect for a dignified and healthy existence—were surprisingly meager and situated well below acceptable standards.

Sufficient housing was determined based on access to basic services, physical space, and affordability. What follows are the initial definitions of sufficient housing as spoken by the respondents.

Bianca: Sufficient housing, I would describe that as, that's a little difficult, but basically in terms a decent place to stay and within reasonable price. Because a lot of places that I see now, I think, are a little over priced, especially for the conditions that they're in. And I would say sufficient room to live in the premises that's being rented.

Bianca's definition of sufficient housing was the closest to the definition from the literature (see previous paragraph) from any of the respondents. Bianca believes that sufficient housing should be decent, affordable, and at the very end she mentions that it should have sufficient room for everyone living there.

Danielle: A place that is not... doesn't have health hazards like, you know, rodents, insects that are not ideal to have living with you as family members. So yeah, that's like a big thing because when I was younger I grew up with that and I don't want that for my children or my whole family.

Danielle believes sufficient housing is a unit void of health hazards. She recollects that as a child she lived in units with various health hazards and does not want the same for her children. Strikingly, this was her only criteria for sufficient housing. This is not to say she would not like her unit to be affordable and spacious, rather, when asked, she only felt it necessary to have a unit that did not put her children at risk.

Arlette: Affordable. You're comfortable with your landlord. You could have a one on one communication and just be comfortable at home. You know, affordable. Not worrying that the landlord is going to raise the rent next month without giving us a thirty day notice.

Arlette, a Hispanic mother in her late 30's, defines sufficient housing as being affordable.

During her narrative she often discussed the lack of affordable housing in Santa Clara County

and how it affected her family's ability to have a consistent place to stay. But the notion of affordability here reflects another aspect of the definition of sufficient housing found in the literature; the psychological well being of the residents of the household. For Arlette, affordability meant not constantly worrying about where the money was going to come from or where they would have to move to if they could not pay rent. Affordability also includes the quality of life one can afford after the rent is paid. What seemed important to Arlette was not only being able to afford the unit but also food, utilities, and other necessities for her children. Finally, she mentions that having a good relationship with her landlord as part of her definition. Again, what the respondents reasonably expect for a dignified and healthy living environment is surprisingly meager and insufficient when compared to the literature.

Dustin: basically, I really don't know. Safety for my son. Make sure things are clean and...I'm not looking for anything fancy. Make sure it's healthy for my son. I don't want my son growing up in the gangster neighborhood like I did. If it came down to it and I had to move into somewhere like that, I would. But I want something better for my son, I don't want him to live the life that I did. He is a smart kid. The housing would all be about my son. Making it safe for him.

Dustin, like Danielle, alludes to his past when defining sufficient housing. To Dustin, safety for his son is his only requirement. Because Dustin grew up in rough neighborhoods as a child, he simply wants to be able to rent a unit in an area where his son does not have to be afraid to go outside. Again, the psychological well being of the resident is covertly acknowledged. Living in a safe neighborhood, where an individual does not necessarily have to worry about the well being of their children while away from home is a luxury not afforded to many low income residents. So, from Dustin's viewpoint, his definition of sufficient housing is completely logical. However, what is unfortunate is that Dustin would have to struggle to achieve such a scenario.

These definitions are very telling in that all of them, at some point, touch on one of the three determining factors for sufficient housing. Bianca and Arlette focus on affordability

while Dustin and Danielle want to ensure a clean and safe environment for their families. Most of the respondents mentioned a sense of security, affordability, and sanitary living conditions. What is more telling, however, is that most of the definitions included a specific mention to a past experience. For example, Danielle and Dustin both recall their childhood experiences when giving their definition of sufficient housing. Danielle recalls living in rodent infested environments as a child and does not want the same experiences to be transferred to her children. Unfortunately, Danielle's narrative included her experience in horrible living conditions as an adult with her children and fiancé in a tiny studio apartment.

Danielle: [My fiancé and I] actually had problems where we were staying, when I moved with him, because it was a studio and I guess for some reason, like, the plumbing was, like, rigged or something, cause it was, like, a garage converted into a studio. [The landlord] was trying to overcharge us PG&E. Like we had a certain discussed amount that we would pay and then, he, when we moved in it was like the PG&E got sky high, but it wasn't because of us. I think he just blamed it on us. And we had the toilet water coming up in the showers, so, they didn't really do anything about that. It was, like, unsanitary there.

Danielle was extremely disturbed by this experience. Recall her definition of sufficient housing, mainly to not have any health hazards in her unit. What Danielle describes here is a major health hazard she and her family were forced to deal with since not even the landlord was willing to fix it. Having to live in such an unsanitary living environment is not what Danielle wants for her children. Yet unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond her control, she is steered to units of this quality in order to house her children.

Unfortunately, the same has happened to Dustin as well. When asked about sufficient housing Dustin did not know how to answer, seemingly because he has never had a stable place to live to begin with. His definition proved to be more of a request than anything else, to have a safe living environment for his son because of the experiences he had as a child. But just like Danielle, Dustin was unable to avoid troubling experiences from affecting his son. Dustin hints that his definition stems from the night a man living in his same apartment

complex instigated a fight with a younger gang member that runs in his neighborhood. As a result Dustin's unit was accidentally shot up by the local gang.

Dustin: They walked, stopped in front of the house, shot the house up, and took off running. And it was my son's room and it was my room. Both rooms got riddled full of bullets. My son's TV got blown out. Our living room TV got blown out. Both bedroom windows got blown out. And my son was in the living room on the floor laying on the carpet. On the floor in a sleeping bag watching TV. I was in my room laying on the bed and just glass started flying. And [my son], I don't know how he did it but he ducked, he just laid there buried his head in his pillows. It was crazy. And I rolled over and grabbed him, got him outside and got him over to my moms. Not one cop came by. Not one. And they shot the house 8 times with a .357 and 7 times a .22. We counted the bullets. I mean I still have some of the copper jackets I pulled out of the wall. Not one cop came by. Not one. I was like 'Whoa!' That tripped me out right there.

Dustin's narrative shows the complexity that such a definition would hold for an individual who has experienced such a traumatic event. Dustin's selfless definition indicates that his past experiences have played a major role in defining sufficient housing for him. Perhaps the most startling aspect of his narrative—besides his statement that the cops never showed after his apartment was shot 15 times—was that Dustin openly admits that if he had to live there again, he would, because there simply are not any alternatives and his son absolutely needs to be housed.

The definitions of sufficient housing provided by the respondents are in sharp contrast to the definition provided by the literature. In fact, what most of the respondents considered sufficient housing referred only to a specific aspect of the concept and was, in many cases, well below the standards identified by the literature. Quite often in the respondent definitions, the one aspect of sufficient housing that corresponded with the literature usually stemmed from an experience from the respondents past, typically as a child. Furthermore, while the literature describes sufficient housing as a decent, safe, spacious, and sanitary place to live, the narratives describe the exact opposite in terms of the housing they have previously occupied. Take the experiences of Albert and Lula for example.

Before receiving a section eight voucher, Albert, a mid 50's Hispanic father of two children, and his wife Lula, also Hispanic and in her early 50's, had to endure years of makeshift living on the streets; including living in a carport to have shelter during the winter. Albert used sticks and plywood to prevent the roof from leaking. Lula placed a tarp over the front to create the front door to their unit. But the worst part was they were renting the carport from someone who was living in the unit to which the carport belonged. As Lula explains it, they were paying much more than they expected to.

Lula: We were doing more than paying rent. We're paying literally everything. We were living with some family and it was too much where she was so we were paying money out of our pocket, paying labor, [and] doing working there. Cause you stay where you stay you gotta. Do what you gotta do. You know? Buying food, cooking, cleaning. Paid more than just rent. And if she was in a bad mood, paid for that too.

The irony here is that one family who was seemingly struggling to maintain their shelter took advantage of another family desperate to find shelter. Albert also added that they paid the utilities because if the tenant got her utilities shut off it would shut off their utilities as well. As he mentioned it, shutting off the utilities became a regular thing for her, so they started paying the bills. In addition, Lula was forced to start watching her kids or risk having their family thrown out. I have previously discussed Albert's inability to find work and the potential causes for his inability. But these are arguably some of the effects of systemic racism, as experienced "on the ground" by interview respondents.

Most, if not all, of the respondents gave a definition that described a unit that corrected a deficiency related to a past experience (good plumbing, no rodents, etc...). All but one gave a definition void of one of the main determining factors: physical space. Though many referenced it unintentionally by describing their unit size and the amount of people living there, only Bianca actually described the need for an appropriate amount of space in their definition of sufficient housing. In fact, out of all the narratives, cleanliness was the first

requirement mentioned by most of the respondents, followed by safety, affordability, and then space. This is not to suggest, necessarily, that most of the respondents do not emphasize affordability. In fact it's quite the opposite. Affordability was often discussed since it determines how and where they are housed. But perhaps given their status as low income individuals they know that affordability will always be an issue, and therefore, in terms of sufficient housing, it was not as high on their priority lists. Furthermore, even though community safety is an issue, it is not an issue they can easily control. However, an issue like sanitation is something more within their control. The landlord can fix the deficiencies in the unit but most choose not to, knowing that someone will be willing rent the unit as is. Therefore, as the respondents—and other people of color—are steered into insufficient units, most of them simply desire a unit that functions properly.

These narratives seem to suggest the following conclusions: (1) by steering people of color into insufficient housing their standard of living is diminished and what is insufficient to the middle class has become sufficient to the poor colored underclass. (2) Most, if not all respondents, have never found a place to live that would meet their definition of sufficient housing and (3) if needed, every respondent would decide to live in the situations they described to ensure that their families had *some* type of shelter.

Chapter V: Conclusion

As an initial point, the narratives of several transitionally poor adults in Santa Clara County presented here—many of whom are people of color—seem to reflect “welfare racism” (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2001) as previously defined and discussed. The findings here suggest that institutional forms of racism, such as and including welfare racism, seem to have a significant impact on the respondents’ lives. Further, the data presented here suggests that the welfare racism experienced in Santa Clara County has a significant impact on the respondents’ ability to obtain sufficient housing. A brief summary of PRWORA (1996) is provided below:

Throughout this study, I have identified how a seemingly race neutral policy such as PRWORA (1996) has disproportionately affected populations of color through color-blind policies and practices. Recall the following innovations introduced by PRWORA (1996): (1) it created a five-year time limit for all TANF recipients, meaning that regardless of a person’s financial situation they would be ineligible to receive TANF benefits unless they had a dependent in their custody, (2) it prohibited the increase in aid to anyone who had a child while receiving TANF benefits, and (3) it created new criteria for eligibility by prohibiting benefits to anyone who had been convicted of a felony or a drug related offense. While none of these guidelines makes any explicit reference to race, each of them results in new color-blind forms of selectivity against low income populations that receive TANF benefits. Furthermore, each guideline’s restriction limits the chances of the recipient obtaining sufficient housing by reducing or eliminating a recipient’s TANF benefits.

As previously mentioned, in the era of color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), hegemonic discourses hold that racism no longer exists, and paints the consequences of racial

oppression as consequences of individual choices or flaws (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2001). Historically, white populations have been able to access sufficient housing while poorer populations, mostly of color, were left to obtain it in other ways (Feagin, 2001). What is left unquestioned here is how more than fifty years after the civil rights movement, public policies such as PRWORA (1996) are able to achieve an almost identical outcome to pre-civil rights (AKA “legal segregation”) legislation. The answer is simple: the rhetoric might change, but the outcome remains the same.

What is problematic here is that the historical continuity between pre- and post-civil rights era racism is strikingly clear. For instance, despite the removal of racial covenants and other racially explicit language from public policies, people of color still have not fully integrated into white neighborhoods (Massey & Danton, 1988). While supporters of welfare restriction would discuss the reality of hyper-segregation as a result of individual flaws, scholars view this mainly as a result of systemic racism (Feagin, 2001, 2006, 2010; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Alexander, 2010). When it comes to sufficient housing, as a result of color-blind policies such as PRWORA (1996), marginal populations of color continue to endure deleterious living conditions in the post-civil rights era. Living conditions which, according to the narratives presented earlier, significantly affect the people—especially children—who are forced to experience them. So, in many ways PRWORA (1996) embodies the prototypical color-blind policy of the post-civil rights era.

First, PRWORA (1996) clearly affects populations of color from a politico-economic perspective by using the rhetoric of individual responsibility to amplify public fears about welfare dependency and economic parasitism. By reducing the issuance of TANF to a maximum of five years, people who would otherwise qualify for TANF are forced to survive

without any social safety net in a deeply unstable post-industrial economy. In addition, even as PRWORA (1996) attempts to use the rhetoric of individual responsibility, the legislation contradicts itself by placing a 50 % limit on the access to CALWORKS. In other words, part of the reason PRWORA (1996) was created was to decrease alleged welfare dependency by preparing its beneficiaries to find work through job training programs, such as CALWORKS. However, PRWORA (1996) does not require everyone to enroll in CALWORKS, but only about 50% of its recipients. Therefore, although PRWORA (1996) manages to reproduce racial stereotypes about lazy welfare recipients, it contradicts itself by not making CALWORKS mandatory and leaving 50% of its recipients without assistance in finding employment. Inevitably, this has a strong effect on PRWORA's (1996) ability to maintain effective social control over populations of color.

In an economy characterized by an increasingly contingent workforce and by the ongoing downsizing of welfare (Daguerre, 2008), housing—both its availability and quality—has become the product of the current economic system. The transitionally poor, who depend on PRWORA (1996) the most, are effectively at the mercy of state charity when searching for housing. What my research suggests is that transitionally poor populations, particularly people of color, have lowered their standards for what is considered “sufficient” when searching for housing, simply because there are little to no alternatives available. In addition, despite the intolerable conditions these respondents have been forced to endure, most if not all of the respondents have yet to find a unit that satisfies their own definitions of sufficient housing. While the poor have historically been the privileged targets of social control strategies, I would like to suggest that the limiting of sufficient housing has become a new element of social control to consider. Not only has the transitionally poor population been

forced to accept any job offer they receive, regardless of working conditions, but the instability of income forces many families into enduring any type of living arrangement that will be available to them. Therefore, the ability to enhance the subjugation of such a fragile population is remarkably greater under color-blind policies like PRWORA (1996).

Another example of PRWORA's (1996) emphasis on social control is the "one strike and you're out" provision (Daguerre, 2008), which authorizes landlords to evict an entire family if any person commits a violent or drug related crime on the property or in the vicinity of the household. Furthermore, the individual charged with the crime does not even have to be part of the household to warrant eviction. Vera illustrated this scenario in her narrative.

Vera: I was renting an apartment in Morgan Hill and someone had come over and knocked on my door and asked for somebody and they weren't there. They left and when they were leaving they got in some kind of altercation with another person that had lived in the complex and so they evicted me because they think that I was part of whatever happened.

ME: How did that make you feel?

Vera: Mad because I didn't let that person come into my house. They just came and asked for somebody and left. They weren't my friend. I didn't know them, like, as a friend. It was upsetting because, you know, I explained to them that I had nothing to do with it. He's never been in to my [unit] so I wouldn't let him come in. I was mad.

To be clear, PRWORA (1996) gives landlords the legal authority to evict tenants in situations like Vera's. It is disturbing to think that this type of authority could be used so discretionally. However, surviving predatory landlords has become the norm for many of the transitionally homeless individuals struggling to find housing in Santa Clara County. In fact, it was often discussed in relation to having a sufficient place to live.

Most of the respondents have not had good relationships with their landlords. This is partly due to the fact that most landlords who rent to this population have a stereotypical view of their tenants. Many believe that, given the socio-economic status of their tenants, as landlords they can simply impose anything on their tenants without penalty. For instance,

many landlords will refuse to make repairs to their units. As Bianca indicated earlier, she was living in a unit that had feces coming up through the shower drain. Yet, when she tried to discuss the issue with her landlord, Bianca was told that it was her problem and she needed to fix it. In other cases, like Nabil's, his landlord switched the locks on the front door while he was at work because Nabil refused to pay the gas and electric bill. However, Nabil and PG&E both determined that the bill needed to be paid by the landlord because the landlord never requested services for Nabil's unit. Therefore, Nabil's unit was fraudulently receiving services because the landlord did not report it. Unfortunately, Nabil was forced to move out because the situation with his landlord became too much for his family to handle. But at the time, Nabil was employed, paying rent on time, and was generally a good tenant (according to him). While Nabil's story cannot be objectively verified, his narrative is strikingly similar to those of the other respondents.

The current economic climate is aggravating this situation. Mortgage rates are at an all time low and, yet, there is still resistance to purchase property. Even though the transitionally poor cannot purchase property, the increased demand for rental units will ultimately drive up the price for unit rentals. Even when an estimated 42 million households are paying too much for rent⁴² (Wall Street Journal, 2010) and roughly 10 million households are paying more than 50% of their income on rent and utilities⁴³ (Census Data Finds, 2010), the transitionally poor population will continue to reap the worst of these hard economic times. Furthermore, as alternative housing options dwindle down, those able to afford some housing will ultimately accept any type of shelter they can.

⁴² Paying more than 30% of your pre-tax income for your total housing costs.

⁴³ It should be noted here that the data from these two newspaper articles came from the U.S. census data which, traditionally, does not get a huge turnout from the transitionally poor population. Therefore, the data is more indicative of what middle class America is paying.

This study seems to suggest the necessity to ask further questions about our current conceptualizations of, and strategies for ensuring “sufficient housing” as a minimum quality of life standard in the U.S.:

- (1) Why does the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s [HUD] standard for Housing Quality Standards [HQS] only apply to federally assisted housing? Do these narratives suggest the need to inspect *all* units—including the private market—for HQS prior to a prospective tenant moving in?

HUD does set housing quality standards of living for occupants in the private market that must be complied with. However, HUD does not require annual inspections for every unit in the private market. HUD only requires an inspection to take place annually if the unit is being subsidized by federal, state, or local government. In my interview with Jared, a housing inspector for the San Francisco Housing Authority, he claims that many of the units he goes to inspect on a daily basis are so decrepit that the tenants are forced to wait months for repairs to be made. Jared also notes that these repairs are only being made because the landlords want to continue to receive the federal subsidy. However, Jared is adamant in saying that if the inspection procedure did not exist, no repairs would be made. U.S. policy on sufficient housing is not structured to ensure that all rental properties are receiving the same housing quality standards as all other federally assisted units. Unfortunately, this forces many people, especially the transitionally poor people of color, to accept living in insufficient housing.

In my opinion, there is a clear lack of accountability for landlords. Landlords have been given too much authority and the result has been a lack of ethical practices as it pertains to housing. This is not to suggest that all landlords are predatory, but the narratives presented here speak to an unknown set of standards and rules that don’t apply to the mainstream

population of renters. These standards have the consequence of de-humanizing populations of color. Not only are the respondents living in areas with high crime rates, but they are also exposing their children to danger (in and out of the unit), and sending their them to poorly funded schools, all while attempting to provide stability, safety, and shelter for their families. Yet, color-blind policies continue to demonize the behavior of the transitionally poor as lazy, undeserving, and ultimately less than human.

(2) Does the lack of sufficient housing as expressed here in the narratives warrant a discussion on human rights violations?

In my opinion, yes. Despite the fact that the United States participates in committees such as the Human Rights Committee and CERD,⁴⁴ our government is still heavily responsible for manifest human rights violations. Article 25 of the Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including housing...” (UN, 1948). While HUD was created to provide housing for the transitionally poor, recent color-blind legislation has succeeded in restricting people of color from obtaining such federally assisted housing, and as a result it has steered populations of color into insufficient housing.

The narratives themselves cannot prove human rights violations. However, it is here that the need for further research becomes crucial. A more focused, ethnographic study of how poor people of color obtain housing is warranted. Statistics are very useful, but they can be misleading. The interviews I had were not misleading. I could feel the anger, anguish, pressure, fear, and resistance in my respondents: something that cannot be quantified. The transitionally poor have a story to tell and their story speaks to the very essence of the human rights violations they face on a daily basis. If the U.S. wants to continue to be at the forefront

⁴⁴ Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

of international policy, it must be willing to alter its policies on poverty and housing, narrowing the distance that currently separates them from the ideal of a more racially and economically just society, specifically one that does not covertly invoke race in its policies.

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Appendix A

Agreement to Participate in Research

Responsible Investigator: Robert Musallam (SJSU Student)

Title of Protocol: Systemic racism through housing discrimination and welfare reform: An exploration of the social struggle for self sufficiency in Santa Clara County.

1. You have been asked to participate in a research study investigating how, and to what extent, does institutional racism shape people's ability to acquire sufficient housing in Santa Clara County? Also, to what extent does geographic, 'racial' segregation manifest in Santa Clara County? Does the limited assistance provided by the state promote this segregation? Also, to what extent has the Government's change from Aid to Families and Dependent Children (AFDC) to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PWORWA) had on marginalized populations' ability to obtain sufficient housing? Finally, how do marginalized populations 'of color' experience and negotiate the process of attaining sufficient housing?
2. You will be asked to participate in either a semi structured interview or a focus group. The study will take place at a date and time of your convenience and a location of your convenience. For the interviews or focus group I will be using a digital voice recorder and a note pad and pen to take further notes.
3. Overall, the risk involved in participating is very minimal. One risk that does resonate from this study is the public information shared in the focus groups can be used against the subjects if the information they choose to share is confidential. The subjects put themselves at risk for embarrassment if they choose to share something that is personal. The sharing of personal information may lead the subjects into disclosing their involvement in illegal activity, including criminal activity and welfare fraud. As soon as the subject mentions illegal activity, I will stop the focus group or interview to make sure the subject is aware of what she/he just said. If such information is shared, I will assure the subjects that any disclosure of any illegal activity will be kept confidential. Furthermore, it is very possible that the subjects might feel a sense of anger, depression, or hopelessness when giving their narratives, so a list of resources will be presented to each subject before starting the interview or focus group.
4. There are no discernable benefits to the participants. Some indirect benefits include knowing most or all of the participants will have gone through a similar situation and would feel compassion for someone who was willing to divulge that information. There may be some minimal or indirect benefit to the subjects who participate, both from sharing their experiences with others and realizing they are neither alone in their experiences nor responsible for their situation. Having their narratives taken seriously by an outsider is often a benefit to members of groups who are typically marginalized in society.

5. Although the results of this study may be published, no information that could identify you will be included. The interview list and interview transcripts will be kept separately so anyone seeing an excerpt can't identify who said it. In addition, I would also like to make a note about protecting subjects that divulge information that could get their family expelled from the shelter. All subject's stay at the shelter will be protected if they choose to reveal current illegal activity. Upon transcription, all original files that would otherwise contain interviewees' personal information will be erased and/or destroyed. Interview transcripts will be held by the researcher in a locked location in my personal home until the project's completion, and destroyed thereafter. At this time, transcripts and signed consent forms (also kept in a secure, locked location in my personal home) will be destroyed.
 6. There is no associated financial cost to the subjects for participating in this study.
 7. Questions about this research may be addressed to Robert Musallam at robertmusallam@yahoo.com. Complaints about the research may be presented to Dr. Ann Lucas, Department Chair, Department of Justice Studies, College of Applied Science & Arts, (408) 924-2914. Questions about a research subjects' rights, or research-related injury may be presented to Pamela Stacks, Ph.D., Associate Vice President, Graduate Studies and Research, at (408) 924-2427.
 8. No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose not to participate in the study.
 9. Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or in any part of the study. You have the right to not answer questions you do not wish to answer. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University or with San Jose Family Shelter.
 10. At the time you sign this consent form, you will receive a copy of it for your records, signed and dated by the investigator.
- **The signature of a subject on this document indicates agreement to participate in the study.**
 - **The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the above named subject in the research and attestation that the subject has been fully informed of his or her rights.**

Participant's Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

Appendix B

Interview Guide

State Assistance

Are you currently or have you ever received public assistance? If so, what forms of assistance?

Can you tell me what led to you asking for public assistance?

How long have you been on public assistance?

Could you describe your family size and the amount and form(s) of assistance you receive? Are you receiving aid for all of your children? If not, why? Any impressions upon hearing how much aid your family would be given?

Can you take me through the process of obtaining public assistance, from who you called until you started receiving aid?

How was your experience with the eligibility worker? Do they ask you any questions? If so, would you mind sharing some of those questions? Were there any questions that you felt were inappropriate, in other words, did you feel like the questions they asked you were relevant to your need for assistance?

What is your definition of sufficient living? Do you believe (state assistance) fulfills your definition of sufficient living? Why or why not? If you had to describe living on assistance to a friend, how would you describe it?

Housing

Can you tell me what a typical week of daily life at the shelter would look like for you from beginning to end? (If applicable) Can you tell me how it's different now that you have moved out? What is a typical week like now?

Can you tell me about a particular day during your stay the shelter that you remember vividly from beginning to end? Is there a particular reason you remember this day?

Can you describe the process of finding a place to live? Describe the methods you used (internet, newspaper, etc...) to contact landlords and describe your interactions with them.

How familiar are you with the neighborhoods in San Jose? Would you be able to describe the different areas of San Jose that you are familiar with? Are there any notable differences among these neighborhoods? Population? Crime?

Can you describe the school systems in these areas? What dreams do you have for your child's future? Can you describe how the schools in these areas contribute to that dream? If your child was struggling in school, who would help her/him? Are you available to the children after school? Why or why not?

What is your definition of sufficient housing? Do you believe (state assistance) fulfills your definition of sufficient housing? Why or why not? Can you describe any major barriers to finding sufficient housing?

Are there any limitations on where you can live? Can you describe some of the limitations? What language is spoken at home? How might that affect where you live?

How long have you lived in this neighborhood? What do you like about this neighborhood? What do you dislike? What would you change about it?

Have you ever been evicted? Can you describe what led to the eviction? Would you mind describing the process and your thought process throughout?