Book Proposal

Indefensible Spaces:
Policing and the Remaking of Segregation in the Antelope Valley

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1. Brief Description

Situated in the Antelope Valley, Los Angeles County's northernmost outpost, *Indefensible Spaces* examines how racial segregation was engineered and re-engineered between two eras of Black migration into the Valley, first during the region's mid-century aerospace boom, and second in the aftermath of its post-Cold War economic collapse. The book offers a unique answer to the pressing question of how racial segregation has adapted to the past half century's changes in law, policy, and social norms. In a departure from accounts of residential segregation that omit policing from their scrutiny, I argue that policing has always played a role in residential segregation. Building from this, I show that today, policing is among the most powerful tools that communities can use to produce and maintain residential segregation.

To tell this story in full, I begin by examining the wartime growth of the Antelope Valley as an aerospace construction hub, and the concomitant migration of Black residents to the valley for jobs in these industries. Barred from residency in the valley, Black residents built their own town, Sun Village, on the region's fringe. Sun Village became the grounds from which Black residents built their civil rights movement, and fought to desegregate the valley. Next, I trace the white polity's response to the success of the Fair Housing Act, and its search for ways to shore up racial hierarchy amidst the erosion of residential segregation. I catalogue their effort to reclaim the valley, from organizing neo-nazis, to violence, cross burnings, confederate symbols, and widespread institutional discrimination. But as extreme as each tactic was, none could restore the valley to its perfectly segregated past. And when aerospace investment declined at the end of the Cold War, the valley was left neither rich nor segregated.

Rather than mark the end of the desert community, the economic collapse of the Antelope Valley in the early 2000s made it attractive to Angelenos being priced out of Los Angeles. And the federal government's turn away from public housing and towards Housing Choice Vouchers meant that poor families had to accept moving to places like the valley in order to receive housing assistance. The result amounted to a second wave of Black migration to the valley, which responded by turning to policing to re-assert racial segregation. Policing here meant not just the actions of law enforcement agencies, but also the participation and activity of private renters and homeowners. Policing allowed for homeowners to empower themselves through the denigration of those they surveilled and reported to police, city, and housing authority regulators. By participating in policing, white homeowners and their allies redeemed the valley one dispossession at a time.

The targets of this policing, often Black women in the housing voucher program, describe the effects on their lives and well-being, illustrating how home and family are made precarious and permeable through policing. Their experiences illustrate that voucher tenants are not moving to opportunity so much as they are moving within a racist social structure.

Despite these circumstances, tenants, activists, and lawyers organized and litigated to end some of the worst policing-segregation practices in the Antelope Valley, a movement that represented not just new directions in fair housing work, but also a confrontation with white property itself. Their work helped produce the U.S. Department of Justice's first lawsuit alleging that police practices violated fair housing: litigation central to the

successful settlement of this case and a precedent for similar action against housing policing programs in Minnesota, Ohio, Illinois, and Northern California.

Ultimately, *Indefensible Spaces* is about the Antelope Valley's effort to prevent something which has already happened. Black residency predates white development in the valley, but the false memory of the region as a once-white paradise serves as a prescription to terrorize and dispossess the region's Black community. The book's title also references how governing housing through crime has turned the homes of voucher tenants into indefensible spaces, permeable and precarious rather than private and protected.

I write this book on the basis of nearly 100 interviews with Black voucher tenants, local residents, community leaders, activists, civil rights lawyers, landlords, and city officials, as well as public records, NAACP archives, local newspaper records, and court filings. Through these sources, *Indefensible Spaces* acts as both a history of Black Los Angeles told through one of its most overlooked regions and a case study of national trends such as the spread of crime-free and nuisance housing ordinances and persistent hostility to tenants in the Housing Choice Voucher program. It reveals how policing has emerged as the new frontier of fair housing law and serves as a common thread linking the governance of housing assistance programs like vouchers to the criminalization of welfare more broadly, and has become a vital part of efforts across the nation to secure housing justice.

2. Market Consideration

Indefensible Spaces is written in an engaging and accessible style. Each chapter is centered on a key protagonist whose ambitions and work is used as a through-line for the chapter's main content and contribution. As it engages with literatures and debates across multiple academic disciplines, the book's theoretical contributions are presented through examples that facilitate their understanding by a broad range of readers, from students and academics to activists, policy makers, and the legal community.

Academic audiences

I have presented research from the book project at a broad array of academic venues, including the American Sociological Association, Society for the Study of Social Problems, Urban Affairs Association, and Law and Society Association. I have also given invited talks at the Housing Justice in Unequal Cities Conference, Duke University, Northwestern, UCLA, UIC Law School, Sociology of Housing Conference, and Blum Initiative for Global and Regional Poverty Studies at UC Riverside. This year, I will be presenting chapters from the book project at University of Wisconsin's Institute for Research on Poverty, NYU's Urban Initiative, and UIC's Institute for the Humanities.

This range of talks indicates that *Indefensible Spaces* will be relevant to scholars across disciplines of sociology, geography, law and society, history, urban planning, criminology, African American studies, American studies, gender studies, and public policy.

Teaching potential

I have already presented parts of the project to an undergraduate course (Social Welfare Policy and the Welfare State) at Lafayette University; a mixed undergraduate and masters seminar (Crime, Justice, and the City) at the University of Colorado-Denver, and an undergraduate sociology course at Williams College. This record gives confidence that courses across multiple academic disciplines will find this book engaging. I envision faculty being able to teach this book in undergraduate and graduate courses ranging from Introduction to Sociology, Sociology of Race & Ethnicity, Urban Sociology, Housing Policy, Public Policy, Law and Society, African American Studies, Urban Planning, Carceral Studies, Carceral Geography, and Race, Class, Gender, and the Law.

Because the book is both a historical survey and contemporary case study, it can be used as a core text in undergraduate survey courses. Its early chapters correspond with syllabi content on the development of racial segregation in the early 1900s, and the role of civil rights organizing in fighting this system in the mid-century period. The latter chapters can be read when courses turn their focus to contemporary questions of public policy, policing, and civil rights, illustrating the gaps between the legal victories of the 1960s and the realities of the present. For graduates, the book would work well in seminars, offering students with a wide array of scholarly interests ways to engage with the text.

National audiences

While working on this research, I have built institutional relationships with housing policy organizations interested in this work. For example, my research has been featured by the

National Low-Income Housing Coalition and I have been invited to participate in a workshop to inform voucher policy priorities at the Urban Institute. Additionally, policy recommendations from my research have been incorporated into policy briefs and platforms by PolicyLink, Renters Rising, and the Center for Popular Democracy. I expect that when this book is published, I can rely on these relationships to help bring the book to wider public audiences.

Furthermore, because the book is a case study of a national phenomenon of housing policing, it will have appeal to fair housing practitioners, housing nonprofits, and housing activists who see the weaponization of housing regulations, code enforcement, and nuisance housing laws happening in their communities as well. This is evidenced already by my having been asked to provide expert witness testimony on a related case by fair housing attorneys. I anticipate that the civil rights and fair housing communities will be key audiences for the book when it is published.

Local audiences

Finally, the Antelope Valley and California more broadly represent key audiences for this book. In the valley, several tenants and activists who I encountered through my work asked for or expressed interest in a history of the valley's social problems and social movements. I have worked hard to make sure this book also functions as a critical history of the valley. In California, this book informs urgent debates in housing policy, and links processes occuring in the Antelope Valley to similar locations in Northern California, like Antioch.

3. Table of Contents

Chapter Descriptions

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2011, Michelle Ross, Sheila Williams, and Jaquinn Davis sued the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, and the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles for discriminatory policing practices designed to evict them and their families from their the homes they lived in through the Housing Choice Voucher program. Their case was a landmark moment locally and nationally: their allegations reflected the experiences of thousands of voucher tenants across the valley, and they led to the Department of Justice's first legal filings alleging that police practices violated the Fair Housing Act.

But these tenants' experiences also countered decades of academic and policy-making orthodoxies that saw residential mobility as a solution to racial disadvantage. I describe these ideas and the role they had in changing American housing policy such that thousands of low-income families were pushed to struggling neighborhoods like those in the Antelope Valley.

The Antelope Valley's present-day struggles are the product of its decades-long transition from an engine of the county's wartime economy to the escape valve relieving its economic and social crises. This role helps explain why the region is at the bottom of the county's life

expectancy tables and the top of its police spending budgets. Over the course of this transition, Black residents of the Antelope Valley have fought for civil rights, political power, and housing justice.

The introduction concludes with an explanation of the book's title. *Indefensible Spaces* refers to the valley's inability to prevent Black residents from gaining a foothold in the region, because in reality Black residency predates white development in the valley. But it also references how the governing of housing through crime has turned the homes of voucher tenants into indefensible spaces, permeable and precarious rather than private and protected. I conclude by previewing the book's arguments and chapters, and discuss the methods used in the chapters to follow.

Chapter 2: Sun Village

This chapter begins with the story of Charles Graves, the first Black resident of the Antelope Valley. Graves, born into slavery in Kentucky, left the South after the Civil War, travelling west by rail until reaching the Antelope Valley in 1882. He grew rich from gold mining, and built the valley's first integrated public school in Rosamond. Graves' existence belies the last century of white politics in the valley, which presupposes that Black families have never lived in the valley and that their imminent arrival is something to be prevented at all costs. This paradox, the valley's desperate attempt to prevent something which has already occurred, is a thread that will run through the book. Graves' life history, and the histories of Black families coming to the valley from the early 1900s through the present, offer a counternarrative of Black placemaking that links the valley to struggles for community in Los Angeles and across the region.

The chapter continues by tracing the growth of the Antelope Valley into an aerospace construction hub for the military during World War 2. As the valley boomed, it created a more perfectly segregated version of Los Angeles – not allowing Black residency but incorporating Black workers into service occupations throughout the valley. In turn, Black workers built a town named Sun Village, one of several all-Black communities along Los Angeles' peripheries. Sun Village thrived in the 1950s and 60s, establishing the nation's first public park named in honor of Jackie Robinson, and participating in local and national NAACP organizing. To illustrate the sinews connecting Sun Village to Los Angeles, I trace nearly fifty years of civil rights organizing by the Prioleau family: their establishment of the Bethel A.M.E. Church in Los Angeles, their struggle against eviction from Bruce's Beach, their desegregation of the City of Los Angeles' swimming pools, and finally, their youngest daughter Lois Patton's role in founding the Sun Village NAACP and breaking the wall of residential segregation that had once defined the Antelope Valley.

Chapter 3: Redeeming the Right to Discriminate

Despite overwhelming public backing, California's conservative establishment could not successfully prevent fair housing law from taking hold. How its constituents reacted to this failure is a critical question in urban and political history. In the valley, these events seemed to validate the outsider approach of the white power movement, spearheaded in Los Angeles by preacher Wesley Swift. Swift exerted a tremendous influence on white

supremacist politics across the country by recording and disseminating taped lectures developing the ideas of what would come to be known as the Christian Identity Movement. His career served as a bridge between the white power movement of the 1930s and 1970s.

Through examining both the formalized efforts of white institutions like the California Real Estate Association and the informal tactics of Swift and his progeny, this chapter offers an answer to the question of how white homeowners managed to restore the right to discriminate in housing, and more broadly the social superiority that had come with segregation. The valley spent the 1970s, 80s, and 90s casting about for ways to undo the growing Black presence in the valley. Groups in the valley variously tried violence, nazism, erecting confederate symbols, and racist practices in schools, jobs, and housing. But none of it was enough.

I offer policing as the mechanism by which white homeowners reinvigorated their property rights – and illustrate how the war on crime's extension into housing has created new powers for property owners through a thicket of civil, criminal, and regulatory rules that turn the homes of poor renters into surveilled, quasi-carceral spaces. I argue that through policies that allow governments and individuals to police housing and evict neighbors, property owners have regained the right to discriminate in housing.

Chapter 4: Policing as Property

While the previous two chapters are built from newspaper and archival records, this chapter draws from interviews conducted with private homeowners and renters, fair housing lawyers, and city officials. I focus on the city of Lancaster, where Mayor R. Rex Parris tried a variety of tactics to criminalize, remove, and prevent voucher renters from entering the city. Seeing most of them fail, Parris and other city leaders settled on a participatory policing regime. In this system, private renters and homeowners are empowered to surveil their neighbors and file complaints against them to the city, housing authority, or police. Enough calls, regardless of their merit, could result in a voucher tenant being evicted by their landlord, losing their voucher, or simply leaving in frustration.

The core of the chapter features interviews with private renters and homeowners engaged in surveilling and policing their neighbors. From my conversations with them, I theorize that the reasons people participate in policing go beyond attitudes of anti-Blackness or opposition to welfare programs. Participation in policing offers status and other benefits that are of value to participants. In this way, building from the work of Cheryl Harris, policing is cognizable as a form of property. Policing as property illustrates the stakes that private property owners and renters have in policing Black residents. To be able to police while others cannot, to degrade through policing, and to acquire a superior social status through policing – these are lucrative rewards not just in the Antelope Valley but in neighborhoods across the country.

Chapter 5: Indefensible Spaces

In the 1950s and 1960s, welfare agencies and public housing authorities collaborated to spy on, raid, and withdraw benefits and housing from women in the Aid to Families with

Dependent Children program if evidence was found that they were romantically involved with any man. These "man in the house" rules, enforced through the draconian midnight raids, were presumed to have been ended by the 1968 King v. Smith ruling. Interviews with 40 voucher tenants in the Antelope Valley illustrate how tenants experience this surveillance and policing regime today, and how it has effectively resurrected the "man in the house" rules and midnight raids once thought to be a thing of the past.

Casting social and family relationships as evidence that tenants were harboring "unauthorized tenants," neighbors and the local housing authority have brought broken windows policing into the home. They launched roughly a thousand inspections of voucher tenants between 2007 and 2011, evicting hundreds each year. Paired with one-strike eviction policies based on drug and criminal charges, tenants faced a complex miasma of ways they could be evicted. The most practicable way to avoid this is to stay unknown and out of the public eye. This involves curtailing a range of fully legal behaviors, like inviting guests over, supporting family, and allowing children to play in the yard. In other words, the effect of the valley's policing regime was to turn family and social bonds into eviction liabilities. Tenants bear these conditions because the protection of housing is of highest importance, finding alternate housing through the voucher program is extremely difficult, and being evicted or pushed out would also be disruptive to the lives and education of their children.

Chapter 6: The Second Sun

Finally, I use interviews with local activists, public officials, civil rights attorneys, and tenants to review the ways that Black residents in the Antelope Valley overturned some of the region's worst policing practices. This mobilization represents a second battle against segregation, much like the first struggle waged by Sun Village in the 1960s. I focus on the activism of one local group, The Community Action League (TCAL), who responded to a wave of reports about voucher evictions through mobilization on two registers: on one, they mobilized sustained community opposition to voucher policing and on the other they filed litigation on behalf of evicted voucher tenants. I interview members of TCAL who worked on this campaign and lawyers who worked on the case about their strategies. I follow the case's settlement and examine how residents interpret its outcomes today. And I ask what implications this mobilization might have for similar cases in municipalities around the country.

Ultimately, the fight against policing subsidized tenants in the Antelope Valley was many things: a fight for civil rights, for tenant rights, against eviction, and for family and community. But to the extent that policing became a white property right in the late 20th century, it was also a fight against property itself.

By eliminating policing programs that empowered white residents to police subsidized housing tenants, activists and their legal allies reduced the scope of policing in the Antelope Valley, as well as the powers afforded to private homeowners and renters. Their work should be weaved into the full scope of our understanding of contemporary housing justice struggles in Los Angeles. And their efforts represent a model for other struggles around crime free and nuisance housing cases around the country to build upon.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The concluding chapter considers Sun Village alongside two sites that border it; one, the remains of the socialist colony Llano Del Rio, and the other a so-called museum of native artifacts from the valley. The public memory of these three places can be summarized roughly as follows: indigenous peoples were not legitimate inhabitants of this place, the socialist colony failed, and the Black town never existed. These narratives have narrowed the Antelope Valley's range of possibilities to capitalist development and racial hierarchy – a path that has left it among the deadliest, most policed, and most unequal places in Los Angeles. In this light, Black struggle in Sun Village and across the valley facilitates a reconsideration of the region's core premises and narrow futures.

To suggest the Antelope Valley that could be, I argue for an agenda of de-policing housing – a framework that makes novel contributions to both urban sociology and carceral studies. Cutting down the thicket of HUD regulations that weaken privacy rights and increase eviction risks would make voucher tenants' homes more private and stable as opposed to surveilled and precarious. More broadly, I argue for seeing crime free and nuisance housing ordinances as contemporary segregation practices, and making their elimination a key part of fair housing work. Zooming out to the national level, I show that this agenda is already well at work, and that the Antelope Valley's legacy can be seen in efforts to challenge the policing of housing in states such as Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, and elsewhere in California.

4. Apparatus / Illustrative Materials

I expect that the book will run to approximately 80,000 words. I anticipate using 2 maps, 2 tables, and up to 30 images. The project has a companion digital exhibit that will house more archival images from this research. Thus the number of images in the book is flexible.

5. Comparable and Competing Volumes

I envision this book fitting into five broad areas of contemporary scholarship: First, it builds on new work documenting the relationship between policing and space, advanced by Daanika Gordon in *Policing the Racial Divide* and Jodi Rios in *Black Lives and Spatial Matters*. To this work I add new theorizing of policing as an historic and contemporary driver of racial segregation.

Second, its exploration of the realities of the Housing Choice Voucher program makes it an important contribution to literature on the history of public housing, and the policy ideas that led to its partial demolition and replacement with vouchers. In particular, I see this book as a complement to Eva Rosen's *The Voucher Promise*, adding to our understanding of the experiences of tenants in the aftermath of the policy transformation.

Third, I see this book's contributions to the sociology of property and property rights as fitting alongside Claire Herbert's *A Detroit Story*, and Gene Slater's *Freedom to Discriminate*. My theorizing of policing as property helps explain the remaking of hierarchy in the wake of urban changes like desegregation, gentrification.

Fourth, as a study of the regulation of the welfare state, this project also fits alongside Spencer Headworth's *Policing Welfare: Punitive Adversarialism in Public Assistance,* and Cayce Hughes' forthcoming *Privacy, Poverty, and Punishment: How Surveillance in the Social Safety Net Penalizes Poor Black Mothers.* Here, my work adds a strong call to understand the welfare reform and housing reforms passed at the end of the 20th century as two parts of the same process of neoliberalization and punitive regulation.

Fifth and finally, this book adds to an exciting new crop of critical studies of Los Angeles including Lynn Hudson's *West of Jim Crow,* Andrea Gibbons' *City of Segregation,* Max Felker-Kantor's *Policing Los Angeles,* Forrest Stuart's *Down, Out, and Under Arrest*, Kelly Lytle Hernandez' *City of Inmates,* and Mike Davis and Jon Wiener's *Set the Night on Fire.* What these books share is a focus on the metropolis, and I enrich that work by illustrating the fate of one outpost so deeply tied to it.

6. Status of the work

I have completed, workshopped, and revised Chapters 2, 3 and 4 (included as sample chapters). These chapters help illustrate the range of historical records and contemporary interviews that make up the book's data. I have drafted Chapter 5 and anticipate completing it this fall. What remains are Chapter 6, the introduction, and the conclusion. I anticipate completing those and having a full draft manuscript ready for review in Spring 2023.

7. Suggested Reviewers

The following reviewers would be among the many who I would appreciate reviewing this manuscript. While some of the individuals listed below are familiar with me, my book project, or my other publications, none have read sample chapters from the manuscript.

> Ananya Roy, Robin D.G. Kelley, Priscilla Ocen, Kelly Lytle Hernandez, Walter Johnson, Monica Bell, Eva Rosen, Elizabeth Korver-Glenn, Forrest Stuart.

8. Author Biography

I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminology, Law, and Justice and Department of Sociology (by courtesy) at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC).

My work is broadly focused on the policing of housing, and I have published scholarship on this topic in *City and Community, Du Bois Review*, *Feminist Formations*, *Housing Policy Debate*, and *Social Service Review*. My work has won awards from the American Sociological Association, Society for the Study of Social Problems, and the Surveillance Studies Network, as well as grants and institutional support from the Russell Sage Foundation and UIC's Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy.

I recently completed a visiting scholar position with the American Bar Foundation and am currently a faculty fellow with UIC's Institute for the Humanities as well as the chair of the Poverty, Class and Inequality Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Looking forward, I have accepted an invitation to join the Editorial Board of *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*.

This year, through a yearlong fellowship and support from UIC's Digital Humanities Initiative and the California African American Museum, I am building a digital exhibit documenting Sun Village and its civil rights history. I anticipate making substantial progress on the exhibit over the coming academic year and launching it publicly either as a preview of the book or as a follow up to it, depending on the progress of both projects.

I received my PhD in Sociology from the University of California at Los Angeles in 2018.

Author Platform

I have a strong author platform based on academic presentations, institutional relationships, and media coverage.

As mentioned in the market considerations section, I have presented research from the book project at a broad array of academic venues, including the American Sociological Association, Society for the Study of Social Problems, Urban Affairs Association, and Law and Society Association. I have also given invited talks at the Housing Justice in Unequal Cities Conference, Duke University, Northwestern University, UCLA, UIC Law School, the Sociology of Housing Conference, and the Blum Initiative for Global and Regional Poverty Studies at UC Riverside. This year I will continue building interest in the book project through invited talks at the University of Wisconsin's Institute for Research on Poverty,

NYU's Urban Initiative, and UIC's Institute for the Humanities. My scholarly platform is also bolstered by a recent visiting scholar appointment at the American Bar Foundation and my leadership of the Poverty, Class, and Inequality Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems.

Outside the academy, I have built institutional relationships with housing policy organizations interested in changing public policy around vouchers and neighborhood policing. For example, my research has been featured by the National Low-Income Housing Coalition and I have been invited to participate in a workshop to inform voucher policy priorities at the Urban Institute. Additionally, policy recommendations from my research have been incorporated into policy briefs and platforms by PolicyLink, Renters Rising, and the Center for Popular Democracy. I expect that when this book is published, I can rely on these relationships to help bring the book to wider public audiences.

My research has been referenced in a number of media outlets, including the Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, OneZero, and KCRW, indicating broad public interest in the themes and policy debates that my book intervenes in. I recently published an op-ed in The Chicago Tribune warning of the dangers of letting policing become a new form of citizenship. This media coverage, paired with my strong presence on social media, has increased my public reach and helped me build relationships and an audience beyond traditional academic venues.

Finally, through a yearlong fellowship and support from UIC's Digital Humanities Initiative and the California African American Museum, I am building a digital exhibit documenting Sun Village and its civil rights history. I anticipate making substantial progress on the exhibit over the coming academic year and launching it publicly either as a preview of the book or as a follow up to it, depending on the timing of both projects.