

“We Need to Have a Meeting”: Public Housing Demolition and Civic Engagement among Rent-Assisted Families

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Introduction

In 1948 the right to adequate housing was codified within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an essential determinant of well-being. However, in the United States, access to stable, adequate and affordable housing has always been inconsistent. Housing affordability has been a longstanding challenge for many US citizens (Ranney and Wright 2000). Additionally, the displacement of marginalized populations is a reoccurring theme in US history (Fullilove and Wallace 2011). Several scholars have suggested that the recent large-scale demolition of public housing projects in many urban areas, is a recent example of the “serial displacement” of low-income African American communities that has undermined the well-being of individuals and their communities (Bennett and Reed 1999; Keating 2000; Keene and Geronimus 2011a). This demolition of public housing is part of a broader shift in assisted housing policy which, according to some (Crump 2003; Fischer 2001), has reduced access to stable and affordable housing. Across the country, federally owned and operated public housing developments have been replaced by voucher-based assistance where poor residents must compete for an often limited number of vouchers that can be applied to an often limited number of private market rental units (Goetz 2000; Oakley and Burchfield 2009; Oakley, Ruel, and Wilson 2008). Under this system, shelter is not a guaranteed social right, but a contingently available market good that is available, only to a subset of “deserving” poor who play by the rules of a market-based system (Crump 2002).

The demolition of public housing has led to the relocation of thousands of public housing residents from their homes. While some have made successful transitions to higher quality units

in better neighborhoods, others, particularly older and disabled adults, have struggled to keep a roof over their heads (Oakley, Ruel, and Reid 2010; Popkin, Cunningham, and Burt 2000). Additionally, in the process of relocation, many public housing residents were removed, not only from housing units where they had spent many years, but also from geographically anchored “homeplaces” (Burton and Clark 2005) where they had put down deep roots and were often politically and civically engaged with their public housing communities.

Although largely absent from popular images of public housing, a significant body of ethnographic work describes strong community networks and high levels of civic engagement in public housing projects (Bennett and Reed 1999; Clampet-Lundquist 2010; Greenbaum, Hathaway, Rodriguez, Spalding, and Ward 2008). HUD regulations require tenants associations in all public housing developments. Although there is variation in how active these associations are, they provide a unique structure that may facilitate the development of community dialogue and serve as an important source of collective power (Williams 2004). Additionally, the relative stability of public housing in comparison to private market housing may have allowed public housing residents to develop ties to each other and to their communities (Keene and Geronimus 2011b). Existing research suggests that neighborhood attachment and engagement in geographically rooted social networks are important determinants of political participation and civic engagement (Hays and Kogl 2007)

While several studies have examined the impact of public housing demolition on individual outcomes such as physical health or economic well-being (Manjarrez, Popkin, and Guernsey 2007; Popkin, Katz, and Cunningham 2004), very little research (Bennett and Reed, as a notable exception) has considered how public housing demolition and the broader shift from a state-centered to market-centered assisted housing policy will contribute to civic engagement and

collective power of public housing residents. A home is more than just a roof over one's head and these collective processes are important considerations when thinking about strengthening and protecting the right to housing

In this chapter, I begin to examine this gap in the literature, drawing on in-depth interviews with former residents of public housing projects in Atlanta, Georgia who have been displaced by recent public housing demolition. In these conversations many participants, particularly those who had lived in public housing for many years, described a strong sense of rootedness in their public housing communities that were "like families". Several participants also described high levels of engagement with collective life in their former public housing developments as both informal and formal leaders in their communities, or as participants in residents' councils and other organizations. They also describe the challenges to reestablishing these sources of collective power in their new, private market rental communities where formal opportunities for civic engagement were limited, where their claims to space were fragile and where they experienced high levels of residential instability.

Background

The Rise and Fall of Public Housing

Over the last 75 years, the discourse around assisted housing policy in the US has shifted dramatically, from an early era that framed housing as a social right that was provided directly by the federal government, to our current era, where assisted housing is often provided through public/private partnerships and also has become more contingently available as a result of eligibility requirements and supply shortages. The idea of affordable housing as a social right, was introduced with the Public Housing Act of 1937 which resulted in the first federal ownership of housing for the poor by creating a system of local public-housing authorities that were

charged with constructing and managing subsidized low-income housing (Smith 2006). At this time, in the midst of the great depression, the need for government assistance was wide-spread and less stigmatized than it is today (Marcuse, Varaday, Preiser, and Russell 1998).

The language of social rights was again evoked with the 1949 Public Housing Act which declared the right to a decent home. In the name of providing adequate housing, the 1949 public housing act funded the razing of many urban areas that were deemed blighted. (Although as several scholars have argued, much of the housing that was demolished through this process of “slum clearance” was in fact decent, but also located on prime land that came to house the large-scale urban renewal projects of the 1950s and 60s (Gans 1965). “Slum clearance” displaced thousands of families, the majority of whom were African American and poor, and contributed to a shortage of affordable housing in cities across the country (Gans 1965). The Public Housing Act of 1949 also funded the construction of hundreds of thousands of new public housing units which came to house many of the African American communities that were displaced by urban renewal and in the context of housing shortages and discriminatory housing practices, were left with no other options (Fullilove 2001; Keating 2000). While public housing continued to serve a racially and geographically diverse population, these large urban and predominantly African American public housing developments came to represent the public face of US assisted housing (Bennett and Reed 1999).

While 1949 public housing act aimed to create decent housing for the poor, the “decency” of this housing was threatened by a few factors. First, the location of newly constructed public housing developments in racially segregated and underserved areas contributed to the concentration of minority poverty (Massey and Kanauaypuni 1993), excluded residents from economic opportunities (Wilson 1996), and confined them to highly stigmatized

places that became increasingly marginalized in public discourse (Wacquant 1996; Wacquant 2008) . Second, during the 1970s, financing for the maintenance and new construction of public housing was severely curtailed, and by the 1980s, all construction of new federally subsidized housing had ceased (Smith 2006) . This declining investment led to a deterioration of the existing public housing stock. While the majority of public housing remained in good condition (and in many cases superior to what was available to low income families in the private market), in the decades that followed, the sense of crisis that emerged from this period of neglect helped to fuel support for public housing demolition (National Housing Law Project 2002). Finally, broader labor market changes leading to high rates of unemployment and increasing participation in alternative economies such as the drug trade, negatively affected the conditions around public housing developments.

As the conditions in and around federally owned and operated public housing developments were declining, so was national support for the concept of public housing itself. Increasing concern with the geographic concentration of urban poverty, racialized and negative representations of public housing, and sensationalized accounts of crime in public housing developments furthered the disfavor of public housing in public and political discourse (Crump 2002; Ranney and Wright 2000). Additionally, in an era of increasing neoliberalism, the role of the federal government as owners and providers of low-income housing was coming into question in favor of private-public partnerships (Ranney and Wright 2000). Specifically, in the 1970s the Section 8 program was created with two components; project-based section 8, which subsidized private developers to construct new low-income units and tenant-based section 8, which provided rent subsidies to low-income families that could be used to secure non-subsidized units in the private sector. In later decades, project-based section 8 was phased out

and tenant- based section 8 was replaced by the Housing Choice Voucher system which unlike its predecessor was portable across state lines.

The move away from public housing took another step in the 1990s, with the HOPE VI program. In 1992, HOPE VI was launched to fund the demolition of distressed public housing developments and the construction, in their place, of mixed-income developments that served both subsidized and unsubsidized tenants and were constructed through private-public partnerships. The HOPE VI program, through block grants that were awarded to local housing authorities, sought to transform public-housing developments that were considered “islands of despair” into “vital and integral parts of the surrounding neighborhoods” and to “create mixed income environments that encourage and support movements toward self-sufficiency” (GAO 1998). While HOPE VI was initially intended to fund the demolition of a small portion (6%) of public-housing units that had been identified by a 1989 federal investigation as distressed, the program quickly expanded its reach beyond this goal. By 2007, HOPE VI had funded the demolition of nearly 90,000 public-housing units, many of which were not identified as distressed (Cabrera 2007).

The mixed-income communities that were constructed with HOPE VI funds often had significantly fewer subsidized units than the developments that they were replacing. This left many (often the majority) of former public housing residents to find other housing, most often in the private market with Housing Choice Vouchers. Much like the demolitions of the urban renewal era, the demolition of public housing under HOPE VI contributed to affordable housing shortage. Left to find housing in the private market, where landlords often had no incentive to accept subsidized renters, many relocated residents faced challenges in finding replacement units (Fischer 2001).

Additionally, new eligibility requirements for assisted housing contributed to the contingent nature of housing assistance. Specifically, the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility act (QHWRA) of 1998 (much like the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity) sought to reduce reliance on government assistance by encouraging employment among public housing residents. QHWRA allowed housing authorities to require work hours, community service or job training participation from those receiving housing assistance (Wilén and Nayak 2006). The QHWRA also expanded the ability of housing authorities to evict tenants for minor infractions.

The Case of Atlanta

Ironically, the city of Atlanta was one of the first cities to establish federally funded public housing developments in 1936, was also one of the first to take advantage of HOPE VI funding to demolish its housing stock. Between 1996 and 2004, the city demolished 13 of its public housing developments and constructed 10 mixed-income housing communities using HOPE VI funds (Ruel, Oakley, Ward, Alston, and Reid 2013). In 2007, the AHA announced plans to demolish its 10 remaining traditional (family) public housing developments, in addition to two low-income housing developments that served the elderly and the disabled. These demolitions were carried out under Section 18 of the 1937 Housing Act which unlike HOPE VI, does not require the construction of replacement units. Thus in Atlanta, the only relocation option available to those residents who did not qualify for the remaining senior developments was a Housing Choice Voucher (Ruel et al. 2013). In the sense that it is at the forefront of the policy shift away from federally owned and operated public housing developments, Atlanta is a unique and important place to study the impact of demolition on public housing residents and their communities.

Methods

In 2008, a research team at Georgia State University launched a longitudinal study to investigate the impacts of this most recent demolition. The team surveyed 382 residents of 7 public housing communities: 4 family and 2 senior developments that were recently demolished and one ‘control’ senior development that was not demolished. Respondents were surveyed before they moved, and again at 6 months following relocation (Ruel, Oakley et al. 2010). In 2010, two graduate students and I conducted 40 in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of survey respondents 8 to 13 months following relocation. These interviews provided an opportunity for participants to narrate their own relocation story.

Interviewees were selected at random from 4 categories of survey participants that were stratified by age (> or < 60) and length of residence in public housing (> or < 8 years). The average length of residence was 11 years and the average age was 56 . Thirty Five of the participants were women, 38 were African American and two had moved to Atlanta from the Caribbean. The neighborhoods that participants moved to varied widely. A few lived near the center of Atlanta in relatively well-off neighborhoods, while others moved to apartment complexes in poorer neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city. Findings from the larger survey sample indicate that the majority of participants remained in poor neighborhoods after relocation (Oakley, Ruel, and Reid 2010; Oakley, Ruel, Reid, and Sims 2010).

Data were collected in the form of semi-structured interviews. Because a central objective of this study was to allow participants to tell their own stories of relocation, interview questions were framed in an open-ended manner. The interviews took place in participants’ homes and respondents were compensated \$40 for their time. Interviews lasted an average of 70 minutes and were all audio-recorded and transcribed. Analysis followed a modified grounded theory approach, starting with broad questions about the experience of relocation and reading

transcripts closely for emergent themes (Corbin and Strauss 1998). Following an initial ‘open-coding’ process, we constructed a detailed codebook of themes and categories. I coded all transcripts (using Atlas-TI) according to this codebook and then analyzed the data through repeated readings of thematically organized quotations, making comparisons across cases.

The sections that follow describe participants’ experiences of civic engagement before relocation and the challenges that they faced in reestablishing these roles in their new homes. In order to protect participants’ anonymity, I have changed their names and the names of their public housing developments when presenting these data.

Findings

Social Ties, Collective Responsibility and Civic Engagement in Public Housing

Sixty-seven year old Ruby Johnson had lived in Linden Court for 31 years before moving to her current home in a sprawling and somewhat run down privately-owned apartment complex on the outskirts of Atlanta. She says that she likes her new place, but she would have preferred to stay in Linden Court, which she describes as a close-knit and stable community. She says, “It was like one big family. Because everybody knew everybody over there because they had been over there so long”. This sense of kinship and community was common among the participants, particularly older adults who had aged in place, often raising children and grandchildren in the same community and alongside familiar neighbors. As 62 year-old Roberta Shepard says of her 28 years in Meadowbrook Village, “Everybody treated everybody good. Like a big family, in other words.” The presence of long-term elders was felt by younger residents, or those who had not lived there as long. For example, 28 year-old Vanessa Sells says that she never had any problems with her neighbors in Locust Homes because. “Lady next door to us, she stayed in

Locust Homes 30 years, the same apartment, 30 years, next door to us. She was just like mama. Well I call her Grandma.”

Several participants describe, not only a place where people knew each other, but where there was a sense of collective responsibility that led to strong community engagement. As 76 year-old Irene Thompson, who had lived in Hillside Court for over 35 years, says,

Everybody, right, they like kinfolk. Everybody looked out for one another, helped one another and everything at Hillside Court. See, Hillside Court is same as home for all of us because we stayed there so many years and everybody know one another out there.

Several participants describe not only providing social support to individual neighbors, but also organizing activities for the broader community. For example, Selena Carter describes organizing with other residents to start a farmer’s market that brought fresh fruits and vegetables to the community. She says of her days selling vegetables, “And nobody tried to rob us. And it would just be four of us ladies, sitting out there. Nobody never tried to”. Others described organizing activities for young children such a field trips, tutoring activities and field-days.

A few participants describe the way that a strong sense of community drew participation from former residents, who had moved out of assisted housing but wanted to give back to where they came from. For example, 76 year-old Irene Thompson describes the way that a former resident named Jim provided numerous activities for children in her community. She says, “Yeah. He take the children, carried the children out to different places, parties and things, let them see things, brought them back”. Her grandson added, in reference to Jim, “He uh, you know, he got up and got just, your know, how you get something, but you give back to the community once you get so far.”

For some participants, participation in collective life took on a more formal role as members of public housing tenants' councils which provided a formal mechanism for civic engagement, served as an important mediator between the residents and the Atlanta Housing Authority and also seemed to serve as important source of collective power among public housing residents. Sixty-five year-old Jocelyn spent much of our two hour interview discussing her involvement in the tenants' council and her position as secretary of Oakwood homes where she lived for 28 years before it was torn down. She describes herself as an advocate for the residents of Oakwood homes and when asked what she liked most about living in Oakwood, she says,

That I was able to help a lot of peoples, and I got involved in a lot of people's lives and I got where folks just want to come to me and sit down and talk to me about problems... I couldn't get in there, financially, and help them people like they really needed help. And, so the only thing I could do was use my mouth.

Jocelyn told several stories of how, as a member of the tenants' council, she was able to successfully advocate on behalf of her fellow residents. For example, when one of the main bus routes that served Oakwood Homes was cut off, she helped organize a successful protest to get the bus route reinstated. She says, "So, we got our bus back, but they brought it back as the #153. But we didn't care, as long as it was, you know, taking everybody to... when they wanted to go".

Participants had several other examples of real changes that the tenants' councils were able to implement in their communities. For example, Ruby Johnson describes how the tenants' council organized to create a program for senior citizens at Linden Court. Likewise, 75year-old Constance Germain describes how the tenants' council organized to institute a written work-order policy for maintenance requests when they discovered when such requests were not being

carried out in the order that they were placed. When she moved from a housing development that was torn down in the 1990s to Linden Court, she did not take on another leadership role with the tenants' council, but continued as a vocal participant at the council meetings. She says, "I would just tell em, I would speak what I know and testify what I see"

Others describe the tenants' council as an important mediator between public housing residents and the management of their developments. For example, Selena Carter, who spent 37 years in Oakwood Homes, was president of the council's grievance committee where she helped protect many residents from eviction as she explains to me in the conversation below:

SC: Well see, her son was on her lease. And he moved out and didn't tell her. And by him having another lease somewhere else, they was going to put her out. And I went and talked to the people, you know. Asked them not to put her out because she didn't know her son had this problem, you know. They listened to me. They would listen to me.

DK: The management listened to you?

SC: Um-hm. And I was president of the grieving committee of Oakwood Homes. You know, so we helped save a lot of people from getting put out that way, you know

With the impending demolition of public housing, the tenants' councils also became important mediators between the tenants and Atlanta Housing Authority. Prior to relocation, as required by Section 18 of the 1937 Public Housing Act, the AHA held meetings for public housing tenants to inform them about the process. These meetings were often the first place that participants' officially learned about their impending relocation, although as many noted, rumors about the possibility for demolition were prevalent although not always believed. As 52 year-old Wanda Stokes says, "I didn't even believe it. I said they been talking [about tearing] Oakwood Homes down. Oakwood Homes ain't going nowhere. I didn't believe it. Until I started going to

the meetings and stuff and they were-oh, okay, this is for real know.” According to Jocelyn, the tenants’ councils and their presidents played an important role in encouraging attendance at these meetings. Council members also communicated about relocation process through door-to-door outreach in their communities. As 59 year-old Donald Bell says of the Oakwood Homes president, “Come around and everything, they knock on your door and everything. Communicate”

The tenants’ councils and community meetings were not only an important source of information about the relocation process, but they also served to mobilize communities in order to protest relocation itself and to advocate for the rights of public housing residents during the relocation process. For example, Jocelyn describes hearing about the impending demolition as a member of the tenants’ council and helping to organize the residents of Oakwood Homes to protest. She says,

We had heard about they was, you know, we read about how they was moving folks in Chicago. And how the folks in Chicago were fighting about they, they, they public housing....So, that’s when we, you know, we start really getting out fighting.

Likewise, 50 year-old Sherry Briscoe also describes the tenants’ council at Linden Court organizing on behalf of the residents. She says,

So, some said that everything was gonna be (pause) easy. But then you find out they were lying. So, uh, we got a lawyer. We had one lady who was the president out there. She got a lawyer for the whole complex.

While participants describe having little power to alter the course of the proposed demolitions, they were, in some cases, through the work of the tenants’ councils, able to effect small changes in the way relocation was carried out. For example, when the president of

Oakwood Homes got word that the AHA was planning to evict 137 families prior to demolition (which would make them ineligible for vouchers and leave them without housing assistance), she organized families to prevent these evictions. Jocelyn explains,

I think it was ten families they had thrown out before [Oakwood Homes president] and I got to working on it. By the time we got to working on it, uh, the families, a lot of them, they volunteer and moved out because they had got these demand letters.

Ultimately, according to Jocelyn by threatening the AHA with media exposure and holding pickets at the rental office, they were able to prevent many of the remaining families from being evicted.

Likewise, seventy-five year-old Constance Germain, describes working with the residents council to protect the rights of tenants during the 2005 demolition of Washington Homes. She explains that when Washington Homes was demolished in 2005, the management had tight restrictions on who could move back into the new mixed-income development that was constructed in its place and the residents council successfully protested the residence requirement so that people could not be excluded for lease violations that occurred when they lived in the Old Washington homes. She explains, “They was just weeding them out like that. And we stopped that. We went to City Hall and Everything and got everything and we had a meetin’ that no, they could not go back to that.”

The opportunities for civic engagement described above were not only a source of collective power for public housing residents, but also, on a more individual level, seemed to provide psychosocial benefits, in particular for older adults. Participants often described the roles their community engagement with a sense of pride, and expressed sadness at the loss of these roles after relocation.

Civic Engagement after Relocation

The civic engagement that participants described in public housing, was largely absent from their descriptions of their post-relocation homes and communities. In particular, their new private market rental communities did not have the same formal structure for organizing that the tenants' councils provided. A few participants lamented this loss for themselves and for their communities. For example, Jocelyn explains that many younger residents have lost their vouchers because they can't afford their new rental apartments and because they no longer have a community of elders looking out for them. She says,

Now, we have all these peoples out here with these children. A lot of them – God bless 'em – trying to move in with families. It's already over-crowded. They done lost everything they had. They can't afford to, you know, stay out there.. They had a better chance of, uh, uh, over there in Oakwood Home, when we were working them than what they have now....They don't have nobody to stand up for them”.

Jocelyn continues to try to help former residents of Oakwood homes. For example, when she learned that one of her former neighbors was facing eviction because she had not fulfilled the work requirement that accompanies a housing voucher (30 hours a week), despite the fact that she has a letter from her doctor saying that she can't work, she helped her to find pro bono legal assistance. However, she laments the fact that she cannot help them the way that she used to when she was part of the tenants' council. She says,

It's a lot of them out there right now that need help. Serious help. I can't help em because I'm not in there like I was with Atlanta Housing. So, I can't get in their business no more...It worries me that I can't help these people....We need to have a meeting. We need to- I can't do that no more because there's no longer a Oakwood Homes.

In her statement, “we need to have a meeting”, Jocelyn notes the lack of formal structures for organizing in private housing developments. In addition to this structural change, some participants describe their new homes as places that aren’t conducive to the kind of community building that occurred in public housing. They describe a more private ethos, where people don’t spend much time outside and interact with each other infrequently. As Constance says, “You don’t see nobody knockin’ on each other’s door over here”.

Similarly, 70 year-old Gwen Warren explains that her new apartment lacks the organized activities (trips, bingo, bible-study) that had allowed her to make many close friends at the Magnolia House. Additionally, she explains that in Magnolia House, there was a community room and a patio where residents gathered to play cards and barbeque, but these spaces do not exist in her new, privately-owned complex. Seventy-eight year-old Thomas Roberts describes a similar lack of communal space in his new complex. He says, “They need a big place, you know, where community can get to know each other, instead of 2 or 3 at a time. See in Oakwood it be 50 or 60 of them at one little party?” Additionally, some participants explain that their new apartment complexes have prohibitions against gathering on front stoops and thus limit opportunities for socializing. One important exception to this seems to exist among participants who moved to a privately owned senior high-rise called the Towers which contains a library, a gym, a computer room, indoor communal spaces and numerous organized activities for its residents. Residents’ of the Towers did seem to be civically engaged in their community. For example, Eighty-two year-old Gladys Cullen describes signing a petition that was circulated by other residents of the Towers to obtain city bus service for the development which is currently somewhat isolated from downtown Atlanta.

Other participants noted that their new neighborhoods had tenants' organizations, but that they were reluctant to get involved. Jocelyn explains that her new neighborhood has a neighborhood crime watch called "Take back your Neighborhood" but she has not gotten involved with them because she doesn't know anybody and because they already have "their people". Additionally, she is worried that the stigma associated with her former home in public housing will make her unwelcome. As she says, "They find out I'm from Oakwood. You know, they're probably looking down on me". Selena reiterates this sense of stigmatization that was associated with residence in Oakwood Homes stating, "They gave Oakwood Homes such a bad reputation, you see what I'm saying? Oakwood Homes wasn't that bad. You had to really live in Oakwood Homes to know how Oakwood Homes was". Likewise, Lenore Allen describes how the residents of her new privately owned apartment complex had a meeting where they complained about the influx of voucher supported renters. She explains that her neighbors, who do not know that she herself is a voucher holder, have approached her with complaints about the influx of voucher holders to who they attribute declining property values and rowdy crowds at the community pool.

As often stigmatized newcomers in their communities, many relocated public housing residents had not developed the same connections to their new communities as they had in public housing developments. While it is possible that these connections and opportunities for civic engagement would develop over time, participants' experiences suggest that post-relocation residential instability may hinder the development of such community ties. For long-term public housing residents, relationships with neighbors developed over many years, in the context of relatively stable communities. Their new communities are often described as more transient places, where people are, "always moving out."

Participants themselves may also move around more than they did in public housing. In the larger survey sample of 382 respondents, 12 percent had moved a second time within 6 months of relocation. Additionally, participants stories contain many examples of eviction, frequent moves or fears of instability.

Many participants discussed affordability issues in their new private market housing. Despite the fact that their rent was still subsidized, utility bills (which were covered in public housing) often strained household budgets. As 21 year-old Kiana Landley says, “Like certain people getting put out of their houses and apartments because they can’t afford their rent. I mean it’s crazy, a lot of homeless people. It’s gonna be a lot” . Thirty-four year old Michelle Mitchell describes her own experience with a recent eviction from the complex where she lived. She had gotten verbal permission from the leasing office to pay her late rent when her income tax return came in, but came home one day to find her stuff on the curb. She found another place to live, but her finances are still a struggle. As she says,

I lost everything. So we had to start all over from scratch, and by the grace of God, we were able to get this place, to actually move in this place. I was actually able to find a place within a month. So now it’s like a situation as far as my finances. I work right now, but it’s still kind of hard trying to pay all the bills, because it’s not enough to pay all of my bills.

In addition to the added expenses associated with utility bills, some relocated public housing residents struggle to maintain eligibility for the housing assistance vouchers they are receiving. In particular, participants describe struggling to maintain the 30 hour a week work minimum that is required in order to receive a voucher. As 28 year-old Vanessa Sells explains,

I was [afraid of losing my voucher] because I don't have a job, you know, and I'm pregnant, so I'm like, "I hope I don't lose my voucher." That's why I got to do something immediately after I have my baby. My grandma gonna help take care of my baby for me, so. I need to find me a job, 'cause right now I don't want to lose my voucher right now.

Other participants describe the broader fragility of private market housing where availability is subject to the decision of individual owners. For example, 52 year-old Wanda Stokes worries is renting an apartment in house that is on the market. Her ability to remain there will depend on whether the new owners retain its section 8 certification. She worries about having to move. As she says, "Yeah, they got it up for sale. So I'm hoping I don't have to move though. Because that's a hard job".

In the context of this instability, it is unclear whether participants will be able to recreate the same sort of civic engagement and sense of community that participants described in public. As 59 year-old Donald Bell says "Well let me put it like this here, it took a long time for Oakwood Homes to get like that....It wasn't just a day or two, a year, it took a while."

Discussion

Research evaluating the costs and benefits of public housing demolition has typically focused on individual outcomes related to housing and neighborhood quality (Popkin 2006). In this paper, I have examined the collective dimensions of public housing communities that were also affected by demolition and relocation. My in-depth interviews with relocated public housing residents in Atlanta Georgia find frequent accounts of collective and civic engagement. Many participants were involved in formal structures of democratic participation- the tenants'

organizations. Additionally, many of those who were not formally involved, were embedded in social networks of mutual exchange which provided opportunities for collective engagement.

In Atlanta, the complete removal of publicly owned low-income housing developments (with the exception of a few complexes for the elderly and disabled), left relocated residents to find replacement housing in the private market where access and affordability were more fragile. Participants' stories of eviction and instability echo national data which find shorter tenancy among voucher holders in comparison to traditional public housing residents and also less community engagement among this more transient group (Keene and Geronimus 2011). Our narratives suggest that this instability made it challenging for residents to recreate the same opportunities for civic engagement that existed prior to relocation. Additionally, many new neighborhoods lacked the formal organizing structures that existed in the tenants' councils of public housing developments. Furthermore, for some former public housing developments stigma associated with former residence in public housing created barriers to their involvement. This finding echoes research conducted in newly constructed mixed-income housing developments finding that former public housing residents are stigmatized and marginalized from the communities' organizing structures (McCormick, Joseph, and Chaskin 2012).

The loss of these collective resources is an important consideration when thinking about the effects of public housing demolition in Atlanta and the broader shift away from federally owned and operated public housing throughout the country. In thinking about the right to adequate housing, it is important to consider not only the buildings that provide shelter, but also the collective and social dimensions of home. In particular, participants in this study describe real, although limited, collective power that existed in their formal organizing structures and in the social capital that existed in their informal ties to one another (Greenbaum 2008). Despite

their lack of political and economic power as marginalized and poor citizens, they were able to effect some real changes on behalf of their communities- for example, obtaining bus service or preventing the eviction of their neighbors. As argued by some scholars (Greenbaum 2008) and evidenced in these data, one consequence of public housing demolition has been to reduce the capacity of public housing residents to come together and advocate for their collective rights in this way.

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