

How the Other Half Lives: Tenure Differences and Trends in Rental Gated Communities

Karen A. Danielsen

Virginia Tech

Abstract

The current literature on gated communities characterizes residents as fearful, wealthy, white homeowners. Thus, researchers using recent American Housing Survey (AHS) data were surprised to find that many residents of gated communities live in apartments and that residents of walled or fenced communities were actually more likely to be renters than owners.

This article uses the AHS to explore the characteristics of residents of rental gated communities (the other half). Factors leading to the growth of gated communities in general and gated apartments in particular are considered. Owned and rental gated communities are compared as a first step in defining the differences between these kinds of tenure, and existing research on subsidized gated housing is updated using descriptive and trend data. The housing opportunities and restraints that rental gated communities create for minorities are analyzed, and policy implications for the growth of rental gated communities are discussed.

Keywords: Demographics; Gated communities; Multifamily housing

Introduction

The current literature on gated communities characterizes residents as fearful, wealthy, white homeowners. Thus, it came as a shock to researchers examining recently published American Housing Survey (AHS) data to find that many gated community residents actually live in apartments (Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale 2005). In fact, they found that residents of walled or fenced communities were nearly 2.5 times more likely to be renters than owners. These renters are also much less affluent than owners and are more likely to be black or Hispanic. As a relatively unexplored dimension to enclave communities, rental gated communities offer the opportunity to gain new insights into community and neighborhood change.

The reasons for gating apartments may represent a complex matrix of social processes that have not yet been fully documented. For instance, rental gated communities may be the device of choice around the world to manage diverse social environments (Billig and Churchman 2003; Briggs 2002; Caldeira 2000; Giglia 2003; Lemanski 2006; Salcedo and Torres 2004), to lower the resistance on the part of nearby homeowners to multifamily and affordable housing (Lemanski 2006), or to give minority groups access to homes they might otherwise not be able to occupy (Crowder, Tolnay, and Adelman 2001; South and Crowder 1998). These rental communities may serve to integrate land uses and races on a small scale, but they also increase the social distance between tenures and people (Billig and Churchman 2003; Fischer 2003).

Chile, Brazil, Israel, and Mexico have had similar experiences in using gates amid their relatively homogeneous (in terms of ethnicity, not class) populations to decrease the physical distance between rich and poor in urban areas and to increase the social distance between those same populations (Billig and Churchman 2003; Briggs 2002; Caldeira 2000; Giglia 2003; Lemanski 2006; Low 2003; Salcedo and Torres 2004).¹ Indeed, this checkerboard pattern of gated and ungated communities may be what integration looks like in a fast-growing, urbanizing, diverse, and heterogeneous country.

While many of these observations are speculative, they do indicate that Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale's (2005) findings raised many questions about why rental gated communities exist and how they differ from their owned counterparts. To gain a better understanding of rental gated community dwellers (the other half), this article uses American Housing Survey (AHS) data (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] 2001, 2003, and 2005) to dig a little deeper and to analyze additional characteristics of these residents.

I begin by tracing the factors leading to the growth of gated communities in general and gated apartments in particular. The next section explores the tenure characteristics of owned and rental gated communities as a first step in defining the differences between the two. The next section analyzes descriptive and trend data that update some material from Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale (2005), adds an in-depth focus on subsidized housing, and discusses the housing opportunities and restraints that rental gated communities create for minorities. The final section considers policy implications for the growth of gated rental communities.

¹According to one study, Orange County, CA, is trending the same way as these less developed countries (Maher 2004).

Factors leading to the growth of gated communities

Community cohesion

Research on gated enclaves centers on the loss of community in terms of maintaining or increasing resident cohesion (Atkinson and Flint 2003; Barton and Silverman 1994; Blakely and Snyder 1997; Blandy and Lister 2005; Callies, Franzese, and Guth 2003; Fischel 2004; Grant 2005; Grant, Greene, and Maxwell 2004; Grant and Mittelsteadt 2004; Lang and Danielsen 1997; McKenzie 1994, 2005; Thuillier 2005). This same literature considers the downside to having the wealthy separate themselves from the larger community. Wilson-Doenges (2000) finds that high-income residents of gated enclaves report less of a sense of community than their lower-income non-gated counterparts. Yet, as Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale (2005) discovered, gating is not limited to the wealthy or to homeowners. Another recent study (Kirby et al. 2006) documents that blue-collar families are found in gated homeowner communities in the Phoenix metropolitan area.

But by isolating themselves from the surrounding town, gated communities are perceived as an impediment to maintaining the public realm and the public involvement of residents. Studies have documented a growing demand for enclaves that arises from several social currents centering on fear of crime, globalization, and a demand for more security than local communities can provide.

Culture of fear

Many observers have documented a culture of fear associated with the rise of gated communities (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Davis 1990, 1992; Ellin 1997; Flusty 1997; Greenberg and Rohe 1986; Jencks 1993, 1997; LaGrange, Ferraro, and Supancic 1992; Low 1997, 2001; Maher 2003; Wilson-Doenges 2000). The culture of fear focuses particularly on middle-class homeowners' obsession with safety and fear of crime (Clark 1993; Davis 1992). Davis (1990, 1992) even goes so far as to assert that the culture of fear results in a "militarization of space." Gated communities represent the physical expression of this fear. Indeed, some have dubbed gated communities "the architecture of fear" (Ellin 1997; Jencks 1993 [73], 1997; Marcuse 1997), creating a new "aesthetic of security" (Caldeira 1996, 309) as part of a larger trend of "wallification" (Jencks 1993, 73).

The fear of crime and the culture of fear have arisen in part because governments cannot adequately protect the population at the level desired by residents. Municipalities have limited capacity to expand these services because of fiscal constraints and a changing political climate seeking to limit govern-

ment (Hunter 1985; Lang and LeFurgy 2007). As a consequence, concurrent public safety trends have led to the proliferation of gated communities. First, in an effort to leverage smaller police forces, there has been an increased emphasis on community policing, which consists of voluntary neighborhood watch and crime prevention strategies. Crime prevention includes public education and the use of many of Newman's (1972, 1980, 1995, 1996) ideas of defensible space or "CPTED" (crime prevention through environmental design). A large part of the CPTED strategy includes physical barriers and "target hardening" devices such as gates, walls, and limited access systems (Felson and Peiser 1998; Greenberg and Rohe 1986; Jeffrey 1971; Meck 2005; Newman 1972, 1980, 1995, 1996; Robinson 1998). According to a recent poll of apartment dwellers, gates are increasingly becoming the crime prevention device of choice. Twenty-five percent of the renters in the poll responded that a gated community was one of the security measures they used to prevent crime (Apartments.com 2006).

Newman's (1972, 1980, 1995, 1996) ideas of defensible space, while incorporating target hardening devices, also include having the residents themselves be responsible for some self-policing by clearly defining perimeters and knowing who belongs.

Another related trend is an increased level of spending on private police in large, growing metropolitan areas. D'Alessio, Eitle, and Stolzenberg (2005) and Barkan and Cohn (2005) find that economic inequality and racial prejudice account for the growth in spending on private police, most often by whites. D'Alessio, Eitle, and Stolzenberg (2005) in particular observe that as the relative size of metropolitan black and Hispanic populations grows, so does the size of private police forces. Indeed, Chiricos, McEntire, and Gertz (2001) find that the perceived risk of victimization is influenced by the perception that blacks or Hispanics live nearby.

Lang and LeFurgy (2007) find that certain Sunbelt municipalities are encouraging the growth of gated communities, both owned and rented, as part of a larger process of shrinking government. In fact, a few communities that have only part-time mayors and councils require new residential developments to be gated to alleviate municipal service responsibilities.

Real versus perceived crime

There has been much discussion as to whether gates actually reduce crime. Blakely and Snyder (1997) observed that it was fairly easy to gain access to gated communities. They also point out that residents of gated communities may feel a false sense of security and let their guard down. In

addition, residents cannot be certain that their neighbor will never commit a crime.

Some newspaper accounts report that residents have become jaded about just how secure their community is (Overbeck 1997; Richards 1996) because entry codes and access cards are often distributed to nonresidents to facilitate deliveries. In many gated apartment complexes, gates are closed only after the manager leaves for the day. Apartment developers offer 24-hour restricted access as a luxury amenity.² There is also some speculation that perimeter walls may offer a safe haven for criminals because police cannot gain immediate access to the area and that walls may offer a place for criminals to hide (Blakely and Snyder 1997). Yet, as many criminologists note, with both women and men in the workforce, many houses are empty during working hours, creating a situation that invites crime (Felson and Peiser 1998; Rengert and Wasilchick 2000).

These facts also point to the different public safety needs of different income classes living in gated communities. Wealthier gated communities, whether owned or rented, require surveillance because residents are largely absent during the day or because the house is a second home (Rengert and Wasilchick 2000). These residents are willing to pay for private police forces merely to quiet their anxiety about crime, whether there is actual reason to be afraid or not. The next section will illustrate that lower-income communities have a definite cause for concern.

Gates and walls in public and other subsidized housing

During the 1990s, much scholarly attention was devoted to reassessing the country's public housing stock on the heels of the release of the *Final Report of the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing* (NCSDPH) in 1992. Design elements that would make public housing a better place to live were considered, and the defensible space concept espoused by Newman (1972, 1980, 1995, 1996) was particularly influential.³

Gates, fences, and walls are integral to his idea of defensible space in which defined perimeters are the basis for safety. In the 1990s, the HOPE VI (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere) program incorporated⁴

²This observation is based on my fieldwork in the Inland Empire of California (Riverside and San Bernardino Counties) and in the Phoenix metropolitan area and on Lang and LeFurgy (2007).

³The New Urbanism movement also was influential, but will not be discussed in this context.

⁴HOPE VI was established in 1993 to correct the public housing deficiencies identified by the NCSDPH report.

these design elements as part of a rehabilitated public housing security plan (Newman 1996). Henry Cisneros, the former secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, supported these strategies as a way of creating community. He recognized that gating and walling in subsidized housing have the same effect as fortressing in higher-income gated communities, but argues:

Legitimate as these concerns may be, they are not relevant, in my judgment, to the use of defensible space in the low- and moderate-income communities I am addressing here. (Cisneros 1996, 13)

He goes on to explain that the difference between gates as a community improvement and fortressing is a matter of the materials used in the gates:

Cheap wire mesh fences create a “fortress” impression, connoting a community that considers itself under siege. Open ironwork fences with attractive landscaping signal a stable and pleasant place to live. (Cisneros 1996, 13)

The idea of creating a stable, safe home for poor residents before engaging the larger community harkens back to a seminal work on public housing published in the late 1960s. Rainwater (1966) argued that security and safety in the home are necessary for people to be able to function well in society. If people do not feel safe at home, they are expending effort to keep safe at the expense of being productive members of society. Thus, securing safety inside the walls of an apartment, and by extension increasing security through installing walls and gates, while this might create some initial isolation, would allow public housing residents to more fully engage the community in the long run. This same argument permeates the writing of both Cisneros (1996) and Newman (1972, 1980, 1995, 1996) on defensible space as an improvement for public housing.

Gating subsidized housing appears to be a common practice that is sometimes requested by residents (Kreyling 1999; Richards 1996). For instance, the Atlanta and Pittsburgh metropolitan areas and the cities of Richmond (VA) and Birmingham (AL) have a policy of gating some or all public housing projects (Hilden 2003; McNulty 1998; National Public Radio 1998; Overbeck 1997; Silver 1998). Nashville (TN) gates public housing on a case-by-case basis depending on neighborhood distress. Indeed, while the idea of creating a safe public housing environment is the goal of gating and walling, it does not always work in reality. For instance, a HOPE VI coordinator at the local housing authority in Nashville (TN) noted:

The residents asked for the gates. They said it was necessary to keep crime at bay. Normally, when you redo public housing, you try to link it back into the surrounding neighborhood....But we agreed because at Vine Hill there's not really much of a neighborhood to link to. (Kreyling 1999)

It is not clear whether these measures actually reduce crime, but as Rainwater (1966) predicted, they may act more as a psychological boost. For instance, a National Public Radio story reported that in one public housing community, the crime rate went up 5.7 percent after fences and gates were installed. But the director of the Birmingham Housing Authority attributed the increase to residents' feeling more comfortable about calling the police rather than to an increase in crime (National Public Radio 1998). As would be expected, reactions vary. Some public housing residents protest the gate as a means of "fencing in the poor" or complain that it produces a feeling of being caged or makes them feel like criminals themselves, while others welcome the gate and better security (McNulty 1998; National Public Radio 1998; Overbeck 1997; Richards 1996).

The AHS⁵ (HUD 2001) neighborhood quality data offer some support to residents' mixed perceptions of how useful gates are in creating a haven in public and other subsidized apartments. When residents of all types of gated subsidized housing (those receiving vouchers, those living in public housing, and those receiving other government subsidies) were asked whether they perceived any crime in their neighborhood, at least 50 percent reported no crime. The mixed perception arises when looking at the responses by ethnic groups and by various subsidy types. All blacks living behind gates and receiving vouchers or other government subsidies reported no crime in their neighborhood, but only 50 percent of public housing residents reported this perception. Some 60 to 70 percent of ungated black apartment residents reported crime in their neighborhood.

Hispanics using vouchers in gated communities showed a similar mixed pattern, with 100 percent reporting some crime in their neighborhood. Four out of five gated apartment residents (84 percent) with other types of subsidized rent and roughly two-thirds of public housing residents (63 percent) reported crime in their neighborhood. However, at least 75 to 80 percent of residents in ungated subsidized situations similarly reported no crime in their neighborhoods.

⁵I used data from the 2001 AHS National Sample in this instance, not the latest data from 2005, because the differences between gating and nongating were much clearer in the 2001 data.

These data do not directly prove that gating reduces crime in public housing, but it appears that gating has a strong impact on residents' perception of crime, particularly among black and Hispanic voucher users and black public housing residents. But it appears that gating is not always necessary to produce safe neighborhoods.

Tenure and gated communities

Definitions and dimensions

Gated communities are generally defined by the physical barriers—walls, fences, and security system (gates and/or guards)—that restrict access by non-residents. A spate of recent research (Grant and Mittelsteadt 2004) has refined the definition to include four major dimensions: the functions of enclosure, security features and barriers, amenities and facilities, and residents. Grant and Mittelsteadt (2004) believe that these studies have not gone far enough and suggest that four additional dimensions be considered: tenure, location, size, and policy context. Each dimension can also be further differentiated by its physical (gated), economic (property value), social (privacy or exclusion), and symbolic (status) characteristics. Although the authors consider policy context as a dimension, I would add governance to this list because governance can be differentiated by the same four characteristics and represents a significant part of the literature, particularly in the United States (Blakely and Snyder 1997; McKenzie 1994).

Rental gated communities have not been well defined because there is not much attention given to tenure in the literature. Other than Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale (2005), passing reference is made to the lowest-income gated communities, which typically are public or some form of social housing or apartment condominium communities (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Giglia 2003; Grant and Mittelsteadt 2004; LeGoix 2005; Wilson-Doenges 2000).

The U.S. Bureau of the Census uses a similar definition in the printed edition (2002), but offers a somewhat ambiguous distinction between communities and buildings. HUD first gathered data on gated communities in the 2001 AHS. The data have appeared in subsequent national and metropolitan surveys. The printed edition of the survey refers to gated communities as “secured communities,” which are defined as

types of communities [that] are typically residential communities in which public access by nonresidents is restricted, usually by physical boundaries such as gates, walls, and fences, or through private security. These communities exist in a myriad of locations and devel-

opment types, including apartment complexes, retirement developments, and resort and country club communities. (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002, A-25)

The U.S. Bureau of the Census (2002) also defines a separate category of “secured multiunits” in the printed edition of the AHS (A-25 to A-26). While it sounds like apartments, the definition makes no reference to tenure. The difference between the two categories is that secured communities refers to the community, while secured multiunits refers to one or more buildings. In fact, secured multiunits are tabulated under both tenures.

Tenure differences between homeowner and rental gated communities

Tenure should be an important variable in gated community research because each tenure affords a different set of rights, benefits (both social and economic), experiences, and built environment to respective residents. Table 1 summarizes the differences between these gated community types.⁶

Tenure and tenure conversion. A tenure trend that is having a big impact on the state of gated communities in general and rental gated communities in particular is “tenure conversion,” which refers to a property’s changing from rental to ownership (either the entire property or individual units) or vice versa. It is a process that is not limited to just residential properties because other property types can undergo the same change (hotel and office building conversions to rentals or condominiums). Rental gated communities can readily change into condominiums under the right market and legal conditions.

Management. Increasingly, common interest developments (CIDs) and rental gated communities resemble each other in terms of property management. Rental properties are operated by large professional management firms and REITs (real estate investment trusts). CIDs began with the homeowners managing themselves, but in recent years CID managers have proliferated and professionalized and are certified by associations much like rental property managers are. However, CIDs may have many neighborhoods within a larger master-planned community, each with its own homeowners association (HOA). These neighborhood associations in turn are managed by a large master HOA that ensures order and coordination among the various neighborhood associations. One of the many neighborhoods in a large master-planned community may also be a rental gated community.

⁶This section is based on Barton and Silverman (1994), Blakely and Snyder (1997), Foong (2005), Kirby et al. (2006); and McKenzie (1994).

Table 1. Comparing Tenures of Rental Gated Communities and Common Interest Developments

Characteristic	Rental Gated Communities (Property Owners and Tenants)	Common Interest Developments (Owners)
Tenure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residency is often short term. Rentals are easily converted to condominiums. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residency is more long term than with a rental. Units can be rented but tenants often do not have all the rights of an owner.
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An on-site property manager/management company is hired by the owner. Rental may be managed by the owner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An on-site community manager is hired by developers and/or homeowners. Multiple managers report to a master HOA manager.
Type of contract and effect on residents	<p>Lease Agreement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rules are detailed in the lease. Leases are always under the control of the owner. Rules protect the property owner, not the tenants. The lease controls tenants' behavior. Violating the rules leads to eviction. 	<p>CC&Rs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rules are encoded in the deed. CC&Rs protect all homeowners. CC&Rs control homeowners/behavior. Violating the rules results in foreclosure. Control over governance is ambiguous during build-out.
Law, rights, and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenants need public law to protect their rights. The owner must obey tenant/landlord laws. The owner maintains fee simple property rights. Owners and renters are subject to municipal governance unless the community is part of an HOA. Tenants and owners have more constitutional rights. Social control of tenants is maintained by the management company and/or the property owner and the local police. Rental owners face scrutiny under fair housing laws. Rentals operate under state and local land use control. Tenants-in-common ownership arrangements operate much like HOAs; investors own and are deeded fractional shares of property but are not involved in day-to-day operations. Rental gated communities may be part of a larger HOA and subject to the HOA's governance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homeowners are subject to contract law, not public law. Contract law may supersede regular fee simple property rights. Owners are subject to private governance and municipal governance. Homeowners cede many constitutional rights to contract law. Social control of homeowners is maintained by the management company and by enforcement of the CC&Rs through the court system as an additional layer to the local municipality. Fair housing laws are harder to enforce. The community is subject initially to state and public land use control. The community converts to private land use control after development is completed.

Table 1. Comparing Tenures of Rental Gated Communities and Common Interest Developments *Continued*

Characteristic	Rental Gated Communities (Property Owners and Tenants)	Common Interest Developments (Owners)
Taxation, fee assessment, and expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rentals are treated like businesses. • Expenses and maintenance fees can be deducted. • Subject to local law, the owner can raise rents and other fees without input from tenants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance (or condominium) fees are not tax deductible for homeowners. • Owners claim double taxation. • Owners cannot treat expenses as business expenses. • Condominium fees and other assessments can be raised only if all homeowners agree.
Maintenance/amenity provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The management company or the owner provides services and amenities. • Tenants are not responsible for direct upkeep. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The management company may or may not provide services and amenities. • Homeowners pay for upkeep through HOA fees.
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rentals are more heterogeneous by race and income. • There is some homogeneity by age (senior housing). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common interest developments are more homogeneous by age, race, and income.

Source: Barton and Silverman 1994; Blakely and Snyder 1997; Foong 2005; Kirby et al. 2005; McKenzie 1994
 CC&Rs = conditions, covenants, and restrictions; HOA = homeowners association.

Contracts. Rental gated communities and CIDs both operate under contractual systems that control resident behavior and protect property owners. Rental properties employ a lease, while CIDs use the now infamous conditions, covenants, and restrictions (CC&Rs). The differences are that leases are not attached to the deed and that the lease benefits the owner more than the tenant. Violations of each type of contract may also have different outcomes, such as evictions for leases and possible foreclosure for CC&Rs. Because a developer retains control of a development until construction is completed, CID owners may have a period of ambiguous ownership rights.

Laws, rights, and governance. One major difference between the two tenures is that rental gated communities do not have what are called “private governments,” which take the form of condominiums, HOAs, or cooperatives. As of 1998, there were about 16 million private governments representing about 15 percent of all U.S. housing units (Nelson 2003, 2005). Because rental gated communities have a single owner—typically a large REIT, a real estate development firm, an independent management company, or a public housing authority—they are subject to local and state laws. Tenants must rely on public law for creation and protection of their rights.

However, an increasingly common ownership structure known as tenants-in-common (TIC) mimics much of the HOA model of CC&Rs. TIC investors own fractional interests in an investment-grade property and receive proportionate shares of the net income, tax shelters, and growth. Unlike the case in a traditional partnership, each TIC investor receives a separate deed and title insurance for his or her percentage interest in the property. Because each investor has the rights and privileges of a single or fee simple owner, major decisions require unanimous approval (Mortgage Bankers Association 2005). Like homeowners in a CID, TIC investors are not involved in day-to-day property management operations, which are ceded to a management company often selected by the TIC sponsor (Foong 2005).

CID residents are subject to contract law, which may supersede fee simple property rights. The contract gives the HOA the right to privately govern its residents in terms of behavior, land use, fee assessments, and provision of services. Apartment complexes that are part of a larger master-planned community are also subject to the CC&Rs of the master-planned community.

Taxation, fee assessment, and expenses. Related to governance are taxation issues. Although a CID may operate on some level like an apartment complex in terms of property management, owners cannot treat the fees paid to maintain the property as a business expense. Rental properties can deduct expenses such as property taxes because they are considered businesses. Owners of rental properties are also free to adjust rents up or down without tenant input, depending on local rent control laws.

CID residents must pay property taxes and maintenance fees for community-provided services in addition to those that the town may supply. (Maintenance fees cover expenses related to that particular community and not the town at large.) CID advocates and residents have claimed that this amounts to double taxation. Fees and other types of improvement assessments are raised only if all homeowners agree—and unanimity is not always easy to attain. Another difference is that TIC deals are often driven by tax considerations. Many TIC investors use the investment as a way to defer income taxes. The growth in TICs has been dated to a 2002 Internal Revenue Service ruling that allows investors to defer income tax through investment vehicles known as 1031 property exchanges. TIC offerings are issued as securities and regulated by the Securities and Exchange Commission (Foong 2005).

Provision of maintenance and amenities. In this category, there are many similarities between apartments and CIDs. Management companies increasingly provide services, amenities, and maintenance for both tenures. Where they differ is that homeowners in CIDs are billed directly for property upkeep, while tenants pay for maintenance indirectly as part of the rent.

Diversity. Because of natural market forces, apartments attract much more heterogeneity than CIDs. Ellen (2000a, 2000b) predicts that apartments should be less sensitive to diversity for various reasons. First, renters are less invested in the community and (usually) can move often, quickly, and cheaply. Second, renters are not concerned with property values. Third, many renters do not have children or are not married and thus are not as concerned with the quality of the schools or neighborhood safety. Such characteristics make these demographic categories more open to mixed neighborhoods.

Trends in rental gated communities

According to current trajectories of construction and sociodemographic trends, rental gated communities will continue to post growth in areas where they already exist (the South and the West) and will appear slowly in areas where they do not exist. Rental gated communities will be found in areas experiencing a large influx of minorities and immigrants and lacking affordable housing.

Growth

It is difficult to determine from the literature and available data the exact origins of rental gated communities. A further complication in establishing baseline growth data arises because apartment communities often retrofit gates and walls around their perimeters for various reasons that may not be reflected by the year the property was built. Because the AHS began to ask whether a household lived in a gated community only in 2001, it is difficult to discern when the trend began.

The raw numbers in the AHS (HUD 2003) do not demarcate any clear line between gating and nongating, but the modal year for all and market rental gated communities is 1985 (see table 2). The modal figures offer some indirect proof that gated rental communities began to appear during that period. These data confirm much of the literature on homeowner gated communities, which anecdotally observes that the most recent round of gating began in earnest in the mid- to late 1980s (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Davis 1990). If rental gated communities mirror this trend—a reasonable assumption—these data suggest that much of the gating and walling is built *ex post facto*, particularly among subsidized housing communities. The data indicate that newer apartment complexes are market-rate communities exhibiting the modal year of 1985.

Much of what gave rise to gated communities in general consists of the lifestyle preferences of consumers; the prestige associated with gates; a

Table 2. Age of Rental Gated Communities

Type	Mean	Median	Mode
Public housing	1969	1970	1970
Voucher	1973	1975	1960
Subsidized rent	1970	1975	1970
Market	1972	1975	1985
All	1977	1980	1985

Source: Author's tabulation of HUD 2003 (AHS National Sample).

mounting concern over safety, security, and privacy; and perhaps a concern over the growing diversity in large metropolitan areas (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Grant and Mittelsteadt 2004). Developers also find gates to be in their interest as a marketing tool and as a way to maintain a larger measure of control during the construction phase. Although the literature applies these trends to homeowner gated communities, many of these same characteristics are found in rental gated communities, particularly those apartment complexes that are embedded within large owned master-planned communities.

Also, developers are now building gated apartment complexes to condominium standards, in anticipation of later converting the property. These developers file subdivision maps many years before they intend to sell the units as condominiums. These apartment communities are referred to in the business as “shelf” condominiums because the subdivision documents are put away for the duration of the rental period (Van Atta 1994). Tenants may not even be aware that the building can be converted to condominiums (Schubert and McGuire 2005).

Demographic mix

The question left unanswered by Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale (2005) is why so many minorities opt for multifamily rental gated communities. One reason may be that these communities represent an unexpected dimension to segregation. Wealthy Americans have always employed a number of devices to control neighborhood dynamics. The more familiar have been restrictive covenants, large lots, minimum house size, and minimum frontage and other types of exclusionary zoning, in addition to the gating of private residential neighborhoods (Higley 1995). Evidence from the literature (Blakely and Snyder 1997), newspaper accounts (Overbeck 1997), and my field research suggests that gating and walling, particularly in the western United States, may represent two sides to the same coin. The wealthy may have turned to

gating not only to protect their property values, but also to enclose apartment residents for the same reason.

Yet another somewhat speculative answer may arise from the small decrease in some forms of segregation observed during the past 10 years (Alba, Logan, and Stults 2000; Frey 2003; Iceland, Weinberg, and Steinmetz 2002; Logan, Stults, and Farley 2004). The decline in segregation has been detected most often in the fast-growing Sunbelt areas, such as Phoenix and California's Inland Empire, where rental gated communities are most prevalent, (Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research 2006). Some researchers have suggested that fast growth may contribute to more housing access for minorities. For instance, South and Crowder (1998) demonstrate that minorities have significantly more housing choice, availability, and opportunity in places where there are new housing markets, such as the Sunbelt, as opposed to more entrenched parts of the Northeast. Yet despite the prospect of more opportunity, minority housing prospects in general are still limited because of more familiar access difficulties such as credit problems, affordability, or a continued lack of choice due to more subtle and systematic forms of discrimination and segregation (Aalbers 2003; Ards and Myers 2001; Berry 2001; Yinger 1998). Thus, decreases in segregation, while perhaps a contributing factor, cannot by themselves account for this phenomenon.

Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale (2005) also discovered that more renters than owners live in gated communities, but that an even larger proportion of residents in rental gated communities are minorities, particularly Hispanics (see table 3). These authors puzzled over the reason for such a high percentage of Hispanic residents.

In her ethnographic account of gated communities, Low (2003) offers some cultural reasons that may explain this phenomenon. It appears that Hispanics flock to gated communities and apartments both here and in Latin America because of safety and security concerns based on previous victimization. Gated communities and apartment complexes are common in Latin

Table 3. Gated Communities by Tenure and Race/Ethnicity

Tenure	Percent White			Percent Black			Percent Hispanic		
	2001	2003	2005	2001	2003	2005	2001	2003	2005
Owner	4.2	4.2	4.2	3.1	3.8	3.5	7.0	6.3	6.2
Renter	10.3	11.4	10.7	12.0	13.3	12.3	15.2	17.2	15.4

Sources: Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale (2005) and author's tabulation of HUD 2003 and 2005 (AHS National Samples).

America, so much so that in Brazil, there is “an ‘aesthetic of security’ based on walls, fences and guards” (Low 2003, 123). One Brazilian informant in the book remarked that “In São Paulo, you have those kinds of areas, gated communities in the suburban areas...So we picked a place in an apartment complex, gated closer to town.” This woman notes that she “only feels secure with gates” (Low 2003, 87).

Mexico has had a long tradition of gating and walling in its colonial architecture (Low 2003). Latinos do not see walled-off space as a liability or an impediment to community activities and, in fact, use all of the space within closed-off areas. Mendez (2005) notes that in Los Angeles, Mexicans often wall off their property to use the entire space, a tradition that increases the area for social interaction between household members. Moura remarks that residents consider “the openness of the spaces within the walls more relevant than the actual closing off of the area” (2003, 5). Low’s Brazilian informant echoes this tendency: “In Latin America, there was socializing within the gated community” and “lots of activities for families and children” (2003, 87). Davis (2000) hints at how important gates are culturally to Latinos when he mentions that successful immigrants leave behind their gated “casas de sueños” (dream houses) in Mexico to work full-time in the United States. Arabs live similarly and fully use the enclosures that Glasze and Alkhayyal (2002) classify as “extended-family compounds” (323).

Trends in gated subsidized housing

Another reason for the high percentage of minorities in rental gated communities is that a substantial proportion live in subsidized rental housing. Blakely and Snyder (1997) were among the first to systematically investigate gated communities. They performed a nationwide survey of gated communities and used newspaper articles to supplement facts where they did not have hard data. But their analysis focused mostly on homeowners. The few newspaper accounts that they incorporated into their book mentioned two incidents of public housing developments that retrofitted gates in 1992 as a security measure: Potomac Gardens in Washington, DC, and Mar Vista Gardens in Los Angeles. Wilson-Doenges (2000) describes a similar retrofit on a public housing project in Los Angeles in 1991.⁷

⁷It is interesting to note that these two studies use public housing projects as their examples of low-income gated communities rather than finding low-income market-rate projects. Perhaps there is an assumption that all rental gated communities that are not public housing have residents with high incomes.

Table 4 compares the percentage of households in gated rental communities that consist of public housing or have residents using vouchers or other government subsidies. These data indicate that although a small percentage of all rental gated communities are public housing, nearly one in eight public housing families lived behind walls or fences in 2003. Gated apartments are also home to voucher recipients. Tax-exempt bonds are used to construct apartments, and other state affordable housing programs either subsidize rent or are also used to construct apartments. Although the AHS data in table 4 show that the percentage of voucher recipients in gated communities is going down, the percentage of those units receiving some form of subsidy increased somewhat in 2003, but dipped in 2005.

Table 4. Percentage of Households in Gated Subsidized Housing Communities

Type	As a Percentage of Rental Gated Communities			As a Percentage of Subsidized Housing Type		
	2001	2003	2005	2001	2003	2005
	Public Housing			Public Housing		
Gated	5.8	6.3	5.8	11.9	13.5	11.5
Nongated	5.7	5.5	5.8	87.8	86.5	88.5
	Vouchers			Vouchers		
Gated	2.7	2.6	2.4	12.0	10.9	10.0
Nongated	2.7	2.9	2.8	88.0	89.1	90.0
	Other Government-Subsidized Rent			Other Government-Subsidized Rent		
Gated	8.1	8.2	8.2	13.7	14.7	13.9
Nongated	6.9	6.6	6.6	86.2	85.3	86.1

Source: Author's tabulation of HUD 2001, 2003, and 2005 (AHS National Samples).

Table 5 shows the demographic characteristics of subsidized gated communities. Hispanics do not account for as high a percentage in public housing as they do in other forms of subsidized gated rental housing. Blacks, however, comprise a higher percentage of gated public housing residents than Hispanics or whites. Blacks are making up an increasingly larger share of those groups that are in gated public housing. Whites using vouchers and other forms of subsidized rent (mostly seniors) are found more often in gated rental situations.

Table 5. Demographic Characteristics of Households in Gated Subsidized Housing

Race/Ethnicity	Gated as a Percentage of Racial/Ethnic Group Renters			Gated as a Percentage of Subsidized Housing Type		
	2001	2003	2005	2001	2003	2005
	Public Housing			Public Housing		
White	4.1	2.7	1.5	51.1	43.1	37.3
Black	11.2	12.3	10.9	36.5	44.9	53.6
Hispanic	5.7	6.7	3.4	16.6	27.4	19.5
	Vouchers			Vouchers		
White	58.1	49.3	61.7	2.2	2.3	1.0
Black	28.5	48.9	56.3	4.7	5.6	2.9
Hispanic	23.0	31.7	40.8	3.8	3.2	2.9
	Other Government-Subsidized Rent			Other Government-Subsidized Rent		
White	57.7	48.9	56.7	5.7	5.6	6.7
Black	30.2	44.1	36.5	11.4	15.0	13.1
Hispanic	17.3	24.1	18.5	7.3	7.4	6.3

Source: Author's tabulation of HUD 2001, 2003, and 2005 (AHS National Samples).

New housing markets and housing opportunities for minorities

Although a significant number of rental gated communities serve the lowest income groups, most minorities in rental gated communities lease at market rates.

The AHS data (HUD 2001, 2003, 2005) point to continued growth in gated communities in most major metropolitan areas. As table 6 indicates, between 2001 and 2005, 9 of the 10 largest metropolitan areas experienced at least a slight increase in the percentage of walled and access-controlled communities. Several metropolitan areas, including Atlanta, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC, nearly doubled or more than doubled their percentage of renter households in gated communities from 2001 to 2005. Boston and New York show dips in the percentages during that same period.

Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, and Los Angeles, however, showed at least a quarter (to more than half in the case of Houston) of their renter households in gated communities. The trend indicates that the metropolitan areas south of Boston and New York, and even more so south of the Mason-Dixon line, added substantially to the stock of rental gated communities during the 2001–05 period.

Table 6. Percentage of Households in Gated Rentals in the Top 10 Metropolitan Areas

	Percentage of Households		
	2001	2003	2005
Atlanta	7.4	12.2	24.3
Boston	3.5	2.7	2.8
Chicago	5.3	4.4	9.2
Dallas	17.8	18.9	34.8
Detroit	2.3	3.7	5.9
Houston	26.7	24.1	52.7
Los Angeles	18.2	19.4	30.7
New York	5.2	7.5	5.1
Philadelphia	2.0	2.3	6.2
Washington, DC	4.3	4.9	9.8

Source: Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale (2005) and the author's tabulation of HUD 2003 and 2005 (AHS National Samples).

Beyond these larger metropolitan areas, rental gated communities are found in smaller but growing areas in the southern and western parts of the United States. These fast-growing housing markets were overheated until recently. What they have in common is that because they are sprawling into new ground, there is not much of an entrenched housing market and the municipal fragmentation that is prevalent in the East is lacking. These trends offer new housing opportunities for minorities⁸ (Crowder, Tolnay, and Adelman 2001; South and Crowder 1998). The fact that there is no expectation of how an area should be divided racially, together with fair housing laws, means that minorities have fewer restraints on their housing choice than minorities in eastern cities and suburbs (Rosenbaum 1994). In fact, Crowder, Tolnay, and Adelman (2001) note that blacks are more likely to move into newer housing in a white or mixed tract in the West than in the Midwest or the South. Ellen (2000a, 2000b) also finds that racial mixing is more tenable in areas farther outside the city rather than close in, especially when initiated early in the development process.

⁸Researchers often examine housing opportunities as access to homeownership, with one of the dimensions being discrimination. Here I focus on housing opportunities less as a function of discrimination and more as a function of the availability in rental housing. Housing opportunity can be defined in terms of availability, discrimination practices, tenure and amenity preferences, and persistent patterns of segregation.

It has been suggested that rental housing should offer more opportunity to reduce segregation because of the very nature of the apartment market. Ellen (2000a, 2000b) posits that renters are more open to diversity because they do not own their homes and are not concerned with property values. Renter demographics also favor mixing because renters are more likely to be young and unmarried or, if married, to be childless or to be empty nesters—groups that typically are less concerned about safety and school quality than those with young children. Thus, it is not entirely surprising that rental gated communities may offer more housing opportunity for minorities. In addition, most analyses of rental markets look at renters only as short-term residents. Wulff and Maher (1998) conducted one of the only studies of long-term renters and identified two types: The first, “continuals” (87), are those who have always rented and usually have lower household incomes and higher unemployment rates, while “returners” (88), are those who have resumed renting after owning a home at some point. This group is more socioeconomically diverse, is usually older, and often has had marital difficulties, such as separation or divorce. Although the authors conducted their study in Australia, it is not difficult to see cross-cultural similarities in the United States.

The tendency of gates and walls to increase the social distance between those inside and outside the gates would be similarly effective in allowing diversity in a situation where there are nongated homeowner developments outside the rental gated community. There is no disputing that generating social distance in this manner creates segregation, but because gated communities occur worldwide among homogeneous populations (see Billig and Churchman 2003; Low 2003), this behavior may be based more on class/income separation or density rather than solely on race. Pendall (2005) confirms this tendency for native-born Hispanics who live in dense, class-stratified neighborhoods rather than in ethnic enclaves. Harris (1999) offers a cautionary conclusion that in some cases, social class is more segregating than race even for blacks, who experience the most discrimination. His hedonic model finds that people avoid black neighborhoods more for reasons of social class. That is, whites are not necessarily avoiding black neighbors, but rather have a stronger preference for affluent, well-educated neighbors. In addition, Iceland, Sharpe, and Steinmetz (2005) find that blacks with higher socioeconomic status tend to live in more integrated neighborhoods, although the effect is small. Cutler, Glaeser, and Vigdor (1999) find that whites often pay a premium to live in white neighborhoods and that decreasing segregation is not a product of integrating all black census tracts. They also observe that segregation has not declined in the largest cities, but has decreased in smaller cities and, in particular, in the suburbs.

Housing restraints: Expensive housing markets

The housing market has become more and more expensive in areas where gated rental communities are proliferating. Apartments become the affordable housing of choice by default. In addition, the most active building of rental gated communities often takes place in areas with large immigrant populations, such as California, Florida, and Texas. In these markets, most recent immigrants rent, are rent burdened, and live in more crowded conditions than native-born households. For instance, more than 75 percent of recent immigrants rent, with less than a quarter of those who arrived from 1991 to 2000 owning their homes. By comparison, nearly 69 percent of native households own their homes (Greulich, Quigley, and Raphael 2003). Saiz (2003) estimates that high numbers of immigrants in a market increases rents by about 1 percent.

Condominium conversions, while slowing with the rest of the housing sector, have been contributing to already expensive markets. In a house price environment that had soaring prices coupled with low interest rates, gated rental communities were ripe for conversion. The demand for second homes and affordable entry prices had fueled the demand for condominiums and conversions before 2006, with most activity occurring in 2004 and 2005 (see table 7). Part of the allure of conversion was the shortage of land zoned for multifamily housing or infill housing in desirable housing markets. And although investors had been paying a premium for these properties, they claimed that conversion costs much less than new construction, which involves locating appropriate land and securing development permits to develop it. Using existing buildings skirts most of these problems, requiring developers merely to bring the building up to “condo” standards and conform to local conversion laws.

Apartment builders and REITs often position newly constructed multifamily developments for conversion in the near future by building to “condo specifications.” In California, it has been standard practice in the recent past to build rentals first and then convert after 10 years (Ktsanes 2004).

This raises an important policy issue: the preservation of affordable housing. If rental gated communities are the seeds of homeowner gated communities, much affordable housing will be lost. Real estate market analysts believe that there is some good in the conversion trend because rents have been flat in some places and conversions tend to tighten up the market and raise them (Marcus and Millichap Research Services 2006). Table 7 shows that in most U.S. markets, apartment vacancies are dropping, indicating tighter markets. The seven markets with the lowest vacancy rates accounted for most of the recent conversion activity. These indicators trend toward a

Table 7. Apartment Units Converted to Condominiums, together with Vacancy Rates

Markets	2002 Total Units	2003 Total Units	2004 Total Units	2005 Total Units	2005 Vacancy Rate	2006 Vacancy Rate	Difference 2005–2006
National average	NA	NA	NA	NA	6.3	5.9	–0.4
Boston	NA	108	1,897	1,531	6.8	5.8	–1.0
Ft. Lauderdale, FL	NA	2,234	5,594	11,955	3.7	3.4	–0.3
Chicago	261	863	1,333	7,495	4.9	5.7	0.8
Washington, DC	NA	4,087	4,877	7,082	4.0	3.8	–0.2
Jacksonville, FL	696	1,050	1,757	3,496	7.3	5.8	–1.5
Las Vegas	NA	648	6,823	4,847	3.7	3.3	–0.4
Los Angeles	159	308	2,173	2,203	3.7	3.3	–0.4
New York	NA	NA	1,460	5,697	3.4	3.2	–0.2
Miami	1,295	2,851	11,524	8,695	3.7	3.6	–0.1
Orange County, CA	NA	344	357	1,530	4.0	3.9	–0.1
Orlando, FL	148	288	4,406	14,183	3.5	3.2	–0.3
Palm Beach, FL	690	932	2,936	7,510	3.7	4.1	0.4
Phoenix	274	252	981	11,862	5.05	5.2	0.15
San Diego	1,113	2,062	7,345	5,092	3.5	3.3	–0.2
Seattle	NA	184	521	2,868	3.5	3.3	–0.2
Southwest Florida	348	732	2,300	8,298	6.2	5.3	–0.9
Tampa, FL	95	1,133	2,356	13,468	5.1	4.6	–0.5

Source: Marcus and Millichap Research Services (2006) and Slatin (2005).
NA = not available.

serious loss of affordability among the lower-income groups that live in these communities.

Affordable rental housing is also being lost to declining new rental construction. As table 8 indicates, the percentage of housing units started for rent has been declining steadily for the past eight years. Indeed, the percentage of for-sale housing starts exceeded the percentage of for-rent starts in 2005 for the first time during this period. Industry observers have noted that in some markets, apartment construction is in tough competition with for-sale multifamily units. This includes many large apartment REITs that are shifting their business strategy to include some condominium construction and conversions (Handley 2005; Mattson-Teig 2005; Smith 2005). Marcus and Millichap (2007) note that recent construction figures indicate that it will take more than three years to replenish the rentals lost to conversions since 2004.

Table 8. New Privately Owned Housing Units Started, by Purpose (in Thousands)

Year	Total	Family	Units in Buildings with Two or More Units				
			Total	For Rent	For Sale	Percentage for Rent	Percentage for Sale
1998	1,271	882	346	287	59	82.9	17.1
1999	1,302	912	339	270	69	79.6	20.4
2000	1,568	1,230	338	263	75	77.8	22.2
2001	1,603	1,274	329	258	71	78.4	21.6
2002	1,706	1,359	347	274	73	79.0	21.0
2003	1,849	1,499	350	265	85	75.7	24.3
2004	1,957	1,611	346	226	120	65.3	34.7
2005	1,716	1,359	352	149	203	42.3	57.7

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (2005).

In response to the potential loss of affordable rental housing, several large cities and communities either have already initiated a moratorium on conversions or are considering such legislation. Examples are Los Angeles, San Francisco, East Palo Alto, San Diego, and Hayward, CA; Las Vegas; Key West, Pembroke Pines, and Daytona Beach Shores, FL; Asbury Park, NJ; and Montreal. Yet the current housing market has already corrected some of the recent excesses in these metropolitan areas.

Conclusions and policy implications

Tenure is an important distinction in the debate over gated communities despite much similarity. Rental gated communities include a wider range of income and ethnicity than their owned counterparts. In addition, today's rental gated community may be a condominium in the near future. Trend data based on the AHS from 2001 to 2005 indicate that the number of gated rental households is rising and gated homeowner households are decreasing (HUD 2001, 2003, 2005). The direction of the data may have shifted, as the more recent housing starts and conversion numbers demonstrate. However, these trends validate the fact that the rental product still has market value, particularly as TICs, and high residual value as condominiums.

Minorities continue to live in gated rental communities, and the number is growing. A more important finding is that rental gated communities

include subsidized housing, with one in eight public housing households living behind gates. As Sanchez, Lang, and Dhavale (2005) first revealed, Hispanics live in rental gated communities more often than blacks do, but my study reveals that blacks live in gated public housing more often than Hispanics do.

From this discussion, it is clear that despite the negative community outcomes that gated enclaves seem to cause, accentuate, or perpetuate, rental gated communities serve multiple—perhaps positive—purposes where they appear. For instance, gated apartment complexes service the lowest-income groups and serve more income levels than their homeowner counterparts.

There are more housing opportunities for minorities in areas where gated rental communities are more prevalent because newer housing markets have fewer constraints on housing choices. Rental gated communities are found in high-growth areas, such as the South and West, with high minority and immigrant populations and high housing prices. This trend is likely to continue, although this product type will not appeal to less urban places or entrenched housing markets nearing build-out.

Research on gated apartment complexes, including public housing projects, suggests that gating and walling are useful for community building. Hispanics and Arabs in particular traditionally embrace gates as a starting point for community and family relations. Heeding arguments by Cisneros (1996) and others, recent federal housing policy has incorporated the idea of gates as a way for residents to feel safe inside their complex before they can engage the larger community. Blacks feel that they benefit from gates, as demonstrated by the responses in the AHS (HUD 2001, 2003, 2005), because they perceive less crime in gated public housing and voucher households. This suggests that gates and walls are an important component to ensuring resident safety despite the loss of community cohesion and reduced neighborhood interaction. Gates are also becoming the crime prevention method of choice among renters (Apartments.com 2006).

The recent surge of condominium conversions indicates that gated rental complexes serve as a potential source of affordable housing for ownership. However, conversions will reduce the amount of affordable rental housing stock and tighten already overheated markets, thereby making affordable housing preservation an issue. Many communities have reacted by imposing conversion moratoriums in an attempt to preserve the balance of rental housing in the face of applications for condominium conversions, but the recent cooling of the housing market should stem some of the loss.

Author

Karen A. Danielsen is a Ph.D. candidate in the Urban Affairs and Planning Program at Virginia Tech.

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