Talking on: "The Threat of Eviction: How Landlords Shape a Contingent Tenure"

While recent research has illustrated the frequency and deleterious consequences of eviction, the number of finalized evictions pales in comparison to the number of poor families threatened with eviction. This paper uses interviews with 127 randomly sampled landlords and property managers in Baltimore, Dallas, and Cleveland to examine their strategies related to eviction, with a focus on the extended process of evicting rather than the discrete instance of eviction. We find that landlords avoid costly evictions, instead relying on the threat of eviction. By redefining renters as debtors, filing assists in rent collection by leveraging the state to materially and symbolically support the landlord’s debt collection. At the same time, housing tenants in small amounts of arrearage aggravates the power imbalance within the landlord-tenant relationship. It gives landlords the legal pretext to remove a tenant for any reason and prevents tenants from exercising their legal rights regarding code enforcement. These findings emphasize the importance of examining the precarious and power-laden relationship of landlords and tenants while they are still in residence. Poor families live under constant threat of eviction, facing housing insecurity, fees, and legal sanction, with negative impacts for their sense of home and community.