

*INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL RENTAL HOUSING ISSUE OF HOUSING & SOCIETY*

*by Charles F. Hohm, Guest Editor*

Over the years, *Housing & Society* has analyzed various aspects of housing. One aspect of housing that has not received much attention by the journal is rental housing. Hence, I asked Earl Morris if *Housing & Society* would be interested in publishing a special issue on this topic. His response was affirmative.

Four articles in this issue deal with rental housing in the United States, while the fifth one is international in scope. Kirk McClure's paper is a fascinating analysis of changing consumption in the rental housing market. Using 1980 census data for the San Francisco Bay area, McClure found that from 1970-1980, there was a marked decline in the proportion of renters who were husband-wife households. In 1980, renting households are predominantly composed of single parents, single persons, and unrelated individuals living together. Factor analysis shows that the rental housing market is accommodating most of these groups quite well. The one glaring exception is black, single parent, female-headed households. It appears that discrimination is still preventing this group from being adequately accommodated in the rental housing market.

Barbara Haley's article also utilizes national data to study an important aspect of rental housing. In this case, Annual Housing Survey data is used to analyze changes in the availability of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) housing. Haley finds that between 1976 and 1980, there was a 20 percent decrease in the number of SRO units in the United States. The data suggests that SRO losses were concentrated among units that served the poorest tenants. Haley finds that demolition and lack of habitability account for the majority of losses, while conversion to owned-unit status accounts for very little of the loss of SRO's. Haley concludes her article by making a forceful argument against those who assert that the recent significant increase in the U.S. housing stock and the "filtering" process explains the decrease in SROs. Those who concur with the "filtering" theory would suggest that SRO's have been disappearing because low-income tenants have been availing themselves of housing that is a notch better than SRO housing. Haley argues that the poorest of tenants are unable to afford this "better" housing and, without a coherent national housing policy aimed at rehabilitating and retaining the SRO housing stock, are often forced into being homeless.

Sandra Rawls and Savannah Day's paper is an interesting analysis of a neglected area--tenant participation on housing authority boards. Rawls and Day sent questionnaires to a nationwide sample of 397 housing authority directors. The data results indicate that tenant representation on local housing authority boards is significantly greater in housing authorities that manage 1000+ units and on boards located in the northeast and western regions of the United States.

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Tenant representation is also found to be significantly greater on boards with seven or nine commissioners, on boards with a moderate or high degree of general tenant participation, and on boards with at least one female commissioner present or at least one black and/other minority commissioner present.

The research note by Kyung S. Yoo and Jeanette A. Brandt examines differences between female-headed renter households and jointly-headed renter households in terms of energy-problem beliefs and home energy-conservation behavior. They find that female-headed renter households report less belief in the seriousness of the energy problem than do jointly-headed renter households when controlled for age, education, and income.

The article by Elizabeth and John Huttman deals with the decline of the private rental housing sector in the United States, Britain, and the Netherlands. The Huttmans present convincing evidence to show that private rental housing has indeed declined as a proportion of the total housing stock in the above countries. Furthermore, they argue that the mobile segment of the population, the poor, the deviant, the young, the old, the singles, minorities and those needing temporary shelter are most affected by the decrease in private rental housing. The Huttmans conclude by calling for increased government subsidization of this important segment of the housing stock.