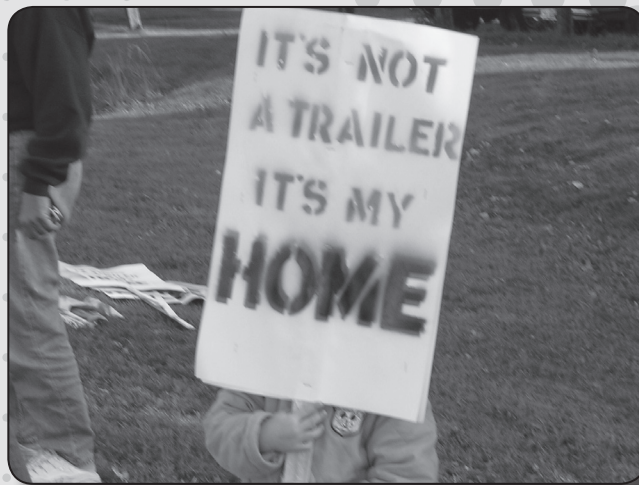


Park Prejudice



The term park prejudice was coined to give a name to the negative public image of people who live in manufactured home parks and the injustice that occurs as a result.

Park Prejudice is:

- A form of oppression
- Based on a set of stereotypes that promote the idea that people who live in manufactured home parks are inferior and do not deserve the same rights and opportunities as others
- Rooted in history and embedded in the structure and cultural norms
- Something that happens between individuals AND something that is part of the laws, organizational policies and practices, and social norms of our country.
- Not an accident, but rather a series of decisions that put park residents "in their place" to benefit others
- Perpetuated by the media

Examples of Park Prejudice:

- It is acceptable to use the phrase "trailer trash" to describe people. This phrase literally means: worthless, useless, something that should be thrown away, discarded.
- The federal government does not consider manufactured homes as equal to stick built homes, therefore public and private institutions, such as banks, government entities, and non-profits, deny homeowners the opportunity to earn equity, get fair financing, apply for first-time home buyer loans and participate in other housing programs.
- When there are problems in manufactured home communities, often the people who have the power to solve them (police, the city council, courts, churches, social service agencies) do nothing. This is justified by the perception that people who live in manufactured home parks are dysfunctional, unintelligent, alcoholics and meth addicts whose poor life choices have caused the problems.
- During a time of rapid growth in the manufactured home park industry, zoning ordinances in cities across the county restricted parks to industrial areas and the outskirts of town. At the same time cities prevented individuals from placing manufactured homes on city lots, forcing people to place their homes in specific designated areas. Now, these areas are being developed and parks are closing for a "higher and better use of the land."
- The entertainment and news media portray manufactured home parks as dangerous, dirty, falling-down places where the dregs of society or poor victims live. Some common portrayals are: tornado victims, crime scenes (announced as "mobile home murder" as opposed to "single family home murder"), teen pregnancy, neglectful parents, poor, "white trash," "illegal alien," and bad grammar.
- When park owners let the infrastructure of a community deteriorate, the public often thinks that the best solution is close the place down rather than fixing it. Even non-profit organizations and public housing agencies find it acceptable to close manufactured home communities in order to build other housing (condos, senior apartments).
- People are hurt by the park prejudice of their family and friends, relationships are lost.

Why Does Park Prejudice Exist?

Manufactured home parks are a relatively new type of neighborhood in the context of our nation's history. In many parts of the country, manufactured home parks were built to fill the housing shortage for the nations returning heroes of World War II. Just a few decades later, people living in these same neighborhoods are now seen as the scum of the earth, quite literally "trash."

Many different forms of prejudice (race, class, gender, religious, etc.) have developed over the course of hundreds or even thousands of years. How did park prejudice develop so quickly? How did national heroes become perceived as "trailer trash?"

To answer this question we need to look at why park prejudice exists in the first place.

Park Prejudice Exists Because of Fear and Ignorance

It's amazing how many people still believe that manufactured homes are mobile. "It's just a matter of hauling a truck up to the front of the home and riding off into the sunset. Right?" This perception comes from an outdated historical model of manufactured home life. People need to understand the difference between yesterday's travel trailers and today's homes.

The media shapes most people's perceptions. Shows like Jerry Springer and COPS are aired almost every night, promoting horrible stereotypes against park residents. Local news media coverage tends to portray park residents as either victims or criminals. When examining the media as a source of information, it is not surprising that the public views park residents solely as dysfunctional, drug dealing, and tornado victims.

Because of this negative image, a lot of people are afraid of park residents. This is unfortunate because it prevents people from seeing the reality of park life that only happens through personal interaction. Ever notice that there are almost always police officers at city council meetings that your group attends? Do they go to all council meetings or just the ones you are at?

Park Prejudice Exists to Take Away Our Power

Like any form of prejudice, Park Prejudice creates a feeling of superiority among people who don't live in parks. Park Prejudice puts people in their place. Think back to the exercise we did on how to influence powerful institutions. The last ring of power is the ability to shape public meaning. Think about everyone that benefits from the keeping park residents in their place. This ranges from park-lords to nonprofit organization whose job is to "help" people living in manufactured home communities. Park Prejudice therefore is no accident, rather is an intentional means to take away your power. Park prejudice is used in influencing agenda setters and decision makers to someone else's benefit and at your expense. Often time park owners will talk about park residents as free loaders, gamblers, alcoholics, and other derogatory terms when speaking in front of the city council. They do this because they understand the power of this corrupted meaning of park life.

Park Prejudice Exists Because it is Tolerated

Parks owners, the media and public officials are using park prejudice to take away your power. What is our response? We can't afford to sit around and wait for these negative attitudes to change, because they aren't going to unless we do something about it. The sad truth about park prejudice is that it has been tolerated for far too long. We see the negative consequences of these images playing out all the time in manufactured home communities. But how often do we speak out? How often do we call park prejudice what it is? Rather than going home upset about what we've heard, now is the time for organized people to hold individuals and institutions accountable for perpetuating park prejudice.

Level	Definition	Examples
Individual Park Prejudice	Individual Park Prejudice exists within an individual. People who don't live in parks are influenced by negative portrayals of park residents in the media. People who live in parks internalize, or believe, these negative images.	<p>Non-Park Residents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Believing that stereotypes of park residents are true ▪ Holding prejudiced thoughts and attitudes <p>Park Residents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feeling inferior because of internalized stereotypes ▪ Having a victim mentality, wishing to be helped rather than helping themselves
Interpersonal Park Prejudice	Interpersonal Park Prejudice takes place between individuals. It is carried out as specific actions from one person to another.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Harassing or making fun of someone for living in a manufactured home ▪ Calling someone "trailer trash" ▪ Using the word trailer rather than home ▪ Telling derogatory jokes about park residents
Institutional Park Prejudice	Institutional Park Prejudice takes place when a political, community, financial, or other institution acts to the detriment of manufactured home owners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rent increases, unfair rules, abusive treatment by park owners and management, and unfair treatment by police ▪ Businesses denying employment to park residents ▪ Local government attempts to get rid of parks
Systemic Park Prejudice	Systemic Park Prejudice takes place across systems (legal, political, cultural, educational, economic, etc). This happens when a variety of institutions and systems act to the detriment of manufactured homeowners. It is also tied to the whole history of manufactured home parks and their public meaning.	<p>Lack of resources and public will to preserve manufactured home parks compared to other forms of housing</p> <p>Manufactured homes not considered "real" homes</p> <p>Differences in rights of stick built owners compared to manufactured home owners</p>

by Paul Wissmiller, APAC Treasurer

Abode, domicile, home, dwelling, and residence are all synonyms for a place where someone lives. Trailer is not one of them.

The word trailer offends me. When a person uses the word trailer to refer to a manufactured home, they degrade not only the homes but also the people who live there. Even when a home is described as a nice house in a "trailer court" or "trailer park" it diminishes everyone by using this derogatory term.

What comes to mind when you hear the word "trailer park?" Ever notice how people always say "down at the trailer park?" Why is it never up? A lot of people immediately associate "trailer park" with "trailer trash," an ugly slur that society uses against us. Using the

word trailer therefore brings about all the negative images of "trailer trash," those stereotypes that say we are all transients that are dangerous, stupid and living off welfare. Changing the language we use to talk about our homes is an important part of changing this perception.

The term trailer is not only offensive, it is inaccurate. All though it may be pulled by a truck from the factory to where it will be established, a manufactured home stops being a "trailer" once it is delivered and set upon a pad.

Some people have opted for the term "mobile home" which, although better than trailer, is still inaccurate. Statistics say that over 90% of manufactured homes are never moved once they are installed. The two main reasons manufactured homes remain on their original site are that they were meant to be permanent and that moving them after they are installed is extremely costly, sometimes over \$10,000. Many older homes cannot be moved due to their age.

If a home is one of the small number that ever leaves its original site, it may stop being lived in while in transit to a new location, but it never stops being a home.

Using "manufactured home" is the best term. Even if a lot of people don't know what it means, use this as an opportunity to enlighten them about the reality of manufactured home living.

Maybe the real question here is why we should even have to label our homes in the first place. After all, no one else has to have these debates over what to call their homes. The way I see it, a home is a home, whether it's a million dollar mansion or a single wide. So if you ever feel confused over all the terminology used to categorize our homes, don't settle for it. Just say, "It's my home."



A Mobile Justice Movement

When we look back through history, it is clear that social movements can combat prejudice and oppression against groups of people. The suffrage movement won women the right to vote and the labor movement won the 8-hour workday. There are countless other examples.

This is our time in history, and we can create a movement to end park prejudice. In fact, one has already begun. Thousands of homeowners are already fighting for Mobile Justice. Anyone who wants to see park prejudice put into the history books can work to build and strengthen the Mobile Justice movement.

What Makes a Movement?

Leaders: Heroes are not required, just many ordinary people who are willing to organize. Ordinary people become leaders by building a base of neighbors and allies who understand park prejudice, have a vision for justice, and act on that vision as part of an organization. Sometimes this base is called a homeowners association. This means homeowners associations must link local issue campaigns to the larger Mobile Justice movement in order to influence the public meaning of manufactured home parks.

Organizing: Organizing is what builds any movement. Homeowners across the nation must unite and demand change. However, organizing campaigns around issues in individual parks alone will not end park prejudice. Mobile Justice will be achieved when:

1. Leaders are intentional about putting local issue campaigns in the context of a larger movement to end park prejudice.
2. Homeowners demand institutional and structural changes that take park prejudice out of laws and institutional policies. Even if, by magic, every person in this country shed his or her prejudices against manufactured homeowners, park prejudice would still exist. It will exist until the unequal treatment of manufactured homeowners that is mandated by law, common policies, and practices are changed.

Time: Genuine social change takes time. Mobile Justice will not happen with one campaign or in one year or in one city. The Mobile Justice movement must be sustained and built for many years and in many locations in order to be successful in combating park prejudice.

People Power: Many manufactured homeowners from across the nation will have to be involved in sustaining organizing campaigns, setting the agenda, presenting an alternative meaning for manufactured homes, influencing decision makers and keeping up the momentum for change.

Where do we begin?

Know Our Place in History

Manufactured homeowners have been told time and time again, “stay in your place,” but only a few take the time to ask why. The first step in ending prejudice against manufactured home park residents is to understand where it comes from and how it works. Instead of “staying in our place” we must seize our place in history and know that we have an opportunity to impact the future. Take time to research the history of manufactured home communities in your area.

Create a Vision for the Future

It's easy to talk about what we are against, but if we want to build a movement we have to know what we are “for.” What do you want the “public perception” of manufactured home parks to be in 5 years? What values do you want to uphold? What does Mobile Justice mean to you? What does Mobile Justice mean to other people in your community?

What it Will Take to Overcome Park Prejudice

Decide to Fight for our Shared Vision

Being powerful is a choice. If you want to end park prejudice and reach your goal, you have to make a personal commitment.

Build Power in Your Own Community

A leader in the Mobile Justice Movement must have a base of people who are willing to stand up for what they believe. Start in your own community by motivating your neighbors to get involved. Start a campaign to fix a small injustice in your park and keep the momentum going.

Reveal Park Prejudice

Ignoring or denying that an injustice exists is one of the most effective ways to keep it going. Homeowners who want to end park prejudice must first prove that it exists.

- Research and document cases of park prejudice
Find concrete evidence that demonstrates that manufactured homeowners are treated unfairly. Keep the focus on institutional policies and practices, not individual behavior.
- Call it what it is
Explicitly say that an issue is “park prejudice;” this forces people to acknowledge and address it as such.
- Explain it
Combine concrete evidence with personal stories to illustrate how park prejudice works to keep manufactured homeowners in their place. Focus on systemic patterns and appeal to people’s core values of fairness.

Re-frame Park Prejudice

To change the public perception of manufactured home parks, homeowners must present a new and more accurate story about their communities to the public. Park prejudice is one frame, and it is winning. Homeowners must create their own definition of manufactured home parks.

10 things homeowners can do to combat park prejudice

1. Stop using the word “trailer” and explain to others, including the media, how that word works to perpetuate park prejudice.
2. Learn about the history of manufactured home parks in your city and state. Has there been a pattern of unfair treatment of the park by the city? Are there any current city policies or actions that threaten the park? Share what you find with your neighbors, write a letter to the city, and/or ask a local news reporter to write a story about what you discover.
3. Set up an alert system so that when public figures, such as legislators, city council members, or news reporters, say something that is park prejudiced you and others who care can write letters of disapproval.
4. Start a resident association in your park and demonstrate that park residents are powerful when united.
5. If you think something is wrong, do research to find concrete evidence that homeowners are being treated unfairly. Share what you find with your neighbors, the authorities and the media.
6. When describing your homeowners association to the media use words like: outraged, park prejudice, united, powerful, demand accountability, take a stand, justice, unfair, fight for family, home, community, rights, join us, and manufactured home. Avoid words like: victim, struggling, helpless, have no voice, need help, afraid, hopeless, impossible, trailer, trash, and problems.
7. Get involved with or start a campaign to change park-prejudiced laws in your city or state. Or proposed a new law that will give manufactured homeowners more rights.
8. Create art that exposes the injustice of park prejudice.
9. Testify at a public hearing so that decision-makers hear about your experience of park prejudice and understand why there is a need for change.
10. Connect with other homeowners who are standing up for change across the country.

The Evergreen Estates Story

Narrator: John, a single father of two teenage boys, is getting married to Marissa is just a few months. John and Marissa were worried about finding room for their combined family. There was simply not enough space in John's manufactured home at Evergreen Estates for Marissa and her two elementary aged children, especially since Grandma moved in last year after her stroke. Finding a bigger house to fit their budget was nearly impossible in their expanding suburban community, and John wasn't willing to move his boys from their school. John started having second thoughts about the wedding, but then a perfect solution appeared. He saw Neighbor Norm put a "For Sale" sign on his single-wide home. John called Marissa and they decided to buy the home. The boys would live there with Grandma, leaving space in John's home for Marissa and her children. They went to tell Neighbor Norm.

Neighbor Norm: I got a call from the park manager yesterday. She saw the "For Sale" sign and told me that I can't sell my home in the park unless I find a buyer who will agree to replace the siding and all the windows. That adds thousands of dollars to the sale price. There is nothing wrong with the windows or the siding; she just wants the house to look new. She should fix up the pot-holes and paint the speed bumps instead of making demands of my home.

Marissa: But that's illegal, she can't force us to fix the place up when there's really nothing wrong with it! I know that the state law says manufactured homeowners have the right to sell their home in a park, no matter how old it is or how it looks.

Neighbor Norm: Well, the law doesn't count here. John, you remember what happened when that family down the street threatened to take the park to court because their water started coming out brown. The retaliation was so bad they decided to move out. Remember how the manager canceled their trash service and threatened to evict them? Yeah, it's best to keep quiet around here. There's nothing we can do.

John: I'm sorry Marissa, but I think Norm's right. Marcus will turn 18 in February and that means he will have to apply to live in the park. Even though he has lived here his whole life, if the manager wants to, she can reject his application. Let's not give her a reason to make my son homeless. We'll just have to come up with the extra money for the siding and windows somehow. It's our only option.

Marissa: You're right, there's nothing we can do. How are we going to get the money?

Narrator: John and Marissa looked into getting a home equity loan, but their home had no value in the bank's eyes, so they didn't qualify. Next they turned to family. Marissa though maybe her sister would be willing to help.

Marissa's Sister: I can't believe you're even considering moving into that trailer park. Have you seen how those people live? I feel sorry for your girls, the other kids at school are going to call them trailer trash. How could you do that to them? No, I won't help you fix up that worthless trailer. Why don't you buy a real house?

Narrator: Meanwhile, John looked into a grant from the local non-profit housing organization.

Housing Advocate: Well, John, I see you're in a difficult situation and I feel for you. Unfortunately, we don't give out grants for mobile homes, and I don't think you'll find any responsible non-profit to help you fix up a 1978 mobile home, it's not safe. I wouldn't be able to sleep at night knowing I helped someone move into a place that could catch fire or blow over in the next wind-storm. Besides, we can't justify helping people invest in something that will only depreciate in value. And you know, I don't think Evergreen Estates Trailer Park is going to be there a year from now. The city is holding meetings to discuss a better use for that land. Have you thought about moving out of the area? We may be able to help you finance a small single-family home.

EXAMPLES OF PARK PREJUDICE: *The Evergreen Estates Story*

Individual/Internalized Prejudice:

- **Norm** stating, "It's best to keep quiet around here. There's nothing we can do." John and Marissa agreeing that "there's nothing we can do," about the manager breaking the law. All three characters internalized the park prejudiced belief that residents are powerless to challenge the demands of a park manager.
- The **housing advocate** who believes that manufactured homes are unsafe and bad investment has internalized the park prejudiced ideas that manufactured housing is undesirable and should be eliminated in the future.

Interpersonal Park Prejudice:

- **Marissa's sister's** belief in the stereotypes about people who live in manufactured homes. She acts on her belief of the trailer trash stereotype by shaming Marissa for putting herself in a situation where those stereotypes will apply to her. She denies Marissa her support and approval.

Institutional Park Prejudice:

- The **non-profit housing organization policy** that excludes loans and services for manufactured homes. This policy excludes manufactured homeowners from opportunities traditional homeowners can access.
- The **financial institution policy** prevents manufactured homeowners from getting low-interest loans, limiting the amount of equity people can build in their homes. Federal guidelines from Fannie Mae prevent many manufactured homeowners from accessing market rate loans. This denies manufactured homeowners the opportunity to borrow against their homes to pursue higher education, make home improvements, or respond to financial emergencies.
- **City officials** suggest that manufactured homes are not the best use of land. The city holds meetings about the future of the park, without informing residents and asking them to participate.

Structural Park Prejudice:

- In the broader context of structural park prejudice in the United States, a history of public policy decisions, institutional practices, and cultural myths have created a housing situation that disenfranchises people. Manufactured home parks have played the role of segregating poor and working class people into the same space where they can be managed by wealthy park-lords. Public institutions, driven by the belief that manufactured homes are not real homes, deny homeowners access to earning equity in their homes, fair financing options, first-time home buyer loans and other housing programs. The undervaluing of manufactured homes is justified by the myth of mobility and the idea that people who live in manufactured home parks are transients, not real homeowners. The negative treatment of manufactured home owners is justified by the myth of trailer trash, which brands residents of manufactured home parks as undeserving of the same opportunities as traditional homeowners. The American Dream of homeownership does not include manufactured homes. Internalized privilege and oppression keep this system in place.

