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A Study of the Influence of a Mobile Home Community on Suburban High School Students: Anthropological and Educational Implications

Beverly Evko
Loyola University Chicago

A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF A MOBILE HOME COMMUNITY ON SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

by

Beverly Evko

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VITA

Beverly Evko, the daughter of John Evko and Anna Maryanovich Evko was born in New York City. After attending public schools she matriculated at Northwestern University earning a Bachelor of Science Degree (with distinction) in 1956 and a Master of Science Degree in 1957, in speech pathology and audiology.

Ms. Evko has been a professional clinician and/or administrator since graduating from Northwestern University. She has been on the staff at J. Sterling Morton High School and Junior College, conducted research for SEDOL, Special Educationa District of Lake County, and originated and headed the Hearing Conservation Program in High School District 214. In 1966-67 she was speech consultant for the Illinois Department of Education.

While living in Madrid, Spain and attending the University of Madrid (1968-69) she became interested in anthropology and education and mindful that cultural influneces are particularly consequential in the lives of students. In 1975, Ms. Evko received a Master of Arts Degree in anthropology at Loyola University. She is presently a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Foundations, Graduate School, Loyola University of Chicago.

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INTRODUCTION

> There's too many park owners
> who act as if they own the
> people not just the land.
> Park Resident

How have dwellings, resting on wheels, concealed by "skirting," come to be part of the American experience? And why do people, citizens in this vast and rich nation, feel privileged to have an opportunity to rent a small space on which to park their homes? And, how, in this "land of the free and home of the brave," did law-abiding citizens come to live with high fences surmounted by barbed wire as part of their home environment? And why can some Americans be called "trash" with impunity?

This study describes and analyzes life in a mobile home park, Robben Island. It is a real place with a fictional name. The study will share observations and interpretations of findings that emerged in the course of the research.

The major goals of the study are two: (1) to describe the historical process occurring in the United

States that led to the mobile home park; (2) to indicate the implications that residency in a mobile home park, such as Robben Island, has on daily life. The particular focus of the study is upon adolescents growing up, attending school, and spending the formative years of their lives living in a park environment; it will examine the unique features of the mobile home and the quasi-governmental authority of the park landlord over the lives of the tenants, and look at the self-image and the social image that appear to be associated with life in the park.

Further, it will be seen that the events in the lives of people at Robben Island are not unique experiences in this park and that facts gained through correspondence, conversations, and research support the observation that there is a repetition of experiences, a similarity in what residents in the park can come to expect as part of "mobile home living."

The mobile home must be distinguished from the trailer set up for temporary use. It must also be distinguished from the recreational vehicle (RV). We have all seen the trailer used as an office at construction sites, as a classroom in overcrowded schools, for temporary delivery of health care, and for library and information services. The mobile home is none of these; it is used as a permanent residence.

Robben Park is considered an unrestricted mobile home park (one which has no age restriction for tenants). In this study, terms referring to mobile home owner (mobile home tenant), and mobile home park have the following meanings: mobile home owner, one who rents space in a mobile home park from a mobile home park owner for the purpose of parking his mobile home; mobile home park, a contiguous parcel of privately owned land which is used for the accommodation of mobile homes occupied for year-round living.[1]

The people who are the subject of this study live at Robben Island Mobile Home Park. The writer finds that the residents of this park (and later it will be seen that residents at other parks, as well) suffer from ambiguity in their social and legal place in contemporary American society. This ambiguity is discussed in Chapter IV, Symbolic Images. The dual roles of being both owner-tenant and of making one's home in a dwelling so often confused with a recreational vehicle or the trailer of the 1930s and 1940s, are only two instances of factors contributing to the frustration of mobile home park dwellers.

A negative public image of the trailer unit can be traced to the early 1930s. C. M. Edwards, author and

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[1]State of New York, Senate Bill No. 7730-A. An Act Section 1, 233, May 7, 1974.

mobile home housing consultant, observes that an image of trailer camps established during World War II (1942-46), "has plagued the mobile home industry. . . . many influential people hold prejudices about mobile homes."[2] The term "influential" refers to people who influence the decisions that result in restrictive local zoning ordinances regarding land use and zoning of mobile home parks.[3]

Although Edwards places the origin of the negative image in the 1940s, documents indicate that although there were few house trailers, the antecedent to today's mobile home,[4] in the mid-1930s disdain against them was already being felt by the trailer owners.

When, in the mid-1930s, Howard Vincent O'Brien sought the perils and pleasures of the road in his house trailer, he found signs greeting him with "NO MORE HOUSE CARS." At one point, he attempted to board a ferry in Florida, and justifiably feared that his "covered wagon,"[5] as he affectionately referred to his trailer, would be

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[2]Carlton M. Edwards, Homes for Travel and Living: The History and Development of the Recreation Vehicle and Mobile Homes Industries (East Lansing, Mich.: By the Author, 1977), p. 65.

[3]Correspondence with Mr. C. M. Edwards, April, 1980.

[4]Edwards, Homes for Travel and Living, pp. 7-17.

[5]Howard Vincent O'Brien, Folding Bedouins or Adrift in a Trailer (Chicago: Willette, Clark & Co., 1936), p. 36.

turned away, for it was well-known that the "skipper had an active distaste for trailers."[6] As O'Brien approached Palm Beach, he noted: "We shall be pariahs there, of course. But it is clear now that we are pariahs everywhere, except in the tourist camps."[7]

Records from 1936 indicate that "no statutory definition" of the house trailer existed; however, there was a general definition: "A house trailer is a two or four wheeled (usually the former) vehicle with no independent motive power, towed by a private passenger car."[8] Although there were only 25,000 house trailers in 1935[9] the prejudice had already evidenced itself.

Residents of Robben Island commented often to the writer: "People think we're trailer trash." Their hurt in the revelation of what they saw as truth ran deep. They would add more cheerfully, "But they should see how

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[6]Ibid., p. 33.

[7]Ibid., p. 36.

[8]National Highway Users Conference, "House Trailers: A Survey of All State Legislative Provisions Which Apply to Their Ownership and Use" (Washington, D.C.: National High Users Conference, 1936), p. 7.

[9]"The House Trailer: Its Effect on State and Local Government," A Report Prepared in Cooperation with the American Public Welfare Association, American Society of Planning Officials, National Association of Housing Officials, Report No. 114 (Chicago: American Municipal Association, 1937), p. 32.

nice our mobile homes are." However, residents, aware as they are of what they feel the public image of life in the park to be, have a defensive need to justify themselves in terms of mainstream morality. Further, they have other concerns with which to contend, such as costs and maintenance of their homes, the ever present concern about the park rules and regulations, and whether they have overstepped a rule or offended the park manager and thus may be evicted.

Following fears about frequent and unconscionable hikes in rent, the most salient feature of life in a mobile home park appears to be the anxiety of the residents about possible eviction. A fourteen-year-old boy said:

> The manager of the park is horrible. Everyone hates him. He's a drunk. He evicts people whenever he wants to. He'll make up any reason like--"They have a pet." Everyone in the park seems to have a pet, a dog, or a cat. We have a cat.

Another aspect of life in the park is that adolescent students attempt to conceal the fact that they live in the park. For Blue Meadows High School records, a student may list his home address as a post office box. There is a constantly felt need to justify living in the mobile home park. A freshman boy said:

> When we lived in the village, we had a big house. I

> feel proud about that. I don't tell people I live in the park. I say, "Hillview." If I know them [the people] eventually I'll admit it. People think we're "trailer trash." They think we're all freaks.
>
> The cars in the park are better than you see in the village. One guy has a Mercedes. My friend's mother is really rich. I don't know where they get their money. They have a double trailer. They could live anywhere. They could definitely afford to live in a house.

Contributing to the negative attitudes toward the mobile home is the positive attitude toward the stationary dwelling. The house, a powerful symbol in a highly sedentary American society, looms large in the minds of villagers as well as mobile home park residents. Park residents spend a considerable amount of time thinking about the house-dwelling villagers and the villagers are quick to note that mobile home park residents "do not have a nice house or apartment."[10] Park students even have a name for village students: "house kids."

An examination of the mobile home park experience of today requires an historical perspective and a review of a series of events in the American past. The first event to be considered in this process is the meeting and interaction of the Indian and European: land was acquired; the land was crossed by settlers in their Conestogas; and the land was measured and sometimes fenced. Thus, the

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[10]Director of Welfare, Township of Blue Meadows.

American is witness to a "continual series of transformations" as men adapted to the land and each other.[11] Later, the "modern production-line artifact par excellence, the automobile . . ."[12] appeared; and the house trailer, whose appearance was predicated "upon the existence of the automobile,"[13] followed. The house trailer was later transformed into the mobile home.

Not only did two peoples, Indians and Europeans, belonging to different historic streams,[14] meet on a vast continent; but these diverse people had an impact on each other's lives and ultimately on American life as we know it. William Brandon, the noted author and historian on the American Indian and American West, makes the point that "the usual picture of land-hungry white settlers irresistibly pushing the Indian back, clearing the Indians out, is naively oversimplified for any period, and basic-

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[11]Murray L. Wax, Indian Americans: "Unity and Diversity," ed. Milton Gordon, Ethnic Source: Groups in American Life Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 24.

[12]James Burke, Connections (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1978), p. 154.

[13]Donald Olen Cowgill, "Mobile Homes: A Study of Trailer Life" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1941), p. 3.

[14]Melville J. Herskovits, Cultural Relativism: Perspectives in Cultural Pluralism, ed. Frances Herskovits (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 78-79.

ally wrong for the decisive years before 1800."[15] Brandon laments the fact that traditionally the Indian is regarded as a natural feature of the land, like mountains or rivers; or he is regarded as troublesome, even though colorful, affecting American history only by impeding the progress of the civilized advancing settlers.[16]

> This valley should be surveyed as soon as practicable, for the wigwam of the savage will soon give way to the whites. Instead of the hunting and fishing groups of the red man the valley will teem with a thriving and busy population.[17]

These words appearing in an 1866 Government report suggest that the wigwam is not a "real house." One finds a transfer from value judgments about material culture to judgments about morality. For the anthropologist, Sir Edward B. Tylor, a square house was a sign of moral progress "superior" to a round one (closer to nature and thus primitive). Tylor believed, ". . . one great sign of higher civilization is when people begin to build houses square-cornered instead of round."[18]

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[15]William Brandon, The Last Americans: The Indian in American Culture (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1974), p. 229.

[16]Ibid., pp. 1-2.

[17]National Geographic 151, No. 3 (March, 1977): 409-34, quoted in William Albert Allard, "Chief Joseph," p. 415.

[18]Sir Edward B. Tylor, Anthropology, Abridged with a Foreword by Leslie A. White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), p. 118.

When we think of the American frontier, we think of the European pushing the Indian back. There was another frontier, however, the Indian-versus-Indian frontier. For example, the fierce Winnebago west of Lake Michigan were crushed by pestilence and a war they provoked with the Illinois. The Illinois, Potawatomi and Miami were subject to Iroquois onslaughts in the 1680s. For many years afterward families of displaced Eries, Susquehanna, and Delaware, dispossessed of their Pennsylvania lands by European real-estate developers operating with Iroquoi connivance, travelled about the land.[19]

The friction among Indians themselves in the Indian-versus-Indian frontier coincided with the frontiers of European settlement.[20] The progress of North American frontiers, particularly in the early phases, was very possibly as much the result of Indian policies and attitudes as of white policies and pressures.[21]

In any case, the Indian and European came into contact with each other and ultimately influenced each other for good or ill, but influence they did. The very idea of government by council, which was practiced by the

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[19]Brandon, Last Americans, p. 228.

[20]Ibid., p. 229.

[21]Ibid., p. 19.

Indian, may have been one of the factors contributing to the form of modern American republics.[22]

Brandon states: "In sum, white frontiers were set in motion with the considerable assistance, voluntary and involuntary, of forces within the Indian world."[23]

As for attitudes that separated the Indian and European, Brandon calls attention to the fact that the basic difference between these two peoples may have been in the attitude toward property. By and large, the European way of life was one of individual competition for the acquisition of property. It is, in this sense, probably more correct to describe white frontier expansionists as property-hungry rather than land-hungry.[24]

Treatment of the land reflected the vast differences in attitude toward the land. The whites cleared the forest, cultivated ground, slaughtered game in massive quantities, and mined the earth's gold and silver as if they could never end. They blocked out towns in the style of those they had known in their homelands. "Defining land as a commercial product like sugar or gunpowder, the whites measured it, bought it or stole it, fenced it, tilled or

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[22]Ibid., p. 22.

[23]Ibid., p. 232.

[24]Ibid., p. 8.

built upon it, with an abandon that horrified Indians."[25]

Thus, the European and Indian met and interacted. Indians were also acting and reacting to each other prior to and during the European experience. The conflicts that the Indians experienced among themselves created an instability that European settlement could and would exploit. The fact that the Indian did not share the white man's view of property and particularly of land turned out to be an advantage to the white man in his greedy acquisition of lands that were not his.

The attitude of the Indian toward the earth was that the earth belonged to the first men, the Indians, who must take care not to defile it as the whites did. The Indian, Somohalla, born about 1820 in the Rocky Mountains and educated by Roman Catholic missionaries, spoke of the sacredness of the earth.

> You ask me to plow the ground! Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it and be rich like white men! But how dare I cut my mother's hair?[26]

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[25]Peter Nabokov, ed., Native American Testimony: An Anthology of Indian and White Relations, First Encounter to Dispossession (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1978), p. 85.

[26]Man's Rise to Civilization as Shown by the Indians of North America from Primeval Times to the Coming of the Industrial State, cited by Peter Farb (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968), p. 279.

And, it became clear, as Brandon stated, that the "collapse of the Indian world when it came into general conflict with a materialist civilization"[27] became its dreaded fate.

Collapse of the Indian world was manifest in many ways and certainly and decisively in their removal from their sacred lands. Indian removal operated for years in a haphazard manner, but the passage of the Indian Removal Bill in 1830 gave the president the authority to set aside an area west of the Mississippi, not included in any state or organized territory, as a reserve for the Indians.[28]

Even the haphazard removal of the Indians made their land open for settlement to some extent. The signing of the Treaty of Paris (1763), following the Revolutionary War, had advanced the western boundary of the continental colonies to the Mississippi River.[29] With England having ceded the lands of the Ohio Valley to the new nation, the land was open to settlement.[30] A sturdy vehicle

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[27]Brandon, Last Americans, p. 8.

[28]Harold C. Howard, "The Protestant Missionary and Government Indian Policy, 1789-1840" (Ph.D. dissertation, Loyola University, 1965), p. 165.

[29]Dictionary of American History, 1976 ed., s.v. "Treaty of Paris (1763)."

[30]George Shumway and Howard C. Frey, Conestoga Wagon 1775-1850, Freight Carrier for 100 Years of

was needed to transport the settlers and their possessions along rugged terrain. Just such a vehicle was designed and built: the Conestoga wagon, which got its name from the Pennsylvania town where it was first built in the mid-1900s. Conestogas, a distinctively American means of transportation,[31] carried most of the people and freight that moved across the Alleghenies from the time of the Revolutionary War until about 1850.[32]

The Conestoga wagon served as a transitory home for the pioneer families that sought a "firm and secure" homestead[33] in the West. This American vehicle is considered the antecedent of today's mobile home,[34] although the mobile home is not a structure to be used "in transit" but functions as a permanent home. The Conestoga consisted of a box or bed, running gear, and the cloth cover to protect loads. The graceful design of the bed was curved so that the front and rear were higher than the

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America's Westward Expansion, 3rd ed. (York, Pa.: George Shumway Publishers, 1968), p. 21.

[31] Colliers Encyclopedia, 1973 ed., s.v. "Conestoga Wagon," by Raymond Walters, Jr.

[32] World Book Encyclopedia, 1977 ed., s.v. "Conestoga Wagon."

[33] A house, esp. a farmhouse, with adjoining buildings and land. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 1970 ed.

[34] Cowgill, "Mobile Homes," pp. 1-2.

middle. This was especially important in rough terrain and steep inclines. Half a dozen or more wooden bows looped over the box;[35] and cloth covers made of homespun, hemp, cotton sailcloth, or canvas were drawn over the loads when protection was needed.[36] Because these wagons had white canvas covers to protect their loads in case of bad weather they were called covered wagons, an expression which may have been first used with reference to these wagons.[37]

The reality of the Conestoga took on new meaning for this writer when a gentleman who had been the city engineer for Hillview for several decades, prior to his retirement, said:

> "I was born and raised on a farm but I had my mind set for going to Engineering School from the time I got into high school." The writer asked: "Did your family farm as far back as you know?" "Yes," he replied, "I was born in Missoura [sic] in a little town that's still there, Durnham. My parents traveled in a covered wagon to Iowa when I was two years old."[38]

There were standard accessories to the wagon in addition to the bows and wagon covers mentioned earlier.

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[35] The Encyclopedia Americana International, 1978 ed., s.v. "Conestoga Wagon," by George Shumway.

[36] Shumway and Frey, Conestoga Wagon, p. 190.

[37] Mitford M. Mathews, American Words (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1959), p. 72.

[38] Interview with Mr. E. N. Springer, January, 1980.

There were several water kegs, a tar bucket, a long box that hung on the rear and served as a fuel container on the trail and as a feed trough in camp, and a gunny sack for collecting buffalo chips in buffalo country.[39]

Not only did the Conestoga wagon evolve to meet the needs of settlers of the young nation, but a breed of horse which became a recognized American breed in the first half of the nineteenth century, developed because of the special demands of hauling the Conestoga Wagon. (The breed no longer exists, and knowledge about it must be reconstructed from early written records and drawings.)[40] The Conestoga horse traveled hundreds of miles over poor roads, in mountainous territory, meeting hardships in his journeys that the pure draft horse would not have been able to endure.[41]

Because of the overhang at the front of the classic Conestoga wagon, the wagoner could not properly handle the team from a seat on the wagon. As a result, the driver rode the nigh-wheeler, the left front horse.[42] "The

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[39]Henry Pickering Walker, The Wagonmasters: High Plains Freighting from the Earliest Days of the Santa Fe Trail to 1880 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 25.

[40]Shumway and Frey, Conestoga Wagon, p. 127.

[41]Ibid., pp. 136-37.

[42]Walker, Wagonmasters, p. 104.

method of driving a Conestoga team was remarkable, for the six powerful animals and the long wagon behind them were managed by a driver holding one single line. . . ."[43]

The drivers of these wagons whiled away the long hours as best they could, often smoking. An enterprising American conceived of an unusually long, cheap cigar which he thought would appeal to these wagoners. The cigars sold for a cent apiece and were so popular with the Conestoga wagoners that they became known as Conestoga cigars. The name was shortened to stogie, or stogy. Long, slender cigars called stogies are still part of the American experience.[44]

The Conestoga was an important and needed vehicle in its day, but with the coming of the railroad a more efficient means of transporting people and freight was possible.[45] These "camels of the prairies" gave way to rails, but before the railroads were built in the West, a modified Conestoga wagon, the prairie schooner, brought supplies to military posts in the "far West." Its nick-

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[43]Albert I. Drachman, "The Team and Its Control," in Conestoga Wagon, by Shumway and Frey, pp. 138-57.

[44]Mathews, American Words, p. 72.

[45]Shumway, Conestoga Wagon, p. 527.

name derived from the resemblance of its canvas tops to the sails of vessels at sea.[46]

Passenger wagons still existed in America, along with the freight wagons. The Concord, produced in New Hampshire, was a large, closed, horse-drawn coach, with a driver's seat outside in front, and a covered baggage compartment at the rear.[47] Coaches such as the Concord and the Deadwood Stage bore the maker's name on their sides.[48]

In sum, the Conestoga may be said to be America's first mobile home. It was designed and built to meet the needs of people in a new nation. Americans have always demonstrated remarkable ingenuity in finding solutions to problems that they face, solutions which sometimes have unexpected, unrecognized, and infrequently mentioned consequences, as we shall next see in regard to the surveying of land and the fencing of the West.

As land was acquired by the white man, it had to be described. Early on, trees and natural objects, or stakes placed in the ground were used to identify and mark the corners of land as property. In the American

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[47] Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, 1968 ed.

[48] Robert Lacour-Gayet, Everyday Life in the United States Before the Civil War 1830-1860, trans. Mary Ilford (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1969), p. 50.

colonies, land was acquired as gifts or purchases from the English Crown. Surveys and maps were lacking or inadequate, and land was described in general terms. The land that remained in the Thirteen Colonies was transferred to the new nation at the close of the Revolutionary War. Later this land was parceled out to individuals.[49]

Old surveys were done with a Gunter's (Surveyor's) Chain, consisting of 100 links or 66 feet.[50] Boundary lines were described by metes and bounds (directions by magnetic bearings, and lengths in Gunter's chains, poles, or road).[51]

In an interview with a local land surveyor, the writer learned that "Boston was surveyed by metes and bounds and perhaps New York City. The Spanish used a vara to describe land but it did not have the same length anywhere they went."[52]

In discussing the historical need for an organized system of surveying, Rayner and Schmidt point out that

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[49]Russell C. Brinker, Elementary Surveying, 5th ed. (Scranton, Pa.: International Textbook Co., 1969), pp. 408-9.

[50]Charles B. Breed, Surveying, 3rd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1957), p. 7.

[51]Brinker, Elementary Surveying, p. 409.

[52]Interview with Mr. H. R. Brizer, March 1980.

because there was no general system of survey, and because the attempts to mark land corners with natural features or temporary devices proved unsatisfactory, particularly when dealing with deed of land, the Continental Congress sought a better system for the survey of the western lands.

Massachusetts had already laid out several townships five, six, or seven miles square. Actually the Romans had employed the rectangular subdivision of land for civil and military purposes. And so, when Thomas Jefferson's committee submitted a plan for subdividing and disposing of the public lands to the Congress in May, 1784, it was not a new idea. Novel features were originated, however, and the plan was adopted as an ordinance on May 20, 1785.

Among other things, this ordinance provided: that each township should be six miles square, subdivided into lots (sections) one mile square containing 640 acres, by lines running north and south, and others crossing them at right angles; that Lot No. 16 of every township be reserved for the maintenance of public schools within the township.[53]

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[53]William Horace Rayner and Milton O. Schmidt, Surveying: Elementary and Advanced (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1957), pp. 286-88.

When the writer talked to a local land surveyor and mentioned some of the dreary consequences of the rectangular grid, he commented, "This is the first time I ever heard a criticism of it."[54]

In 1885 the Métis Indians of Canada "tried again to oppose imposition of the rectangular grid. . . ." The grid had already become the way of surveying land in the United States, where it had become the precedent regardless of terrain. The Métis, however, like early cattle ranchers, had allotted their property along the riverside, for without water they could not live on the land. Where the vast Plains could not be left open and common, bison could not be hunted. The Canadians succeeded in imposing the rectangular grid as had their American neighbors to the south, with the result that the ecological position of the Indians in Canada was destroyed. "As the Canadian Plains were brought under the plow, those who had once been masters of the land were relegated to the lowest status."[55] In the writer's opinion, the same situation occurred in the United States. The cutting off of a means of self-sufficiency results in the impoverishment of many and the enrichment of a few.

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[54]Interview with Mr. H. R. Brizer, March, 1980.

[55]Wax, Indian Americans, pp. 23-24.

Although the method of surveying the land on the rectangular grid provided a uniformity of measurement and accuracy in record keeping, at the same time it contributed to the impoverishment of native Americans by cutting them off from the land they needed in order to survive.

In addition to the use of the rectangular grid for land surveying, the use of barbed wire fencing had a great impact on the lives of Americans. Where there was a scarcity of materials such as rock and timber to build fences, as was true of the plains and prairies of Illinois, wire fencing was advocated.[56] Most farmers had some experience with smooth wire.

It was a man who had left New Hampshire in 1813, working his way West and settling in the village of DeKalb, Illinois,[57] who was to come to revolutionize the American West "by making possible effective fencing of cattle ranges."[58]

On November 24, 1874, Joseph F. Glidden was granted patent No. 157124. His barbed wire fencing was hawked

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[56]Henry D. McCallum and Frances T. McCallum, The Wire That Fenced the West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), p. 61.

[57]Ibid., p. 35.

[58]The New Encyclopedia Britannica Micropaedia, 1980 ed., s.v. "Fence."

in the new market--the West. And in 1875 the first barbed wire salesman appeared in Texas.[59] "Barbed wire was soon to be sold by the ton, by the mile and by the cartload."[60] "This . . . remarkable invention, barbed wire, a new, cheap, and rapid kind of fencing"[61] had two results: first, it squeezed out the small sheep-herders and cattlemen, who were cut off from water supplies and grazing areas. Second, the enclosures benefited many large landholders but contributed to the property of the small ranchers. Railroad lines had opened the territory quite effectively in the West by 1881. The new markets for wool, meat, and hides opened by the railroads accelerated the consolidation of larger and more efficient ranches.[62]

In summary, the "Long, difficult, and novel process" produced a uniquely American society.[63] Europeans not only encountered a new land, but a new people with whom they interacted. The people interacted with each other and with

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[59]McCallum and McCallum, Wire that Fenced the West, p. 65.

[60]Ibid., p. 72.

[61]The New Encyclopedia Britannica Macropaedia, 1980 ed., s.v. "Farming Outside Europe."

[62]Joan W. Moore, with Alfredo Cuéllar, Mexican-Americans, Ethnic Groups in American Life Series, ed. Milton M. Gordon (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), pp. 13-16.

[63]D. W. Brogan, The American Character (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), p. 4.

the land and experienced transformations as they acquired, crossed, settled, surveyed, and fenced the land. New ideas, inventions, and industries resulted in prosperity for some and impoverishment for others.

The Conestogas, prairie schooners, and Concords were replaced by the railroads; but their influence left a mark on our American past, and they affect our present. If any single invention can be said to have transformed America, it is the birth of the assembly-line and the mass produced automobile.[64]

Although the internal-combustion engine is of European origin, it was an American idea to have the luxury item of the auto transformed into a product of universal availability.[65] The Model-T--the "flivver," or "Tin Lizzie,"--the most famous motor vehicle ever built was offered to the public in 1908.[66] In 1908 the total output of automobiles in the United States was 65,000, and in less than ten years the Ford Company sold more than half a million cars in a single year.[67] "Ford succeeded in producing a low priced motor vehicle intended for use by the general public. It was durable, easy to operate, simple to repair

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[64]John R. Rae, The American Automobile, ed. Daniel Boorstin, The Chicago History of American Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 1.

[65]Ibid. [66]Ibid., p. 59. [67]Ibid., p. 62.

and easy to maintain."[68] Automobile travel led to a veritable craze for tenting and camping"[69] following World War I and during the 1920s. The appearance of the house trailer had to wait for the automobile to develop sufficient power to endure hauling the additional weight of a trailer hitched to it.[70] By 1930, 100 per cent of house trailer production was for vacation use. By 1937, however, 50 per cent of house trailers were used by vacationers and the remaining consumers consisted of retirees, and migratory workers. The latter two groups represented 200,000 families making their year-round residence in the house trailer.[71]

With the need for housing for defense workers in World War II, the Trailer Coach Manufacturers Association, the trade association for the industry, was alert to the need to provide housing for workers. Lobbyists proposed to the National Defense Council that trailers could provide the answer to the housing needs of workers.[72]

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[68]Ibid., p. 59.

[69]Cowgill, "Mobile Homes," p. 3.

[70]Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[71]Arthur D. Bernhardt, "The Mobile-Home Industry: A Case Study in Industrialization," in Industrialized Building Systems for Housing, ed. Albert G. H. Dietz and Laurence S. Cutler, A Compendium based on MIT Special Session, August 18-29, 1969, and June 16-20, 1970 (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1971), p. 176.

[72]Edwards, Homes for Travel and Living, p. 110.

On the recommendation of Charles F. Palmer, the defense Housing Coordinator, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, on March 19, 1941, declared that trailers would be used to provide "temporary shelter housing for defense workers."[73] It was not long, however, before the trailer located in what were termed "camps" near defense industries received attention because of overcrowding and generally unsatisfactory conditions related to this crowding, such as poor sanitation.[74] Edwards believes that much of the present day attitude about mobile homes as units to be used only for temporary housing, or "only in areas of disaster or housing crisis" can be traced to the World War II period.[75]

After the war, colleges and universities were unable to meet the housing needs of returning veterans and their families. Many institutions of higher education found a solution to this temporary housing need by providing campus housing in the form of trailer units[76] as well as Quonset huts.[77] The latter, like the former, were

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[73] New York Times, 10 March 1941.

[74] Ibid., 9 November 1941.

[75] Edwards, Homes for Travel and Living, p. 112.

[76] New York Times, 20 October 1945; 10 December 1945; 30 December 1945.

[77] Ibid., 17 December 1945: Quonset: trademark used for a prefabricated shelter set on a foundation of

looked down on and were regarded as a half-measure at most. Graduates of state universities have reported to the writer that as late as the mid-1960s Quonset huts were being used for classrooms[78] and trailer parks originating in the post-war years were still being used to provide student housing.[79]

But even prior to the war, trailer camps and parks were receiving attention in the American press. In 1938 New York City adopted sanitary regulations for trailer camps in anticipation of the influx of trailers to the 1939 World's Fair. These regulations were a response to the fears of local residents who foresaw the emergence of "shanty-towns" on camp sites.[80] Such fears may have resulted partially from the "Hoovervilles" of ramshackle dwellings built upon dumps or urban wastelands and occupied by the dispossessed, unemployed, or migratory workers.[81]

John Steinbeck immortalized the plight of the migratory worker living in Hoovervilles:

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of bolted trusses and built of a semicircular arching roof of corrugated metal insulated inside with wood fiber. Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

[78] Interview with Dave Brody, graduate of Indiana University, Bloomington, May 1981.

[79] Interview with Chris Simpson, graduate of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, May 1981.

[80] New York Times, 28 April 1939.

[81] Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

> And then the raids--the swoop of armed deputies on the squatter's camps. Get out. Department of Health orders. This camp is a menace to health.
>
> Where we gonna go?
>
> That's none of our business. We got orders to get you out of here. In half an hour we set fire to the camp.[82]

The attitude of mainstreamers toward "Hooverville" occupants is portrayed vividly:

> Sure, they talk the same language, but they ain't the same. Look how they live. Think any of us folks'd live like that? Hell, no![83]

These camps were relegated to the most undesirable land areas that were often subjected to flooding:

> In the boxcar camp the water stood in puddles, and the rain splashed in the mud. Gradually the little stream crept up the bank toward the low flat where the boxcars stood.[84]

But even with the existence of ordinances and, in fact, shortly after the New York ordinance was adopted the owners of five trailer camps were found guilty of violating the city's new camp ordinance that put "such places" under stringent regulations.[85]

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[82] John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: Viking Press, 1939).

[83] Ibid., p. 322.

[84] Ibid., p. 593.

[85] New York Times, 28 April 1939.

In 1941 the "trailer movement" was receiving national attention as an already well-established "controversial subject." By the time Donald Olen Cowgill completed his dissertation on the subject of house trailers in 1941, almost two thousand "trailer cities had sprung up in the U.S." and Cowgill was reported to be "neither an advocate nor an opponent in the controversy surrounding the trailer movement."[86] He made the study, he says, as an attempt to record and interpret a "new development in our complex and ever changing civilization."[87]

By 1975 the Trailer Coach Manufacturers Association was calling itself the Manufactured Housing Institute (MHI).[88] This trade association now has its headquarters in the Washington, D.C., area where its primary service of representing the interests of the industry before the Federal Government can be most effective. Membership consists of manufacturers and suppliers to mobile/modular homes and RV's, as well as developers of mobile home parks.[89]

Among the leading manufacturers of component parts

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[86]Ibid., 6 July 1941. [87]Ibid.

[88]Encyclopedia of Associations, 1980 ed., p. 176.

[89]Manufactured Housing Institute, "Quick Facts," June 1979, pp. 1-10.

for mobile homes one finds the same companies manufacturing components for RV's. Skyline Corporation and Fleetwood Enterprises are among the leading manufacturers of mobile homes, motor homes, and recreational vehicles (RV's) as well. The two leading producers of components for both the mobile home and RV are Elixir Industries and Philips Industries. As many as two hundred manufacturing firms produce mobile homes at some 500 factory sites in the United States. There are an estimated 12,000 mobile home dealers and some 24,000 mobile home parks.[90] The mobile home industry is big business.

Housing specialist Margaret Drury finds it an advantage that the mobile home was forced outside of the boundaries of land use limitations and code jurisdiction. Being outside of the jurisdiction of local building codes, the mobile home industry has free rein to develop a product to the standards of the industry. "Being forced out of the conventional market, the mobile home industry has been operating in an extraterritorial market where it has free rein."[91]

In the period 1960 to 1973, the mobile home industry

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[90] Standard & Poors Industry Surveys, 1 April 1980, pp. 113-15.

[91] Margaret J. Drury, Mobile Homes: The Unrecognized Revolution in American Housing (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1967; rev. 1972), p. 145.

captured an increasingly important share of the single family housing market (with annual mobile home shipments increasing from 9 per cent of all single family housing starts in 1960 to some 33 per cent in 1973). After that time shipments of mobile homes fell to 15 per cent in 1977, where it has stabilized.[92]

Contributing to the market for mobile homes is the rise in price of site-built homes. In 1979, the price of the median site-built house was $58,000, an increase of $14,000 in only two short years.[93] With half of the houses sold costing more than $58,000, the average American is being priced out of the conventional housing market. As desirable as the American site-built house is to Americans, it is becoming financially beyond their reach.

In brief, the historical process that had led to the present-day mobile home and mobile home park is an uniquely American process. The vast lands of the Indian gave way to the Europeans, to land survey, settlement, and fencing of the white man's property. Today's mobile home park resident counts himself lucky if he can rent a speck of land for his mobile home.

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[92]U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office, Third Annual Report to Congress on Title VI of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 (Mobile Homes), Washington, D.C., pp. iv-1.

[93]U.S. League of Savings Associations, "Homeownership: Coping with Inflation," 1980.

The travel trailer had to await a sufficiently powerful automobile capable of hauling a substantially heavy load. Thus the traveler could cross the land to remote areas that provided few if any commercial accommodations. Later the trailer provided temporary housing for the many defense industry workers during World War II and for returning student-veterans. The reputation of the owner of the house trailer being a "pariah" in the land had taken root even before these war years. It was the lone trailer that acquired a negative image; it did not have to await the crowded trailer camps that later followed.

The present-day mobile home park dweller, and particularly the adolescent, must contend with the historical image of the trailer-turned-mobile home, and he is often hard pressed to understand why he must defend where he lives (and his modern, fully equipped mobile home unit). In the critical developmental years of his adolescence the park student is faced with the burden of being regarded as "trash" by his high school peers.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

There is no single academic discipline which has the subject of mobile homes as its province. However, people of various persuasions, backgrounds, and disciplines, such as mobile home dwellers, consumer advocates, housing researchers and anthropologists have studied the mobile home and its residents to some extent and have published their findings. The literature may be classified under three headings: popular, consumer, and academic.

Popular literature, which is usually found in the press, trade journals, or books for mass consumption, often, but not always, tends to present a "wonderful world of mobile home living," depicting the mobile home park as a "fun place" to live. Disadvantages or possible disadvantages are mentioned but given little importance within the dominant theme of mobile home living as a page from Camelot. For instance:

> There is no other life style quite like living in a mobile home park. There is a feeling of companionship and neighborliness that is reminiscent of the small towns many years ago. If you are retired, or if you are raising a family, and want a fun place to

> live, with plenty of activities and friendly people, mobile home park living is for you.[1]

Kaye Condon goes on to state that the advantages of a mobile home are "too numerous to mention now and will become apparent as we progress with the book."[2] She then briefly discusses seven disadvantages and summarizes:

> Most mobile home owners will assure you that the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. If you are interested in exploring a new and exciting life style, mobile home living may be for you.[3]

Harrison M. Karr, in his book The Wonderful World of Mobilehome Living, attacks the negative attitude toward mobile homes, mobile home parks, and mobile home residents.

> [This book he hopes will] give the knockout punch to a bugaboo that should have been buried long ago. Unfortunately it is still alive and kicking. I refer to the belief still held in some circles that modern mobile home parks are but kissing cousins of the old "trailer camps" of a couple of generations ago: inhabited mainly by gypsies and transient laborers. This is a libel upon a way of life that, in other circles is rapidly becoming recognized as a superior way of life.[4]
>
> Closely related to the canard about mobilehome parks is the equally false belief about mobilehome people.

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[1]Kaye Condon, The Complete Guide to Mobile Homes, How to Select, Finance, and Run Your Mobile Home (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), p. 47.

[2]Ibid., p. 8.

[3]Ibid., p. 9.

[4]Harrison M. Karr, The Wonderful World of Mobilehome Living (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Trail-R-Club of America, 1968), pp. 10-11.

> Many misinformed persons still cling to the notion that mobilehome dwellers are sort of marginal people, people that haven't made good in our competitive society and are consequently compelled to live in substandard surroundings. Getting acquainted with contributors to this book should help to scotch that notion. . . . many retired folk refuse even to investigate a kind of living that many of us look upon as the most desirable way of life for the retired.[5]

Consumer literature provides a balance which the popular literature does not. It contains advice from the financial advisors and consumer advocates regarding factors to consider when contemplating the purchase of a mobile home product: mobile home and park residency. The possible financial and social consequences of such a purchase are provided. For example, unexpected costs may arise in entrance fees, exit fees, and the requirement to sell a mobile home only with the approval of the park owner. The park owner may require that mobile home unit accessories such as skirting, awnings, porches, and sheds, be purchased only through him. The park owner may also authorize servicemen of his choosing to make repairs on a mobile home unit.[6] At one time, the present owner of Robben East authorized only one laundry service in the park and tenants could use no other. Today, Robben South residents must buy propane for their mobile homes from the park owner. The owners of Robben Island East, West, and South, euphe-

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[5]Ibid., p. 11.

[6]Jane Bryant Quinn, Everyone's Money Book (New York: Delacorte Press, 1979), pp. 307-16.

mistically term entrance and exit fees, "service charges."

The literature may caution that the price of the mobile home unit is often just the beginning of the cost of owning a mobile home: there are also insurance, financing charges, maintenance costs, and monthly park rentals, all likely to increase, a particularly vital consideration to the mobile home park dweller living on a fixed income.[7] The high interest the mobile home owner must pay for his unit further erodes his budget and leads to the observation:

> It is unfair that these people [mobile home owners] shut out of the conventional housing market, must pay higher interest for a mobile home loan than for a conventional mortgage and worse, more than for a car loan.[8]

In his book, Griffin provides a chapter entitled, "How Can Trailer Living Cost So Much?"[9] thus giving another source of information for the potential mobile home buyer. Many park residents have told the ethnographer that they feel they "have been burned," "are stuck," "made an expensive mistake." One mobile home owner, who is retired and

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[7]Ibid., pp. 309-14.

[8]A Report by the Center for Auto Safety, Mobile Homes, The Low Cost-Housing Hoax (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1975), p. 51.

[9]Al Griffin, So You Want to Buy a Mobile Home (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1970), pp. 13-27.

who lives in the most elite mobile home park in the state, expressed his feelings:

> The government housing authorities should forewarn people about the vulnerability and danger of being trapped, where you can be ripped off. Of course they won't do it but every mobile home sold should have a plate that says: "A mobile home may be dangerous to your health."

The retired gentleman who said this had sold his site-built house in the city because he could not keep up with the yard work and house maintenance. He paid $40,000 for a double wide unit and moved into a luxury park. Shortly thereafter, the park was sold to a corporation and the rental fees began to skyrocket.

Jane Bryant Quinn, a financial advisor, states, "The most serious drawback to renting space in a mobile home park is the risk of eviction."[10]

> Children may be required to show more decorum than can reasonably be expected--creating potential conflict in families and risk of eviction if a teenager happens to have an obstreperous year. . . . [Furthermore] rules can be changed suddenly and arbitrarily. The extent of this problem depends very much on the attitude and personality of the park owner.[11]

She, along with many consumer advocates, warns of other problems. With local zoning codes discriminating

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[10] Quinn, Money Book, p. 308.

[11] Ibid., p. 310.

against mobile homes, mobile home parks, and mobile home dwellers, there are few parks, and many that exist exclude children under the age of sixteen. In part, as a consequence of the shortage of park spaces, the park owner can enjoy an unquestioned power that has been likened to that found in fiefdoms of old.[12]

If the park resident had turned to the popular literature for guidance when contemplating the purchase of a mobile home he might have been misled. Today, the potential mobile home buyer must also keep in mind that prices in both the popular and consumer literatures are essentially obsolete in virtue of the spiraling inflated economy that the United States has experienced since the 1970s.[13]

The popular and consumer literature reveal the attitude of non-mobile home dwellers toward the mobile home unit, park, and dweller. The attitude expressed by non-park dwellers toward the mobile home experience is approached differently in the popular literature and consumer literature. The popular literature dismissed negative attitudes toward park dwellers with a wave of the

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[12]Center for Auto Safety, Low Cost Housing Hoax, pp. 52-68.

[13]"Housing Shuffle, Years of Low Construction Lead to Shortages," Time 27 October 1980, pp. 80-83.

hand; whereas, the consumer literature communicates the importance of these attitudes and how they may influence the life of the resident in a mobile home park.

The observation has been made in both the consumer literature, as well as the academic literature, that the academic community has shown little interest in the subject of mobile homes:

> [The mobile home's] increasingly important place in the housing supply over the last ten years makes the mobile home a vital subject, but a subject that has largely been ignored by academicians, government, and until recently, the media.[14]

And, according to Knight:

> Despite the important role of the mobile home in the nation's present housing production, there continues to be little evidence of academic interest. However, this is perhaps to be expected in view of the general shortage of academic research in the entire area of housing.[15]

Knight cites a 1967 report by Margaret Drury,[16] to be discussed in this chapter, as a "standard reference work for

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[14]Center for Auto Safety, Low Cost Housing Hoax, p. xi.

[15]Robert Lee Knight, "Mobile Home and Conventional Home Owners: A Comparative Examination of Socio-Economic Characteristics and Housing Related Preferences of Young Families in Chicago" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1971), p. 23.

[16]Drury, Mobile Homes.

the industry."[17] It is unclear, however, if Knight is referring to the conventional housing industry or the mobile home industry.

The academic research that has been done in the area of the mobile home often focuses upon housing preferences and/or retirement communities. As early as 1941, sociologist Donald Olen Cowgill,[18] examined this question: Will the mobile come to replace the traditional site-built house in American society? In addition, Margaret Drury reviewed the literature from 1955 through 1967 to examine why more Americans chose the mobile home during that period of time. Knight compared housing preference among young families in traditional and mobile home communities. George Hoyt,[19] Shelia Johnson,[20] and Christine Fry[21] studied retirement mobile home communities in Florida, California, and Arizona, respectively. Although in the case of Hoyt, the fact that the retirement community consisted of a mobile home park was incidental to his study.

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[17]Knight, "Housing-Related Preferences," p. 24.

[18]Cowgill, "Mobile Homes."

[19]George Calvin Hoyt, "A Study of Retirement Problems" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1962).

[20]Shelia K. Johnson, Idle Haven. Community Building Among the Working-Class Retired (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

[21]Christine L. Fry, "The Community as Commodity: The Age Graded Case," Human Organization 36 (Summer 1977): 115-23.

The results of the study that Cowgill undertook was awaited with considerable interest by the housing industry because of the predictions that had been made in 1936 by two prominent men: Robert W. Babson, the famous futurist, and William B. Stout, the originator of the prefabricated home, who predicted that within twenty to thirty years half of Americans would be living in mobile homes.[22] The announced results of Cowgill's study put these fears to rest.

Cowgill utilized questionnaire, interview, and participant observation to study a group of trailerites; those who used their house trailer as a permanent home as they traveled about the country. Cowgill found: (1) this mode of life did not contribute to a disintegration of family life; (2) the people he lived with and studied were "stable, happy, dependable"[23] and living in what he termed "well regulated communities that were becoming more so";[24] and (3) in the future no more than 15 per cent of Americans will live in mobile homes. Cowgill saw in 1941 that the mobile home was here to stay, but he predicted that it would probably never replace the site-built house.[25]

Drury reviewed the literature from 1955-1967 to

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[22]Cowgill, "Mobile Homes," p. 88.

[23]Ibid., p. 90. [24]Ibid. [25]Ibid.

find an explanation for the increase in the production of mobile homes. She states that her review of the literature was from the perspective of the housing authority.[26] In her view, the mobile home industry enjoyed growth while competitors in manufactured housing fell by the wayside because they attempted to meet the standards of local building codes, whereas the mobile home industry developed outside of existing codes, thus avoiding the expenses of meeting housing standards. She acknowledges that the mobile home has never been recognized as permanent housing by Americans. At fault, in her view, is the fact that Americans have an ideal: the site-built house. She warns that the technology now exists to rid Americans of this obsolete ideal.[27] Among areas of re-

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[26]In the preface of her book Drury expressed appreciation to two professors, fellow graduate students, and five persons, directly or indirectly involved with the mobile home industry, three of whom are members of the Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association. These individuals are gratefully acknowledged for having shared their knowledge of the mobile home industry. One might wish to question how it is that persons who could not be considered disinterested by any measure have influenced the content of an academic report.

[27]Drury, Mobile Homes, "Perhaps, the most peculiar American idiosyncrasy is the concept of the 'symbolic traditional single-family home.' Society's unwillingness to change this traditional concept of home in spite of changes in family needs, type of use, or new technology reflects our strong cultural desire and its resulting institutional backup for this symbolic home. Before innovation or a major revolution in housing can be effected, the culture will have to redefine its ideal of this symbolic home, . . ." p. 9.

search that are needed are those that determine the effects of mobile home living on the individual.

The study of Robben Island responds to this need. It has revealed that the house is a powerful symbol in America. When Drury discusses symbolic values, she offers her personal opinion and her personal bias in favor of the mobile home. She is completely in favor of a product whose effects on the individual are acknowledged to be little known. In any case, the Robben Island study is an effort to provide one contribution to this type of needed research.

Robert Lee Knight studied housing preference among young site-built home owners and mobile home dwellers. He used a mailed questionnaire and had no direct contact with his respondents. He found the following: restrictive zoning laws reflect the attitude that mobile home park dwellers are considered undesirable additions to a community and site-built home owners are considered very desirable, an attitude Knight considers unfounded; the classification of the mobile home as a vehicle has kept the financing of the mobile home unit expensive relative to conventional homes; park dwellers occupy a "no man's land" with respect to conventional housing as they neither qualify for a subsidy nor have quite enough income for conventional housing; the average tenure of the mobile home park resident is longer than had been expected and indi-

cated a lower degree of mobility than expected; even the highest quality of mobile home is not preferred when compared to a site-built house; and that the overwhelming preference of both mobile home owners and conventional home owners was for a site-built house. This last mentioned finding is consistent with the attitude reported in the study of Robben Island because the site-built house is a powerful symbol in American society.

Shelia K. Johnson used a mailed questionnaire, interview, and participant observation in her study of a mobile home retirement community in California. She explains that a six-foot-high fence surrounds the park, as the result of earlier state laws that considered trailer parks so unsightly that they must be concealed from view. Johnson found that park residents appear very comfortable in the park because there is a ceiling on the amount of display of wealth that can be and is made. In other words, no one keeps up with the Joneses. Johnson found that the strong sense of insider-versus-outsider that developed in the park makes residents feel very safe from vandals and burglars. However, in contrast to her findings, the research of Robben Island residents found that they are aware that it is they who are outsiders and that there is vandalism in the park. The unrelenting presence of large dogs may relate to this insecurity. Johnson concludes that

mobile home parks "constitute an interesting and viable form of community that has developed in response to certain acute social problems."[28] She refers to the retired fleeing the cities and urban violence. Although Johnson mentions many abuses and fears that are a part of mobile home living, she concludes that this is a "viable form of community," for the retired.

Although the present Robben Island study focused attention on the adolescent, in the course of field research the ethnographer met and interviewed many retired park dwellers in Robben Island and three other parks in the area. The retired face problems as serious and numerous as the adolescent. True, the retired who had been harassed in the city were relieved to live in the park even if they were uncertain as to how they would make their rent payments (due to the frequent rent hikes). Thus, one set of fears supplants the other.

George Calvin Hoyt utilized a structured questionnaire in face-to-face interviews with a sample population of male heads of households in Bradenton Trailer Park in Florida. Hoyt's interview schedule required that the respondent rank order his responses. When analyzing the data, Hoyt found methodological problems in assigning

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[28]Johnson, Idle Haven, p. 175.

weights to motives, especially because the respondents were asked to rank-order events that had happened in the past. For example, why the respondents decided to move to the park? Because of such problems, Hoyt suggests that there is less validity in the statistical results he reports than he had anticipated. Hoyt did comment that park residents tend to regard the park as a temporary place, and to regard their home as their place of origin. The lack of socioeconomic demarcation that is felt outside the park is not found within the park, and this is most comfortable to park residents.

Hoyt reports that he was studying retirement problems in a retirement community and that the type of dwelling, as far as his study was concerned, was of little importance. He concluded:

> Age concentrated communities, with a somewhat specialized set of institutions and interests emphasizing frequent social contact and activity although seemingly superficial, may well be the pattern of retirement living for the future.[29]

Christine L. Fry used interview and participant observation in the study of two mobile home communities in Arizona. Such planned, designed, and developed economic endeavors are relatively new in American society. The concept of a community that has not evolved gradually, and

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[29]Hoyt, "Retirement Problems," p. 128.

one that is packaged and promoted, requires us to consider community as commodity. In attempting to attract customers (residents), social organization is planned, directed, and promoted by the park officials and also may be considered a commodity.[30] The concept of community as commodity is related to the present study, especially, as it is not often realized that the park itself is a commodity and a part of the mobile home industry. The fact that parks are packaged and promoted also underscores why park owners do not wish their parks to become obsolete and why they attempt to rid their parks of older model units regardless of the personal consequences to the mobile home owner. The pressure of parks to keep up with the newest models is an additional concern for the mobile home park dweller, as we shall see in the study of Robben Park.

To summarize, the popular literature is roseate; the consumer literature is practical; and the academic literature is spotty and lacks a thread of unification. In all three types of literature, the negative attitude of the non-mobile home dweller toward the mobile home park experience is evident. If a review of the literature has left this ethnographer with a single impression, it is that we need to learn more about how the mobile home

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[30]Fry, "Community as Commodity," pp. 115-22.

experience affects the daily life of its consumer and the offspring of the consumer who make their home in a mobile home park. The present study represents a contribution in that direction.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

> Get a little farther; you
> are too near me.
> Speckled Snake
> Creek Chief[1]

Although the social sciences have stressed men's ability to relate to one another on the basis of such matters as economics, technology, urbanization, or religion, little attention has been given to the matter of how symbolic forms shape his social life.[2] In the present study an awareness of symbolic forms is critical to the analysis of life in a mobile home park.

That man lives in a physical environment there can be no doubt, but that he lives in an environment of symbolic forms, as well, is not as accepted or as well under-

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[1]Peter Nabokov, ed., Native American Testimony: An Anthology of Indian and White Relations, First Encounter to Dispossession (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1978), "I have listened to a great many talks from our Great Father. But they always began and ended in this--Get a little farther; you are too near me" (p. 87).

[2]Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Symbols in Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 3.

stood.[3] Man, however, is stimulated to action by symbolic as well as physical stimuli. Man has been described as two-dimensional in that he is Political Man as well as Symbolist Man.[4]

> Symbols are objects, acts, concepts, or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of disparate meanings, evoke sentiments and emotions, and impel men to action.[5]

Here, symbol refers to a "stimulus that has a learned meaning and value. . . ."[6] When man responds to a symbolic stimulus, he responds to its meaning and value and not merely to the stimulus from his sense organs. Here, the meaning of the symbol refers to its "dictionary definition"; to culturally patterned and learned feelings such as sympathy and/or antipathy that come to be associated with the symbol.[7] Meaning and value also become part of what we commonly refer to as traditions.

Because meaning is learned, a symbol has only the meaning people give it. Also, meaning is dynamic and

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[3]Abner Cohen, Two-Dimensional Man, An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 1-17.

[4]Ibid., p. xi.

[5]Ibid., p. ix.

[6]Arnold M. Rose, "A Systematic Summary of Symbolic Interaction Theory," in A. M. Rose, ed., Human Behavior and Social Processes: An Interactionist Approach (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962), p. 5.

[7]Ibid.

subject to change, as when a once powerful symbol, dishonored or ignored for a long period of time, comes to have little or no importance.[8] Man organizes his experience with symbols, which he learns through interaction with people, and for this reason we think of symbols as having common or shared meanings and values.[9] Symbolic interactionism represents one approach to the study of human group life and human conduct.

This chapter provides a symbolic interactionist perspective and a participant observation methodology in an ethnographic study of a mobile home park. Dramaturgical principles are employed; that is, the behavior of park dwellers is considered in terms of a theatrical performance, for dramaturgical principles concern how the individual

> presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may or may not do while sustaining his performance before them.[10]

The ethnographer agrees with Braroe that the term "perspective" rather than "theory" is appropriate, in regard to the symbolic interactionist approach, "since there

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[8]World Book Encyclopedia, 1979 ed.

[9]Rose, "A Systematic Summary of Symbolic Interaction Theory," pp. 5-6.

[10]Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1973), p. xxi.

is as yet no generally accepted body of integrated formalized propositions for symbolic interactionism.[11]

Many of the ideas of interactionism had an independent origin in Germany, as reflected in the work of George Simmel and Max Weber, while its American origins date from the turn of the century.[12] Many notable Americans contributed to its intellectual foundation, among whom are William James, John Dewey, W. I. Thomas, Robert E. Park, Charles Horton Cooley, Florian Zaniecki, James Mark Baldwin, Robert Redfield, Louis Wirth and George Herbert Mead.[13]

By the late 1960s a number of scholars who were exponents of interactionism had developed their own versions of the perspective. Important among them are those of Herbert Blumer, of the Chicago School; Manfred H. Kuhn, of the Iowa School; Erving Goffman, who used the dramaturgical approach; Harold Garfinkel, identified with ethnomethodology; and a number of German philosophers including Alfred Schultz, and Edmund Husserl, known as the

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[11]Niels Winther Braroe, Indian and White: Self-Image and Interaction in a Canadian Plains Community, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975), n. 10, p. 25.

[12]Rose, "A Systematic Summary of Symbolic Interactionism," p. 3.

[13]Herbert Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 1.

phenomenologists. Central to the interactionist perspective, regardless of the variations mentioned above, is the idea that "we live in a world of symbols, both verbal and nonverbal."[14]

The perspective of interactionism provides an analytical scheme of human society and human behavior that is distinctive. There are three premises at the very heart of symbolic interactionism as presented by Blumer: (1) "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them"; (2) "the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows"; (3) "these meanings are handled in, and modified, through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters."[15]

One may ask oneself: What is distinctive about (1) meaning being central in its own right? (2) What is distinctive about the source of meaning arising out of the interaction between people? And (3) what is distinctive about the individual interpretative process?[16] A discussion of these questions may contribute to our understanding.

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[14]James Wilfrid and Vander Zanden, Social Psychology (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 10-13.

[15]Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism, p. 2.

[16]Ibid., pp. 3-6.

The premise that "the meanings that things have for human beings are central in their own right" would require no comments were it not for the fact that in the field of psychology and other social sciences there is a tendency to treat human behavior as a product of factors that affect human beings. Some types of factors that concern psychologists are those of stimuli, attitude, and conscious or unconscious motives; whereas other social scientists are concerned with such things as social position and status, social roles, norms and values. In both the psychological and social science perspectives, the meanings that things have for the individual human being are either by-passed completely or tend to be lost among the many types of factors, some of which have been mentioned.[17]

The second premise considers the source of meaning; and this source, as viewed by the interactionist, differs from the two dominant views which account for meanings that are held among psychologists and social scientists. One of these views regards meaning as emanating from the intrinsic makeup of a thing: "a chair is a chair," "a cloud is a cloud." Since the meaning emanates from the thing, no process is thought to be involved in its formation; all that is needed is to recognize that the meaning

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[17]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

is there in the thing. The other prevailing view regarding "meaning" sees it as arising out of a constellation of psychological elements that are within the person, such as feelings, ideas, memories, and motives, to mention but a few. Symbolic interactionism, however, sees the source of meaning as arising in the process of the interaction that takes place between people.[18]

The third premise which differentiates interactionism is one that recognizes that the individual goes through a process of self-communication as he arrives at his meaning about things. This is a two-step process in which the individual (1) indicates to himself that a thing has meaning, and (2) interprets the meaning through a process of selecting, checking, suspending, regrouping, and transforming the meaning in light of the social and cultural situation in which he finds himself.[19] Others constitute the organized "me," and then one reacts toward that as an "I."[20]

Part of the "me"-self is a reflection of relationships with others, and enables associates to predict accurately the behavior of the self. The "I" self may have attitudes that differ from those of the group, but

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[18]Ibid., pp. 3-4. [19]Ibid., p. 5.

[20]George H. Mead, Mind, Self, and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), p. 175.

because they are so well developed and consistent, associates are able to predict the behavior of this self, even if it differs greatly from that which is expected by the group. In any case, the "I" is based upon the individual's "me's," and is not free of the expectations of the group, because the individual sees himself in relation to his group.[21]

In the theoretical map of human society that George H. Mead, a sociologist, provides, in addition to "the self," there is also "the object." Here, "object" is anything that can be referred to, be it physical object, a person, or an abstract concept, such as a house, a senator, or democracy. Mead's analysis of objects includes the following: (1) "the nature of an object is constituted by the meaning it has for the person or persons for whom it is an object"; (2) "the meaning of an object is not intrinsic to the object but arises from how the person is initially prepared to act toward it (readiness to use a chair as something in which to sit gives it the meaning of a chair)"; (3) "objects, all objects, are social products in that they are formed and transformed by the defining process that takes place in social interaction." In Mead's analysis we find that human beings live in a

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[21]Rose, "A Systematic Summary of Symbolic Interactionism," p. 12.

world where objects are vested with meanings as a result of the process of social interaction.[22]

One of the positions taken in this paper is that an important aspect of the study of the mobile home park dweller is the study of the objects, such as the physical, the animate, and the conceptual, that comprise the life of the mobile home dweller and that of the non-park resident. It will be seen that the meaning of objects often differs between park dwellers and non-park residents. For example, park dwellers consider the mobile home as a permanent residence which has all the meaning of "home" for them, whereas non-park dwellers may consider the mobile home as a recreational vehicle or temporary emergency shelter only. For as Mead states:

> . . . different groups come to develop different worlds . . . those worlds change as the objects that compose them change in meaning. Since people are set to act in terms of the meaning of their objects, the world of objects of a group represents a genuine sense of its action organization. To identify and understand the life of a group, it is necessary to identify its world of objects: this identification has to be in terms of the meanings objects have for the members of the group.[23]

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[22]Herbert Blumer, "Sociological Implications of the Thought of George Herbert Mead," in W. L. Wallace, ed., Sociological Theory (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969), pp. 238-40.

[23]Ibid., p. 239. Underlining by the ethnographer.

As previously stated, the meaning of symbols may undergo transformation. Mead notes that human beings are not "locked" into the meanings that objects have for them at any given time. As new meanings toward objects are worked out, behavior toward the objects will change accordingly:

> . . . people are not locked to the objects: they may check action toward objects and indeed work out new lines of conduct toward them. This condition introduces into human group life an indigenous source of the transformation.[24]

In sum, an underlying theme of symbolic interactionism is that human beings are not passive creatures who automatically respond to the objects in their environment. Rather, human "response" is mediated by the use of meaning which may be referred to as "symbols," and it is through the mediation of symbols that the human being interacts with himself, his fellows, and in fact, all "objects" that constitute his world.[25]

The interactionist sees the human act not as merely a release of an already organized predisposition, but as a process built up by the actor in self-interaction. The actor pieces together his line of action in terms of what he has taken into account regarding the

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism, p. 78.

situation.[26] Applying the perspective of interactionism requires an approach that takes the position of the actor, who perceives, interprets, and judges the situation in which he finds himself. In short, "one would have to take the role of the actor and see his world from his standpoint."[27]

The perspective provided by symbolic interactionism applies not only to individuals but equally well to the joint action of groups, institutions, organizations and social classes, for it is equally true that in all joint actions, individuals fit their lines of action to one another.[28] In looking at joint actions, the concept of human group life or the life of society has been customarily understood by social scientists to be a "social system." But, as Blumer explains, interactionism challenges this concept, for it sees human society not as an established structure but as a formation made by human actors. Each actor constructs his action based on what he personally takes into account about any given situation. In this way group life is viewed not as an expression of established structure, but as a process that is built up

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[26] Ibid., pp. 94-96.

[27] Blumer, "Sociological Implications," p. 242.

[28] Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism, p. 16.

of the joint actions of individuals.[29] There is continuity in the process and the tradition and recurrence of similar situations do tend to give the impression of a fairly stable symbolic "structure."

Blumer does not discount the existence of structure in society. He acknowledges that there are such matters as social features: stratification, role relationships, and institutional relations; and they are important. They are important, however, only as they "enter into the process of interpretation and definition [of the situation] out of which joint actions are formed."[30] Blumer sees social organization as a framework:

> From the standpoint of symbolic interaction, social organization is a framework inside of which acting units develop their actions. Structural features, such as "culture," "social systems," "social stratification," or "social roles," set conditions for their action but do not determine their action. . . . Social organization enters into action only to the extent to which it shapes situations in which people act, and to the extent to which it supplies fixed sets of symbols which people use in interpreting their situation.[31]

Thus, interactions do not occur between social roles but between people. It is the individual participant

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[29]Blumer, "Sociological Implications," p. 242.

[30]Ibid., p. 243.

[31]Herbert Blumer, "Society as Symbolic Interaction," in A. M. Rose, ed., Human Behavior and Social Processes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), pp. 189-90.

in an interaction who is required to interpret and handle what confronts him, be it a topic of conversation or the solution to a problem.[32]

Blumer has said that one feature of social structure is that of stratification. Braroe observes that in societies that are stratified, "ethnically, or otherwise," it is apparently common for various segments of the society or the community to make "moral evaluations" of one another and these evaluations are frequently found to be uncomplimentary.[33]

Using a dramaturgical model to study a band of Cree Indians and their White neighbors living in a community in Western Canada, Braroe found that each group felt itself to be "morally superior" to the other. This was so, despite the general societal view that judges the White to be "superior" and the Indian to be "profane."[34] In the present study, "mobile home owners" and "traditional home owners" were also found to make moral evaluations concerning one another. Mobile home owners would say about those not living in the park, "I know they think we're trailer trash." At the same time, they would pride

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[32]Blumer, "Sociological Implications," p. 243.

[33]Braroe, Indian and White, p. 187.

[34]Ibid., pp. 1-11.

themselves on the fact that unlike their accusers they did not strive to "keep up with the Joneses." They are not "stuck up." People not living in the park refer to park dwellers as "low class" and "a group apart." Although the writer never heard an adult refer to park dwellers as trailer "trash," the implication was apparent. Adolescent and younger children would use the term trash to underscore the "profane" nature of park dwellers in their eyes.

At the beginning of the chapter it was stated that one version of the interactionist perspective is the dramaturgical approach provided by Goffman. It is this approach that will be used to attempt to further understanding of life in a mobile home park. According to Kenneth Burke "dramatism," "invites one to consider the matter of motives in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action."[35] Burke names the five fingers of dramatism, his well-known pentad of key terms: Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose:

> the act (names what took place, in thought or deed), . . . the scene (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred), . . . the agent (what person or what kind of person performed the act), the

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[35]Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. xxii.

> agency (what means or instruments he used), . . . and the purpose.[36]

In other words the five fingers of dramatism will provide some answers to these five questions: "what was done (act); when or where it was done (scene); who did it (agent); how he did it (agency); and why (purpose)."[37] Goffman acknowledges that the term "dramaturgical" has its limitations as well as its strengths. Certainly a stage performance cannot be said to be real life. However, the analogy can be drawn because the techniques required for the individual to define and sustain his performance in both real life and on the stage demand the mastery of similar techniques.[38]

For example when an individual appears before others, he attempts to control the impression they receive of the situation.[39] The individual wishes to convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey,[40] at the same time that he strives to avoid such things as unmeant gestures, inopportune intrusions, faux pas, and "scenes" which detract from his performance.[41]

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[36] Ibid., p. xv.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Goffman, Presentation of Self, pp. 254-55.

[39] Ibid., p. 15.

[40] Ibid., p. 4.

[41] Ibid., p. 208.

While the individual attempts to define the situation when he appears before others, the others present, however passive their role may appear to be, also effectively project a definition of the situation as they respond to the individual.[42] It should be kept in mind that the audience may confirm as well as contradict the individual's performance.

Performance itself may be classified in terms of basic function. There are those who perform, those who are performed to, and outsiders who neither perform in the situation nor observe it. An individual can be said to be in the role of "non-person," when he is present in the situation but in some respects does not take the role either of performer or of audience. A classic type of "non-person" in our society is the servant. His employer may act in his presence as if he is not there.[43]

However, those present in a situation can treat a performer as if he is not present and in this way express hostility toward him. The audience thereby shows the "outcast" that he is being ignored, although the "activity that is carried on by the audience in order to demonstrate this may itself be of secondary importance."[44]

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[42] Ibid., p. 9.

[43] Ibid., p. 15.

[44] Ibid., p. 152.

To show an individual that he is being ignored because he has temporarily fallen out of grace is different from a classification that came to light in the present study, which is, that of not even ignored. To be ignored implies an initial recognition of the individual and of his existence, but the "not even ignored" fail to enjoy even this initial recognition and may be said to be "invisible." In the course of ethnographic research, teachers and school administrators repeatedly referred to "trailer park kids" as being "invisible" as far as their classmates are concerned. The park student is simply not part of the social stage nor of the cast of performers. His presence is only acknowledged when fellow classmates wish to remind him of his profane status.

A seventeen-year-old senior high school student related:

> Trailer park kids hang around together. I don't know if house kids (a term that park students use to refer to a suburban home dweller) are afraid of us. We are more rowdy. They never talk to us. I go by the [class] rooms at passing. I can see the kids from the park just sitting there before and after class. We call anyone who lives in a house a "jock." Sometimes "jock" just means athlete. When Sandy Keller [a classmate and park resident] says, "I wouldn't talk to those jocks," she means they won't talk to her. They call us freaks.

The park students use the term "house kids" or "jock" to refer to students who live in houses. The senior

just quoted uses both terms in his conversation. He is making a distinction concerning the particular use of "jock" among park students. In the high school culture the term jock refers to an athlete or someone closely associated with the clique of athletes. It is only among high school park students that "jock" has a dual meaning which includes living in a house. This dual meaning is a key symbol arising out of a (non-) interaction context.

The Robben Island students are the first on the school bus early in the morning and last off in the late afternoon. They live farthest from the school. During the 1979-80 school year the park students would shout at the suburban students getting off the bus, "Make the bums walk." As one student who rode the bus and who lives in the park remarked, "They dropped off each kid at his house. That made us even later getting home." Park students sit in the back of the school bus. Suburban students sit in the front of the school bus. This appears to be accepted practice and is a reflection of the complete lack of social mingling between park students and their suburban peers. However, at the beginning of the 1980-81 school year, a new student, Walter, moved into Robben Island. Walter is known for "saying what he thinks." Not being accustomed to the isolation of park students from their schoolmates, he reacted to the situation. With Walter as the leader, the other park students threw

wads of paper at the house kids and they taunted and jeered them with comments such as: "You think you're better than we are, man." "If you keep your nose at that altitude it'll get to be an icicle."

Nevertheless, house kids continue to ignore the Robben Island students throughout the course of such eventful bus rides. A Robben Island student commented about such a ride: "They totally ignore us and that makes us even madder. They are totally separated from us. They don't talk to us. This gets the trailer kids enraged. I do think it's rage. I see their faces." Another park student said,

> It's not just fun. I can see the anger in their faces when they [park students] call them [house kids] "stuck-up." When Walter says, "You better not talk to those people. Look at the expensive homes they live in," the park kids nod in agreement.

Park students may be said to be regarded in essentially three ways: (1) they are invisible and do not exist in terms of the school culture; (2) they are ignored; or (3) they are treated contemptuously. Underlying all of these is the idea that park students are profane and as such they have no place in the drama of face-to-face interaction. The park student is prevented from entering the stage of interaction and thus of impression management. It is as if he has no impression to

manage; he is a park dweller. Even when efforts are made to enter the stage, witness Walter, the park dweller is not permitted to enter the stage of action by his peers.

In the first chapter it was stated that the purpose of the study is to investigate life in a mobile home park and to focus attention upon the experiences of adolescents of high school age who live in Robben Island and attend the local public school. An important finding of the study is that during these critical years of development, years in which the individual struggles to develop his identity, the overriding experience of school life for students living in the mobile home park is one of being "not even ignored": invisible.

Duncan, an astute social observer, tells us that the self is born in dialogue with others,[45] but when those who are necessary to us for our definition of self are indifferent, disorganization of self occurs, because the human being discovers his social existence in relationships with others.[46] Indifference of others cannot be endured for long, for in indifference there is no relationship, and thus no social being.[47] When an individual is thought so little of by those in his environment that

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[45]Duncan, Symbols in Society, p. 100.

[46]Ibid., p. 102.

[47]Ibid., p. 104.

no sign is given of his existence, it is difficult, if not impossible for him to develop a sense of his own identity.[48]

In Goffman's view, through the treatment the individual gives to others and receives from them, he comes to have a definition of himself. Goffman goes on to say:

> Through socialization into group living, the individual comes in effect to make assumptions about himself. Although these assumptions are about himself, they nonetheless are delineated in terms of his approved relationship to other members of the group and in terms of the collective enterprise--his rightful contribution about these assumptions about himself concern his normatively supported place in the group.[49]

The problem of the "lack of place" in the group is one that faces the adolescent living in Robben Island; although it is also a general problem in adolescence, as well, for the adolescent is betwixt and between adulthood and childhood. This "lack of place" magnifies adolescent alienation so common in America,where it is not generally mediated by formal socially approved passage rituals.

Formal rites that do exist in our own culture, such as graduation, are "less striking and less important, and we are generally more cynical about them. . . ."[50] Rites

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[48]Ibid., p. 107.

[49]Erving Goffman, Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), p. 340.

[50]Muriel Dimen-Schein, The Anthropological Imagination (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1977), p. 157.

of passage, by which cultures universally segment the individual's life path into three biological moments of birth, puberty, and death, are not meaningfully celebrated events in our culture. For example, puberty rituals are the most common markers of male adulthood in other cultures but are weak or absent in ours.[51]

The lack of place that the Robben Island Park student experiences is not simply the cultural lack of place for adolescents in American culture. In addition, his lack of place relates to the fact that he makes his home in a mobile home park. When the adolescent living in Robben Island, attending the local high school, rides on the school bus, walks in the school corridors, sits in the classroom, eats in the cafeteria, and attends extracurricular school activities, he is less than a pariah, for no sign is given to him of his existence by his mainstream classmates who are his age-mates and peers. Sometimes exceptions to being invisible occur. For example, in an English class a student began his speech with the information that he lived in the mobile home park. The classroom full of students responded with uninhibited catcalls, hisses, and abuses such as "Trash."

The Robben Island student seeks companionship with

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[51]Ibid., pp. 155-56.

the only students who will associate with him, other students living in the park. There are some two thousand students who make up the student body of the high school, and of this number one hundred students attending the school live in Robben Island. Thus, the social opportunities of park students are limited. Even in circumstances where the park students aggressively confront their suburban-dwelling peers, they remain invisible.

But the question to ask is, "Why?" Why is this the case?" What have Robben Island students done that makes them such profane people that a classroom of students can call one of their members "trash" with impunity and with the implicit understanding that this widely-shared opinion of "lowness" will not be censured when it is uttered. The teacher's only comment to the classroom full of students jeering the Robben Island student was, "OK, quiet down, kids, and listen."

Park students spend a great deal of time discussing their profane status. They recognize it but are unable to understand it. They offer explanations to themselves and fellow park dwellers: "Kids in suburbs <u>do</u> do better in school." "We aren't involved with the kids at school <u>at all</u>. We know who we are." "We feel people don't like us because they look down on us. People who live here with families are lower class. The retired people here have

money." "In an apartment it's different. People think you live there because you like the comfort It's not as stereotyped as people who live out here. They say we live in a small tin house."

Why does the mobile home-park-dwelling student have no place in the school peer group? The position taken in this research is that students living in Robben Island have a life style that excludes them from the social circle of their age mates and classmates. That is, the typical suburban student lives in a traditional, site-built house, one that is erected in compliance with local building codes. Typically, his family owns the house and the land upon which it stands. The house stands on land that is zoned for residential housing. The park dweller, however, lives in a factory-assembled home. Construction standards of the mobile home do not have to meet the standards of local building codes. Once sold, the house is transported to a small lot on a homesite where it is "set up."

> "Homesite"--refers to the location where a mobile home is initially set up after sale to a consumer.[52]
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> "Set-up"--includes installing, blocking and leveling a mobile home on a foundation, and the connection of

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[52]Federal Trade Commission, "Mobile Home Sales and Services," Final Staff Report to the Federal Trade Commission and Proposed Trade Regulation Rule (16 CFR Part 441), Bureau of Consumer Protection, August, 1980, A-4.

> utilities, in accordance with state and local laws. . . . For mobile homes which are transported in more than one section, set up includes the joining of the sections of the mobile home and sealing of the seams.[53]

The homesite, in this case, Robben Island, is privately owned property, and is on land that is, according to local zoning ordinances, an area of light industry. It is not zoned for residences. The family of the mobile home-dwelling student pays the park owner a monthly rent for the privilege of residing in the park and is bound to comply with the Park Rules and Regulations if he wishes to retain tenancy in the park. The family is at one and the same time an owner of a mobile home and renter of lot space in a privately owned park. In brief, the mobile home dwelling student is part of a family that consumes a product that is inconsistent with the life style of his suburban peers. He lives in a factory-assembled mobile home dwelling; and he lives on a homesite that is designated to be one, not of residences, but of light industry.

Furthermore, current widespread attitudes toward the mobile home product and the mobile home park are not favorable and are reflected in the following: Drury, a housing specialist, is a strong supporter of the mobile home but acknowledges that the product in the United States has been considered "a second-class stepchild since

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[53]Ibid., p. A-4.

its inception."[54] A journalist in a metropolitan newspaper stated that, ". . . the mobile home hasn't caught on. It continues to suffer from image problems, and zoning boards . . . turn up their noses at the thought of mobile home parks."[55] A respected manager and mobile home parts supplier (his father owns two parks) living in a community several hundred miles from Robben Island, confided that it is not uncommon for people in the trade to refer to mobile homes as "wobbly boxes" and to the mobile home park as a "tin ghetto."[56] A local supplier stated, "They [park residents] are looked down upon."[57]

More than one person who has been involved with the study of mobile home parks has observed that the unfavorable reputation which house trailers and trailer camps developed during World War II continues to plague the modern day mobile home park resident and to affect the perception of the mobile home park.[58] Knight, in his study of housing preference, found that there is "strong opposi-

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[54]Drury, Mobile Homes, 1967, p. 3.

[55]Chicago Tribune, 31 January 1979.

[56]Telephone interview, Mr. B. Baum, April 2, 1980, B & B Company.

[57]Interview with Mr. L. Turner, Turner Supply Co., May 23, 1980.

[58]John Deck, Rancho Paradise (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), p. 9; Edwards, Homes for Travel and Living, p. 84.

tion to mobile home parks." Furthermore, he found residents of traditional houses are considered to be "desirable" members of a community, whereas mobile home residents are considered to be "undesirable."[59]

In order to better understand how life style can result in the profanation of the park-dwelling student, life style and its relationship to status honor must be explored, for the writer sees the park dweller's low status honor as responsible for his profanation. Status honor is one of the symbols that a man uses to organize and uphold the social order.

The dramaturgical model previously discussed provides an approach to understanding this social organization. It provides a structure of action that is dramatic, and through the function of action it serves to create and sustain the social order. Symbols come into play because through the use of symbols man names and, in naming, he creates and sustains social order. "Man goes to battle in the name of Allah!" He acts in the name of family, friend, work, obligation, ideology, and he acts in the name of status honor. In the case of status honor he expresses his style of life in the drama of hierarchy.[60] It is in

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[59]Knight, "Housing-Related Preferences," p. 8.

[60]Duncan, Symbols in Society, pp. 21-22.

such a hierarchy that the mobile home park dweller in our society finds himself to be in a low position.

According to Max Weber, the way in which status honor is distributed among people constitutes social order. "The way in which social honor is distributed in a community between typical groups participating in this distribution we may call the 'social order.'"[61] "A style of life, like any style, is an expression through symbols of appropriate and inappropriate ways of acting."[62] In Weber's view, a "status situation" is a social estimation of honor. "In content, status honor is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific style of life can be expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle."[63] This expectation is accompanied by restrictions on "social intercourse" from those who are not part of the circle in which a desired life style is expected.[64]

Weber tells us that "'property' and 'lack of property' are the basic categories of all class situations."[65] This hierarchy is true only after the rise of

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[61] From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, trans. and with an introduction by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford, 1946), p. 181.

[62] Duncan, Symbols in Society, p. 21.

[63] From Max Weber, p. 187.

[64] Ibid., pp. 187-88.

[65] Ibid., p. 182.

state societies based on intensive agriculture and does not pertain to hunting and gathering bands and other small-scale societies that have generally produced most of their own food supplies.[66] "Property as such is not always recognized as a status qualification, but in the long run it is, and with extraordinary regularity."[67] "The development of status is essentially a question of stratification. . . ."[68] ". . . the possibility of a style of life expected for members of a status group is usually conditioned economically."[69]

For the people living in the township under study, for the mainstream adolescent, and for the adolescent living in the unincorporated area of light industry in the mobile home park, the house proves to be a powerful symbol. The ethnographer can recall no occasion throughout the research and has found no record in the review of field notes and interviews in which the importance of the concept of house did not occur. Symbols name; and powerful symbols are those that man believes to have a capacity to consecrate those styles of life which are "true" and

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[66]Gretel H. Pelto and Pertti J. Pelto, The Cultural Dimension of the Human Adventure (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979), pp. 102-3; "Hunting-gathering society. Group of people whose predominant subsistence economy is hunting animal foods and gathering of nondomesticated vegetable foods . . . ," p. 415.

[67]From Max Weber, p. 187.

[68]Ibid., p. 188.

[69]Ibid., p. 190.

"proper," the styles that are the source of social order.[70]

The mainstream home owner, in his own view, thus upholds the social order, whereas the mobile home owner does not. The students living in the park have internalized the same symbols and their symbolic importance. "You see all those great houses and come home to your tin can," is a point of view the students express one way or another. Many of the park dwelling students state that they believe it is the lack of a house that makes them "different," but they are often not certain. "Maybe we are feared." "We are not liked because we are loud." "We do not do as well in school as house kids." "It's true, trailer park kids are not good students."

The writer takes the view that the mobile home dweller lacks the possession of one of the most powerful "sacred" symbols of the culture in which he lives, the house. Man can hold a concept of the sacred in secular as well as in religious terms:

> Sacred--Cultural traits or aspects of culture that symbolize important cultural values and evoke attitudes of great respect or awe . . . the ideas or objects that become the focus of sacred values and emotions need not be religious in the usual meaning of the term. . . .[71]

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[70]Duncan, Symbols in Society, pp. 21-22.

[71]George A. Theodorson and Achilles G. Theodorson, A Modern Dictionary of Sociology (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1969), p. 360.

Goffman reminds us that "as sacred objects, men are subject to slights and profanations."[72] Since the house is a "sacred" symbol, those who do not possess this sacred symbol and, further, those who possess a product (a mobile home dwelling) that is regarded as "profane" have themselves become profane people.

Methodology

The methodology used in the study of mobile home park living must be consistent with the theoretical perspective of interactionism. Earlier in the chapter it was said that the interactionist perspective lends itself to a participant observation methodology. That is, it is interested in the point of view of the actor.

In ethnographic research, the focus is on a whole social sub-unit as seen from the point of view of participants. The important distinguishing feature of this method is that by its nature it provides the investigator with a directive for the breadth of data to gather and the theoretical frame he will ultimately adopt in analysis of the data.[73]

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[72]Erving Goffman, Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1967), p. 31.

[73]Jacqueline P. Wiseman and Marcia S. Aron, Field Projects for Sociology Students (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing Co., Inc., 1970), p. 240.

One assumption of the study is that the early years of an individual's life have a profound influence on his later life. This is so even when we regard his "later life" as the early school years of the young child. The assumption is similar to a view held by Kimball in his discussion of the transmission of culture, that is, that the formative years of life are years in which patterns are formed. Even the young child entering school has antecedent experiences. There are children in Robben Island who were born while they lived in the park. These children have only a park residential experience as their personal knowledge of "neighborhood" living. This is unlike the early experiences of their suburban peers. It is well to keep in mind that by the time the young student enters school he has already had experiences that will affect his life in school. Kimball states:

> Infancy and early childhood furnish crucial experiences for the formation of the emotional and cognitive patterns that individuals will carry into later life. In fact we can hardly expect to understand the consequences of directed teaching unless we know the personal and cultural antecedents which the child brings with him into the classroom.[74]

Two important cultural influences upon the adolescent under study take place in his home environment, which

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[74]Solon T. Kimball, "The Transmission of Culture," in Joan I. Roberts and Sherrie K. Akinsanya, eds., Schooling in the Cultural Context: Anthropological Studies of Education (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1976), p. 257.

includes the mobile home park and his school. Both the park and the school are influenced by the larger community in which they exist.

A participant observation method was utilized by the researcher in a field study of Robben Island Park. A preliminary study of the park was conducted during the 1978-79 school year, with full-time field work covering the 1979-80 school year and follow-up visits to the park during 1980-81. The writer arrived at the park early each morning and wrote up field notes at the end of the day. All of the field notes are available for those who wish to consult original notes. The same procedure was followed when interviews were conducted in the local high school and with members of the community.

Although there is not a social center in Robben Island, it was possible to gather with mothers and their children as they waited for the school bus in the morning and to talk with park residents in the laundromat. The researcher more often than not met with Robben Island informants in their homes. All individuals who met with the writer throughout the course of the research were initially informed regarding the study of the subject, Robben Island Park, and that the writer was investigating mobile home park life in connection with work at the university. The names of real people would not be used in

the final report unless it was preferred by the informant himself. Individuals both within and outside the park were generous in sharing their views and knowledge concerning the park. Park residents were particularly eager to communicate regarding park life because they believe that "mobile home living" is generally not understood by outsiders. Questions to informants were openended. "How do you find living in the park?" "Have you lived elsewhere?" Questions were equally openended for interviews with persons living outside the park.

Persons living outside of Robben Island were interviewed at their places of business and were selected because of their professional or social knowledge of the park, for example, school personnel, township officers, police and fire fighters. The individuals outside the park tended to be good informants; however, within the park itself there were differences that became apparent. For example, Robben Island women and adolescent males, mostly of high school age, were by far the best informants; retired men were also good; adolescent girls were good to fair; and male heads of households were poor, in that they seemed to measure carefully what they offered. When Shelia Johnson studied a California mobile home park she found that females were good informants and that the men were "taciturn."[75]

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[75]Johnson, Idle Haven, p. 12.

Although interactionism utilizes participant-observation, the in-depth interview is also valuable in discovering the attitudes of individuals.

> A major advantage of depth interviewing is its flexibility. Instead of going into the field with a narrow and specific hypothesis that he assumes to be the best approach to the study area, the researcher goes in with the idea of developing hypotheses and categories in the course of the investigation. . . . The goal then, of this unstructured approach is to obtain information that cannot be anticipated.[76]

Therefore, in addition to participant observation in Robben Island Park and the senior high school, and to a lesser extent in the elementary and junior high schools, in-depth interviews were conducted with park residents, educators, and citizens in the township. Further, telephone interview, correspondence, and library research were utilized.

Participant observation provides a unique opportunity to both participate in and observe informal events. In the school, informal aspects of the interactions of faculty with students were studied. For it is not only the formal aspect of the educational system that constitutes an important vehicle for the transmission of culture; it is in the informal aspects, less clearly defined than are curriculum and established procedures, that nuances

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[76]Wiseman and Aron, Field Projects for Sociology Students, p. 30.

of relationships take place. Such informal relationships are part of the school culture and take place both inside and outside the classroom.[77]

It is the point of view of the adolescent student living in the mobile home park that may be said to be at the heart of the study, because the attitude toward park students appears crystallized at the high school level. The ethnographer became aware of these attitudes while conducting preliminary research for the study. Students are very much aware of property distinctions and, as will be seen in Chapter VI, "Robben Island," the issue of conformity is one of the hallmarks of the high school culture. For example, in a property-conscious society, park students come from families that are thought not to possess property. Park students seldom conform to the image of what it means to be a successful high school student in the suburban high school culture of Blue Meadows. A study that takes the view of the adolescent student would probably meet with approval from Peter Sindell, who is critical of anthropological studies that have been "biased," in

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[77]A Mexican-American male student living in Robben Park South, was one of the most popular and accomplished students in the Class of 1979. He was both athlete (tennis) and scholar. His friends were exclusively mainstreamers; he did not associate with Mexican-Americans or park students. Both of his sisters dropped out of school; one, during the course of this study. This young man presently attends a major university.

that they reflect "reality only as adults see it,"[78] and rarely are students interviewed in depth about their feelings, attitudes, and values.[79] Nor, believes Sindell, do anthropologists studying education usually use participant observation with "children outside the classroom."[80] The present study has used participant observation as well as in-depth interviews with adolescent students.

The park dweller is acted upon by the product: the mobile home. Therefore, an important consideration will be the image of the mobile home as it exists in the larger society.

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[78]Richard L. Warren, "The School and Its Community Content: The Methodology of a Field Study," in G. D. Spindler, ed., Education and Cultural Process: Toward An Anthropology of Education (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1974), p. 426.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Peter S. Sindell, "Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Education," Review of Educational Research 39 (December 1969): 601.

CHAPTER IV

SYMBOLIC IMAGES

> There's a chandelier in the dining room, a sunken tub in the bath, and the biggest walk-in closet I've ever seen. It's just that it isn't a house.
>
> Home Hunter[1]

Making one's permanent home in a mobile home unit in a mobile park means that the resident must contend with the symbolic images of the product and of the park, for these symbolic images ultimately affect his self-image. There are similarities as well as differences between park dwellers and persons living in site-built dwellings which are important to note in an examination of the mobile image held by mainstreamers. Mainstreamers indicate that park dwellers are blue collar, live under crowded conditions, and conform to strict park regulations. Mainstreamers state that it is such factors that contribute to the negative image of the mobile home and its occupant. These comments prove little, however, for among mainstreamers, in the suburb of Blue Meadows, one finds

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[1] Chicago Tribune, 25 January 1981, Sec. 4, p. 8.

blue collar workers, small site-built houses no larger than a double wide mobile home, neighbors only a wall apart in townhouses and condominiums, row houses, and apartments. Many of the dwellers of these complexes live under stringent regulations. Mainstreamers must hold park dwellers in low esteem for reasons other than those they state.

Other differences, then, must be considered as somewhat affecting and influencing the image that mainstreamers hold. The mobile home industry developed outside of institutional housing, where it still remains. The mobile home is factory-assembled and is usually sold fully equipped with appliances, rugs, and drapes. The home is transported to a homesite where it is set up. There are few parks, and those that do exist are zoned into the less desirable, non-residential land areas. Park dwellers do not have as much tenant protection as do many apartment dwellers: few states have park tenant-landlord leases. With so few parks, fear of eviction, and few places to move their home, park dwellers live with more constraints than do apartment dwellers who may move if discontented, but who do not have to move a home as well.[2]

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[2]Bonnie Levy Shuman, "Closing the Gap: Protection for Mobile Home Owners," Arizona Law Review 1 (1974): 101-6.

However, the differences mentioned above are not sufficient to account totally for the poor image associated with the mobile home and ultimately with its owner. This subject of image is complex and has its roots in current history when the trailer houses of the 1920s were looked upon unfavorably, and the negative image was further reinforced by the proliferation of makeshift trailer camps established throughout the nation during World War II.

A sedentary[3] society always looks down on nomads or potential nomads even to the point of sometimes taking violent action against them. Jan Yoors lived with and studied the life of the Rom or Gypsies, many of whom "remembered the days they had been the victims of organized manhunts, when they had lived on acorns, hiding in the heart of the forest, and suffered untold atrocities under oppressive governments."[4] In Ireland, the "travellers" as they prefer to be known, are derogatively referred to as "tinkers."[5] The disdain with which nomads or potential nomads are held may be mingled with an admiration (repressed) for those who are mobile and thus "free."

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[3]Sedentary. Pertaining to human groups that remain more or less permanently settled, not migratory. Pelto and Pelto, Cultural Dimension, p. 420.

[4]Jan Yoors, The Gypsies (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), p. 122.

[5]Martina O'Fearadhaigh, Irish Tinkers (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), p. 10.

Examples of this "mixed" attitude abound in anthropological literature.

In examining the negative image that persists in regard to the mobile home park dweller, there are three factors that the writer believes warrant attention: a lack of definition of the mobile home; reaction to terminology used to identify the mobile home; and the obsolescence of the mobile home. These three factors are critical because of the number of people that are affected. Current estimates, prior to the release of figures from the 1980 census, are that "over 10 million people now live in about 4 million mobile homes . . ."[6] with "approximately 4,125,230 occupied residential mobile homes in the United States in 1979,"[7] yet the mobile home unit is still not accepted as housing.

In the ethnographer's view, the ambiguity that surrounds the definition of the mobile home unit contributes to its negative image. Mobile homes have been defined in terms of both size and use. The distinction between a mobile home and a recreational vehicle (RV), however it is defined, does not always distinguish the home from an RV. For example, a counsel for the mobile

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[6]U. S., Congress, Senate, Fourth Report to Congress on Mobile Homes, U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 96th Cong., 1st sess., 1980, p. v-7.

[7]Ibid.

home industry states,"Some RV's could be mobile homes. Some manufacturers are producing what they term 'park models' which fall within the definition of a mobile home."[8]

The criteria used to define the mobile home and to distinguish it from the recreational vehicle vary. "Recreational vehicles differ from mobile homes principally in size and intended use."[9] Anything longer than that [35 feet] or wider than 8 feet is a mobile home. . . ."[10]

In her study of the mobile home, Drury defines the mobile home as "a movable or portable dwelling constructed at a factory, to be towed on its own chassis, connected to utilities, and designed without a permanent foundation for year-round living. . . ."[11]

In Drury's definition, the mobile home is without a permanent foundation, while others report that a permanent foundation is not critical to the definition. Hodes and Roberson provide a definition of the mobile home which they state is used by housing manufacturers as

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[8]Leonard S. Homas, "Capitol Insight," Manufactured Housing Dealer, September 1979, p. 14.

[9]Center for Auto Safety, Mobile Homes, p. 6.

[10]Griffin, So You Want to Buy a Mobile Home, p. 164.

[11]Drury, Mobile Homes, p. 3.

well as most state and federal agencies in the United States.

> Mobile Home--a transportable structure, which exceeds eight body feet in width or 32 body feet in length, built on a chassis and designed to be used as a dwelling with or without a permanent foundation when connected to the required utilities.[12]

In addition to consideration of size and foundation is the question of use. James Carter, an attorney, states that the mobile home unit is a "vehicle when on the road and a dwelling when at rest."

> . . . it has been held that a mobile home is a "building" within the insuring clauses of a fire insurance policy; a "dwelling house" within a criminal arson statute; a "motor vehicle" within the terms of a statute of limitations; a "vehicle" within the meaning of a federal statute providing for confiscation of vehicles used to transport illicit goods; and a building "erected upon real estate" within the meaning of a restrictive covenant. Conversely, it has been held that a mobile home is not a "home" within the contemplation of a testamentary directive for the purchase of a home, and the courts which have faced the problem are divided as to whether a mobile home possesses enough of the characteristics of a "dwelling house" to entitle the owner thereof to a homesite. . . .[13]

In sum, the lack of acceptability of the mobile home may be attributed in part to the fact that the mobile home has yet to be clearly defined. At times it is con-

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[12]Barnet Hodes and G. Gale Roberson, The Law of Mobile Homes, 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Affairs, Inc., 1974), p. 4.

[13]James H. Carter, "Problems in the Regulation and Taxation of Mobile Homes," Iowa Law Review 48 (1962): 18.

sidered a vehicle, while at other times it is a dwelling. The mobile home defies standard cultural categories and anything that does this is considered "potent" and "dangerous." It cannot be clearly classified in terms of traditional criteria and it falls between the classification boundaries that exist.[14] When the mobile home unit is placed on a permanent foundation, is it still a mobile home? Although the components within the mobile home, such as stove, refrigerator, and other appliances, fall under the jurisdiction of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the mobile home itself does not meet the definition of "consumer product" under the Consumer Product Safety Act.[15]

Just as the lack of definition contributes to the negative image of the mobile home so, too, does the terminology surrounding the mobile home, at least in the view of the park dweller, manufacturer, and park owner. Characteristically, they respond to the negative image in two distinct ways. First, they desire to change the terminology. Second, they seek to have the mobile home appear to look like a site-built house.

When the term trailer was used to describe the

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[14] International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 1968 ed., s.v. "Pollution" by Mary Douglas, pp. 336-41.

[15] Federal Trade Commission, Report on Mobile Home Sales, p. 441.

trailer hitched to and trailing behind the family automobile, it was apt. The term was used both formally and informally. When the industry wished to upgrade its image and adopted the term mobile home, and later when the Trailer Coach Manufacturers Association became the Manufactured Housing Institute in 1975,[16] the informal usage of trailer persisted and persists today. The industry continues to look to its market; "anything to sell" the product is very American, that is to say, commercial. As Calvin Coolidge said, "The chief business of the American people is business."[17] It should be pointed out, however, that the term trailer is not necessarily pejorative. Often it is simply easier to say one word, trailer, than it is to say two words, mobile home. Manufacturers currently wish their product to be referred to as "manufactured housing," as they experiment with a term that will lend respectability and acceptance to their product and thus increase sales.

In the previous chapter reference was made to the Cree Indians Braroe studied, and how they protected and defended their images of themselves in an effort to protect their self-esteem. Similarly, mobile home dwellers

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[16] Encyclopedia of Associations.

[17] Calvin Coolidge, Speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, January 17, 1925.

make efforts to defend themselves morally. One way they do this is to adopt the term "mobile home" in place of "trailer." For example, Ken Day in a column appearing in a local Washington paper states,

> We live in a mobile home now, not a "trailer," a mobile home. . . . It is getting difficult to find a place to park one. . . . The image of the old "trailers" persists and people don't want them around. . . . Mobile home living can be lovely but it can also lead to a lot of fingernail chewing.[18]

Whereas the park dweller is concerned that the negative image of the mobile home unit reflects upon him, the trade realizes that the negative image hurts business. "The mobile home and recreational vehicle industry is big business. The two principal products of the industry are the mobile home and/or recreational vehicle and the parks. . . ."[19] A poor image can result in reduced sales and reduced business profits.

Because the mobile home industry is aware of the poor image of its mobile home product, it hopes to improve the image by adopting a new trade terminology. In this way a change in vocabulary is expected to result in the

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[18] Mobile Home Living (Bothell, Washington) March 1980, reprinted with permission of the author from the Bellevue (Washington) Journal American.

[19] David Nulsen, All About Parks for Mobile Homes and Recreational Vehicles (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Trail-R-Club of America, 1972), p. 5.

desired change "in our image." Henceforth, ". . . a home--a house . . . is the image that must be placed in the mind of Mr. and Mrs. John Q. Public."[20] For example, the place on which the mobile home rests should no longer be referred to as a "space" or "pad" but should be replaced with the terms now used for site-built houses: "site," "land," or "lot."[21]

The writer found, in corresponding with officers of mobile home owners' associations throughout the United States, that park names tend to fall into one of three categories: (1) the geographic location of the park, for example, "Grand Rapids Mobile Home Court"; (2) the name of the owner,"John's Trailer Park"; and (3) suggestion of a life in "Camelot." The last name appears to be a prevalent theme of park names that the writer encountered: "Green Acres," "Happy Valley Manor," "Paradise Mobile Home Park," and "Safari Mobile Trailer Park." The writer interprets the last category of names as essentially a reaction on the part of the park owner to deflect attention from the negative image that park living has come to have.

In addition to reactions to terminology, efforts

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[20] Park Manager and Developers, August/September 1978, p. 9.

[21] Ibid.

are being made to make the mobile home unit "look like" a site-built house. Herbert A. Temple, president of American Mobilehome Corporation, a California-based firm that is in the business of creating mobile home parks, states that the firm has organized its own design department "with the aim of making mobile homes look less mobile and more like homes. . . ."[22] People in the trade urge the use of a skirting, usually made of aluminum, to extend around the mobile home unit and "mask" the undercarriage and wheel assembly. "An effort is made to match the exterior siding to give the appearance that the walls start at ground level."[23] The use of exterior wood products is advocated to "give a mobile home more of a home look" in an attempt to counter its "former distinctive look of a 'bright shiny box' as mobile homes have been derisively called."[24] Many Robben Island dwellers have garden furniture, patio equipment, elaborate flower beds (actually rare in the village of Blue Meadows), swing sets for children, and the ubiquitous dog of large breed.

In addition to the lack of definition and the terminology applied to the mobile home, an even more important

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[22]Griffin, So You Want to Buy a Mobile Home, p. 16.

[23]David R. Nulsen and Robert H. Nulsen, Mobile Home and Recreational Vehicle Park Management, 2 vols. (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Trail-R-Club of America, 1971), 2: 132.

[24]Edwards, Homes for Travel, pp. 113-14.

consideration is the obsolescence of the unit. The relatively rapid rate at which the mobile home unit becomes obsolete may create problems for the mobile home owner, problems such as difficulty of securing a space for an older mobile home unit in a park, difficulty in unit resale, and fear of eviction because of the age of the mobile home unit. Following are illustrations of difficulties encountered because mobile home units were old. Evelyn Bauer, a retired widow, feels victimized by the sudden sale of the park where she lives. The writer visited Mrs. Bauer at her home in Serene Mobile Trailer Court, some thirty miles from Robben Island. Mrs. Bauer said, "They'll do with us whatever they want to do with us and I'm a nervous wreck. One lady went down the street crying and screaming, 'What am I going to do?'" The news had been a shock to the residents, many of whom had lived in the park for twenty years. Lena and John Carlson, thirty years old, with a two-year-old daughter, had purchased their mobile home in Serene Park just one year earlier. Mrs. Carlson said, "Where can we go? A lot of parks will take only 14 wides, or the trailer can't be over five years old. They say it's a fire trap."

Anthropologist Jules Henry refers to dynamic obsolescence which drives Americans to make what is "useful

today, unacceptable tomorrow."[25] The mobile unit, as will be seen, is a product of American industry and as such is subject to planned obsolescence. The development of new models, revised state highway regulations, the stress of transport and set up on the mobile home (which affect durability), are all factors that contribute in some way to the resulting obsolescence of the mobile home.

The mobile home is commonly referred to and categorized according to the width of the model, for example as (8 wide, 10 wide, 12 wide, 14 wide, and double wide). The mobile home, "described, identified, and classified by its width," comes in various sizes as do many industry produced products, and like many other products it has undergone rapid change. In the 1930s and 1940s the manufactured trailer was small (8 x 20 x 24) and light enough to be easily towed behind the family automobile. With the exception of 8 wide models that include a "pop-out" feature which expands floor space, 8 wides are considered to be "extinct" or are regarded as recreational vehicles.[26]

Within a fifteen-year period (1954-1969), the industry has introduced four new home models to the American market; three of these four were introduced within

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[25]Jules Henry, Culture Against Man (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 22.

[26]Nulsen and Nulsen, Mobile Home, 2: 102-8.

one decade. These models, the 10 wide, 12 wide, 14 wide, and double wide (two 12 or 14 wide units joined at the homesite), may also include expandable fold-out walls that provide more floor space.[27] The 10 wide model soon gave way to the 12 wide, at one time considered the most common type of unit, the "standard," making up almost 90 per cent of mobile home sales.[28]

The 14 wide manufactured in the late sixties has been touted by manufacturers as gaining ascendancy over the 12 wide. ". . . it gained in acceptance every year, tending to replace the 12 wide. . . ."[29] The Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association reported that the 14 wide has become "the most desirable rapidly growing type of manufactured housing."[30] It provides 18 per cent more living space than a 12 wide unit. The 14 wide is said to be the "bellwether" of the multi-billion dollar manufactured housing industry. Sales figures show that the 14 wide received only 2.3 per cent of the market in 1969, but sales grew up to 22 per cent of the market in four short years. At the same time, the earlier 12 wide showed a decline from a total market of 84.2 per cent in 1969 to

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[27] Edwards, Homes for Travel and Living, pp. 17-19.

[28] Bernhardt, "Mobile-Home Industry," p. 178.

[29] Mobile Homes Manufacturers Association, "The American Dream for Millions," pp. 1-9.

[30] Ibid.

58.6 per cent in 1973. From 1969 to 1973 the sales of double wides and expandable models showed steady growth.[31]

Condon celebrates the introduction and acclaimed popularity of each succeeding mobile home model:

> Older models are available in 8- and 10-foot-wide while all newer models are usually 12 to 14-feet wide. . . . Each year the industry is making great strides, and soon the doublewide units with the addition of a tag-along unit will be the rule rather than the exception. . . . Triple-wide units are gaining in popularity.[32]

The writer recently learned that 16 wides and even 18 wides are now being manufactured. "Minnesota, Texas, and the Western states are allowing movement of 16 wides."[33]

Larger models that provide more floor space are not the only improvement introduced by the manufacturer. Many manufacturers have improved the design and appearance of their models. Mobile home models are available with simulated wood exteriors, "cathedral-type" windows, raised dining rooms, sunken living rooms, increased amount of insulation, and numerous other options.[34]

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[31]Ibid.

[32]Condon, Complete Guide to Mobile Homes, p. 106.

[33]Telephone interview with Representative of Morgan Driveaway, Inc., Transporters of Mobile Homes, 13 February 1981.

[34]Standard & Poor's Industry Surveys, 1 April 1980, p. B114.

As a result of the model changes, there has inevitably been a change in towing practices. The introduction of the 10 wide model in 1954 represents a benchmark in the industry. With that model the mobile home unit became associated with permanent year round housing.[35] It not only became associated with year round housing, but because of its increased size and weight it was too heavy to be towed by the family automobile. It also exceeded the load limitation prescribed by state highway regulations.[36]

The regulations regarding transport of mobile homes contributes to the obsolescence because as wider models are allowed in a state, narrower models go out of style. Every state in the United States permits unlimited highway movement of vehicles which do not exceed eight feet in width or fifty feet in length. Because by structure and design the mobile home is classified as a vehicle on the road (although functionally it is a dwelling), it is subject to all highway regulations while on the highway (complying with highway rules that govern the safety and size of vehicles). The size of the 10 wide requires

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[35]Drury, Mobile Homes, p. v.

[36]Edwards, Homes for Travel and Living, p. 17.

special highway permits to allow travel and also requires the services of commercial haulers.[37]

In addition to changes in models and the resulting transportation regulations, the longevity of the mobile home unit must be considered as a factor in obsolescence. Two factors must be considered: (1) the effect of highway transportation stresses on the mobile home; and (2) the stress of set up. Researchers, evaluating the effects of highway transportation and site-installation on the longer-term structural durability of mobile homes, assume a fifteen-year occupancy for the single wide model and a twenty-year occupancy for the double wide unit. Durability test results indicate that whenever a mobile home is moved it loses a portion of its structural stiffness. The single wide model appears far better to withstand transportation stress than does the double wide unit. The double wide encounters severe durability problems as a result of stresses experienced in the process of transportation.[38] "Improper transportation and set-up are significant causes of defects in mobile homes."[39]

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[37]Hodes and Roberson, Law of Mobile Homes, pp. 2, 45-46.

[38]Fourth Report to Congress on Mobile Homes, 1980, pp. v-21-23.

[39]Federal Trade Commission, Report on Mobile Home Sales and Service, p. 305.

James Boyle, Executive Director of the Texas Consumer Federation, commented:

> Over the last two years, more and more consumers are purchasing double-wide homes. Very rarely are these mobile homes properly set up. The effects of an improper set up is disastrous in most cases. If the mobile home is not properly leveled, the frame becomes bent or warped and windows and doors become out of line. Leaks inevitably develop and the floor rots, the covering under the home deteriorates and rats and other rodents enter the mobile home. In a very short time, the mobile home is worthless.[40]

Improper set up may result in safety risks for the mobile home dweller. Improperly functioning windows and doors, which frequently result from improper set up may make it difficult to leave the mobile home in case of fire or other emergency.[41]

The Federal Standards Act of 1976 also contributes to obsolescence of the mobile home. All residential homes manufactured and sold in the United States on or after June 15, 1976, must comply with the HUD Mobile Home and Safety Standards Act of 1974 and must have a data plate that provides the owner with information about the mobile home. (The Federal Mobile Home Standards Program is administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Mobile Home Standards.) HUD was authorized by Congress through Title VI of the 1974 Housing Act, to establish and enforce Federal Construction and Safety

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[40]Ibid., pp. 323-24.

[41]Ibid., p. 325.

Standards for mobile homes and to authorize safety research and development.)[42]

The principal research efforts are in the "complex safety and durability areas."[43] Congress declares that the purposes of this Title are "to reduce the number of personal injuries and deaths and the amount of insurance costs and property damage resulting from mobile homes."[44]

However, mobile homes manufactured prior to June 15, 1975, are not covered by the standard, and therefore, they are less desirable home models. Thus, as new models with improved features and more floor space are introduced and supplant older models, these older models become obsolete. Also as highway transportation laws are altered in the states and come to permit larger loads to traverse their highways, earlier and smaller mobile home units become obsolete.

In addition to obsolescence caused by these factors there is some need to consider planned obsolescence. Observers of American industry state that the mass-produced item is not built to last and that what was formerly

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[42] Fourth Annual Report to Congress on Mobile Homes, 1980, pp. II-3.

[43] Third Annual Report to Congress on Mobile Homes, 1979, p. III-1.

[44] Fourth Annual Report to Congress on Mobile Homes, 1980, p. V-1.

termed planned obsolescence is now more frequently referred to as lack of product quality.[45]

Two definitions of planned obsolescence may serve to emphasize and clarify the problem.

> Planned obsolescence--An approach of consciously making an item out of fashion in the eyes of the consumer by repeatedly bringing out new models or products featuring improvements that are promoted as being superior or beneficial.[46]

> Planned obsolescence--incorporating easily recognized high fashion features into a product, to induce customers to replace it with a newer model when current fashions change. Planned obsolescence has long been a vital feature of the garment industry, but it also appears in such products as automobiles and electrical appliances.[47]

Earlier, mention was made of the fact that the mobile home is sold fully equipped with such items as electrical appliances, furniture, carpeting and drapery. Among these items which ". . . show signs of wear faster than the basic [mobile home] unit itself . . . ,"[48] one finds electrical appliances which are well recognized as products of planned obsolescence. The common practice of selling the mobile home fully equipped contributes to what

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[45] Chicago Tribune, 7 September 1980.

[46] Jerry M. Rosenberg, Dictionary of Business and Management (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), pp. 335-36.

[47] Christine Ammer and Dean S. Ammer, Dictionary of Business and Economics (New York: Free Press, 1977), p. 318.

[48] Griffin, So You Want to Buy a Mobile Home, pp. 20-21.

Griffin calls depreciation,[49] and what this writer considers as a major factor in obsolescence.

Although model changes in mobile homes are no doubt intended to improve the unity by providing more floor space and features similar to those found in site-built houses, there is planned obsolescence occurring in the mobile home industry, as witnessed by the frequent model changes. When one considers the rapidity with which new mobile home models are introduced to the market, promoted and packaged as being "far superior" to previous models, the evidence of planned obsolescence becomes convincing.

The consequences of obsolescence in the mobile home may be said to go beyond those associated with other fruits of American industry that become obsolete. The owner of an obsolete mobile home model cannot find a place in a desirable park, and the owner of an older model may be evicted because his model fails to conform to approved standards. The "mom and pop" camps and trailer stops that provided vacationers with utilities which the early trailer house did not provide have, by and large, become obsolete as the corporation-owned planned mobile home community prevails among new parks. "Probably 80 per cent of all new parks are developed by large land development companies

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[49] Ibid.

rather than by independent entrepreneurs."[50] These modern mobile home communities, as well as many other park communities, will usually not permit older models into their parks nor, increasingly, will parks permit mobile home models that fail to meet the 1976 standards of quality and safety into their parks. The result is that mobile home owners with models that are pre-1976 fear eviction from their present park, or realize that few parks will allow them to enter should they wish to change their park residency.

In brief, the lack of definition contributes to the negative image of the mobile home unit, adding, in its ambiguity, fuel to the argument that it in fact remains a vehicle and the "trailer" of former times, rather than a year-round residence. Further, the anomalous nature of the mobile home (moving, tenuous, not pinned down) causes it to be a morally questionable product, in contrast to the site-built home (stable, secure, fixed) and thus moral. By a false extension of home type to people type, a questionable product becomes a questionable person.

It is understandable that park dwellers are unhappy about <u>any</u> terms used with the intention of discrediting them or the dwelling they own. It should be kept in

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[50]Philip Weitzman, "Mobile Homes: High Cost Housing in the Low Income Market," <u>Journal of Economic Issues</u> 1 (September, 1976): 387.

mind that the term trailer is not always or even usually pejorative in and of itself. It is a downgrading term for some, but for many it is the informal term that remains in use. In any case, cosmetic efforts on the part of park dwellers, the trade, or park owners to improve the mobile home image by reacting to terminology or attempting to make the mobile home unit appear to be a site-built house are superficial approaches to a complex and now established problem. Such efforts, the writer believes will be to little avail. Those park owners who have reacted to the undesirable image of "trailer" by adopting exotic names that suggest a"kind of Eden" have succeeded in juxtaposing a product that many in American society regard as profane with an idealized image. The result of juxtaposing these extreme images may appear ironic to some, and may even further the negative image of the mobile home rather than enhance it.

The obsolescence of the unit contributes to its image as that of a disposable item that lacks permanency. Such images become associated with owners who are said to be trailer gypsies, transients, and uncaring about property. Here one finds a move from material culture to status and supposed morality. Since U.S. morality is so linked to material surroundings, it is an easy step to these stereotypes.

The mobile home unit shares with the American automobile the planned obsolescence resulting from model changes for its own sake. However, there are even further consequences to the owner of the unit in that changing highway regulations, the stress on the unit experienced in transport, and, also set-up contribute to obsolescence. What, for example, happens in a state that has never allowed 14 wides on its highways but suddenly changes its highway regulations to permit their transport on state highways? According to information received from Morgan Drive Away, Inc., one of the two leading haulers of mobile homes in the United States, the State of California changed its highway regulations at the end of 1980 and now for the first time allows movement of 14 wides on California highways.[51] Will the 12 wide models of that state literally become obsolete overnight? Furthermore, has the mobile unit transported just once from factory to homesite and set up already lost much of its structural integrity as a dwelling? And, although the purpose of the 1976 standards is intended to upgrade safety and durability of the mobile home unit, the fact remains that it contributes to the obsolescence of models produced before that time. Are today's buyers, two-thirds of whom are first-time buyers,[52]

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[51]Telephone interview, Morgan Drive Away, Inc., Representative, 12 February 1981.

[52]Federal Trade Commission, Report on Mobile Home Sales and Services.

wise enough to realize that a pre-1976 model is now obsolete?

Arthur Bernhardt, a specialist in industrialized housing, states: "The industry still faces a negative image problem. The mobile-home population still experiences discrimination and enjoys little social integration."[53] Mobile home dwellers were found to be less socially integrated into the community, to the extent that participation in voluntary formal associations reflects integration into the community.[54] Since mobile home dwellers are regarded as second-class citizens by mainstreamers and they are aware of this attitude, it is not surprising that on this basis alone they would fail to participate in community organizations, for they are everywhere and always outsiders.

In the next chapter this lack of social integration will be analyzed as one of the consequences that mobile home dwellers, and particularly adolescents, experience as a by-product of the morally questionable product they called a residence. And by a false extension from home type to people type, the questionable product has

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[53]Bernhardt, "Mobile Home Industry," p. 206.

[54]John N. Edwards, et al., "Social Participation Patterns Among Mobile-Home and Single-Family Dwellers," Social Forces 51 (June 1973): 489.

become a questionable person, the park dweller. The mobile home unit defies conventional categories and is thus viewed as "polluting." This unclassified product at the same time reminds mainstreamers that park dwellers are not respectful of the stable, fixed, solid values that they themselves possess; further reason to hold park dwellers in low esteem. The adolescent living in the park must try to find himself in a period in his life, adoelscence, between childhood and adulthood, and at the same time he must deal with all of the problems and ambiguities of living in a dwelling (the mobile home unit) and a place (the park) which are not clearly defined and are thus regarded as "polluting."

The student living in the park must then attend a school where he is reminded by his peers, who remain beyond his reach, that he is "trash," polluted. Living at the outskirts of Blue Meadows, he rides the bus each day to and from the school and he sees the contrast between the stable, respected home (and its dweller) and the profane mobile home (and its dweller). It is not surprising that these burdens do not contribute to a positive identification with Blue Meadows High School and the high school culture nor with bolstering one's self image.

CHAPTER V

A NEW MINORITY

> The most significant social history of our country in this century is to be found in the struggle against invidious discrimination. . . .
> John J. Kilpatrick[1]

In Chapter II it was said that in face-to-face relations park dwellers find themselves to be a profane people; that is, "not initiated"[2] and "not devoted to the sacred . . . serving to debase or defile that which is holy or worthy of reverence."[3] Thus mobile home park dwellers may be said to be (in the view of mainstreamers) uninitiated and undevoted to a sacred American symbol: the site-built dwelling. It was also said that a "move" is made from the morality of material culture to the morality of persons: the profane dwelling results in the profane dweller. There is a link as well between life style and morality as viewed from the sedentary/nomadic

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[1] Chicago Sun Times, 9 February 1981.

[2] Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language.

[3] Ibid.

contrast. The sedentary, thus stable, mainstreamers and the "nomads" or "potential nomads," park dwellers, may be viewed as being on the sedentary/nomadic contrast along with mainstreamers. In all cultures in which the sedentary/nomadic contrast exists, life styles are contrasted. For example, in the Western world the gypsy may be regarded as the symbol of the nomad, as the Bedouin is in the East, and the Pygmy is in the former Belgian Congo, at the heart of Stanley's Dark Continent. Yoors found the Gypsies were called barakkenvolk, meaning "people living in wagons," but the implication is "scum of the earth." Gypsies wondered about the habits of the villagers they saw, who have "awful, sticky flypaper in their homes, hanging over a table, covered with black flies. What was wrong with these Gaje [non-Gypsies]? The Rom wondered." Unlike the villagers the Rom did not believe in "accumulating things," nor did they see power in possessions. The enjoyment of possessions was only in the spending of them.[4]

Pitti la Kaliako, a Rom of the Tshurara tribe dressed in awful rags but was known as "the millionaire" because he had spent a million.[5] Irish Tinkers, poor as they are, burn a caravan [trailer] where a dead person has been, rather than looking to turn a profit in trade or sale.[6]

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[4]Yoors, Gypsies, p. 64. [5]Ibid., p. 124.

[6]O'Fearadhaigh, Irish Tinkers, p. 119.

The nomadic Bedouins believe that they are "closer to God" than sedentary people, who they say are concerned only with pleasure, luxury and worldly occupations, whereas they have fortitude and courage. In contrast, their sedentary neighbors respond in disbelief when one of their own wishes to return to the desert, stating, "You have turned back and become an Arab?"[7]

The Pygmies are despised by their village (sedentary) neighbors and are jeered at for being puny and living in the "evil" forest; whereas to Pygmies villagers are "clumsy as elephants" and could never live in a world in which one's life may depend upon an ability to run swiftly and silently.[8]

In this chapter it will be shown that life style is of major importance as an indication of how groups regard and treat each other. Furthermore, it will be shown that in group relations park dwellers find themselves to be a minority people. The subject of this chapter concerns mainstreamers, minority groups and their interaction.

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[7]Ibn Khaldun, "The Bedouins," in Regna Darnell, ed., Readings in the History of Anthropology (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 49-51.

[8]Colin M. Turnbull, The Forest People (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1961), pp. 11-23.

Pluralistic complex societies such as American society are characterized by a polarization of dominant versus minority groups. Complexity and stratification seem to have arisen together. Members of the dominant group, among whom are those referred to as "mainstreamers" have among their members those who are established as powerful and who moralize a sense of superiority to rationalize their power. As superiors they treat other groups who differ biologically or culturally as inferior.[9] Seldom do they regard those unlike themselves as inconsequentially "different." Dominants are in a position to further the interests of their own group, for they enjoy the high status of the superordinate with power derived historically and sanctioned and maintained by custom, law, and influence.[10] On the other hand, minorities, who are subordinate,[11] have less formal education, considered as desirable and the only "real" education, have little or no capital, and lack access to the basic resources of the society.[12] The interaction of dominant and minority groups is a feature of stratification (a formulation of social levels into a hierarchy of

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[9]Charles F. Marden and Gladys Meyer, Minorities in American Society, 5th ed. (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1978), p. 22.

[10]Ibid., p. 21.

[11]Ibid., p. 10.

[12]Ibid., p. 386.

prestige)[13] and reflects status positions (relative rank in a hierarchy of prestige).[14]

Human beings tend to "assume that the survival of the group" and, in fact, the survival of society "depends on the perpetuation of their values."[15] Ethnocentrism is the tendency to unconsciously assume that one's own values are the only possible standard for evaluating values and the people who hold them. Of course, those evaluated from this myopic perspective always appear as deviant or pathological. Members of groups learn to think about themselves and their way of life in an ethnocentric manner without even realizing it. That is, they learn that their own cultural practices are the "right" practices and "what ought to be." Anthropologist Melville Herskovits explains such ethnocentrism as a psychosocial process by which men come to center the world in their own group. He considers it a universal process that performs an essential function: by centering the world in his own group, by seeing it in his own dimensions, by judging conduct by his own standards, man is able to adjust to the world in which he lives. The process is not one to be

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[13]Webster's Dictionary, 1976.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Marden and Meyer, Minorities in American Society, P. 21.

praised or blamed. It is simply a matter of understanding the nature of culture.

> For culture regulates the relationship of one member of society to his fellows; it orders the concept of the universe which a people hold; it patterns their esthetic satisfaction. It conditions the way in which they perceive and react to time and space; it gives to every man the ethical norms by which he guides his own conduct and judges that of others. There is literally no moment in the life of an individual when the influence of his culture is not felt.[16]

Herskovits stresses this premise: "The critical point about culture is the fact that it is learned: and the process of cultural learning is called enculturation."[17] And because it is easier to think and act in an accustomed way than it is to learn new ways of thinking and acting,[18] man strives to perpetuate his own culture through sustaining custom, through influence, and through laws, thus maximizing the interests of his own group. Although it is true that man can learn new ways, "a way of life is a tightly knit fabric, and it is most difficult to substitute any one strand for another without affecting the pattern of the totality."[19] Although dominant as well as minority groups feel the need to perpetuate their own group's values, dominant groups are in a position to

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[16]Herskovits and Herskovits, Cultural Relativism, pp. 76-77.

[17]Ibid., p. 76.

[18]Ibid., pp. 76-77.

[19]Ibid., p. 80.

further their own group's interests through power. One should keep in mind that "minority status is an imposed status" and it is one that has validity "only as dominants possess the power to sustain it."[20] True, minority groups also have power even if only the power of the weak. Hippies were feared in American society although they had no money. Power elites are often afraid of unbridled manifestations of disregard for their "conventions."

The fact that culture is learned and that each man is grounded in his own culture is pertinent to the subject of this study, for Americans have learned that the house is a sacred symbol and that money is to be transformed into something that "shows." The production and distribution of goods and services are in themselves social or communicative acts. Duncan writes:

> The provision of goods and services is a social act and a communicative act. Goods and services are distributed according to rank and power; at the same time, the kinds of symbols available to us, and their control by various institutions, determine the kinds of goods and services we have.[21]

In America, monetary power is not only displayed, it is displayed in ways that are meaningful and approved by dominants. A house, preferably a big house, is one of

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[20]Marden and Meyer, Minorities in American Society, p. 22.

[21]Duncan, Symbols in Society, p. 207.

the very best ways Americans have chosen to display monetary power. A house in itself is a sacred symbol, but if monetary power can translate this into a bigger and thus better house, so much the better, according to this scheme of values.

In the view of the powerful and established, mobile home dwellers have failed to learn that the house is a sacred symbol, reflected in choice of residential location and manner of life. In fact, Knight found that the site-built dwelling is the housing preference of both traditional home owners and mobile home owners![22] Since display of wealth is so linked to "desired status," if one has wealth he is expected to display it; and the mobile home does not provide conventional display. Hence, to U.S. mainstreamers and home owners, park residents seem to lack the means of such display and thus what constitutes the "sound" morality evidenced in dramatism. Hannerz found that black ghetto dwellers were caught in the vise grips of mainstream morality, in that they saw the desirability of many aspects of mainstream culture, while they felt they fell short.[23] Those in the ghetto who aspired to black mainstream values tried to dissociate physically

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[22]Knight, "Mobile Home and Conventional Home Owners," p. 129.

[23]Ulf Hannerz, Soulside, Inquiries into Ghetto Culture and Community (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 65-67, 186-88.

and symbolically from those in the ghetto who did not.

In America, the "economic system now functions in terms of a symbol called money, whose symbolic properties have made possible the American way of providing services for the community."[24] "Money as such is not a very useful symbol of hierarchy "[25] It must be transformed. It must be transformed because it cannot be eaten, used to clothe the body, or used for shelter. "Money must be transformed into something other than what it is, and this process of transformation involves a great share of our time and energy in America."[26] If a wealthy man dies in simple surroundings, or a miser dies in a cheap boarding house, the event becomes front page news. The American man who does not spend money to communicate his success is thought to be "slightly mad."[27]

Sociologists Coleman and Rainwater state, "Money, far more than anything else, is what Americans associate with the idea of social class. . . . For many Americans, other considerations are comparatively inconsequential."[28]

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[24]Duncan, Symbols in Society, p. 207.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., p. 208.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Richard P. Coleman and Lee Rainwater with Kent A. McClelland, Social Standing in America: New Dimensions of Class (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1978), p. 29.

Coleman and Rainwater go on to say,

> When social class is viewed as "all a matter of money," its existence is most dramatically illustrated by the monetary extremes--wealth at one end of the continuum, poverty at the other . . . variations in housing and the segregation of neighborhoods up and down the scale seem to constitute ever-present visual reminders of differences in the amount of money people have. . . .[29]

Ultimately what most Americans envy most about Americans with money is what "more money" can buy. "More money is thus said to buy 'a nicer,' 'bigger house,' certainly 'more expensive,' probably 'beautiful,' and in some cases, 'practically a mansion.' Further, more money buys a 'house that is better located. . . ."[30]

Sociologists Warner and Lunt, in their study of an American community they called Yankee City, found that the geographical location of a person's dwelling was yet another way that Americans ranked people in the town.[31] The better the location of the dwelling the higher the status the dwellers of the dwelling were perceived to enjoy.

Where a person locates his residence is part of the decision he makes about how he will spend his money.

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[29]Ibid., p. 30.

[30]Ibid., p. 31.

[31]W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt, The Social Life of a Modern Community, Yankee City Series, 5 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971; 11th printing, published 1966), 1: 84.

What should be kept in mind is that a man's budget is constrained in a large part by a culture and symbolic system. In Yankee City, "The desires of all those who spent money for things they wanted were basically physical, but the values and categories (symbolic) which dominated the expression of their wants were social."[32] There is the man who seeks the "right kind" of house in the "right" neighborhood because it will bring the approval of his friends and his social superiors. In other words, he chooses a house which he believes will correspond with and reflect his family's way of life.[33] The location of a man's dwelling is a symbol of the money he possesses or wants people to think he possesses.

The ethnographer believes that the apparent disinterest on the part of mobile home dwellers regarding symbols important to mainstreamers causes dominants to perceive park owners as irreverent. To outward appearances park dwellers have failed to learn that the site-built house is sacred, that money is to show, and that location of residence is important. Furthermore, the ethnographer believes that park dwellers suffer consequences as a result of this perceived irreverence. Local ordinances as well as state and federal statutes contribute little to including them in the mainstream of American

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[32] Ibid., p. 287.

[33] Ibid.

society. For example, the owner-occupied single family home is considered an American ideal.[34] "This ideal is reinforced by the favored tax status of home ownership. . . ."[35] "Income tax deductions . . . are used to lower the costs of upper income housing, but are of little benefit to the average mobile home owner."[36] As far as financing of home loans is concerned, mobile home owners find themselves "shut out of the conventional housing market, [they] must pay higher interest for a mobile home"[37] than one must pay for a mortgage on a site-built house. Weitzman concludes, ". . . the existing structure of housing markets and home finance favors the economically powerful. . . ."[38]

Other consequences the mobile home owner, and particularly the mobile home park resident, encounters are the following: restrictive local zoning ordinances that severely limit the number of parks and restrict those in existence to the least desirable land areas; the quasi-governmental authority of the mobile home park manager that is too frequently not mitigated by sufficient park tenant rights; and the inadequate warranty protection for

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[34]Weitzman, "Mobile Homes," p. 577.

[35]Ibid., p. 586.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Center for Auto Safety, Mobile Homes, p. 51.

[38]Weitzman, "Mobile Homes," p. 589.

the mobile home. Such consequences are perceived by members of the society. A local fire investigator commented to the writer, "What those people have is a lose-lose situation. They have no place to go and the park manager can throw them out at any time." The far-reaching consequences of such perceptions are discussed later in this chapter.

"Most town and country zoning codes discriminate against mobile homes. . . ."[39] The mobile home unit is consigned to the "least desirable" land[40] far from residential neighborhoods where the sacred house is located. At the state level, few states have statutes governing landlord-tenant relations in mobile home parks. There is, however, a "need for protecting mobile home owners in their relations with park owners."[41] At the federal level, evidence from studies begun as early as 1972[42] reveal that

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[39]Knight, "Mobile Home and Conventional Home Owner," p. 8; Southern Dutchess News (New York State), 9 April 1980; telephone interview, William Palmer, President, Mobile Home Association of New Jersey, Inc., March 16, 1980; Quinn, Money Book, p. 307.

[40]Joseph P. Fried, Forward by John V. Lindsay, Housing Crisis U.S.A. (New York: Praeger Publisher, 1971), p. 157; Center for Auto Safety, Mobile Homes, p. 54.

[41]Bonnie Levy Shuman, "Closing the Gap: Protection for Mobile Home Owners," Arizona Law Journal 1 1974): 104.

[42]"Mobile Home Sales and Service," Final Report to the Federal Trade Commission and Proposed Trade Regulation Rule (16 CFR Part 441), Bureau of Consumer Protection, August 1980, p. 10.

> inadequate warranty service is a major problem in the industry . . . the sale and service of mobile homes by manufacturers and dealers has resulted in substantial consumer harm through a number of practices which are unfair and deceptive. . . .[43]

A report published in August of 1980 cited the need and means to provide such as yet unrealized protection to the mobile home owner.[44] Thus, at the local level, the mobile home unit is consigned to the least desirable land; at the state level mobile home park tenants do not have sufficient protection in their relations with park owners; and at the federal level warranty protection for the mobile home unit is inadequate.

In addition to a person's desire to perpetuate his own group's values, one must consider the perception one has of his fellows. On the basis of this perception the person designates the people around him as being like or unlike him. Thus in the process of perception, one designates anyone who differs biologically or culturally as being other, "a different one."[45] Although dominant groups as well as minorities share a mutual perception of those outside their own group as other, it appears from the fieldwork experience that for the most part what a member of a dominant group is likely to mean by other is "inferior"; whereas, what a "minority" is likely to mean

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[43] Ibid., p. i.

[44] Ibid., p. 3.

[44] Webster's Dictionary.

by other is "advantaged." According to Moore, the perceived traits of a minority are an important part of the reality with which a minority must live.[46] One finds an all-pervasive group centeredness here.

An important consideration concerning mainstream and minority interactions is that the tendency to stereotype minorities appears to be more prevalent on the part of mainstreamers when minorities are concentrated in a certain locality. For example, scattered minorities may be regarded as novelties to be tolerated or ignored and a concentration of minorities is more likely to result in discrimination, segregation, and prejudice.[47] The lone mobile unit on private land, used as a summer home or winter retreat, may be pointed to with pride. Mainstreamers at Blue Meadows High School speak with delight of their mobile home "up at the lake," or the "trailer on grandpa's farm." However, once dominant-minority relations become habitual and formalized, a constellation comprised of stereotype, discrimination, segregation and prejudice is too likely to become part of the scenario.[48]

Consideration of the term minority is essential

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[46]Moore, Mexican Americans, p. 1.

[47]Marden and Meyer, Minorities in American Society, p. 25.

[48]Ibid., pp. 29-32.

at this time. Anthropologists Wagley and Harris provide an excellent definition of minority with five important criteria, the first three of which the writer believes apply to mobile home park residents:

". . . a minority is a social group whose members are subject to disabilities in the form of prejudice, discrimination, segregation, or persecution (or a combination of these) at the hands of another kind of social group."[49] It is not the numerical number that constitutes a "minority group" or a "majority group" [dominants]. True minority groups are products of political entities, and their salient feature is that they are in a relation with a dominant majority which has "greater power over the economic, political, and social mechanism of the society. . . ."[50]

Minority groups are "self-conscious social units."[51] Members of minorities often come to have a sense that they belong to a group that is distinct from the dominant majority. Although the degree of self-consciousness that minorities experience may vary dramatically, in one sense or another, all minority groups experience "self-conscious-

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[49]Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris, Minorities in the New World: Six Case Studies (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 4-5.

[50]Ibid., p. 5.

[51]Ibid., p. 6.

ness of themselves as a group distinct from others in their own society."[52]

The disparagement of a minority is often related to a distinguishing physical or cultural trait that sets the minority apart from the majority. The trait is one that is disapproved of by the majority and sometimes even by the minority members themselves. Disapproval may be reflected in ridicule, suspicion, or even hate. The disapproved-of trait is one that differs from a trait or traits possessed by the majority and is often related to physical appearance, language, religion or culture. It is the trait that distinguishes the minority member and sets him apart from other depressed groups within a society.[53] Mobile home park dwellers meet the three criteria outlined in the definition of minority provided by Wagley and Harris: they experience discrimination; they are a self-conscious social unit; and most importantly, they possess a trait disapproved of by dominants, i.e., residency in a mobile home park. Application of these three criteria follows.

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[52]Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[53]Ibid. Wagley and Harris provide two additional criteria which they consider important but which they believe are seldom mentioned in most definitions of minority. (4) One is born into a minority group by virtue of the fact that one or both parents are members of the group. (5) Endogamy, or the rule of marrying within the group is typically found among minorities.

Mobile home park dwellers are a socially segregated group that experiences social discrimination from mainstreamers. Social discrimination refers here to "All practices, formal and informal that limit admission to groups or situations that are primarily sociable or prestige defining. . . ."[54] Owners of mobile home units are denied admission to the prestigiously-zoned land reserved for site-built residences.

Zoning restrictions for the location of mobile home parks are a fundamental reflection of local attitudes about the undesirability of having a mobile home park in the vicinity. These local attitudes are caused in part by the unwarranted characterization of mobile home owners as "trailer gypsies"[55] as well as "drunks and drifters."[56] This characterization makes people reluctant to have mobile home dwellers as neighbors and results in the relegation of mobile home parks to fringe areas that are non-residential.[57] A federal district court judge has remarked that the zoning restrictions on mobile homes demonstrate a "town's determination that there be

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[54]Ibid., p. 30.

[55]Fried, Housing Crisis U.S.A., p. 157.

[56]Center for Auto Safety, Mobile Homes, p. 54.

[57]Knight, "Mobile Home and Conventional Home Owners," p. 22.

metaphorical tracks for a mobile home park to be on the other side of."[58]

A resident of Robben East reported a very unpleasant experience that she had at her church. Ann Marie, her husband (both college graduates), and their two daughters live in Robben Park. Ann Marie has been an active member of a nearby suburban church for several years and she related the following recent experience she had.

> We were standing in the lounge at church. The man I was talking to said, "Where do you live?"
> "In Blue Meadows, but the unincorporated area."
> "I don't know any houses around there."
> "I live in the mobile home park."
> "Oh, I have a house in Rembrandt." (This is an affluent suburb.)
> "It's the people that make a home, not the building."

Ann Marie went on to say,

> Another thing is people don't want to know anything more about you or what you have to say if you live in a mobile home. People at work were talking about redecorating. I started to talk about redecorating my daughter's room. The attitude was complete disinterest. It's, "Oh, you live in a mobile home."

Ann Marie is aware of the prejudice her children and others encounter in school. She said, "It gets to you even as an adult. You always have to defend where you live. I think, 'What have I done?' I think, 'What the hell did I get into?'"

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[58]Lavoie v Bigwood, 457 F2DF, 10 (1st Cir 1979), 10.

Robben Island students are aware that they live on the wrong side of the tracks in the township in which they live. Park dwellers attending the senior high school make every effort to conceal their home address. The ethnographer observed this avoidance again and again, during the preliminary study. When a park student was asked his address (with no knowledge on the part of the questioner that the student lived in the park), he would attempt to avoid providing the information that indicated he lived in the park. A typical park student would hem and haw and finally reluctantly give his park address, which consists of the name of the highway fronting the park and the lot number. "6000 Washington, Lot 28. I'm careful who I tell my address to. People look down on you. You're an adult. You understand [the ethnographer will not look down on me]."

A more exceptional case was in a one-to-one situation when a teenage park student flippantly announced his address, using the park name, "Robben South, Lot 69." In this case the address was uttered with rapidity and relief at having mastered a difficult task. School personnel report the reluctance of park students to provide an address orally. For example, when a school nurse requested the home address of a student who was to leave school because of illness, she reported, "He didn't want

to tell me his address. He's ashamed." The look of discomfiture that the ethnographer has seen on the faces of park students as they reveal a Robben Island address in a school situation requiring oral disclosure of their address cannot be mistaken. Because Robben Island students look for the most part like the other Anglo-American students who predominate in the student body of Blue Meadows (there are three popular black athletes and about one hundred Mexican-American students) it takes an effort for the park student to disclose something about himself that he knows will be perceived as information likely to stigmatize him. For it is not unusual that within moments of the revelation of his park address the park student becomes aware of moving from a perceived status as mainstreamer to one in which he is perceived as a member of a minority group.

In addition to the social discrimination reflected in restriction about land use, the mobile home park student is a non-person in the high school culture and thus is barred from social communication with his peers. Furthermore, village parents complain about the fact that park students ride the school bus and even that their children must "unfortunately attend school with trailer park kids." An executive at the bus company providing bus services to the school districts in the area related to the

ethnographer, "A lot of people don't want their children to ride the bus with 'trailer park kids.' I try to schedule a complete busload from the park so park students don't have to put up with village kids." The Chief of the Rural Fire Protection Service related that a community leader complained at a local township meeting that his children had to attend a school where "trailer park kids go."

Mobile home park dwellers are a self-conscious group. Park students refer to themselves as "park kids" and they refer to villagers as "house kids," an example of locational symbolism. When the police counselor at Blue Meadows High School reported that drug problems were more prevalent among park students than among other students, a group of boys from Robben Park went to the police counselor and asked to check his records. A review of records proved the police counselor wrong and the original statement, published in the school newspaper, was later retracted.

> Dear Editor:
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> I would like to clarify a statement attributed to me in a recent published article in the Blue Meadows Echo. My purpose was not to point out errors in reporting, but rather to correct an injustice to a segment of the student population. In the article, dealing with drug and alcohol violations, I have been quoted as saying, "Since the students usually caught live in the trailer park. . . ." This simply was not the case. My reference to the trailer park and its

residents was used in conjunction with examples of people who would be hurt the most by financial penalties related to the de-criminalization of marijuana. These students are not singled out by myself, nor to my knowledge, any other member of the staff, and hopefully they are not looked upon as different by the remainder of the student body. If one were to look over the figures of students disciplined this year for drug related offenses, fewer than 5 per cent were residents of the trailer park.

I would like to thank the editor and staff of the Echo for allowing me to correct this apparent gap in communication with this letter and also for expressing an interest in an area so few are willing to talk about.[59]

Respectfully,
John Conway
Police Counselor[60]

Part of the field research involved attendance at a regional meeting of a mobile home association leadership conference at which a woman residing in the finest mobile home park in the state rose from her chair and asked those assembled: "What I want to know is--Do people look down upon mobile home owners as much in other states?" A woman from the same park privately told the writer, "Boy, when people learn you live in a mobile home park their opinion of you goes way down."

A young couple living in Robben Park for two years told the writer, "People have the impression that people who live in trailers are gypsies. People who aren't

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[59]Underlining by the ethnographer.

[60]Blue Meadows Echo, 17 November 1978.

stable." The husband added, "They treat these mobile home people (gesturing to the mobile homes surrounding his) as the dregs of society. Parks are tucked away in some little corner where no one can see them."

A teacher in a local junior high school related to the writer, "Park kids group together and stay together. Kids think they're garbage. Kids separate themselves and don't accept park kids. Park kids are very dependent on one-to-one [relationships] and it hurts." In the Spring of 1980 a column appeared in the Hillview Review in which an education writer referred to students who live in "comfortable suburban homes" and contrasted them to students who "go home to trailer courts."[61] Mrs. Pastor, a resident of Robbens Park who is a mother of three and holds a Master's Degree, was upset by the disparaging characterization of mobile home park dwellers. She wrote a letter to the newspaper indicating that she too lives "in the suburbs" although she makes her home in a mobile home park. Mrs. Pastor is active in the community and is only too aware of the discrimination park dwellers face. "I was at a meeting where it was assumed that park stu-

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[61] Hillview Review, 6 May 1980, "Now, Madison School, has youngsters from diverse backgrounds. Some live in comfortable typical suburban homes with manicured lawns. Others go home to trailer courts. It doesn't matter. They've all been working together, learning about each other's heritage.

dents were responsible for the school's low test scores!"

The school principal of a local elementary school indicated that he used to put out a newsletter in which he used the term "trailer park." "I stopped doing that when parents started telling me, 'We're not trailer trash. We're mobile--a mobile home park.'" The principal went on to say, "Park people feel like second-class citizens. The adults have bad feelings about living in the park."

The third criterion in Wagley and Harris' definition of minority concerned a physical or cultural trait which sets a minority apart. Mobile home park dwellers possess a trait disapproved of by mainstream home owners. Traits are visible and may be biological (physical type, lineage), cultural (verbal and nonverbal communication patterns, institutional practices, style of dress), and associational.[62] In the consideration of visible traits of mobile home park dwellers the question is, "What trait or traits are park dwellers perceived to possess in the view of mainstreamers?"

The low regard in which park dwellers are perceived was revealed in interviews with residents of Blue

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[62]Wagley and Harris, Minorities in the New World, pp. 5-6.

Meadows and nearby Hillview, as well as with those providing direct services to Robben Park. These interviews took place at the fire station, the sheriff's office, the telephone company, the township office, and at local public schools. The individuals involved in these services were selected because of their professional knowledge of the park.

Until January 1978, the Hillview Fire Department provided services to Robben Park. Since that date, and at this time, Robben Park has been served by a Rural Fire Protection Service. Fire fighters and paramedics at the Hillview Fire Station discussed their experiences and perceptions of Robben Park. The fire fighters and paramedics, ranging in age from the early twenties to late forties, revealed to the writer: "The park is a low income area. I wouldn't want to live there. I lived in the suburbs all my life. I lived in a big house. I can't picture myself living in a trailer."

> There <u>are</u> nice trailers in there, too. Of course, there <u>are</u> a couple of nice trailers. It's messy. I went on a call. The sink [in the mobile home] was frozen. The heating wasn't done right. They [mobile home occupants] had no heat for five days.

A paramedic with fifteen years of experience on the service stated, "On the whole they're [park dwellers] a dif-

ferent class; different type of resident. Low income. They're mobile."[63]

A thought that comes to mind is that of the veiled fascination the sedentary person feels for the nomad or potential nomad. Is the mobility disdained, and at the same time coupled with fascination? "Savages are degenerate," but aren't they interesting--so wild and free!

The sergeant at the Sheriff's Office related,

> The park is not a problem area as far as the police are concerned. The problem--there's no place for the park kids to go. They have no place to play. I think the problem is a very impacted area. Everyone's close. I wouldn't want to live in a trailer park. There are disadvantages. They are unincorporated. I don't think you find many white collar workers there.

Many of the people interviewed seem to be saying, "You wouldn't find me there [in the park] so how good can it be?"

During the preliminary ethnographic inquiry for this study well-meaning people in the township cautioned, "You'll have a tough time [with the study]. Those people

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[63]Weitzman, "Mobile Homes," p. 590. "It should be pointed out that once the [mobile home] unit is placed on its pad, it is rarely moved again during its life as a primary residence. The mobility referred to by the term mobile home is the movement from factory to the residential site."

are all to themselves. You can't get to know them." "They are a group apart." "They're secretive people." When the ethnographer would state the subject of the investigation concerned Robben Park, it was usual for the informant to begin to discuss the park resident with such comments as, "They're strange people." But even in those situations when the informant may make every effort to be scrupulously fair about mobile home dwellers, he reveals that he regards them as other. "I find no trouble with these people." "They're just like anybody else." "They don't give us any trouble." But the interviewer was not suggesting that park dwellers were "trouble" or that they were "different."

Further opinions of dominants underscore the feeling that park dwellers are a group apart. A township officer said:

> There has always been a shadow on trailers. [They are] not popular. People looked down on them at first. Seems they are fully accepted [now], sort of more of the community. Don't know of anything to complain about. I find no trouble with these people.

Four school administrators from the local junior high schools shared these opinions:

> It was the second time I'd been in a mobile home. I was really impressed. The mobile home was better than our kitchen before we remodeled ours. I was surprised.

> We had a meeting of parents in the gifted program. Maybe as an educator I shouldn't say this. Somehow it just--it didn't click in my mind that a gifted student lived in the mobile home park. Here I'm the principal of the school and I'm impressed. . . . Wherever students live there's a wide range of abilities. You know how teachers categorize people.
>
> Just because someone lives over there [in Robben Park] they aren't necessarily inferior. Mobile homes have a reputation. Then again, it might be to me. Maybe in this area.
>
> I like those [park] kids. You know they talk about their being different. In a sense they are. So are the kids from here (nodding in the direction of the houses across the street from the school). The difference is the kids around here have a place to play. The kids at the trailer park don't. In terms of academic skills I don't see much difference. You find out that those people--I don't know where they get this, that people think they are "trash."

The Director of Ecology for Blue Meadows Township has lived in the Village of Blue Meadows for twenty years. When interviewed by the writer she stated that as far as parks are concerned, it is not so much the fact of the quality of the dwelling but,

> It's the connotation. They [park dwellers] may live in a double-wide that is larger than my house. That doesn't make a difference. Location [of the park] has a lot to do with it. If you drive through the park it's a down [depressed] feeling.

The Director of General Assistance (Welfare) for the Township said about park people, "They don't have much education. They have lower paying jobs. Nothing prestigious. They don't have a nice house or apartment. The people are liable to be more transient."

Perceptions of the mobile home park dweller as being "poor," "messy," "transient," "blue-collar," "secretive," living in an "unincorporated area," "a group apart," "a down feeling," "no place to play," "don't have a nice house or apartment," have been shared with the writer. What any individual means by "poor" is the subject of semantic argument and is outside the subject of this study. However, the manager of Robben West took exception to an article he had saved in which mobile home dwellers were referred to as "poor." The manager told the writer,

> It belittles mobile home people and it's untrue. Do you call someone poor who can buy a $20,000 mobile home with $8,000 down? There are people here who own Cadillacs and Lincolns that are paid for and a mobile home [also paid for].

Furthermore, mobile homes are not substandard housing nor do they represent a small expenditure in dollars to the owner. ". . . the census data [1960] do not substantiate the prevalent stereotype of 'trailers' as substandard housing."[64] "Although the mobile home is marketed and sold as low priced housing, under present institutional conditions consumers are not acquiring . . . housing at

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[64]Robert Mills French and Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Mobile Homes: Instant Suburbia or Transported Slum?" Social Problems 2 (Fall, 1968): 224.

significantly lower cost."[65] In the mid 1970s a typical mobile home installment contract for a ten to twelve year period realized interest rates of 11 per cent to 14 per cent per annum.[66] Finance charges on mobile homes are 2 per cent plus more than charges on site-built houses.[67]

In addition to this concept of the park resident as being poor (they do not make up a poverty group),[68] other traits attributed to park dwellers are fallacious. The Robben Park resident was accused of being messy because the heating unit in his mobile home malfunctioned. Blue-collar workers live in site-built houses in the Village of Blue Meadows as well as in Robben Park. There are site-built houses in the unincorporated residential areas of the township. The attributed traits of secretiveness and transiency are unfounded. The supervisor interviewed at the local telephone company said:

> Regardless of the area, more and more people want unlisted phone numbers. Most people want and have extension phones and touch phones, regardless of the area they live in. Our trailer parks don't seem as transient. People stay on the average from five to seven years. This is pretty much what you find with home owners. We used to think of trailer parks dif-

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[65] Weitzman, "Mobile Homes," p. 580.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Federal Trade Commission, "Mobile Homes Sales and Service," p. 42.

[68] Johnson, Idle Haven, p. 164.

ferently before--secretive and to themselves. It seems things have changed since mobile homes have been advertised for seniors.

Telephone personnel were interviewed because so many of the people in the township reported that unlisted phone numbers were an indication of the secretiveness of park dwellers. "You can't get them by phone." Also, the phone company's records were checked to indicate the average number of years that villagers and park dwellers retain the same phone number thus implying occupancy in the same residence. As indicated, the number of unlisted phone numbers and the years of residency in a dwelling do not differ between mainstream villagers and park dwellers.

The Sergeant and School Administrator reported that the difference they perceived between park students and other students was the fact that the park students had no place to play. Field work confirms the observation. Park students not only have no place to play but they do not even have a place to gather. As one visitor to the park exclaimed to the ethnographer, "I grew up in a city ghetto but at least we had a corner to hang out on. These kids don't even have a corner."

With regard to perceived traits of park dwellers, it was the Director of General Assistance who expressed what appears to be the most important perceived trait in regard to park residents. "They [park residents] don't

have a nice house or apartment." It is this attitude that shows where mainstreamers are focusing their attention in regard to park dwellers.

The similarity of viewpoint of those living outside the park tends to indicate that in inter-group relations the mobile home park dweller finds himself to be a member of a new minority group. In the process of enculturation or the learning of cultural values, each group comes to believe that the values and customs of his own group are "correct." Home owners with a mainstream cultural sanction enjoy the power and prestige that permit them to work to maintain the dominance of their own group's values.

Mainstreamers perceive mobile home park dwellers as a group that fails to support important symbols of the culture: the sacred house, the use of money to "show," and the importance of location of residence. Because park dwellers own a mobile home and live in a mobile home park, they are viewed by mainstreamers as ignoring these sacred symbols. But this view is probably out-of-consciousness. Park dwellers meet at least three criteria of a minority group; they are subject to prejudice, discrimination, and segregation; they are also a self-conscious social unit and they exhibit a disapproved-of trait. Why did so many of the informants refer to park

dwellers as "those people"? Why is it that dominants express a tacit separateness from the park dweller, and why must they attempt to exonerate him? Of what must the park dweller be exonerated? The answer seems to be: merely making one's home in a mobile home park.

Students of minority studies point out that the appearance and disappearance of minorities in the society is a dynamic process, one that involves the emergence of new minority groups and the absorption of others into the national mainstream.[69] In this chapter the point has been made that mobile home park dwellers have made their appearance as a new minority group in American society. A description of life in Robben Island Mobile Home Park, the heart of the field experience, will further substantiate this assertion.

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[69]Marden and Meyer, Minorities in American Society, p. 22.

CHAPTER VI

ROBBEN ISLAND MOBILE HOME PARK

The purpose of this chapter is to depict life in the ethnographer's field experience, with the particular focus of attention on the life of the adolescent living in the park. However, everyone living in the park will experience special problems by virtue of the fact that he makes his home in the park.

Robben Island Mobile Home Park is located in a state of the United States in the township of Blue Meadows. Park residents, with few exceptions, are American citizens. Americans live under a form of government in which political power is divided among local, state, and national governments. The United States Constitution protects the rights of citizens to speak freely and assemble, and protects their property against unreasonable search and seizure.[1] American citizens also communicate openly with each other by post in the knowledge that postal laws protect mail from obstruction.[2] The Robben Island resident

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[1] United States Code Annotated, Constitution of the United States, Amendments one and four, 1972.

[2] Ibid., Title 18: 1702, p. 24.

lives under the same Constitution and laws as do his fellow citizens, but he, unlike them, is subject to an additional authority: the mobile home park manager, who intercedes between him and his local government.

> . . . the park manager or owner provides a quasi-governmental authority at much closer hand than the local government, which is the nearest authority for conventional . . . [site-built house] residents.[3]

Robben Island lies in the unincorporated area of Blue Meadows Township. The township was a sparsely settled farm community, until the Village of Blue Meadows was founded in the mid-1950s.[4] At that time, thirteen square miles of the township's twenty-eight square miles became incorporated into a village of residents with a planned industrial park. By 1970, the young village boasted six thousand single family dwellings (usually ranch style) and five hundred rental units, owned and occupied by blue and white collar workers.[5]

The village was planned so that municipal offices, shipping, recreational facilities, the library, schools and wide curving residential streets occupied the western

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[3]Knight, "Mobile Home and Conventional Home Owners," p. 4.

[4]Interview with local historian, Mary McGrath.

[5]Interviews with village realtors.

section of the village. To the east, there is a beautifully landscaped industrial park of modern buildings that blends into the greenery of land and trees. Beyond the incorporated village, there are acres of unoccupied land followed by service stations, fast food operations, motels, auto dealerships and small heavy industry. It is here on a strip of highway fronted by open fields, junk yards of used auto parts, gravel mounds and adult book stores and houses of prostitution,[6] that Robben Island Mobile Home Park is found. To the east and west there are service stations, mobile home sale lots, and an above-ground storage parking lot for trucks.

Robben Island Park is a physical island, for it is separated from the environment around it by highways. To the north there is a tollway and on its west, south, and east boundaries there are six-lane highways. The park consists of three parks independently owned and operated. They are separated from each other by a high chain link fence topped by three rows of barbed wire, the type of fencing commonly found around governmental installations, sporting areas, and prisons. There are holes in the fences so that the children move among the parks.

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[6] The Hillview View, 16 July 1979, "New Men's Club Opens in Blue Meadows Township. Billing itself as a men's club, another apparent house of prostitution has opened its doors in unincorporated Blue Meadows Township where two other establishments contending to be 'men's clubs' flourish."

Robben West is owned by a conglomerate and managed by a couple with two daughters, one of whom is a student at Blue Meadows High School. The park consists of the manager's (site-built) house and office, a small fountain with a plaster Grecian goddess, a swimming pool, grocery store, laundromat, small playground with swing sets, and a tool shed. Rural style mailboxes line the main streets of the park. At the entrance to the park there is a large glass-enclosed map charting the locations of the homes in the park, and to the right there is a mobile home sales lot with plastic flags draping the new mobile home models on display. To the left there is a modest swimming pool. The 14 wide model is frequently found in this park, although as the manager related, "The double-wide is now the thing." All model sizes excluding the 10 wide are represented in Robben West. Park tenants are permitted to have porches and detached sheds on their lots. There are many decorative features, and lots are dotted with patio furniture, flowers, and plastic ducks and deer. There are no trees in the park. There are many dogs in the park, generally of large breed with the German shepherd prevailing.

These are the comments that adolescents shared with the ethnographer. The laundry and grocery store are in the same building, back-to-back. There is a small playground with swing sets next to the store. "Nobody

goes to the children's playground. Kids under thirteen go to the pool. There's no place to go in the park." Park management forbids loitering in the store, in front of the store, in the laundry, in front of the laundry, or any other place in the park. "There's no place to go. The worst time is the winter. People really smoke up then; that's about all they do." "What we need in the park is a recreational hall and someone to sponsor activities." A study on housing environment reported that an "important correlate of housing quality is that of play facilities for children."[7] It is a fact that there is no place for play in the park, and there is further no place to gather to talk.

Although the ethnographer frequently heard people living outside of the park commenting that the store owner probably "gouges" his customers with inflated prices since he has the only store within miles of the park, the prices in the park grocery store were competitive. A personable Asian national owns and operates a store that is clean and well stocked. One of the junior high students was truant from school for forty-nine days during one semester. He spent all of those days going to the

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[7]Daniel M. Wilner, Rosabelle Price Walkley, Thomas C. Pinkerton, Matthew Tayback, The Housing Environment and Family Life: A Longitudinal Study of the Effects of Housing on Morbidity and Mental Health (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 140.

grocery store to talk to the store owner. This was the only social contact available to him in the park. When students are truant from school they typically remain in the mobile home all day, and it is not uncommon for them to spend much of the time cleaning the home.

Warnings are posted on the windows and walls of the laundry and reveal the adversary relationship that exists between park management and the children and teenagers in the park. Last year vandalism of the laundromat was a problem, but now a large reward and increasing fear of eviction have eliminated such behavior. As a high school student said, "We don't do that anymore because we don't want to be evicted. The admonishing letter has kept the kids out of here. Eviction is immediate!" There is a $500 reward for anyone reporting vandalism in the laundromat. The students respond to threats of eviction by scribbling profanities on the notices management posts. The following letter, for example, was covered with scribbled profanities:

> Dear Tenant:
>
> Uncontrolled children. It is impossible for us to create a staff large enough to police every single youngster in the Park. We know that most children and teenagers are spirited and occasionally they become boisterous, but this can also be controlled, depending upon the supervision of the parents. . . . We cannot and will not be responsible for uncontrollable youngsters who will not comply with our Rules and Regulations. This letter is directed mainly to the residents of the Park who are not in

> control of their children's actions. It does not apply to the vast majority of decent, law abiding residents of the Park. To those parents who are not controlling their children, we must advise you that where your youngsters cause damage or malicious mischief . . . we will have no alternative but to terminate your tenancy immediately in the Park. There will be no recourse in this matter.
>
> If this letter sounds brusque, it is not meant to be --it is simply reaffirming our obligation to you to operate a well run Mobile Home Park in which you can live in clean and quiet surroundings. We trust you will understand the tenure [sic] of this letter and that you will help us make Robben Island an outstanding Park and that you will remain with us as tenants for many years to come.
>
> The Management

Frequent use of the word "control" in referring to the behavior of children and teenagers reflects the attitude that is common among Robben Island managers and of many of the park parents as well. Children are to be curbed and controlled, a contrast to the prevailing attitude in the village and in Blue Meadows High School where self-realization, self-expression, and independent behavior are considered goals for the middle-class adolescent. The long arm of control reaches beyond the physical boundaries of the park. As school bus drivers and officials of the bus company related, "If a student misbehaves on the bus, the park manager will get rid of him; move the family out." "I've never met a man as hard as the manager of Robben East. He's quick to get rid of a student. He says, 'They don't have to be mollycoddled.'" So when the student rides the school bus to and from the

park each day, he feels as one senior related, "Big Brother is watching." The parks are quiet, but, to the ethnographer, they are conspicuously people quiet. There are no sounds of human speech, of children laughing, playing, or talking. The children that do go to the pool are very quiet. In this respect, the desired control of the youngsters appears to have been accomplished to the pleasure of the park management.

Robben South is what the residents of Robben West and East call "a shame." "Now, that's what you call a trailer park" is a typical comment. The park consists of two, long, unpaved streets that are dusty in the summer and muddy when it rains. The potholes are inescapable, and the ethnographer broke the axle of an automobile because the deep potholes could not be avoided in the narrow streets. There are some 14 wide models in this two-street park but no double-wides. There are many shabby, run-down mobile homes, as well as RV's or campers that are hooked up to utilities and are used for permanent housing. During the course of the study, black-jacketed members of a motorcycle gang moved into the park, further eroding the confidence of both neighbors and observers in the safety of the park. Girls in the park tend to spend all of the time they are not in school in the mobile homes. Earlier in the year, some would gather and speak together when they collected the mail at the rural mailboxes next

door to the laundry, but with the increased use of drugs at this gathering spot and fear of walking the few yards to the mailboxes, girls by-and-large do not leave the mobile, further limiting their world.

Residents of West and East Parks make moral judgments about the residents of South. They, like mainstreamers, have made the move from material culture to moral judgment. The poor material culture of Robben South is associated with a poor moral behavior, however erroneous this association may be. There are clusters of Mexican-Americans living in Robben South and their presence further facilitates the disparagement of the park. However rundown the park, the rental of park lots costs more in South than it does in either West or East Park. Children of West and East as young as seven years of age comment on the park and look down on the residents. These same children are separated from South by a few yards of earth and sometimes only by a chain link fence inches from their own mobile home.

There are propane tanks in a fenced-in area next to the entrance of South Park. Tenants must buy the propane for their mobile home unit from the park manager. There is the ubiquitous large breed of dog, including a Great Dane. There is a small laundry with the usual warn-

ings to children posted. Next to this small building are found rural mailboxes.

Robben East is a tree-lined, paved park, with models ranging from 10 wides to double-wides. There is a laundry in the park and a large field where residents can be found walking their large dogs. The mailboxes are located in the manager's office and consist of pigeon-holed open slots. The manager sorts the mail and deposits it in each tenant's box. The manager's unleashed dog (all tenant dogs must be leashed) is always on the premises and each evening he and his dog patrol the park in a motor scooter. The manager lives in a very affluent suburb where residents of the park have driven to see his "big, beautiful house."

Robben Island Mobile Home Park lies in the unincorporated area of the township. Whereas village residents enjoy services such as police protection, fire protection, recreational parks, library, garbage pick-up and road and street maintenance, Robben Park residents must acquire such services elsewhere. The Sheriff's office serves Blue Meadows Township of which Robben Park is a part. The Sheriff's office serves twenty-three other townships in the region as well. Robben Park has arranged for fire protection with the Independent Rural Fire Protection Service. Fire fighters commented to the writer,

"I reckon the real danger in there [the park] is that there's no water. There's one hydrant that comes off the well. The other closest hydrant is eighty-three feet away --a long way." Another fireman said, "Trailers have their own type--way of burning. They're a hotter fire. They burn a lot faster than a house would burn." Another said, "We have to bring in a tanker. There's no water in the park." In the winter the problems are worse.

> I'll tell you, it's a big problem in the winter there. It's hard getting an engine into the trailer park. The cars are parked right next to the trailers and they [engine drivers] can't get that close to the trailer in the snow; cars block the road.

Each park, West, South, and East, has its own sewage treatment plant. An engineer from the Municipal Sanitary District related to the writer, "We have pressured the park owners to abandon their sewage treatment centers or upgrade them. They are simply inadequate." The local newspaper featured a story concerning such a problem.

> Even sunny days are not enough to dry some streets in Robben Park in unincorporated Blue Meadows Township. Clogged sewer lines that back up are causing the slimy water, occasionally carrying human excrement, to run down some streets in the park. . . . Residents of the trailer park say they have learned to live with other frustrations such as highway noise but their latest frustration--raw sewage is too much.[8]

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[8]The Hillview View, 24 September 1980.

The newspaper story referred to conditions at Robben West. Residents from Robben East reported that in 1976 the flooding of park streets was so bad that a local television crew came out. Immediately thereafter the manager raised the rent for all the tenants.[9] Presently, the flooding is so bad that it is not uncommon for water in the park to be ankle deep from mobile home to street. In the northeast section of the park, problems are more severe, so much so that a woman donned her husband's hip boots to carry her children to the car from her mobile home. It happened that the park manager was patrolling at that time. He guffawed and said mockingly, "You're sure a funny sight." The residents in the park used to boil their water but some have given up that practice. Others bring bottled water from the laundry because it "looks cleaner." Residents say, "Sometimes the water comes out of the tap black in the bath and kitchen." One of the wives said her husband and children refused to drink the water when they moved into the park, "It smells like rotten eggs." She would bring water home from the laundry and refrigerate it. "Now the family drinks the water from the tap. I couldn't keep that up with all I have to do." Another woman talked about the water that "smells like

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[9]The manager raised each tenant's rent $15.00 to compensate for the cost of improving the sewage treatment plant. However, the problem remained.

eggs" and the flooding being bad. "That's why a lot of people in the park have vans. The street floods and the vans sit higher." Another woman wanted to move her invalid mother to a different location within the park because her house is under three feet of water but it would cost $900.00 just to move down the street.

People living in the park, as well as those living in the village, are aware that Robben Park people cannot use village services. Non-village residents must now pay a $30.00 fee to use the library. One college-educated mother said, "I didn't know that when I moved to the park." An A-student in the park said, "I don't have a village library card. It would be a problem getting to the library anyway. The library is way over there." Furthermore, when the school bus bills are received by villagers they have complained to the writer, "I resent those park kids riding the bus. Their parents aren't even taxpayers."

It is clear that Robben Park residents do not belong to the Village of Blue Meadows; but beyond that, park jurisdiction is often unclear to Robben Park residents. A township official related, "Park people often come here for help but we have no jurisdiction." Robben Park residents have a Hillview mailing address and attempt to take advantage of the services offered to Hillview residents.

However, Hillview is merely a postal address and the municipality has no jurisdiction over Robben Park.

Robben Park is called an open park because there are no age restrictions for tenants. Many occupations are represented by park residents: a police commander, patrolmen, teachers, construction workers, and owners of small businesses including restaurants and bars. There are senior citizens who have retired from similar occupations. The manager and the park custodian of West agree, "People here could live where they want. Most of them could." There are 1,273 mobile home units in the park. West is the largest of the parks with 682 units, followed by East with 440 units, and South with 152 units. Of 107 students living at Robben Island Mobile Home Park who attend Blue Meadows High School 59 are from West, 13 are from East, and 34 are from South. Blue Meadows High School is a four-year high school (grades 9-12) with a student population of 2,251. Following is a distribution of park students by park and grade level.

The following school-related characteristics further bring to light the problems of park students at Blue Meadows High School. Among the 107 park students, there are 4 Hispanics residing in West, 11 in South and none in East. As a result of the concentration of high school students in Robben West and South, the students from these

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF PARK STUDENTS BY GRADE LEVEL
BLUE MEADOWS HIGH SCHOOL

	Males	Females	Total
Robben East			
Grade 9	3	2	5
Grade 10	1	0	1
Grade 11	1	4	5
Grade 12	2	0	2
	7	6	13
Robben South			
Grade 9	1	10	11
Grade 10	4	4	8
Grade 11	2	5	7
Grade 12	2	6	9
	9	25	35
Robben West			
Grade 9	10	9	19
Grade 10	8	7	15
Grade 11	9	10	19
Grade 12	4	2	6
	31	28	59
Robben Island Mobile Home Park	47	59	107

TABLE 2

SUMMARY DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS LIVING IN ROBBEN ISLAND PARK

	Males	Females	Total
Robben Park East	7	6	13
Robben Park South	9	25	35
Robben Park West	31	28	59
Total	47	59	107

parks tend to associate with each other and to be viewed as a group by their school peers. The students from Robben East are far less likely to be identified as residents of the park by their peers.

The number of students in the park, and the fact that junior high and elementary school administrators view them as a group, has consequences for the students. When attendance areas are shifted to adjust the distribution of student population among local schools, park students are the ones shifted. This practice has been going on for years and was halted if not stopped in 1979. A senior recalled his early years in school,

> I went to Roosevelt for first grade. Then I went to Taylor for second grade. There was an enrollment shift at Roosevelt; that's why I was sent there. Then I was moved back to Roosevelt for third, fourth, and fifth. Then I went to Madison Junior High.

People who are informed about the longstanding practice of moving park students from school to school report that much of the reputation (unfounded) of park students being transients results from the practices of the local school administration. The students and their families have remained living in the same park throughout the process. An official of the school bus company said:

> These people are not transient. They live far from schools. Schools change the attendance areas and park students are moved from school to school. They

> get a reputation for transiency. One child was moved about to four different schools in four years. The family finally enrolled him in a local parochial school to avoid the problem.

In 1979 when the matter of reassigning mobile home park students came up in an effort to equalize enrollment, a school principal intervened. "I didn't like the idea and I told the superintendent."

The school bus stops at Robben Island Park early each day to pick up the park students and it returns them there late in the afternoon. Park students are bussed from the far eastern section of the township to the far western side of Blue Meadows Village. They are the first on the bus in the morning and the last off at the end of the school day. In the preliminary study, the ethnographer learned that because the students from the park ride the bus together, schoolmates and members of the faculty come to identify these students as a group: a group of "park kids."

As can be seen from the table, park students comprise 107 students in a student body of 2,251 students. A freshman boy from the park remarked, "We are outnumbered" in the classroom. He drew a diagram with a classroom full of students represented by circles and one park student represented by a single X. "There's only one of us. No one will talk to us before class or after class." Par-

ticipant observation by the ethnographer in the school confirmed the accuracy of this student's statement.

At lunch time,[10] park students from West sit at the table near the jukebox in the school cafeteria. South students sit at a separate table. East students mingle or eat alone. Other students from the student body do not join the park students, nor would park students even sit at any other tables in the school cafeteria; they would not be accepted.

Members of the faculty state, "It's rare for park students to participate in school events." A student from East had a lead in the school play but the director of the play added, "That's very rare. Park students don't participate." When the writer went over school records, it was found that of fifteen graduates from Robben Park in the Class of 1979 five students had participated in a total of nine school activities: four of these students were from East and one was from West. One of these students was a member of the National Honor Society.

The high school has a program called the Young Adult Program (YAP) for students who want to work during

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[10]Free lunches and milk are provided to needy students. Of 67 Blue Meadows students receiving lunches, 7 are residents of Robben Park. West has 3 students, South has 4 students, and East has 0 students.

the school day and take high school courses in the evening in order to earn credits toward a high school diploma. Students who enter the YAP program are listed with those who drop out of high school. The distribution of student entering YAP to complete high school requirements and dropping out of school is as follows (Table 3).

Of 107 students from Robben Island Mobile Home Park attending Blue Meadows High School during the 1979-80 school year, 14 students (13 per cent) dropped out of the regular day school program. Six boys and nine girls dropped out of regular high school. A social worker at the high school stated, "I think it's harder on the girls living in the park." The ethnographer believes that girls may find the social isolation that park students experience in the high school particularly difficult. Furthermore, park parents often have their daughters stay home from school to do household chores and to look after younger children in the family.

Not only are girls urged to keep the mobile home "spotless," but the ethnographer also found that many of the adolescent boys work hard cleaning their family's mobile home to keep it immaculate. The standard for cleanliness in the mobile home appears to exceed that found among house dwelling villagers. The high standards of housekeeping found in mobile homes in which adolescents

TABLE 3

ROBBEN PARK STUDENTS LEAVING BLUE MEADOWS HIGH SCHOOL FOR YAP OR DROPPING OUT

	Boys	Girls	Total
Robben West			
YAP	1	3	4
Drop	2	1	3
	3	4	7
Robben South			
YAP	1	0	1
Drop	2	3	5
	3	3	6
Robben East			
YAP	0	0	0
Drop	0	1	1
	0	1	1

resided were largely due to the efforts of the adolescent. When the subject of prejudice comes up park residents state, "If only they could see how nice the inside is." "People think we're trash. My trailer is spotless."[11] The upkeep of the mobile home appears to the writer to have importance in the self-perception of the park student. "Houses that convey an obvious . . . inferior status have been found to influence the self-evaluation and motivation of people who live there."[12] James Wilson found as well, that

> . . . morale, self-perception, and motivation appear to be related more to a broader environment than to the housing unit alone. Neighborhood surroundings, both the social and physical environment, are extremely important--possibly more so than the living quarters.[13]

Many of the park students have lived their entire lives in Robben Park or some other mobile home park. One sophomore said, "I've always known I live in a different community. I had to be bussed to go to grade school. You go through a nice suburban area. The differences are

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[11]Robben Park residents would use the term trailer when speaking to the researcher. They would be "careful" to use the term mobile home when speaking with other residents. The researcher was expected to use the term mobile home. At other parks in the state park residents would try never to use the term trailer under any circumstances.

[12]James Q. Wilson, ed., The Metropolitan Enigma: Inquiries into the Nature and Dimensions of America's Urban Crisis (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, revised 1968), p. 161.

[13]Ibid., p. 162.

obvious." A sixteen-year-old who has lived in the park eight years said, "We used to live in a nice suburb, in a tri-level, a beautiful house. The contrast between this place and my old neighborhood is--God, tremendous!" A student who has always lived in a park said, "Living in a house would be so much better. It hits you every day. You take the bus and pass all those great houses and come home to your tin can." A sixteen-year-old junior (who dropped out of Blue Meadows during the course of this study) said, "I hate living in the court. I was almost born in a park. I've lived in one all my life." The writer believes that many adolescents work hard to keep their mobile home impeccable in order to counteract the prejudice they feel as a result of living in the park. It may also improve their self-esteem.

The mobile home unit is usually purchased completely furnished with furniture, drapes, carpeting and modern utilities. Many Robben Park residents have a washer and dryer in their unit. As a result, few park tenants in West and East use the park laundromat. The paneled walls of the mobile unit, and the many sleek surfaces in a small area, tend to amplify the noise that occurs in a mobile unit. The writer found that even in homes with adolescent students there is no place to read. With the exception of teachers living in the park, the writer found no books or magazines in mobile homes. A

seventeen-year-old boy remarked, "There's a lot of noise in general in the house [mobile home]. There's too much distraction. The TV is constantly going. Everything is small, confining, so there is a lot of noise I guess."

The honor graduate of Blue Meadows, now attending college, told the ethnographer, "If there is a major difference between me and others [at college] it is that they had a place for themselves at home where they could study." This young man was interviewed when he came home to Robben South on vacation breaks. At the last interview he looked about at the squalor[14] and said, "I'm glad I'm leaving."

Mobile homes have the nameplates of the manufacturer affixed to the street-side of the unit. Many mobile home residents have their names on signs four or five times the size of the manufacturer's name. Personalized carved signs "John and Mable Clark" are very common in both West and East. American flags are often displayed even when there is no particular holiday. Flags are displayed among villagers only on special occasions. The park display of patriotism may be proof of American status in a situation in which status is denied in so many ways. The yard decorations and flowers found on mobile home lots create a "homey" appearance in the park

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[14]He looked at the squalor of the neighborhood. The interior of this family's mobile home is impeccable.

and to some imply that park people are "friendly to each other." The intensity of lot display, sometimes leading to clutter in such a small space, may reflect an over-reaction to pressures from the stable, sacred, site-built home. The mobile units in the park do not have doorbells. There is usually one wrought iron set of stairs at the front door only. As a park resident remarked, "We don't have back stairs. Nobody has. If there was a fire we'd just have to jump." Stairs cost a minimum of $200 and are considered an accessory (as is siding), and are not included in the purchase price of a mobile home unit. Doorbells are not necessary as few people other than the residents themselves usually enter or leave a mobile unit. Only senior citizens make it a point to visit to play cards and socialize. For other residents, social life consists of casual conversations that result from chance encounters with other park residents. Some adults lament the lack of community, but others find it comfortable because, "you never know who you're talking to. Things get back to the manager." "People are afraid to talk and say what they really think." "We would like to start an organization but the manager wouldn't like it." The feeling of constraint includes language. A woman said, "You're very cautious about calling it a 'trailer'; it's always supposed to be a 'mobile home.'"

The adolescent students at South[15] and East are usually in their mobile homes when they are at the park. Students at West have organized themselves into two groups, those who take drugs and those who do not. "We have a family of high school kids fourteen to eighteen years old. Cindy is the mother. Sherri is my aunt. I'm one of the kids," a junior student at West related. "There's mom and dad, all the little children, aunts, and uncles. I'm a kid." Students who belong to this group agree with a sophomore who said, "Being part of a group is very important. When I became part of a group I felt good about myself. I had to do what they did to remain in. They used to call me 'goody-goody.'" The park students in this group "drink to get drunk but prefer pot." They say, "Hard drugs are definitely going around."

Among high school park students the topics of conversation center around "house kids," "beautiful village houses," "the bad and unpredictable manager," "eviction fears" and "who will make it." Many students drop out of school and students encourage themselves by voicing the belief that they will make it. "Jon and I are the only two in the family (group family) who will make it. The rest will be only blue collar workers. I know we're the only two who will make it. The others aren't dumb;

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[15]South students gather at the mailboxes frequently and smoke "pot."

they just don't do well in school." Students commonly say, "My sisters[16] dropped out but I'll make it." "My girlfriend dropped out but I'll make it."[17] Park boys often express their determination to "make it" and graduate from high school. The writer has not heard a girl in the park voice a determination to graduate.

One of the first women the ethnographer met in Robben East said, "Too bad you're not a reporter so you could tell what's happening here." Park residents do not have a means to express their needs. The park manager threatens to evict those who organize. The manager at East has been accused of checking the mail of residents so that no one dare voice a complaint through the mail. The manager's dog was in the park office (as was customary) when a park mother and her three-year-old daughter went to place birthday invitations in the mailboxes. The German shepherd lunged at the girl and bit her in the face just below her left eye. Three days later the manager came to the mother and said, "I'll pay the bills. Don't worry about it." The mother will not press charges. "We might be evicted." This woman is a graduate of an Eastern university and has been a Robben Park resident for

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[16]Four of the park girls who dropped out of Blue Meadows are the sisters of brothers who have graduated from the high school or are presently attending.

[17]This student dropped out of school in January 1980.

ten years. The same dog lunged at a seven-year-old when she was in the lot of her mobile home. The girl became hysterical with fear. The mother cautiously called the manager's office and said, politely, "Do you know your dog is here?"

Residents are not only afraid to talk to each other, to assemble and organize, but, in East, they are careful not to write to authorities. Residents will readily state that they fear eviction should they displease management, and they are never certain what will cause displeasure. There are park rules, but they are not uniformly enforced so that enforcement is arbitrary and anyone can be "thrown out" for any reason. There is a state mobile home tenant-landlord law clearly forbidding such arbitrary eviction, but it is a highly abused law. The same law prohibits entrance and exit fees, a prevalent practice at Robben Island. Residents of the park are too fearful to even sign a park lease. "We think our chances are better without it." "If you ask for a lease your rent is raised." The fear of eviction is stated by residents, but what is not stated is what the writer finds to be a fear of humiliation. The management does find ways to humiliate the adult residents as well as adolescents and children. A dog had just walked through the lot of a mobile home on a rainy day and his paws were

muddy as he approached the mobile home stairs. The manager was in the lot and said to the female resident, "If you can't keep your dog clean, I'll evict you. Look at his paws." The same woman told the ethnographer later,

> I was afraid. What if I make another mistake. You never know. You're even afraid to ask him [the manager] for permission. We had a petition signed requesting uniform storage sheds for the park. He said, "No!"

Storage is a problem in the park. Residents store things under the mobile home but these objects are invariably ruined by moisture. People have tried to store things on wooden blocks. They open the door of the skirting to air the area under the home but "nothing helps." "I had to throw out all my Christmas decorations and everything else." "You're even afraid to ask for permission for anything. We have to ask for permission to build a patio and I dread doing it." "If you're thrown out, you fear you won't have a place to park your home. It costs so much to move." The writer believes that it is not only moving fears but the fear of humiliation that intimidates residents. The manager (particularly at East) often sets the stage for humiliations when other people are present. The mobile homes are only four feet apart and adolescents and children observe their parents and neighbors cowering under the threats of the manager.

Furthermore, the close proximity of the mobile homes and the ability to learn about the activities in these homes appears to have great impact on the adolescents in the park. Students exaggerate the number of murders and fires that actually occur in the park. The ethnographer believes that they do this because of the importance each such experience has upon them. When one man was found dead in his mobile home, the rumor was that four men were "found dead this month." A man was murdered and his body was dumped in the open field between the park and the tollway. The students say, "We have lots of murders around here."

The park is, as residents say, "a rumor mill." Rumors concentrate on the arbitrary behavior of the manager. A mobile home was removed from South and found burning on the highway fronting the park. "The man was evicted and his trailer burned. The manager said he would get even with him." The fire chief reported to the writer that this was a "case of arson." Rumors are of course fueled by such incidents. Students of rumor report that ". . . rumor results from an optimum combination of uncertainty and anxiety. . . . Since rumors explain confusing events and thus relieve the tension of ambiguity, they flourish in an atmosphere of secrecy. . . ."[18] It

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[18]Ralph L. Rosnow and Allan J. Kimme., "Lives of a Rumor," Psychology Today, June 1979, p. 91.

is not surprising to find that rumors flourish in Robben Island Mobile Home Park. Adolescents living in the mobile home come to realize that although they are American citizens and they loyally display their flag, they are often denied the rights of Americans because they live under a quasi-governmental power: the mobile home manager or owner. Outsiders at school, they find themselves outsiders in the park, as well, for theirs is an adversary relationship with the park owner. For any misconduct both in the park and on the bus, students are burdened with the threat to their families of eviction. The observed impotence of parents vis à vis the park owner does little to encourage the student that his family or he himself has much control over life. Typically, passivity permeates the behavior of the park student when he is in the school. And although he acts out some of his frustration by scribbling on the notes of management (and formerly by vandalizing park property), he is made to feel a second class person in the park as he is in the school. The "friendliness" of mobile home living is often no more than an awareness about each other's lives. Mobile homes are close to each other and much can be learned "through the walls" about neighbors. There is an absence, however, of social relating that is psychologically nurturing or social interaction that builds social skills. Adolescents do not observe their parents relating in the park just as they

themselves do not relate with schoolmates in the school. Although park students are "forced" to associate with each other because they are excluded from the peer culture at Blue Meadows High School, they do not have an opportunity for learning social and relational skills from each other when they cannot even meet together to speak.

In sum, the social isolation of park students, their awareness of their physical situation, and the atmosphere of fear and intimidation prevailing at Robben Island Park provide few opportunities for the adolescent to build his confidence and self-esteem. Furthermore, not only does he come to feel powerless about his life ("What can you do?"), but he sees that his parents also feel that they have few choices and little control of their own lives in the park. Such an atmosphere does little to help the student to join the mainstream. As two senior boys remarked, "I don't see anybody wanting to live here." "As soon as I got a car, I tried not to be here." But neither physical separation, nor passive acceptance of the situation will bring a solution to the problem. Accurate information which is disseminated, and active leadership fortified by legislation will help in arriving at a solution to the problems of park dwellers in American society.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

> How is it, then, that living in a mobile home park has ironically become not a place of freedom, a haven of security, nor the least bit economical?
>
> Park Resident (California) and author, L. K. Ulery[1]

This study has been about social and cultural meaning: the meaning of human interaction in both its material and symbolic dimensions. These material and symbolic meanings have an influence upon the lives of individuals and the groups to which these persons belong. While meaning is historical, having its roots in the past, its consequences are clearly evident today. As evidence, the mobile home is a material artifact descendant of the proud Conestoga and the profane trailer but its symbolic dimension is powerful. Today, the mobile home defies clear definition (is it vehicle or dwelling?), and in addition to being profane, its models rapidly find themselves to be obsolete. To mainstream home owners it

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[1]Lloyd K. Ulery, The Mobile Home Tragedy (Oxnard, Calif.: Psychic Books, 1978), p. 6.

appears that consumers of the mobile home unit and mobile home park deny important symbolic values of mainstreamers and threaten the fabric of stable society, although this negative attitude is probably out of consciousness.

Innovations and inventions have consequences not often considered at the time of their launching. The columnist Sydney Harris observed:

> First, we invent something. Then we put it into production. Then we buy it and use it. Then, and only then, do we begin to wonder if we haven't been too heedless and hasty. If we are going to become the masters of our technology, however, and not be dominated or overwhelmed by its consequences, it is imperative that we set up a new agency to work alongside the old United States Patent Office, to determine the "social utility" of new devices.[2]

In addition to technological consequences, inventions have symbolic and social consequences and significances. Social problems must be considered as a part of the adaptation of any method or the development of any product. The problem may not always be one that arises as a by-product of a change in the use of methods or materials, but it may result in unforeseen consequences.

The European take-over of the land was facilitated by three factors: the divided loyalties among Indians themselves; the Indians' lack of agriculture technology

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[2]Sydney J. Harris, The Best of Sydney J. Harris (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976), p. 162.

of the European type;and the cultural concept among Indians that land was sacred, to be used and not owned. (In fact, they had "no conception of ownership" prior to European imposition of it); they were lost when they came face to face with the incomprehensible European practice of owning land.) The grid system of land survey adopted by the American government provided a uniformity of procedure; but it also resulted in impoverished populations who could no longer live free from the land because they were cut off from its natural features, water and grazing lands. True, barbed wire made it possible to fence vast expanses of land in the West, but at the same time it also resulted in impoverishment of peoples who were cut off from the land they required for their livelihood.

The travel trailer of the 1920s provided a way for the family to travel through a vast country which had provided few lodging accommodations. It enabled workers with itinerant jobs to take their lodging with them. The trailer provided emergency housing for vast numbers of workers in the defense plants of World War II and for university students in the post-war years. Mobile homes later grew like Topsy, a phenomenon for which local, state, and federal governments were unprepared. The lack of preparedness and the lack of attention to a dwelling that houses more than 10 million Americans is sometimes difficult to understand except for the fact that the mobile

home developed outside of institutionalized or conventional housing and has continued on its own complex path, relatively unfettered and profane.

Each human life is important and each life is lived out somewhere in space within a habitat that has a particular ecology. "Everyone has a story to tell, and it is always set somewhere, for all humans must inhabit a space, whether it is rural, urban, suburban, ghetto, or desert."[3] In this study, the fact of living on an island (Robben Island) has been illustrated to be an important habitat for all residents of the island but particularly for the adolescent, who for the most part knows no other environment. The trailer, established as profane in the American psyche, remains so even when it is called a mobile home.

The park student must not only live with the historical symbolism of his dwelling but with later myths about mobile home living. The combination of the burden is awesome for the adolescent, and he seeks answers, "House kids don't like us; well, we <u>are</u> more noisy." "House kids <u>do</u> do better in school." Such are his efforts to understand why he is invisible in the high school culture. Many conclude that the reason is that they are

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[3]Diane Cole, "Why a Hostage Cannot Forget," <u>Newsweek</u>, 19 May 1980, p. 17.

regarded as "trash" but, why? Mobile homes are now large, look like houses and have many of the same features. These Americans have become members of a new minority group because they consume an American product, the mobile home unit, and they choose residency in a mobile home park.

There is a growing interest in the use of anthropological techniques in educational research. For example, the National Institute of Education is encouraging the ethnographic approach and has recently supported studies employing this method.[4] Ethnography is the "aspect of cultural and social anthropology devoted to the object, first-hand description of particular cultures."[5] Some researchers believe that ethnographic techniques used by anthropologists provide a way of gathering data about human behavior that is impossible to obtain by use of more quantitative methods.[6]

Ethnography involves the description of a particular culture, in this case, a mobile home park. In the first five chapters of their book, Spreadley and McCurdy

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[4]Stephen Wilson, "The Use of Ethnographic Techniques in Educational Research," Review of Educational Research 47 (Winter 1977): 245-47.

[5]Pelto and Pelto, Cultural Dimension, p. 414.

[6]James P. Spreadley and David W. McCurdy, The Cultural Experience, Ethnography in Complex Society (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1972), p. 3; see Chapters 1-5, pp. v-84.

provide an excellent discussion of the ethnographic experience and much of what follows is based upon their concept. Ethnography is not merely a matter of description; it is a systematic approach to culture which aims to "discover the knowledge of how a group of people have learned"[7] to organize their behavior. It is based on the assumption that culture, "nearly everything that has been learned or produced by a group of people,"[8] is coded in complex systems of symbols.[9]

One of the first tasks of the ethnographer who goes into the field (his laboratory) is to become aware of his own ethnocentrism, the "deeply ingrained attitude that your own culture is superior to others."[10] Attempting to rid oneself of ethnocentrism is a step in preparing one for "objectivity," and it must be accomplished early in the field process, prior to the collection of data; for the "most significant distortions in the scientific study of social behavior operate during the process of data collection,"[11] and not, as is often cited, at the point of analysis and interpretation of data. The ethnographer must try to be conscious of his own selective processes so that they are within his awareness.[12] For example, the

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[7] Ibid., p. 9.

[8] Ibid., p. 7.

[9] Ibid., p. 8.

[10] Ibid., p. 16.

[11] Ibid., p. 13.

[12] Ibid.

present ethnographer had never been in a mobile home or mobile home park prior to beginning this investigation. There was no awareness of bias either for or against residents of the mobile home park.

However, in conducting the preliminary research for this study, a bias began to develop in favor of the mobile home park students. They were the "underdogs" but for no apparent reason that could initially be seen. Realizing that this "favorable" bias was operating, the ethnographer made every attempt to be aware of this bias throughout the course of the research and the writing of the ethnographic account of the park. Also the attempt is made to make what is out-of-consciousness to actors come into consciousness. Seeking that which is out-of-consciousness is what differentiates anthropology from the casual observer, journalist, and tourist.

An awareness of ethnocentrism and an effort to be aware of one's own bent may be as close as the investigator can come to "objectivity," for as Spradley and McCurdy point out:

> Complete objectivity may be characteristic of some omniscient observer, but not of a human being. In any research, selective observation and selective interpretation always work to transform the "actual events" into the "facts" that are used in a descriptive account.[13]

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[13] Ibid.

Thus far, mention has been made of how the ethnographer must structure his attitudes before going into the field: this process is particularly important when the "field" is in one's own society. Perhaps it is even more difficult to write in a society whose rules you really do accept or at least feel constrained to uphold. Furthermore, the ethnographic research is conducted in the field, not in a laboratory (as we know it).

> [Ethnographers go to] natural settings to observe everyday activities and record casual conversations among the people there . . . interact with people, watch what they do, listen to them talk, participate in their activities, and in that context, describe their cultural knowledge.[14]

What the ethnographer seeks to do in the field is to "describe a culture using those criteria that his informants employ as they observe, interpret, and describe their own experiences during the course of life.[15] He will use techniques appropriate to the research at hand to acquire his information, including, as in this study, participant observation, life histories, and in-depth interviews. Throughout the process of interaction with informants, the ethnographer learns from them, for he wants to acquire the informant's understanding of the situation. The goal at this time is to anticipate behavior and to predict which actions his informants would judge

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[14] Ibid., p. 23.

[15] Ibid., p. 18.

as appropriate.[16] For example, adult mobile home park residents frown upon the term "trailer" used to describe their home, for "trailer" is used by residents only in a pejorative way, i.e., indicating a run-down dwelling in a run-down park, "Now, that's a trailer camp!" On the other hand, children and adolescents in the park use the term trailer freely and without recrimination. Linguistic definition is an important symbolic categorization. Naming gives one a sense of power or powerlessness. The old adage "sticks and stones will break my bones, but NAMES will never hurt me," is certainly fallacious in this case.

Two sets of hypotheses may be said to underly the rationale for participant observation research and both consider the importance of human behavior: first, behavior must be understood within the context in which it occurs; and, second, behavior has more meaning than may be observed by "fact."[17]

Those unfamiliar with the anthropological research tradition may see this kind of research as nothing more than journalistic reporting or anecdotal story-telling. However, a major assumption of this type of research is

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[16]Ibid., p. 12.

[17]Wilson, "Use of Ethnographic Techniques in Educational Research," p. 253.

that individuals have meaning structures that determine much of their behavior. The goal of the ethnographer is to try to discover what these meaning structures are, how they develop, and how they influence behavior. He also tries to realize these ends in as comprehensive and objective a way as possible.[18]

Because ethnography is based on the assumption that what people say and do is consciously and unconsciously shaped by the social situation, the ethnographer must make sure that he enters the field setting without disrupting the natural communication of the people who live there. To do this, he must establish himself in a role that facilitates the collection of data; for example, the role of social worker or police investigator would not be a role that would facilitate the type of data sought in ethnographic research.[19]

This ethnographer conducted a preliminary study of participant-observation at the high school prior to entering the park field study. At that time many "network starters" were established with the residents of the park as well as with people in the community. The network starters were people with whom rapport was established and who would introduce the ethnographer to other people. The natural links of social networks that developed

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[18]Ibid., p. 254.

[19]Ibid.

crossed age, occupation, and education backgrounds, resulting in an excellent cross-section of informants. Almost six months was spent in the preliminary study and it proved to be well worth the effort.

The well-established groundwork was in part motivated by the many warnings received about "trailer park people being secretive" and "hard to get to know." However inaccurate such warnings, entry into the field was greatly facilitated by the preliminary work that was done. The laying of careful groundwork, and the fact that the ethnographer came to his informants eager to learn from them about life in the mobile home park, resulted in a welcome reception with each link in the social network.

Each informant was assured that names would not be used when the study report was written. Both the people and the name of the park were to remain unknown. In the writing of the ethnographic account, the confidentiality proved to be a considerable restriction. In order to maintain this high degree of confidentiality,less than a third of the data selected was used because inclusion of much of the material would have made the park readily identifiable and,in turn,the residents. However, the rapport with informants may have been augmented by the confidentiality. Another factor that may have enhanced the rapport with informants was that interviews were in-depth

but also open-ended, and informants were free to speak about anything that related to the park or their lives before moving to the park and while in the park. Interviews lasted as long as the informant wished to speak, usually from two to three hours on a given occasion. Follow-up interviews, sometimes six months later, were conducted with park residents and school personnel. The follow-up interview provided a way to compare the same informant's comments over a length of time as well as a way of keeping abreast of his current concerns and attitudes.

Although at the beginning of the study a questionnaire was prepared, it quickly proved to be not only valueless but an impediment to communication. Too little was known about the park and life there to ask residents meaningful questions. Cowgill, in his study of trailer house residents conducted in the late 1930s, used both questionnaire and interview. He found much value in the interview technique.

> there was a tendency toward more frankness in a conversation in regard to the disagreeable features of trailer life. . . . The personal contact was able to overcome a barrier that the questionnaire could not.[20]

Cowgill also found that a "greater range" of in-

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[20]Cowgill, Mobile Homes, p. 16.

formation was revealed by informants during the interview. Cowgill concluded that as far as research models are concerned

> [I am] all in favor of the interview method. It allows flexibility that, while somewhat difficult to handle. . . . When one is entering upon an exploratory study such as this one, he cannot set up definite categories of study in advance. He must acquaint himself with the mode of life before he knows what points will be important.[21]

On the other hand, when Knight studied housing choice of mobile home residents and site-built dwellers, he used a mail questionnaire exclusively. When he came to analyze his findings he was somewhat hard pressed to account for the sentiments of park residents about mobile home living. He found on the one hand that park residents expressed positive responses to mobile home living but that site-built home owners were "clearly negative and might well even be interpreted as hostile to the mobile home."[22] Knight thus stated:

> It may be argued that the relatively positive opinion of mobile home life displayed by the mobile home respondents is possibly due more to a need on their part to justify and defend an already-made choice than an actual approval of mobile home life. However, an opposing view would as easily hold that the present study gave these individuals an ideal opportunity to air their dissatisfactions. . . . In any

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Knight, "Mobile Home and Conventional Home Owners," p. 131.

> case, it is extremely significant that the mobile home group displayed, on the average, a much higher opinion of mobile home life than did the conventional home group.[23]

It is not so surprising that Knight did not get to the underlying attitude of the park residents by the use of a mailed questionnaire. This ethnographer agrees with Cowgill who found that participant observation and the interview revealed information that is not revealed in a questionnaire.

Throughout the study this ethnographer made known to informants that the study of the mobile home park was part of a research project being conducted in connection with a named university. In the preliminary study, the use of recorded equipment was considered but was rejected as somewhat intrusive. Therefore, interviews were recorded in writing as the informant spoke. Permission was always asked of each informant prior to the interview, "Is it all right if I take notes?" All informants agreed. They had already received assurance of the confidentiality of their comments.

Although the ethnographer carried a letter of introduction from the university at all times, it was never necessary to use it. Only one individual, the manager of Robben West, requested to see identification. "I

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[23]Ibid.

just want to be sure I'm not talking to a reporter."

The exact written recording, using the language of the speaker, is considered critical in this study. Although this ethnographer felt confident of recall for conversations, all quotes were checked against the original notes. The ethnographer lived twenty minutes from Robben Island and at the end of each day field notes were typed. Not only information such as name and address, but also movements and gestures of informants were included. When the ethnographic report was written up as much as a year later, such detailed description as well as a verbatim transcript aided in the recall.

The park was, of course, not the only field of participant observation for this ethnographer, for six months were spent at the high school observing and interacting with students and school personnel throughout the school day and in some extra-curricular activities. Whether at the park, in the school, or during interviews with individuals in the community, it was not necessary for the ethnographer to indicate more than that a study was being conducted of Robben Island Mobile Home Park. A great deal of information and opinion invariably followed. The questions this ethnographer asked were appropriate to the situation, but great caution was taken not to lead or to suggest an avenue of thought or opinion.

Throughout, an effort was made to remain openminded and not to prematurely make assumptions or analyze the data that was collected each day. When all the data were collected, the ethnographer reviewed the material and tried to find the meaning of the data. The analysis of the data and the writing of the ethnographic account proved to be the most difficult part of the research experience for the ethnographer.

Other than objectivity and appropriate gathering methods, ethnographic data interpretation becomes an issue of significant concern. There are two facets of this problem: one is the appropriateness of using the language of hypothesis formulation when considering ethnographic data, and the other is the reliability and validity of conclusions so that at least limited generalizations can be made.

Many ethnographers would argue, for example that formulating hypotheses, a priori, is not appropriate since ethnographic data is generally qualitative in nature, and therefore quantitative testing of the hypothesis is not possible. In addition, sampling techniques that are needed to adequately test hypotheses quantitatively are not appropriate to ethnographic research.

While the use of hypothesis formulation may not be a major concern of many ethnographers, there are others who try to address the question from a variety of perspectives. For example, George Overholt and William Stallings suggest that the anthropologist may use abductive inference as a method for generating hypotheses. This method begins with a preference for one hypothesis for what appears to be no apparent reason; it is however the hypothesis that appears more likely to be fruitful in a given research context. In operating abductively, the ethnographer discards or modifies any hypothesis that does not fit the ethnographic facts. He manipulates hypotheses that account for as many of the observed facts as possible with the greatest degree of economy, simplicity, and elegance.[24] "It is for this reason that the ethnographic hypothesis remains empirically grounded in a way that the experimental hypothesis"[25] is not.

Grounded theory is an approach that is inductive, pragmatic, and concrete. In this approach theory is generated from data as hypotheses and concepts emerge and are worked out during the course of the research. The task then is to generate theory from the holistic data

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[24]George E. Overholt and William M. Stallings, "Ethnographic and Experimental Hypothesis in Educational Research," Educational Researcher 5 (1976): 12-14.

[25]Ibid., p. 14.

that has been gathered through naturalistic inquiry. Hypotheses may be said to "emerge" in the process.[26]

The ethnographer may decide to view data by way of patterns that imply possible relationships, in which case several techniques may be appropriate. W. S. Robinson proposes that analytic induction provides a method to examine cases until a universal relationship is established: for should even one negative case become known, either the hypothesis must be reformulated or the phenomenon to be explained must be redefined.[27] Barney G. Glaser suggests that in the constant comparative method an incident in a category is coded and then compared with previous incidents that have been coded in that same category. Through this constant comparison of incidents, theoretical properties of the category come to be generated.[28] Howard S. Becker urges that the detailed steps of an observational study be spelled out so that field evidence, such as credibility of informants and the reactivity of the situation, may be analyzed. In his view, theory, sampling, observations, and analysis must be com-

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[26]Michael Quinn Patton, Qualitative Evaluation Methods (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1980), pp. 80-81.

[27]W. S. Robinson, "The Logical Structure of Analytic Induction," American Sociological Review 16 (1951): 812-18.

[28]Barney G. Glaser, "The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis," Social Problems 12 (1965): 436-45.

bined as was achieved in the study Boys in White.[29] Becker also stresses that the recording of field notes and every other aspect of research be made public.[30]

Another issue is that of "generalizability," for in any scientific enterprise "generalizability" of research findings becomes an important issue. In ethnographic research however, the "generalizability" of findings is not a central concern, at least in the sense that quantitative researchers address this problem. For the ethnographer, the uniqueness of the setting and the problem under study are foremost. That is, the ethnographer is concerned with a well-defined, usually small setting or group. A major interest is to attempt to understand the meaning of behavior (life) in this group, and there is less concern for generalizing the patterns of behavior to other groups or settings.

Robert Dubin refers to a fundamental paradox that arises in social science research: the precision and the power paradox. How is it that precision in prediction can be achieved without any knowledge of how the predicted outcome came about? And, why can a powerful understanding of social behavior be achieved without the ability to pre-

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[29]Howard S. Becker, Blanche Geer, Everett C. Hughes, and Anselm L. Strauss, Boys in White (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

[30]Norman K. Denzin, Sociological Methods: A Sourcebook (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1970), p. 219.

dict its "characteristic in specific situations"?[31] Such paradoxes may not be of great interest to the ethnographer who has little interest in prediction although there is always the ethnographer who is interested in prediction. A distinction should be made here between "pure" ethnography and ethnology, "theoretical analysis and interpretation based on ethnographic data."[32] Ethnology makes use of specific ethnographies to reach more generalized levels by comparison. Many ethnographers also engage in ethnology, the science of comparison.

There are methods the ethnographer concerned with the generalizability of his findings may employ. First, one must make the case that the actual data gathered has to have some degree of validity and reliability. While these two conditions are sometimes difficult to meet in ethnographic research, the investigator can use such techniques as multiple question-asking formats. He may also gather his data over a period of time, and during this sequence of time he will obtain different types of data. Generalizability itself, then, can be attempted in ethnographic studies through the strategy of triangulation. Triangulation is based on the premise that no single method

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[31]Robert Dubin, Theory Building (New York: Free Press, 1969), p. 14.

[32]Pelto and Pelto, Cultural Dimension of the Human Adventure, p. 414.

is in itself adequate because each method of research reveals a different aspect of empirical reality, thus triangulation combines different methodologies in the study of the same problem.[33] A weakness of the Robben Island study may be lack of multiple observers.

The study proved to be both painful and frustrating. It was painful because of the human suffering involved in the lives of the park residents, although the many friendships formed with people in and outside of the park was nurturing. It was a frustrating experience because park residents hoped that this study would help them, although they were assured only that the findings would be presented to the academic community. In any case, most people interviewed asked if they could receive a copy of the report. The ethnographer made no assurance of meeting such requests.

The social and positional stance and perspective of the informants was diverse; adolescent males, housewives, adolescent females, retired males, and retired females proved to be valuable informants in that order. Ironically, the individual who made the decision to move to the mobile home park was the informant least available and least communicative (the working head of household).

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[33]Patton, Qualitative Evaluation Methods, pp. 108-9.

It was apparent that the male head of household whether working or retired made the housing choice regardless of how many claims wives made to the choice being "a joint decision." Retired men had in many cases sold homes they found too difficult to maintain physically. Many employed males said, or their wives said, about them, "He is not handy fixing up a house and doesn't want one." The reason for the descision to move to the mobile home park is beyond the scope of this study but is mentioned because there may be some relationship to being the decision maker and discussing the results of the decision. Another fact that should be mentioned is that a few retired males were among the most adept informants.

The adolescent, particularly the adolescent male, not only was well informed about park life and life outside the park but apart from the braggadocio and hyperbole of adolescence, he proved to be a reliable informant. Yet, when Hannerz studied a black ghetto in Washington, D.C., in a participant observation study, he reported that he had "relatively little direct contact with the teenagers except through their families, largely because they tended to keep very much to themselves."[34] Hannerz also expressed concern that adults were often unhappy about "unruly teenagers," and he did not want to disrupt his

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[34]Hannerz, Soulside, p. 209.

rapport with this group, believing it would prove difficult to be friendly with both age groups.[35]

However, in the Robben Island study working with adolescent informants as well as adults was not a problem. If anything, the adolescent's contribution was invaluable. Future researchers may well wish to consider the importance of including the adolescent in ethnographic studies.

In summary, the ethnographic experience represents a description of a particular culture at a particular time, in this case Robben Island Mobile Home Park from 1979-1981. Using a symbolic interactionist perspective, it was found that the adolescent student living in the park suffers consequences related to his place of residence. These consequences result in his being a profane person in the high school culture and a member of a new minority group in the larger American culture.

It was found that the mobile home has not yet become a viable form of permanent year-round housing in the view of mainstream Americans, and this lack of acceptance is heightened when the mobile home is located in a mobile home park. Life in the park is riddled with uncertainties that are financial, social, and psychological, directly relating to the self-esteem of the park tenant.

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[35]Ibid.

The hidden costs of owning and maintaining a unit, the frequent rental increases, and the complete authority of the park owner have deleterious effects upon the park tenant. When the same park tenant is outside the park, he finds himself disdained by mainstream Americans: both life in the park and outside the park becomes problematic for the park tenant. The most pervasive, ubiquitous, and unrelenting problem in the park has been termed by tenants as "fear of eviction" but this specific fear is more easily identified than the ominous anxiety that park tenants feel regarding the possibility of displeasing the park owner in some unknown, undetermined, and unspoken way. Less focused than fear, the anxiety defies identification.

Life in the park, where the adolescent experiences an adversary relationship with park management, is exacerbated by life in the school, where the park student finds himself an invisible member of the student body. He is confused as to why he is an outsider in the school and, at the same time, he is robbed of the many experiences that participation in school life would contribute to his social, psychological and intellectual development. In both the formal life of school (the classroom) and the informal life of school (social interaction) the park student finds himself in the demoralizing position of being an outsider. School life becomes an alien experience to

most of the park students, although park adolescent males verbalize their intention to "tough it out," "grit their teeth," and "hang-in" until they graduate. Many, and particularly female park adolescents, often fail to realize the dream of graduating from high school.

The park student observes adults and his own parents behaving passively in the park providing evidence to him that they have little control over their own lives: this is the model that the adolescent park student has at home. And, in the school, he has no model at all, for to all intents and purposes he is little more than a cipher on the school enrollment reports. It is not surprising that few students shouldering such burdens can succeed in high school, either academically or socially.

One of the major recommendations that has emerged from this research is the acknowledged need to have an orientation as part of administrator and teacher in-service training in the public school, whereby school personnel may become acquainted with the differing life styles of members of the student body. In this way they can come to better understand the student culturally and thus personally when he is in the classroom or outside of the classroom. Similar in-service sessions have been part of many school programs, but they have been directed exclusively to the student from a non-American society.

The park student, however is an American whose life style, (because of his family's decision to live in a mobile home park) is culturally distinct.

Although residents living in park retirement communities have participated in research, a review of the literature indicates that Robben Island represents a first study that gives attention to the life of the adolescent in the park and at school. Future research should use the adolescent experience as a source of information. Adolescents, furthermore, proved to be most reliable informants. Small teams of ethnographers may find value in studying the life of the adolescent and even younger children who live in mobile home parks and attend local schools.

In addition, a pilot study of cultural exchange might be attempted. In the pilot study students from site-built houses and mobile home dwellers may exchange living experiences, as is now common practice in the foreign student exchange program and the urban/suburban student exchange program. Not only would the individual students participating in the program acquire knowledge about a culture that differs from their own and about individuals living in that culture; the mere fact that a pilot study was being conducted would serve to raise the general awareness of other cultures among school personnel and members of the student body.

Beyond the specific events in the lives of individuals at Robben Island, there are patterns that this study has observed that go beyond the particular park studied. For example, the opinion that mobile home parks and mobile home park residents are undesirable is reflected in local zoning laws throughout the United States. Also, mobile home park residents are renters of lot space on private property and this fact alone permeates every aspect of daily life in the park. This is the case not only at Robben Island but at mobile home parks throughout the nation. The experience of park living is very much influenced by the specific personality and the practices of the current manager and/or owner of the park. When the management changes, the quality of life in the park changes in a corresponding manner.

In this study the life of the adolescent living in a mobile home park and attending a suburban public high school has been emphasized. The lack of "belongingness" is an obstacle to the self-image of the park adolescent, who is considered profane in one-to-one relations and as part of a new minority group (the mobile home park dweller) in group relations. Awareness of the existence of the plight of park dwellers and particularly of adolescents growing up and living in the park is a first step in what should be an attempt to ameliorate the existing problem. Future

research may be aimed at uncovering what social, political and legal forces exist to perpetuate the "pariah" status of the mobile home park dweller.

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APPENDIX A

SOUND PUBLIC POLICY

Probably the most significant aspect of mobile homes is that we know so little about them. Since they tend to be at the fringes of cities in areas that are not zoned for conventional housing, they have remained relatively invisible. But the number of mobile homes is increasing too rapidly to ignore them or to rely on speculation as to how they fit into the overall housing scene in America. If our speculations are warranted, then local, state, and federal officials should begin to formulate public policies which will prevent the emergence of the problems this type of housing seems destined to create. To date, social scientists have virtually ignored this phenomenal housing development in American society. Obviously, the formulation of sound public policy will be aided by more careful study of mobile homes than has heretofore been the case.

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APPENDIX B

PARK DWELLERS AS SERFS

Spring Valley, New York
1st May 1980

Dear [Researcher],

I think that mobile home living can be compared to serfs residing under lords in European history. The landlord has complete control of your way of life by his ability to promulgate Rules and Regulations at his whim. If he is not controlled by a strong alliance of the tenants to a great extent, you can be at his mercy from day to day.

We moved into our mobile home park ten years ago, without having any knowledge of what mobile home living is like. We sold our own home where we had a great deal of independence and transferred into a way of life that virtually took away your independence.

This type of living can only be changed when governments, local and federal realize the way of life that exists. We formed an association within our park which helped make life more bearable. There are many places where people live in constant fear but do not wish to help themselves.

This condition prevails throughout the country. I've been to Florida, California and New Jersey where similar conditions prevail.

Good Luck.

Sincerely,
William Smith Barn

APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Beverly Evko has been read and approved by the following Committee:

Dr. Steven I. Miller, Director
Associate Professor, Foundations of Education, Loyola

Dr. Paul S. Breidenbach
Associate Professor, Anthropology, Loyola

Dean Gerald L. Gutek
Professor, Foundations of Education, Loyola

Dr. John M. Wozniak
Professor, Foundations of Education, Loyola

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 11, 1981
Date

Steven I. Miller
Director's Signature