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# **The Making and Unmaking of Southeast San Francisco**

By

Rachel Brahinsky

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Richard Walker, Chair

Professor Paul Groth

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**Fall 2012**

**The Making and Unmaking of Southeast San Francisco**

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By

Rachel Brahinsky

## **Abstract**

### **The Making and Unmaking of Southeast San Francisco**

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Geography  
University of California, Berkeley  
Professor Richard Walker, Chair

This project historicizes the recent convergence of private and public development interests in Southeast San Francisco, a place that was once dismissed as too risky for investment. Emphasizing the importance of race and gender in this history, I ask how an unexpected story of urban change shifts our sense of possibility for San Francisco and, more broadly, for the future of the American city.

Historically, the Southeast was the place where San Francisco cloistered industries and people that were unwelcome by the mainstream. After years of industrial concentration, the area became home to a naval shipyard that played a central role in World War II, and that drew in thousands of African American families to live and work. The residential character of today's Southeast was further shaped by waves of urban renewal in the 1950s and 60s and by the activism of African American women in the 1970s. Development plans that emerged in the late 1990s revealed that the poor, industrially polluted, and violence-ridden Southeast would be pivotal in formulating San Francisco's 21<sup>st</sup> Century growth patterns.

Today, the city is moving forward with a massive redevelopment plan for the Southeast under a partnership between the Redevelopment Agency and the Lennar Corporation, one of America's largest private homebuilders and a key player in the mortgage crisis. Lennar's Southeast is a largely poor yet racially diverse place, with a recent influx of Chinese-American and Latino families. Nested amid San Francisco's extreme real estate-driven wealth, the Southeast has a long history of alliances defined by political patronage.

In sum, through three case studies that reveal interlinked histories, this dissertation unpacks the ways that the politics of urban development and racial exclusion shape places, even in apparently progressive regions like the San Francisco Bay Area. This work extends and contributes to conversations about the role of government in urban growth, the co-production of urban space and racial hierarchies, and the ways that race-class politics are shifting in the newly multi-ethnic context of the American city.

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I have a complete list of interviewees (we call them informants in the academy) in the Appendix, but I need to offer a special thanks to Elouise Westbrook and her family members who took valuable time out of their lives to help me understand Westbrook's life. I want to extend special thanks to Loretta Goodin, who offered her personal insights and warmly helped facilitate other interviews; hearing her sing was one of the many unexpected and unforgettable joys of working on this project. Oscar James devoted a number of days to showing me the neighborhood, taking me down just about every single cul-de-sac on Hunter's Point Hill and all across the neighborhood. I cannot thank him enough for his tour-guidance.

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I dedicate the completion of this work to my maternal grandparents, Ruth and Sol Cohen, who would have simply loved to see it all happen.

## Chapter 1:

### Southeast San Francisco and the Changing American City

In September 2011 the Cornerstone Baptist Church held a memorial for Elouise Westbrook. The church, a large, white modern-Mission hybrid structure on Third Street, in the Southeast corner of San Francisco, filled quickly with friends, relatives, and others who gathered for a four hour remembrance of a woman whose life's work had changed the geography of the surrounding community. She died without fanfare, living in a weathered affordable housing complex on one of the city's tougher blocks, and San Francisco's prominent newspapers never acknowledged her passing. Even so, Westbrook's funeral was marked by speeches from actor and activist Danny Glover and the Rev. Cecil Williams; US Rep. Nancy Pelosi sent a representative; Senator Dianne Feinstein sent a video commentary from Washington, D.C.

When former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown – who had been one of the California's most powerful people for decades – rose to address those assembled, he offered his eulogy in the form of a roast. “Mrs. Westbrook started cursing me out a *long* time ago,” he said, pausing at the end of the sentence for dramatic effect.

In this crowd, which was mostly African American, he relied on the social capital accrued through having climbed from his birth as a small-town Texan to become speaker of the California State Assembly and then San Francisco's only black mayor – and a major power broker for four decades. From those heights, his words hung heavy:

Mrs. Westbrook used to scare me. When I saw the other day that she lived to be 96 – I started thinking, she must have scared the Lord, too – because he let her live a long time... Mrs. Westbrook was not above taking things into her own hands, if things needed to be done: Her telephone calls to me, her direction to me, her orders to me, and to my law office. [dramatic pause] Oh, Mrs. Westbrook never paid...<sup>1</sup>

Finally, turning his head up to the high-vaulted church ceiling, Brown ended the roast by calling out, while shaking one fist: “Mrs. Westbrook, ‘I don't have to take your calls no more!’” It was an amazing moment, and the room shook with laughter and surprise, and not a little pride as Westbrook's family watched a local hero eulogize their matriarch.

It was also a moment that elided the ongoing struggles within the communities that Westbrook fought for, which both Brown and Westbrook emerged from. For a moment one could almost forget the complicated history that brought them both to San Francisco (separately, but under similar circumstances), in the 1940s – only to treat them with dramatically different outcomes. While Brown joked about being pushed around by Westbrook, he joked from a position of power, wealth, and political celebrity. He lost

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<sup>1</sup> Willie L. Brown, Jr., “Public Comments at Funeral of Elouise Westbrook” (Cornerstone Missionary Baptist Church, San Francisco, September 21, 2011).

nothing by suggesting she had pushed him around. After he spoke, Brown conferred with an ally in the church antechamber and then left the memorial early.



The histories that remained hidden, ghostlike, through Brown's eulogy were multiple. Some of them had been the topic of a hearing at City Hall the year before. Back then, the Board of Supervisors (San Francisco's City Council) met in their richly appointed dark wood-paneled meeting hall, in the building that had been redone when Brown was mayor. On that chilly day the board devoted nearly ten hours to hearing the pros and cons of a massive six-volume environmental review of the latest redevelopment plan for Bayview-Hunter's Point, the dominant neighborhood of the zone many refer to as simply the Southeast.<sup>2</sup>

The Bayview proposal had been recently expanded from its original focus on the decommissioned naval shipyard at Hunter's Point and the residential blocks in Bayview to include the southern part of the district, encompassing Candlestick Point State Park, and the football stadium built to lure the Giants baseball team out to San Francisco in the 1950s. With the Giants long gone to the more centrally located Pac Bell Park, the place was still home to the 49ers football team. But with Silicon Valley wealth luring the team down south, San Francisco planners were desperately re-engineering development plans that might keep the team in town.

Supporters of the project spoke about the jobs that the proposal would bring, and the length of time community members had spent sweating over the details – it was a plan, they insisted, that was long overdue, and it was time to move forward. Many said they had been involved in the planning of the deal, as members of commissions and boards that had overseen formal discussions, for as much as a decade.

Others said they lived in the public housing project slated for renewal under the plan, a complex that sits just north of the ballpark. They spoke about the hope that redevelopment promised them and their neighbors, focusing on jobs, freshly built housing, and a safer, less chaotic community. Some said they were residents of a housing project slated for renewal, but didn't address the persistent gossip that they had been paid by the developer to testify, a rumor that seemed to hint at the history of continuing patronage of the city's poorest people by politicians and land developers.

Opponents, a motley crew of residents, environmentalists and members of the city's political left, made an equally dramatic showing, packing the aisles of the grand gold-trimmed and velvet-draped supervisorial meeting hall, and pleading for the board to spend more time analyzing the project. This side listed a litany of challenges, including doubts about both the report's rosy economic predictions and its assertions of environmental safety.<sup>3</sup> Many were concerned about a proposal to build a bridge over Yosemite Slough (a bay inlet near the housing projects), which they believed would unnecessarily destroy an endangered habitat. Others raised questions about the promise that the toxic soils of the shipyard would be clean enough for residential development any time soon.

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<sup>2</sup> San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and San Francisco Planning Department, *Draft Environmental Impact Report: Candlestick Point-Hunters Point Shipyard Phase II* (San Francisco, CA: City and County of San Francisco, November 12, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

The development plan was the culmination of a massive planning effort underway since the late 1990s to transform the southeast corner of the city, what some might call a ‘final development frontier’ in one of the richest cities in the world. It was happening in a corner of San Francisco that had largely resisted the kind of transformation that visited vast swaths of US cities since the 1970s. In those formerly industrial spaces, new lofts and glass-fronted eateries sprouted up to lure the re-migration of urban elites to corners previously inhabited by train jumpers, welders, meatpackers, and the racialized working class. In San Francisco the Mission District flooded with dot-com youngsters whose stock options made them instant millionaires – yet Bayview-Hunter’s Point had remained poor, and tough, and lacking basic goods, with no decent supermarket and the worst of the city’s crummy public transit.



But Bayview-Hunter’s Point’s historical position within the urban system was not the only story told at the hearing. Opponents also raised the fear of what I call the Fillmore Ghost. Once dormant, the story of the Fillmore Ghost re-emerged in the early 1990s when the city began the public conversation about what to do with the 500 acres of defunct military and shipping space at Hunter’s Point; the ghosts have since shaped a generation of conversations about redevelopment.

To be clear, the Fillmore Ghost story is not fiction – it is based on the very real track record of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency in the Fillmore District/Western Addition, a neighborhood in the center of the city. In that community, beginning in the late 1950s, the agency exercised some of the city’s most infamously autocratic development decision making, with devastating effects on tens of thousands of people. Redevelopment in the Fillmore hollowed out two communities, displacing more than 20,000 people, mostly African American and Japanese-American.<sup>4</sup> The displacements initiated decades of pressure on African American families to leave the city, an issue that remains an unrelenting problem.

The Fillmore displacements remain the agency’s most notorious program for urban change and have lent the term redevelopment a nefarious tinge; rather than seeing the government-led reconstruction of communities as a pleasant, potentially positive intervention by the state, redevelopment is seen by many as a sinister process, one that seeks to destroy the communities in which it works. Through the 40 years that it took to remake the Fillmore, fear that the displacements of that program would be repeated in other communities lingered heavily over public conversations as many of the cleared Fillmore lots grew over with weeds, a glaring symbol of the destruction of the center of the city’s African American culture.

Because the Fillmore Ghost story is in many ways an essential history to remember, community-based activists that remind us of this past do a service for the city’s shifting population, which too easily forgets. The logic of the Fillmore Ghost story reminds us of a truly terrible process, and of the corrupt use of power. At the same time, it can have a stifling effect. Rather than encouraging people to transform the public agencies that manage

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<sup>4</sup> Shizue Seigel, “Nihonmachi and Urban Renewal,” *Nikkei Heritage* XII/XIII, 4/1 (2000): 6–24; Clement Lai, “The Racial Triangulation of Space: The Case of Urban Renewal in San Francisco’s Fillmore District,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 102, no. 1 (2012): 151–170.

urban change, the story seems to shore up a general distrust of government, a prevalent sentiment in black communities that have experienced generations of abandonment by the state.

How could it be that a story that reminds us of history, a story that seeks to educate the public about their position in their own communities, might also stifle political action? Storytelling itself is a mode of power, one that shapes the present, and one that has the potential to craft the fate of communities.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes, however, proponents of people-power have perhaps focused too intently on the very stories that weaken them. In doing so, they miss some of the stories that may be the most helpful in re-thinking the future of urban development and the survival of their communities. In the history of redevelopment in San Francisco there are multiple stories, multiple ghosts that haunt the politics of the present. They are made by the politically-defined markets and migrations of people, displacements and replacements that churn out the ever-changing city.

## Why Southeast San Francisco?

This opening chapter offers an overview of the major issues, themes, and key historical moments at play in this dissertation. First, in this section, I address the historical importance of Southeast San Francisco and situate the contemporary redevelopment dispute underway. Then I look at the way that San Francisco's unique political position – as a place that nurtures both the political left, on the one hand, and urban growth machine logics, on the other – relates to the story of the racialized Southeast. Next, I widen the lens to trace national urban trends that help explain development in San Francisco. I then turn back in to San Francisco's story, with its lineage of development-eager mayors, to focus on what this story tells us about the political nature of urban change and racial migrations. Finally, I frame the rest of the dissertation by offering up my major arguments and chapter structure, highlighting the theoretical questions that help us to interpret the narratives I've uncovered of the history of the Southeast.

Few histories in the voluminous literature on San Francisco offer more than a glimpse of Bayview Hunter's Point or the rest of the Southeast.<sup>6</sup> This is unfortunate, because the story of the transformation of the Southeast since World War II is key to understanding the transformation of the city at large. The racial dynamics, though important, are but one piece of the story. The city's industrial rise and fall, the importance of housing politics – and the contradictions of San Francisco's famous progressivism – are all on display in a study of the Southeast.

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<sup>5</sup> Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Clyde Adrian Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (Verso, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Grey Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Chester Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2002); William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).



There are many common elements between the story of the Southeast and that of typical narratives of “urban renewal”: a big city agency moves to rebuild a neighborhood, the community is split politically between resistance and accommodation; ultimately activists have some effect on the project, but they never obtain complete control. Yet in our tale, the tangle of shifting power relations among city hall leaders and community residents – with private capital playing a range of supporting and directing roles – has an important and tragic twist.

In this case, the fates of working class people of color have been used through political rhetoric to marshal what will be one of the largest development undertakings in San Francisco history. Long before builders even broke ground, though, those same communities were disappearing from the city. The wins of affordable housing activists over the years – as they worked to retain working class people in the pressure cooker of one of the primary west coast nodes of capital accumulation – threatened to fade away even as they were won.



By definition, Southeast San Francisco is on the city’s fringe, in the far south-east corner, about 5 miles from the downtown core; that marginal position has been reinforced economically and culturally by the manufacture of a set of geographical boundaries between the Southeast and its neighbors (see Fig. 1, on p. 5). Two elevated freeways barreled through the western edges of the community in the 1950s, providing physical reinforcement of political, economic and racial divisions that had already taken root. Years later, even after completion of a new light-rail that was meant to better link the community to the downtown, public transportation is relatively limited, a problem that has plagued the Southeast since the city’s founding.

Historically, the Southeast has been the place where San Francisco cloistered its industries – and people – that were unwelcome by the mainstream. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century it was identified as an early site for deep-water dry-docking. It eventually became the city’s industrial powerhouse, its odiferous Butchertown, home to commercial-scale Italian vegetable gardens, outcast Chinese-run shrimp yards, towering steel mills and smoke-belching electric power plants.

In 2011 the Southeast was perched at the precipice of massive change. Bayview-Hunter’s Point (the largest southeastern neighborhood) was gearing up to double its population in the coming decades. The retired naval shipyard and environs were slated for transformation from federal superfund landscapes into a geography of retail establishments, parks, cultural institutions and – most important for its investors – hundreds of market-rate condominiums and other new housing opportunities. The mayor, San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA), and San Francisco Board of Supervisors all approved the project. Yet the Lennar Corporation, which became one of the nation’s largest homebuilders in the lead-up to the housing crash of 2008/9, dominated the writing and implementation of the plan.<sup>7</sup>

Over the decade that it took to gain project approval, Lennar inserted itself into many levels of the community, using charitable giving to shore up support and developing a package of community benefits to win over critics. With a financing program that relied on

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<sup>7</sup> *Arc Ecology V. San Francisco Redevelopment Agency* (n.d.); Informant#1, Bayview worker, interview by Author.

rising property values and with its aim to draw in wealthier residents to the longtime working-class community, the development plan had the potential to displace Bayview's poorest residents. Critics of the plan, who feared that a Fillmore-style transformation was in the works, raised the specter of a future of evictions and community instability. Their fears were framed by the toxic history of the shipyard, which housed, among other things, experimentation with radioactive materials throughout the Cold War. The fight over whether the yard would be clean enough for safe habitation by the time future developments were finished infused every stage of the planning process.

Both Lennar and city agency officials demanded that a different story be told. With the community benefits package that the final contract offered, they argued that the community had been handed previously unthinkable opportunities to thrive. Kids would have money for education, and homeowners – many of whom were African American, a reflection of the historical importance of the shipyard's middle-income employment base – would have opportunities for low-cost loans. They pointed out that the Southeast still had one of the highest rates of homeownership in the city, in spite of its poverty, which meant that many residents would benefit personally from a rise in home values.

The Lennar story was tainted, however, by the company's history of renegeing on affordable housing promises and its practice, throughout the political fight, of treating critics with scorn. This history, plus the company's troubles in development arenas nationally, contributed to legitimate ongoing questions about the company's commitment to its community-development promises.<sup>8</sup>

The other trouble with the promises, even after they were put in writing and signed off by all 11 members of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, the mayor, and the Redevelopment Agency<sup>9</sup>, was the context in which they were given. The Southeast had long suffered the role of neglected stepchild within the city family. One dominant political line came from African Americans who had experienced decades of disillusionment, exclusion, cooptation, and disenfranchisement in a range of political-economic decisions. As one group, a political operation made of locked-out African American construction workers put it, expressing one particularly sobering thread of self-perception in the community, "Don't nobody give a damn about us."<sup>10</sup>

## The Ghosts of History

The meaning – for the city at large – of Lennar's redevelopment program and the dispirited politics that surround it has been fundamentally shaped by four key events in local history. These four moments have *haunted* the current conversation about redevelopment. I am using the term haunting as defined by sociologist Avery Gordon. For Gordon haunting is

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<sup>8</sup> On the Lennar gun incident, see John Cote, "Daly Wants Lennar to Apologize After Its Security Guard Is Cuffed to Pole | City Insider | an SFGate.com Blog," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 10, 2010. On the 2009 ballot fight, see San Francisco Department of Elections, *Voter Information Pamphlet Municipal Election - November 3, 2009*, Ballot Handbook (San Francisco, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Note: For ease of reading I use the abbreviation "Redevelopment Agency" or the acronym SFRA to refer solely to the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency throughout this text. Any other redevelopment agency is named in full.

<sup>10</sup> ABU stands for "Aboriginal Blackmen United" – See Lois Beckett, "San Francisco Standing Up with the Aboriginal Blackmen United," *San Francisco Weekly*, July 29, 2010.



not a mystical or mythical experience, but instead is a way to understand how the structures of memory and history remain present; they are unseen yet they powerfully shape experience.<sup>11</sup> They are ghosts that keep the past in our midst.

First, the community was identified as early as the 1860s as a place that would be ideal for industry – this fact determined the trajectory of land use for the next century. The presence of industry was the key factor in determining both who would live there and how toxic the landscape would be for future generations.

Second, during World War II the Hunter’s Point peninsula, which had already been developed as a major dry dock, was taken over by the US Navy. Its new federal managers expanded the shipyard dramatically for wartime production, drawing in thousands of African American families to live and work. This moment tipped the racial balance of the place, which had been largely home to working-class whites, with a small Chinese immigrant population. The ghosts of industrial development haunt the community today in multiple ways.

Third, the first postwar wave of urban renewal evicted African Americans from the other core African American neighborhood, the Fillmore District, sending them in search of shelter in a housing market limited by racial restrictions that were still being dismantled in practice, if not in law. Some left the city, but many headed to the Southeast. The role of racial exclusion in defining housing options for blacks, as well as for Chinese- and Japanese-Americans, over-determined the way that urban renewal would play out in San Francisco. The ghosts of the Fillmore, and of racism’s impact on housing markets more broadly, have been central in defining the trajectory of the Southeast.

Finally, efforts to rebuild the Southeast in the late 60s and 70s became a grooming ground for local activists who tried to change the path of redevelopment politics. Their work, which has been unrecognized in history books, remains alive in local lore. Even so, their progress was crushed in the wheels of growth-machine politics, deindustrialization, and abandonment of the racialized working class that dominated US cities in the 80s and 90s, even in liberal San Francisco. The efforts of these activists, known as the Big Five (led by Elouise Westbrook), also haunt contemporary politics.<sup>12</sup>

These four specters – industry, the Fillmore, racism, and the Big Five – are threaded through the narratives to come.

## **Left Coast City?**

Famously, the city of San Francisco has long been a hotbed for left political activism and a relatively welcoming haven for nonconformists of many kinds – from union labor organizers to queer-rights activists to cultural and literary innovators and medical-marijuana advocates. It is a place that has nurtured a belief in the power of the political, with

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<sup>11</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, New University of Minnesota Press. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> I have seen Elouise Westbrook’s first name spelled in various ways – I use the spelling most common among the family members that I interviewed. In some archives it is spelled without the u (Eloise). Similarly, though her last name was Westbrook, some friends called her Westbrooks, with an s, although I have not seen this spelling used in any documents.

development proposals and racialized displacement often birthing social movements, and often influencing movements elsewhere.<sup>13</sup>

Still, although San Francisco is a place so influenced by the left that it has been assessed as having at least three distinct political lefts and no right wing, it struggles with the problem of treating its citizens equally. Evident here is a national – or even global – urban double-bind: the liberal drive to make cities more appealing also tends to make them more exclusive – at the expense of the liberal/progressive goal of social inclusiveness. In many ways San Francisco simultaneously represents the best and worst of the intense, race- and class-coded pressures to “clean up” American cities that have washed through the country in cycles since the Great Depression – and those efforts have never gone unchallenged.<sup>14</sup> San Francisco offers an extreme empirical puzzle emblematic of this global problem. These extremes, however, are representative of fundamental dynamics of American cities where growth (progressively packaged or not) and exclusivity seem to go hand in hand.

In the years since urban renewal scarred the Fillmore, the Redevelopment Agency become symbolic of San Francisco’s contradictory left-leaning politics. Although 1970s activists who sought to make change from the inside transformed the agency’s mission, the practices of the agency remained problematic. Even without the bulldozers of the 1950s and 60s, the agency seemed primed to make profits for developers. No matter the intentions or overarching policies of the agency staffers, the rules of development finance have continued to undercut and influence the direction of redevelopment projects.

Nevertheless, the agency has been a site of intense struggle in the development wars, as progressives have tried to reshape the future of the built landscape in the interest of controlling the demography of the city. As one leader in the affordable housing movement puts it: “Who lives here votes here.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, failed redevelopment zones have been blamed for the city’s accelerating black flight. While many northern cities lost African American residents amid the gentrification trends of the late 80s and 90s, black San Franciscans abandoned their city the fastest, fleeing San Francisco for the East Bay suburbs and for their grandparents’ birthplaces in the US South. From nearly 14 percent in 1970, African American San Franciscans comprised just 3.9 percent of the city by the end of 2010.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Richard DeLeon, *Left Coast City: Progressive Politics in San Francisco, 1975-1991* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992); Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*; Issel and Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932*; John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Richard A. Walker, “An Appetite for the City,” ed. James Brook, Nancy J. Peters, and Chris Carlsson, *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> I identify three main historical waves of pressures to “clean up” the American city: 1. Urban Renewal 1950s-1970s; 2. Anti-Homelessness 1980-1990s; 3. Urban Revival, the era in which we see the intersection of privately fueled gentrification with state-led redevelopment through the late 1980s-2000s. On the effects of these pressures on politics, see James Brook, Chris Carlsson, and Nancy J. Peters, eds., *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1998); DeLeon, *Left Coast City: Progressive Politics in San Francisco, 1975-1991*; Stacey Murphy, “‘Compassionate’ Strategies of Managing Homelessness: Post-Revanchist Geographies in San Francisco,” *Antipode* 41, no. 2 (March 2009): 305–325.

<sup>15</sup> Calvin Welch, interview by Author, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> S. A. Ginwright and A. Akom, *African American Out-Migration: Initial Scan of National and Local Trends in Migration and Research on African Americans* (Mayors Office of Community Development Task Force on African American Out-Migration, 2008); San Francisco Mayor’s Task Force on African-American Out-Migration, *Report of the San Francisco Mayor’s Task Force on African-American Out-Migration* (San Francisco, 2009).

In the wake of the dot com crash of 2000 – more than fifty years after the first wave of urban renewal initiated the transformation of San Francisco’s central city<sup>17</sup> – contemporary redevelopment efforts in the Southeast took center stage for the better part of a decade. Under a reformed regime, city managers moved forward with the largest redevelopment project in San Francisco history. The race-class dynamics of this socio-spatial drama might be summed up like this: private investment boondoggles encountered earnest ‘liberal’ public planning processes – which were consistently harpooned by community activists. It all emerged out of a context of multi-decade disinvestment, deeply racialized inequality, and increasing violence in the community.

Ultimately, then, the conflict between the development aspirations of an apparently progressive city – a place in which economically progressive development policies occasionally clogged the flow of private development plans – and the imperatives of growth-focused urban capitalism were on display. San Francisco is often thought of as the nation’s left flank or “left coast.” And yet, it also has been at the heart of west-coast capitalization – which has depended upon the reconstruction of cities as a core accumulation process.<sup>18</sup>

That process has been masked at times by rhetorics that cloak development within environmentally progressive goals. Since the late 90s the talk among progressive urbanists across the country has centered around transit-friendly green development. Amid all the planning for the eco-cities of the future, it is hard to find a US city that can demonstrate a simultaneous commitment to retaining a working class presence while exploring ‘green’ development. This dissonance challenges the meaning of green; is a place sustainable if it only houses the upper middle class and the rich?

The San Francisco story reveals why this is a challenge. Significant elements of the San Francisco power structure, pushed by resilient activist movements, have tried to move a more inclusive – and thus less lucrative – development agenda. At the same time, efforts to build a socially just landscape have been muddied by the pressures of the real estate industry, the dynamics of racial exclusion, and class- and gender-based hierarchies.<sup>19</sup> Though the rhetoric and tools of development have evolved since the first postwar round of slum clearance in the 1950s and 60s, I will explore the ways in which the material impact of urban redevelopment may still be fundamentally about displacement, even in a left leaning city with strong activist involvement. Sustainability as a progressive narrative often eclipses social justice issues.

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<sup>17</sup> Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*; Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*.

<sup>18</sup> Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*, is particularly useful on this point from a historical perspective. Contemporarily, see David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*, Rev. ed., *Geographies of Justice and Social Transformation 1* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); Richard A. Walker, “The Boom and the Bombshell: The New Economy Bubble and the San Francisco Bay Area,” ed. Giovanna Vertova, *The Changing Economic Geography of Globalization*. (London: Routledge, 2006), 121–147.

<sup>19</sup> Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*; Karl Beitel, “The Transformation of San Francisco” (Univ of California, Davis, unpublished dissertation, 2003); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins Of The Urban Crisis : Race And Inequality In Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

## San Francisco in Context

The national race-class-development politics described here have played out locally in San Francisco in both typical and anomalous ways. The city's first passes at redevelopment, which began in the 1950s and picked up steam in the 60s, featured attempts to surgically remove "blighted" spaces that typically happened to be used and inhabited by working class communities of color. Disenfranchised San Francisco communities responded in a variety of ways, using legal maneuvers, political pressure, and civic protest to varying effect.

Nationally, the race-class – and gender – dynamics of the early community movements reflected the changing demography of the postwar city. Meanwhile, communities responded differently to these pressures. What came down as cold-hearted bulldozer politics in many places was absorbed as much-needed capital in another. Why this dissonance existed within one city – and within one ethnic 'community' – is one of the core questions of this study.

The story of Southeast San Francisco's transformation also fits into a larger narrative of US cities as they marched through socio-economic shifts from the decline of the 1930s and 40s and the concurrent rise of state-managed urban renewal programs and city coffers draining suburbanization from the 40s to the 60s. In the years that followed, increased economic globalization and domestic deindustrialization shrank the urban tax and job base nationwide.<sup>20</sup>

In that context, city leaders embarked on a multi-decade series of attempts to respond to the postwar "urban crisis" by repackaging "urbanness" to keep cities afloat economically. Cities were, more than ever, for sale.<sup>21</sup> The so-called Urban Renewal program began as a federally funded initiative, sweeping across US cities, with evictions and bulldozers as the hallmarks of change. In San Francisco, as elsewhere, citizen involvement emerged to challenge the bulldozer regime, with some significant victories. The overarching theme of the 1960s and 70s, however, was one of community displacement in the service of potential capital accumulation.<sup>22</sup>

The federal tap was later cinched, beginning with Nixon, and local governments sought new sources and types of funding. Eventually they settled on Tax Increment Financing and other creative schemes that side-stepped the trend of eliminating taxation for public services, a shift that picked up pace in the late 1970s. Many cities reemerged as wildly spectacular consumer paradises. Often they were simply re-packaged as cleaner, brighter, and free of the rat-infested brick and mortar – and often free of the previous residents – of the pre-WWII city.<sup>23</sup> For several decades residential districts that had been allowed to fall into disrepair were the prime targets.<sup>24</sup> In many cases, this repackaging was a desperate attempt to make

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<sup>20</sup> Beitel, "The Transformation of San Francisco."

<sup>21</sup> It wasn't that it was new to 'sell' the city – the story of urban boosterism is at least as old as the settlement of the west. The formal role of public money as a lever for development solidified with the rise of redevelopment agencies, and the scale of booster-politics shifted ever-larger, as financial practice broadened in scale from local to global markets and strategies.

<sup>22</sup> Susan F. Fainstein, Norman I. Fainstein, and P. Jefferson Armistead, "San Francisco: Urban Transformation and the Local State," in Susan F. Fainstein et al., eds., *Restructuring the City: The Political Economy of Urban Redevelopment* (New York: Longman, 1983), 202–244; Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*.

<sup>23</sup> John Hannigan, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Susan S. Fainstein et al., *Restructuring the City: The Political Economy of Urban Redevelopment* (New York: Longman, 1983); Jon C. Teaford, "Urban Renewal and Its Aftermath," *Housing Policy Debate* 11, no. 2 (2000):

the city attractive again to the white middle class, in the wake of decades of pro-suburbanization housing policies that ignited “white flight.” Because of the role of these policies, I prefer to call it a “white pull” – out of urban centers.<sup>25</sup>

Later, repelled by the gradual demise of the postwar suburban ideal and lured by re-fabricated post-industrial chic urban spaces, richer residents reclaimed American cities. Beginning in the late 1970s and 80s, abandoned industrial zones became the new cradle for urban uplift. Defunct warehouses and old factories, graveyards of the nation’s dying industrial productivity, were frequently transformed into cheap homes for artists that later became genteel sites of hip upper-class loft living.<sup>26</sup> There was an observable late-90s sheen to many inner cities – a sheen that included live-work lofts, a post-industrial warehouse aesthetic, a pastiche of faux-antique architectures, a preponderance of urban chain stores – and an ethnically paler clientele.

The white urban reclamation came at a time when public budgets were recurringly under attack, leaving the fate of many cities in the hands of the market.<sup>27</sup> This pattern wasn’t universal, though. In San Francisco, the rising ethnic population was not white, but Asian. At the same time, it was a time of significant white upperclass population inflow, such that the net increase was both Asian and wealthier white.

At the end of the chain of neighborhood displacement, the Southeast was the place where people ended up when all other options were exhausted and an early site for artists and musicians who were priced out of more central places. Still, the Southeast shared something in common with a few select urban neighborhoods nationwide. As the march towards gentrification permeated cities, there were important anomalies: neighborhoods like the South Bronx or West Oakland, which resisted the makeovers of the 70s and 80s. Amid the building boom, these anomalous places had suffered continued dis-investment by both private landlords and local governments, which exacerbated the effects of processes like redlining and middle-class abandonment that had been taking place for years.

While a gentrified city sprung up nearby, these places remained socially and geographically peripheral as they sprouted grass in abandoned lots, fed their populations on corner store fare as supermarket chains refused to invest, and saw crime statistics – and gun deaths – rise. In the 1990s, however, the pressures of urban transformation spilled over into these places as well, with city governments assisting real estate capitalists to make investments happen.

It turned out that these places had a lot in common with each other. Most significantly, they held the worst industrial contamination, the most violence, and, typically, the largest

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443–446; Rachel [1] Weber, “Extracting Value from the City: Neoliberalism and Urban Redevelopment,” *Antipode* 34 (July 2002): 519–540.

<sup>25</sup> Rachel Brahinsky, “Race and the City: The (Re)development of Urban Identity,” *Geography Compass* 5, no. 3 (March 2011): 144–153; Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996); Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, Johns Hopkins Studies in Urban Affairs (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City*, Globalization and Community v. 5 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*; *Hollow City: The Siege of San Francisco and the Crisis of American Urbanism* (London: Verso, 2000); Zukin, *Loft Living*.

<sup>27</sup> Jason Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology and Development in American Urbanism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Murphy, “‘Compassionate’ Strategies of Managing Homelessness: Post-Revanchist Geographies in San Francisco.”

population of African Americans within their metropolitan areas. Their transformation required a return to 1960s practices, in which local governments laid the groundwork for development, using powers of eminent domain or publicly backed finance packages to create a sense of stability for investors.

Theorizing such change as “third-wave gentrification,” geographers have helped explain the shifting fates of these once-anomalous spaces. In essence, it was a simple concept: until there was virtually nothing else left to easily gentrify, these places would be ignored by capitalists, part of what has been termed a “lumpengeography” or stagnant space of disinvestment.<sup>28</sup> When the politics of development shifted, and city governments became more willing to help private developers invest, they formed coalitions to push past fears of engaging with gang violence, toxic brownfields, and deeply entrenched poverty. In this theorization, third wave gentrification often brings ancillary, perhaps unintentional displacement of longtime low-income residents.<sup>29</sup>

As the third wave idea emerged, it was hailed as a new phenomenon in the annals of gentrification research.<sup>30</sup> And in the world of gentrification studies, perhaps it was. Yet, if we further historicize this sort of urban change, we can see that the first wave of urban renewal – beginning in the late 1950s – had a lot in common with what is now being theorized as gentrification. Abandoned neighborhoods (abandoned by capital, not by people) were targeted for rebuilding – but only with government intervention that made the investment seem safe.

## **Mayors, “Blight,” and Affordable Housing**

In San Francisco, the process of postwar urban change was shepherded by a series of development-eager mayors, from Warren Christopher in the 1950s to Brown in the 1990s (and, less successfully, through to Gavin Newsom in the 2000s). The lure of mayoral legacy-building matched well with the press of development capitalists eager to swell the value of their projects. Throughout, the Redevelopment Agency played the roles of planner, developer, and oftentimes, served as a foil to cover up the role of high officials in development projects.

The often-repeated story among the majority white and Asian city population is that African Americans were treated fairly well in San Francisco until World War II. The idea is that because their population was relatively tiny, blacks weren’t viewed as threatening to the larger society and were therefore either generally accepted or ignored. Indeed, before the war, at less than 1 percent of residents, African Americans, en masse, were not prominent as a cultural force or voting block.

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<sup>28</sup> Richard A. Walker, “Two Sources of Uneven Development Under Advanced Capitalism: Spatial Differentiation and Capital Mobility,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 10, no. 3 (October 1, 1978): 28–38.

<sup>29</sup> Jason Hackworth and Neil Smith, “The Changing State of Gentrification,” *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 92, no. 4 (November 2001): 464–477; Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology and Development in American Urbanism*; Amanda I. Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago’s West Side* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> For a great overview, see Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin K Wyly, *Gentrification* (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2008).

Although the number of racist incidents recorded was small, the rate—the number in relation to the population—was not. Albert Broussard’s finely detailed text *Black San Francisco* shows that the tiny black community wrestled with seemingly endless cases of discrimination in housing, work, and education.<sup>31</sup> Plus, prior to the war, white San Francisco already had a terrible track record in its treatment of racial and ethnic minorities. Violently enforced labor discrimination, and housing and businesses-district segregation against the Chinese and Japanese has been well documented. Both formal and informal practices converged to isolate racialized groups. For example, not only were Chinese businesses subject to planning code revisions that isolated them in select parts of town, but Euro-ethnic youth threw stones at Chinese kids who crossed neighborhood borders.<sup>32</sup>

Yet these events didn’t seem to significantly mar the city’s liberal/progressive reputation, which at that time had been built largely on its history as a maverick political center and its position at the forefront of labor and environmental struggles, not racial ones.

After the US Navy, Kaiser, Bechtel, and other shipyard managers recruited African Americans from the South to build World War II fighting ships and bombs, anti-black discrimination was suddenly much more visible. The black population leapt from around 4,800 in 1940 to more than 43,000 ten years later. A few thousand black newcomers settled in temporary war housing on Hunter’s Point Hill. A much larger group, around 12,000, settled in the Fillmore, which was one of the few established neighborhoods that would accept black tenants, partly because the neighborhood lacked racially restrictive leases (known as covenants), and because of the homes vacated by Japanese families sent off to internment camps.

When urban renewal plans emerged, the Fillmore was at the top of the list. The “blight” that was identified there and in the other racialized neighborhoods that the postwar redevelopment efforts targeted was just one prominent variation of a nationwide effort to restore land values in US central cities following the Great Depression and World War II. The racial and political overtones of the choices made – in terms of which neighborhoods would be targeted for change—set off decades of community response. What had been pitched nationally as “urban renewal” was informally re-christened by opponents, using the racial parlance of the times, as “Negro removal.”

Indeed, many redevelopment zones selected in San Francisco were working-class areas, often home to people of color, including the old produce market near the Embarcadero (now developed as the Golden Gateway), the South of Market (which was home to working-class single room occupancy hotel (SRO) dwellers and gay leather bars), the old war housing out in Bayview-Hunter’s Point, and two massive portions of the Fillmore/Western Addition, which by then was largely (but not entirely) African-American and Japanese.

City planners and mayors legally justified their claims to these spaces by naming them “blighted,” as the law prescribed, and called for urban reclamation in the name of the public

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<sup>31</sup> Albert S. Broussard, *Black San Francisco: the Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> On the Chinese, See Susan Craddock, *City of Plagues: Disease, Poverty, and Deviance in San Francisco* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: A Study of the Anti-Chinese Movements in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967). On housing discrimination against the Japanese see Lynne Horiuchi, “Object Lessons In Home Building Racialized Real Estate Marketing In San Francisco,” *Landscape Journal* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 61–82.

good.<sup>33</sup> The public that would benefit the most from these new land claims was a narrowly defined group. A downtown-government coalition emerged to promote a very targeted urban makeover.<sup>34</sup> The rise of business-class leaders as de facto urban planners was solidified through the formation of the Blyth-Zellerbach Committee and the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association (SPUR), which promoted targeted neighborhood revivals that emphasized demolition rather than preservation. Redevelopment czar M. Justin Herman, by all accounts both brilliant and autocratic, was the agency's most infamous leader. After Herman died in 1971, most of the agency's leaders were bureaucrats overseeing the details for successive mayors and developers; those who tried to exercise vision and leadership tended to leave in frustration.<sup>35</sup>

The Redevelopment Agency's early years (1950s and 60s) were marked by bulldozers, co-optation and desperate negotiations by communities at the bottom economic rungs. In response, the city saw the birth of neighborhood citizens movements that, while they didn't entirely transform redevelopment, continually pushed the bureaucracies that managed redevelopment toward something approximating 'socially-just development.' The 1970s brought court challenges that made a difference in people's lives. The chroniclers of those times have generally argued that most communities without capital were largely displaced and dispersed out of redevelopment zones.<sup>36</sup>

Even so, significant numbers of affordable housing complexes sprouted up in those zones after community pressure transformed the trajectory of development. Thus, in the 70s and 80s the San Francisco redevelopment process creakily transformed as housing advocates – rather than developers – forced themselves into the development war rooms. (The military metaphor is not lightly used – for the people experiencing displacement in US cities, redevelopment is felt quite literally as battle.)

With special complexity and irony, the city's first black mayor was elected in 1994 on promises to help communities of color. Mayor Willie Brown did push state-guided development of affordable housing forward and did hire people of color at unprecedented rates to city positions. And he is often credited for focusing on affordable housing. That's in part because by the 1990s liberal reformers and non-profits had taken hold of aspects of redevelopment, with increasing success in putting affordable housing at the center of the redevelopment agenda – and because their activism legally linked affordable development to new market-rate projects. Yet this happened in part because of the flush dot-com economy of the Bay Area, which funded development in a climate in which reformers boldly forced more dollars to affordability requirements than ever before.<sup>37</sup>

Brown was therefore good at building affordable housing because, not in spite of, his success at pushing through a high-volume for-profit development agenda. His tenure was defined by events at both ends of the development spectrum. He was proud of the wide

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<sup>33</sup> The definition of blight has changed over the years. Blight in California is defined in the state's Health and Safety Code in subsections 33030-33039. See *California Community Redevelopment Law, Health and Safety Code*, n.d.

<sup>34</sup> Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*.

<sup>35</sup> Informant#2, Fillmore resident, interview by Author; Informant#3, Fillmore resident, interview by Author.

<sup>36</sup> Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*; Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*.

<sup>37</sup> Lance Williams and Chuck Finnie, "Willie Brown Inc. How S.F.'s Mayor Built a City Based on 'Juice' Politics," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 29, 2001.; Asian Neighborhood Design, *San Francisco Affordable Housing: A Historical Analysis Mapping Project* (San Francisco, CA: Asian Neighborhood Design, Community Planning Program, January 2008).



boulevard along the Embarcadero that turned the dilapidated, earthquake damaged double-decker freeway into a public paradise, and the stunningly beautiful re-make of City Hall. But his era was equally marked by the displacement of San Francisco's racialized working class. Displacement – direct and secondary – made way for a new kind of city that included ever-higher residential rents paired with the disappearance of the best paying working class jobs.

## The Politics of Development

The Brown development legacy, which is explored further in later chapters, offers a window through which to understand why and how urban development happens. Significantly, it's a lens through which to investigate what role politics – as opposed to an ideal-type of pure economics – plays in shaping the geography of cities and of people's lives. In this study I argue that urban politics plays a constitutive rather than reflective role in the development of cities.

Scholars of the city working in a range of disciplines—geography, sociology, history, urban studies, planning—have attempted to make sense of the relationship between urban economics and urban politics.<sup>38</sup> These debates are explored further in Chapter 2. For now it is worth stating that the study of geography – that is, where things are and *how they came to be there* – is both fundamental to politics and fundamentally political.<sup>39</sup> Cities, therefore, embody an ongoing fight for the right to use space. As others have shown, those who aren't squeezed out by the cost of housing and shrinking middle-wage job base are angling for their “right to the city,” as French theorist Henri Lefebvre put it.<sup>40</sup> I take that to mean the right to remain in urban spaces – as well as the right or capacity to have agency and power to shape those places.

The story of Southeast San Francisco reveals the spatial entailments of this constant struggle among people and groups for a sense of power, a sense of belonging or control. Though there are economic relationships, causes and consequences to these fights, they are not solely economic struggles – they are politically and culturally shaped as well. The story of development in San Francisco is thus a multi-layered and multi-scalar story, bringing together the racial economy, the socio-geography of an isolated place, and the political rattlings of a restive metropolis.

“Politics” and political power do not belong only to a single class of people – or only to those with control over capital. My understanding of politics is broad, incorporating “organized and unorganized protests, riots, grassroots organizing, intellectual advocacy and

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<sup>38</sup> David Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism,” *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 71, no. 1 (1989): 3–17; John R. Logan and Harvey Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: the Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*; Clarence N Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

<sup>39</sup> Many important works on the production of (urban) space as a political-economic phenomenon base their analysis on Harvey's classic text: David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>40</sup> Cf Henri Lefebvre, “The Right to the City,” in *Writings on Cities*, ed. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, 1st ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 63–181; Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003).

engaged journalism, electoral politics, policy making, and litigation.”<sup>41</sup> In San Francisco, these and other fora are venues through which politics are enacted – but nearly all political roads there lead back to land development. Following the growth machine theorists of the 80s and 90s, my project emphasizes both the importance of real estate, the push-pull of capitalists and activists who argue for use over profit; from regime theory I highlight the centrality of alliances between business and political interests in spawning urban change.<sup>42</sup>

This approach differs somewhat from some important thinkers in geography whose work has influenced my project. Foundational critical geographers like David Harvey and Neil Smith have argued for a relatively mechanistic, economically-driven understanding of urban growth, which views capitalist growth as the central urban force, around which social movements evolve, and through which cities compete with each other, stirring growth.<sup>43</sup> It is a view that centralizes class struggle as a key force – yet politics, in this view, is a reaction to capital. Political forces have the potential to push society in new directions, but do not constitute the foundation of cities; that role belongs to the economy, highlighted with the ascendance of neoliberal urban governance since the 1980s.<sup>44</sup>

In San Francisco, land development has been absolutely central in shaping socio-political hierarchies. This is not to say that the fights for worker’s rights, gay liberation, or environmental protections (to give just three examples of strong San Francisco social movements) have not been important in the political development of this town; they have. But in each of those movements, as in many others, urban change and land use have been key struggles.

The centrality of development explains a lot of this city’s most infamous people and traditions. Here the pro-growth push of capitalism has been intensely nurtured and expanded. At the same time serious challenges to its hegemony are plotted and staged. These push-pull development dynamics are largely to blame for San Francisco’s reputation as both wealthy *and* progressive. One of the many effects in San Francisco of the development wars has been the dramatic spiking of real estate costs and waves of displacement of the working class and of communities of color. One red flag that warns of inequalities in San Francisco’s political climate is the black flight phenomenon that was first recognized in the 1990s.<sup>45</sup>

Conversations with residents and pastors who lived through the redevelopment fights from the 60s to the 90s uncover something of a community-scale existential crisis about the speed at which black San Franciscans have been leaving the city – and not returning. Black flight began in 1970, and is blamed for gutting the city’s black cultural and economic base. Many black San Franciscans who remained in the new millennium told me that they

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas J Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2008), xxiii.

<sup>42</sup> Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes : the Political Economy of Place*; Stone, *Regime Politics*.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*.; Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*.

<sup>44</sup> Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology and Development in American Urbanism*.

<sup>45</sup> Sarah Erlich, “The Disappearance of Black San Franciscans: 1970-2010” (Undergraduate Honor’s Thesis, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley, 2010); Christina Jackson, “Black Flight from San Francisco: How Race, Community and Politics Shape Urban Policy” (Master’s Thesis in Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2010).

despaired of any deep or lasting connection to a place that has nevertheless been their family home for decades.<sup>46</sup>

In the 1990s and again in the 2000s a mayoral task force convened to look at what some call the “black exodus” – or, more clinically, the out-migration – and its link to larger processes of migration and urban flux. This is a story that has played out in many northern cities since the 1970s, when black families, 30 years after their families had flooded out of the south, turned their backs on the northern central cities for more affordable suburban fringes.<sup>47</sup> The speed of San Francisco’s African-American dispersal, however, has been unmatched nationally. This dispersal, and the persistence of the problem over time, undermines the city’s wildly progressive image.

There are multiple causes for the demographic shift – but there’s no question that the real estate environment, and redevelopment, have played a leading role in creating the region’s dramatic inequalities. The march outward began in earnest after the Fillmore was destroyed, and it has continued in spurts and waves with successive displacements in the South of Market (SOMA), the Mission, and throughout the eastern side of the city, as dot-com era evictions shoved populations of color to the fringes. Thus, the story of forced urban migrations is directly linked with fights over the built environment of cities.

Fears about black flight have intersected with the other major demographic shift of recent decades. In California – which once was part of Mexico, after all – the Latino presence is nearly ubiquitous and as the dot-com boom re-cast the Latino Mission District, some moved on to the Southeast. More dramatically, as the second wave of dot-com wealth sweeps the city, San Francisco is rapidly becoming an Asian American place, and will probably be the first major US city with an Asian American majority before the Lennar development in the Southeast is completed. Though San Francisco has always been home to Pacific Rim populations, those groups were never the majority. Yet in 2010 nearly a third of the city was Asian, primarily Chinese-American. These three demographic stories meet each other in the Southeast, where blacks had been dominant politically since the 70s and where Asians are, bit by bit, coming to social and political prominence in the new millennium.

## **Structure of the Dissertation**

Ultimately, this work seeks to explain the character and trajectory of a community that was tucked out of sight for many years. When development plans in the 1990’s revealed that the poor, industrially polluted, and violence-ridden neighborhood would play a starring role in the city’s growth plans for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the story of Bayview-Hunter’s Point gained tremendous contemporary relevance. Still, its history has not been well explained.

My project draws on the methods and idioms of historiography, formal and informal key-participant interviews (including life histories in some cases, and multiple interviews in other cases), and an in-depth study of collections in several San Francisco Bay Area

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<sup>46</sup> This is somewhat of a California problem more generally – Carey McWilliams, Joan Didion and others have written about how Californians don’t root, even after a long time. Cf Carey McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

archives.<sup>48</sup> In analyzing this fertile store of data, I connect the richly detailed narratives of people's lives to processes of social and urban change. I contextualize these connections through attention to three historical moments – the production of segregation, urban renewal and its discontents, and the 1990s redevelopment revival – that have defined the shape of the racial-political development landscape of Southeast San Francisco.

By recognizing these moments as crucial to a coherent story of Southeast urban change, I offer an intervention into the broader scholarly dialogue about the changing cultural dynamics of economic processes. Contemporary urban development is largely determined by the flows of international finance capital and boardroom investment decisions.<sup>49</sup> Yet, I argue that there is much on the local scale that influences the scope and texture of community change.<sup>50</sup> These local stories are not incidental; they tell us about the way structural processes work in and through everyday lives. How this plays out in a disinvested neighborhood of color – a place that is nested amid extreme real estate-driven urban wealth – is a story that has yet to be told in this way.

In brief, this dissertation unravels and reveals connections between several moments in time. I first situate the reader in the history of American urban redevelopment and its relationship to racial formation, offering a theoretical framework that links race, space and political economy in Chapter 2. I take the literature on the production of race and link it to the production of urban space. Best understood as a process – *racialization* – rather than as a fixed identity with measurable traits,<sup>51</sup> race is a category embedded in economic and social experiences. The word should not conjure up visions of biology, but of political economy, or what some call the “racial economy,”<sup>52</sup> which I view as the layered ways that race and economics are woven together through everyday practices and experiences, and which are reproduced through practices like segregation in residence and employment, among other things. I situate this racial economy within a history of urban change.

Then, in Chapter 3, I look at the history of Southeast San Francisco going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the long industrial and working class history of the place before turning to the production of racial segregation in the Bayview-Hunter's Point of the 1940s and 50s through blockbusting, restrictive housing covenants, and white flight. I show here how the histories of industrial use and working-class residential patterns have produced the politics of isolation that we see today. The racial dynamics produced during the war era exacerbate this – but did not create it. I also highlight the long-standing presence of Asians – mostly Chinese and Japanese immigrants – in the racial hierarchies of San Francisco and the

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<sup>48</sup> These archives included the Bancroft Library, the San Francisco Public Library History Room, the California Historical Society, the Bayview/ Anna E. Waden Public Library, as well as several small private collections.

<sup>49</sup> Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology and Development in American Urbanism*; Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism.”

<sup>50</sup> The scale debates in the field of geography have been theoretically useful in developing my thinking here. See Kevin R. Cox, *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997); N. Smith, “Contours of a Spatialized Politics: Homeless Vehicles and the Production of Geographical Scale,” *Social Text* 33, no. 1992 (1992): 54–81.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>52</sup> David Wilson, “Introduction: Racialized Poverty in U.S. Cities: Toward a Refined Racial Economy Perspective,” *The Professional Geographer* 61, no. 2 (2009): 139.

Southeast itself. I argue that such politics are relational, and the triangulation of groups against each other is a key dynamic.

In Chapter 4 I unfold the story of the development-related activism of the 1960s and 1970s – first in the Fillmore District where redevelopment earned its ugliest reputation. As I’ve described, this process dislocated tens of thousands of people. In this chapter I also argue that this is a history that produced an important element of the activist base we still see today. The affordable housing movement was largely born in this era, and its lessons were applied in places like the Southeast.

I head back to the Southeast in Chapter 5, where women’s activism brought \$40 million worth of affordable housing to Hunter’s Point Hill, when no other pressures were successful. In this chapter I tell a largely untold story of community success, and explore the gendered dynamics of racial fights in the 60s and 70s. I focus here on Elouise Westbrook as the central figure in a small social movement that teetered between insistence, accommodation and incorporation, but which ultimately failed to convince city leaders to take the larger steps needed to truly shift the race-class dynamics of Southeast San Francisco.

Finally, highlighting the complicated role of Willie Brown, Jr., as a black mayor in a majority white and Asian town, I look in Chapter 6 at the redevelopment revival of the 1990s, which took place amid the gentrification of the dot-com boom – and which led to the ascendance of a single corporation over the future of San Francisco’s largest development project. I return to look at the finance behind redevelopment and the challenges facing the contemporary development regime, even as activists have reshaped it over the years. That last chapter closes by looking forward towards the implications and promises of development politics and community survival in the Southeast in the coming years, in the context of the death of redevelopment agencies levied in 2011 by California Governor Jerry Brown. With a single corporation emerging as dominant over a project that could increase the city’s population by ten percent, the reforms of recent decades in the city’s Redevelopment Agency are called into question.

## **Arguments: History, Race, Land, and Stories**

Through these narratives, I build a set of arguments that offer several contributions to the field, starting with the focus on a place that, in all of the dominant literature on San Francisco, has been an afterthought or a footnote, despite its significance on multiple levels. It is a site of a unique race-class politics, the nexus of the city’s industrial history, a place where assumptions about liberalism in San Francisco are upended, and it will be a pivotal site for new development and economic activity for the next twenty years.

This is a story that examines the changing role of the state in development and helps explain the public-private nature of the next wave of urban change.<sup>53</sup> The agency that citizens engage with today is not the urban renewal promoter of the 1960s, yet surprisingly some of the dynamics of ‘60s remain at the forefront. The story of the Southeast also offers an argument for the central role of race and gender in development politics. These axes of difference matter not simply because they have been sidelined in much of the San Francisco literature, and in much critical geographic work on cities – but because seeing these

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<sup>53</sup> Cf Hackworth and Smith’s “third wave,” described above: Hackworth and Smith, “The Changing State of Gentrification.”

dimensions of the human story of the Southeast changes the shape of our understanding of the community's past, and its potential. This becomes clearer when race (and gender, though less prominently) is seen in relation to geography.<sup>54</sup>

This project also argues that land development is central to the political process in cities, and looks at the implications this has for power building for various groups. This conversation is couched in an analysis of the changing labor dynamics of the city, with the rise of white-collar jobs (and their attendant geographies) outpacing the fall of industrial labor; key, of course, is the relationship between these labor market shifts and the demographic changes mentioned above. Throughout, this project looks at the ways in which developers embed in the political system and the ways that residents, church leaders, and other groups attempt to marshal power of their own.

Most broadly, I highlight the importance of history and storytelling in shaping contemporary urban change. I use storytelling to draw a narrative that exposes the human experience of the structural forces of land development and economic change. Without these (so far, untold) tales, I argue that the story of the current Bayview-Hunter's Point redevelopment quandary is unmoored. At the same time, the stories of earlier development fights have a way of shaping contemporary development discourses in significant ways; these historical memes are rooted in the social histories of the first wave of redevelopment. My interdisciplinary approach, combining the tools of historiography with political economic analysis and extensive interviews, allows me to bring out the human story of urban development and to highlight the role of memory in present day political struggles over space.<sup>55</sup>

One of the overarching analytical questions here is how, in the context of public narratives of growth and change, a community can be living a narrative of decline. By drawing together these important human geographic themes, this dissertation asks how this unexpected history shifts our sense of possibility for the future of Bayview and the city at large.

## Are You Listening?

It was late evening at the Grace Tabernacle Church on San Francisco's Oakdale Avenue, in the heart of Southeast San Francisco, just up the hill from the Cornerstone Baptist Church where Eloise Westbrook was eulogized. The brightness in the main hall contrasted sharply with the dimly lit street outside, where it was, most nights, very quiet. Purple banners inside proclaimed an allegiance to Jesus, but the speaker that night, in the early 2000s, was a

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<sup>54</sup> On race's co-constitution with other vectors, like class and gender, see Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).; On identity and place I borrow from Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).; On the legal and social construction of racial exclusion, see Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, Rev. and updated, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s.*; On the intertwined legal history of property and concepts of whiteness in America see Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1707–1791.

<sup>55</sup> Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*; McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*.

mustachioed Islamic minister, dressed sharply in a crisp beige suit and sporting carefully coiffed, slicked down hair. Minister Christopher Muhammad, who oversaw a Bayview-based Nation of Islam school, spoke energetically, and he had the attention of his audience. He called out to them, speaking in religious metaphors about a local development struggle. “Are you with me?” he asked, in a loud well-trained voice that vibrated through the room, “Are you listening?” They responded continuously: “That’s right, uh huh, you tell it!”

The crowd, an ethnically mixed, but predominantly African American group, was gathered for a weekly political meeting about a development proposal that sought to dramatically transform their community. It’s fair to say that this was nothing like the meetings of the group’s adversaries in City Hall, where bureaucrats follow Robert’s Rules of Order and can meet for hours without showing much emotion. This group, by contrast, swayed and rocked to the lilting of Minister Christopher’s words, which briskly compared a local developer – and the majority of the local and federal state apparatus – to the devil.

The minister, however, did not limit himself to Biblical or religious metaphors (and, perhaps in a gesture to the church that’s hosting the meeting, never mentioned the Koran), devoting a significant portion of his sermon to explaining his theory of political power.. The war over development in Bayview Hunter’s Point – the neighborhood where the church was located – eventually seemed not so far removed from insider political deals that extend from City Hall all the way to Washington, DC. It’s the kind of vision that might lead a small social movement to feel powerless. At the same time, he inspired those in the room to believe in their own strength. At the end of the night, attendees resolved to push forward with a ballot initiative that would mandate stricter affordable housing requirements on a major neighborhood development project that is moving forward under the auspices of the city Redevelopment Agency.

With that moment of inspiration the minister linked his present day struggle with the conflictive historical narratives of the neighborhood he was fighting for. It was a place that had struggled with building local power, as the politics of racial isolation and geographic happenstance circumscribed neighborhood struggles. In the next chapter we look at the ways that race and space intercept and interact through such struggles, and further situate the Southeast story in US urban history.

## Chapter 2:

### Race, Space, and Making the City

“[T]he livability of the world is bound up with a human geography story that is not presently just, yet geography discloses a workable terrain through which respatialization can be and is imagined and achieved.”

–Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*<sup>1</sup>

This chapter unpacks the puzzle of race and space, offering an overview of the history of urban redevelopment in the US, while examining three of the central concepts in this dissertation: the spatiality of urban politics, the spatiality of race, and the centrality of capital to both of these tendencies. It is interesting simply to study the politics or economics of urban development; however, the underlying contention of this chapter is that it is even more meaningful to study the ways in which such processes impact everyday human experience.<sup>2</sup> Uncovering the intersections between race and space also leads us to the socio-spatial processes that perpetuate segregation and racism, offering an important layer of social meaning to the study of urban change.

The history surveyed here provides context for the narrative to come on Southeast San Francisco, in which the dialectical relationship between racialization and spatial production is evident. Situated within the trajectory of US cities more broadly, the Southeast is a case in which capital flows have long intersected with racialized urban planning ideologies.

Ultimately this chapter builds on a set of analytics that lead to one core argument: that race and space are entwined through processes of urban change, exemplified by the history of urban redevelopment. First, I contend that race is a socially constructed identity, one that is deeply intertwined with class. Next, I show how the racialization of people and the development of urban space function dialectically, using a historically situated story about urban change in the postwar period. Given the way that race and space are integrated, I then argue that a critical geographic reading of urban spatial change in the US that views capital flows as central must also incorporate racialization, which is not simply displaced experience of class.<sup>3</sup>

This theory emerges organically from the national history of redevelopment in the post-war period. It has a unique twist in San Francisco, which offers a vision of what the next phase of critical geographic literature on US urbanism ought to look like. Though the lion’s share of literature on race and cities focuses on the post-WWII story of the black-white binary, San Francisco has long been a multi-ethnic place. Just as Japanese exclusion in the Fillmore District was central to San Francisco’s first wave of redevelopment in the 1950s,

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<sup>1</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxi.

<sup>2</sup> This contention builds from three main texts. Cf Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*, ed. Unesco (Paris: Unesco, 1980), 305–345; Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Adrian Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Toronto, Ont: Between the Lines, 2007); Allan Pred, *The Past Is Not Dead: Facts, Fictions, and Enduring Racial Stereotypes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*. 1st ed. (Great Britain: Routledge, 2000).



the presence of Chinese, Southeast Asian and Latino immigrants in Southeast San Francisco today complicates the dominant Chicago- or Detroit-style US narrative. It is impossible to deal with the history of the American city without recognizing the role of these communities, which has sometimes followed a pattern of the “racial triangulation of space,” identified by Clement Lai.<sup>4</sup> This triangulation, in which racial groups are played off of each other in the consolidation of power and capital, is relevant to the new demography of American cities more broadly.

The chapter is divided into two parts. Part I builds the theoretical apparatus and lexicon needed to discuss these questions. Part II places that theory in its appropriate historical/empirical context.

Part I, “Making Meaning,” opens with an overview of some of the core issues shaping the US experience of race and urban change, using the example of urban redevelopment history to help investigate spatial change and racialization in San Francisco’s development politics. I discuss and define race/ racialization and reflect on the way that language and identity intersect. Next I bring in concepts of relationality and triangulation, which are important for understanding racial formation generally, and are especially useful in contexts like the Southeast, where racial groups have been pitted against each other. The final two sections begin to do the work of linking concepts, first linking race with class, and then connecting what I call *race-class* with urban space.

Part II, “Making History,” begins to weave this theory through urban history. First I look at the historiography relevant to a broad conversation about race and urban space. I then hone in on the history of redevelopment as a tool for change in US cities, and then focus on the way that the public and private spheres overlap and interact in promoting development. Finally, I conclude in a section that comes back to the guiding questions of this chapter. The development, or redevelopment, of urban spaces is not responsible for the creation of racial ideologies or racism per se. Cities are, however, unique spaces of both racial mixing and racial segregation, and are therefore key to the perpetuation and re-formulation of racisms.

Throughout I insist that the way we arrange our cities is deeply connected to the value we place on specific bodies and communities and that the American experience of race is fundamentally connected to its experience of spatial boundaries and change.<sup>5</sup> Urban racial segregation, which is once again expanding, has a devastating impact on health and well-being, defining racialized access to education, employment, and civic space.<sup>6</sup> To live a life circumscribed by ghettoized space directly impacts what we may coolly call life chances, and what Gilmore more bluntly and precisely calls “premature death.”<sup>7</sup> The results of urban

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<sup>4</sup> Lai, “The Racial Triangulation of Space.”

<sup>5</sup> George Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape,” *Landscape Jnl.* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 10–23; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; L. Pulido, “Reflections on a White Discipline,” *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (2002): 42–49.

<sup>6</sup> John Logan and Brian Stults, *Racial and Ethnic Separation in the Neighborhoods: Progress at a Standstill* (American Communities Project, Russell Sage Foundation, December 14, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography,” *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (February 2002): 28.

segregation, then, play out as racialized communities face increased exposure to industrial pollution, everyday violence, and limited access to things like quality food and health care.<sup>8</sup> The puzzle of racial inequality, and the economic order in which it is embedded, are thus fundamentally spatial questions.<sup>9</sup> Disentangling the racisms embedded in the landscape thus poses a challenge to existing power relations that have created a segregated and stratified America.

## ***Part I. Making Meaning***

### **“Race” and the Re-Making of Cities**

The notion of “race” is a socio-political construct whose meaning has been re-formed and defined in the context of urban development processes.<sup>10</sup> In turn, core definitions and understandings of the “city” have racial roots that feed evolving understandings of urban-ness. These reworked racial meanings are not mere socio-linguistic maneuvers. The political economies of race and cities – that is the political and economic processes that create them both – impact each other *to material effect* in everyday-people’s lives. The economic and social consequences of racism are thus linked to urban form.

State-led redevelopment demonstrates this relationship in the American context. The rise of government-funded redevelopment agencies and the era of “Urban Renewal” that followed World War II initiated what might be called a “Great Reverse Migration” of working class communities of color<sup>11</sup> away from core city neighborhoods, which were redefined as office and commercial consumption spaces for the upper and upper-middle class. In later years Urban Renewal was renamed and restructured in many cities, and has, contradictorily, brought both working-class displacement and new waves of affordable housing. Like any tool of social or spatial transformation, it is shaped by the politics of those who use it.

Redevelopment alone has not been responsible for the racial transformation of cities. It is just one of several tools of spatial politics – one that both responded to segregation and reproduced segregated communities. In later years, gentrification remade cities through cycles of private purchase and development, often facilitated by government policies. Gentrification created new migrations, sending racialized communities first to the urban fringes, and then on to more distant suburbs. Suburbanization and broad-scale housing

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<sup>8</sup> George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Pulido, “Reflections on a White Discipline”; Julie Sze, *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> McKittrick and Woods, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*; Pulido, “Reflections on a White Discipline”; Richard Schein, “Introduction,” *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (February 2002): 1–5.

<sup>10</sup> I am not arguing that race is solely an urban phenomenon. Rather, I am evaluating the dynamics of race-making in cities. Rural processes are of course historically important to look at. In a longer history that looks at racial formation under American slavery, this would be an essential narrative element.

<sup>11</sup> “People of color” refers to African American, Latino, Asian, Native American and other non-white groups who use the term as a way to claim “color” as powerful and self-defined rather than as abnormal or other.

bubble economics are key race-space processes as well. These patterns have all played into the phenomenon of black flight away from northern and western cities.

Redevelopment is notable because it brings together multiple actors and institutions; both governments and private real estate players participate in negotiating spatial rights with citizens as development plans are strategized. I'm focusing on it here, of course, because redevelopment is one of the central relationships through which the neighborhood-government relationship has been mediated in Southeast San Francisco for a century. In San Francisco, redevelopment has been a key node through which housing, industrial re-use, and urban finance come together through the enactment of urban racial politics.

Redevelopment's negotiations take place in the context of capitalist real estate markets, which provide continual pressure for land values to grow.<sup>12</sup> While postwar redevelopment has been government-managed, private market players have always been involved as planners, partners, and drivers. The public-private partnership fetish of the 1980s and 90s was only new in its technical form – the fusing of public and capital-interests is an old story.

This multi-layered process intersects quite explicitly with the racialization of people: the process by which we define people as members of racial groups. Geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore ultimately defines racism itself as a spatial process, calling it “a death-dealing displacement of difference into hierarchies that organize relations within and between the planet's sovereign political territories.”<sup>13</sup> It is thus a set of relationships between both people and spaces.

Here I explore in broad strokes the meaning of race, the relationship between race and class, and between race and space before turning to the history of redevelopment nationally and in San Francisco.

## Racialization

Proponents of biological racism insist that racial categories reveal *inherent, genetically determined* differences in capacity and ability between people. Biological racism holds that a person's color or shape automatically tells us something about her talents and skills. The ideology of biologically based racial purity and racial difference permeates American society, a relic of racialized slavery and colonialism's racial hierarchies. Racial essentialists, often following the ideas of Charles Murray and others,<sup>14</sup> argue for a hierarchy of races – a

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<sup>12</sup> Robert A Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003); Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*; Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> The chain of logic here for Gilmore's assertion is easy to follow: lack of access to decent jobs leads to the many health challenges of poverty: stress is increased, gang activity and its related deaths increase, illicit drug sales increase, and access to necessities like health care is decreased. All of this leads to a higher death rate among certain groups. Thus: “premature death.” See Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).; On “death dealing,” see Gilmore, “Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference,” 28. Gilmore borrows “fatal coupling” from Stuart Hall.

<sup>14</sup> Richard J Herrnstein and Charles A Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994); J. Philippe Rushton, *Race, Evolution, and Behavior: A Life History Perspective*, 2nd special abridged ed. (Port Huron, MI: Charles Darwin Research Institute, 2000).

kind of “white solipsism”<sup>15</sup> that elevates whiteness, denigrates blackness and is skeptical about brown and yellow, which are perceived to be in-between black and white.

Scientifically, however, racial categories have long been dismissed as invalid. Human capacity, values and worth cannot be linked to physical features like nose or eye shape or skin tone. In research forums and academic scholarship across disciplinary boundaries, race is understood to be a symbolic category *produced through political and social processes* and defined through historical, geographic, legal, class, and gender relationships.<sup>16</sup> Our idea of what it means to be white, for example, did not emerge out of anybody’s womb – it was created through relationships and practices of power that, over time, enforced and reinforced separation of people based on appearance.

These days the rejection of scientific racial claims is commonplace in academia. “The consensus among most scholars in fields such as evolutionary biology, anthropology, and other disciplines is that racial distinctions fail on all three counts — that is, they are not genetically discrete, are not reliably measured, and are not scientifically meaningful,” writes the American Psychological Association.<sup>17</sup> Among the general public however, there’s no question that racial boundaries are employed to both divide and unite. Race is socially and politically treated as a solid, perhaps unchanging, and highly meaningful human trait that is believed to have a scientific root. Because of this, race cannot be ignored or erased. *So although race is not biologically determined, racialization remains a social fact.* That is: race’s culturally defined memes are a reality of everyday life, kept alive via racism, on the one hand, and through cultural pride and alliances, on the other.

That’s why I argue that abandoning the language of race entirely, as some have suggested, doesn’t work – at least not yet. Without conceding that race is biological, we still need to use racial categories to explain and understand not only ‘race’s’ malleability but also its relationship to the urban. Until we develop a language that hints at the malleability of racial concepts, racial discursive constructs are still necessary to engage with real-world urban geographies and power relations.<sup>18</sup>

Thinking about race in terms of “racialization” has been popularized by Omi and Winant,<sup>19</sup> who use the terms racialized and racialization to refer to a historical/political

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<sup>15</sup> As defined by Adrienne Rich: “white solipsism – to think, imagine and speak as if whiteness described the world.” Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), cited in Ula Taylor, “The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis,” *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (November 1, 1998): 234.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas F Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, 1st Schocken paperback ed., Sourcebooks in Negro History (New York: Schocken Books, 1965); Haney-López, *White by Law*; James C. King, *The Biology of Race* (University of California Press, 1981); Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*; A. Smedley and B. D Smedley, “Race as Biology Is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem Is Real: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives on the Social Construction of Race,” *American Psychologist* 60 (2005): 16–26.

<sup>17</sup> Smedley and Smedley, “Race as Biology Is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem Is Real.”

<sup>18</sup> As Bonilla-Silva argues, to entirely toss the racial lexicon could overly emphasize the ways in which race has been used to take power away from racialized groups, perhaps unwittingly erasing from racial historiography the work of people and institutions that have worked to build power using race as a unifier. See Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation,” *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 3 (June 1997): 465–480. On the other hand, for the case against retaining the word “race,” because of the danger of the reification of outmoded conceptualizations, see Loic Wacquant, “For An Analytic of Racial Domination,” *Political Power and Social Theory* 11 (1997): 221–234.

<sup>19</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*.

process by which the project and practice of “race” is naturalized and reified. More simply, Omi and Winant argue that racial categories are “created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed.”<sup>20</sup> Race is made and re-made; it is not a static thing, in and of itself. It is a process – a verb, rather than a noun. Thus, where possible I use ‘racialization’ to emphasize the processual and changing nature of race, without erasing it.

What does racialization look like? Consider, for example, the social patterns that emerged through colonialism, in which pale-faced Europeans characterized indigenous communities as members of an inferior social order, largely identified through appearance. Darker skin tone, highlighted by clothing and cultural traits, were attached to ideas of inferiority, and justifications for genocide.<sup>21</sup> Thus embedded with notions of indelible status, racial inferiority justified ongoing discrimination long after the bloodiest eras of Indian genocide were over.

The same process took place under American slavery, in which physical characteristics defined socio-economic status.<sup>22</sup> Long after abolition, black Americans largely still face a social order that views them as inferior. This status is parlayed into discrimination in employment, education and other arenas. Such discrimination then produces the imagined inequality: persistently poor schooling enables notions of intellectual inferiority, for example.<sup>23</sup> What I have described here is a dialectic between social position and physical appearance. Through this historical process, “race” develops indelibility. This is the basic pattern, which is then further reified through legal battles and other social processes.

Later in this chapter I discuss the dynamics of everyday practices that sediment our ideas about people and groups, but the central point is that once patterns are set, they can be very difficult to unwind – and the world of labor, with its hierarchies that dictate access to resources, and with its daily repetition, plays a major role in cementing our concepts. Thus, following racialized slavery, US labor practices that retained high-paying jobs for “white” people daily reinforced the racist notions of the past – keeping them ever-present.<sup>24</sup> The role of geography, of space and place, has been absolutely central in these processes, as should become clear.

## Relationality and Triangulation

In addition to its geographic and historic traits, racialization is inherently relational: that is, one race is defined and persists only in relationship to other races. As geographer Laura Barraclough puts it, “Race is an inherently relational and ongoing social construction, in that a racial identity category only has meaning through constant rearticulation of what it is not;

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>21</sup> Charles C Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Gossett, *Race*; David R. Roediger, *How Race Survived US History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (London ; New York: Verso, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> The central relationship here is between labor and identity. In her study on gender and labor Ruth Milkman shows how the patterns of history create deep grooves in society that are difficult to remove; in her case study, women prove their capacity en masse within male-dominated industries, yet still face discrimination. Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> David R Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

that is, ‘the other,’ which varies with time and place.” Barraclough cites Doreen Massey, who explains that, “ ‘Identities are forged in and through relations (which include non-relations, absences, and hiatuses). In consequence they are not rooted or static, but mutable ongoing productions.’ ”<sup>25</sup>

Whiteness, for example, like its purported opposite blackness, is not a *de facto* social category. Whiteness is an ideology and practice that evolved out of the same colonial and slave-holding histories mentioned above. Whiteness was then further crystallized in the US as Euro-immigrant groups, from Irish to Italians and eventually Jews, joined the “ranks” of white Americans through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> It was a racial designation that was confirmed and validated through the American legal system, and which acts as a tool of wealth stratification.<sup>27</sup>

To fully grasp the dynamics of race in cities, then, involves acknowledging the role of white racialization in relation to the dynamics of ghettoized groups of color. All-white neighborhoods are, after all, just as *segregated* as all-Chinese ones, though people rarely talk about it that way. In part this makes sense, because of the history of white supremacy, white people have been able to choose their living spaces, creating “enclaves” rather than being forced to live in “ghettos.” Yet, the refusal to name “white spaces” as segregated also obfuscates the real lived history of racial division that takes place across landscapes.

Whiteness is typically assumed to be the universal norm in the political realm as well. In contemporary San Francisco, for example, there is typically a lot of talk about ethnic solidarity amongst Chinese politicians – yet few talk about, or even seem to wonder about, blocs of white voters or white-ethnic solidarity. Even in a city that is more and more dominated by Asians (primarily Chinese), whiteness is still seems to act as Audre Lorde’s “mythical norm,” the invisible standard against which all others are judged, and is thus barely acknowledged in the dominant discourses.<sup>28</sup>

White is the unspoken norm setting up a contrast between normal/mainstream and ethnic/other. Because of this, the idea that so-called white people have ethnicity, have culture, have roots, is obscured. The mythical white norm is nationless, but all-powerful. The myth is perpetuated by the belief in a faux science called race. For example, “Caucasian” is a false category, invented as part of the process of the scientification of race in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Throughout this study, then, I frequently use the term “white-ethnic” to highlight the process of racialization taking place. So I view Italian and Swedish immigrants, living in San Francisco’s Southeast, not simply as white but as white-ethnic. My use of this term does not imply “swarthy” or necessarily “foreign born.” White people became “white” by practice, by law and by trope – but they, like all people, have various backgrounds, cultures

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<sup>25</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, “South Central Farmers and Shadow Hills Homeowners: Land Use Policy and Relational Racialization in Los Angeles,” *The Professional Geographer* 61, no. 2 (April 2009): 169, citing Massey (2004), p. 5; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); Laura Pulido, “Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, no. 1 (2000): 12.

<sup>26</sup> Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks: And What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*.

<sup>28</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, The Crossing Press Feminist Series (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984).

and ethnicities.<sup>29</sup> The trope of whiteness has played a sinister role in urban life, and deserves much more study than I can offer here.

Clare Jean Kim's racial *triangulation* theory helps to paint a picture of race's relationality. The three-way relationship that she describes, between black, white and Asian identities, reveals how racialized groups are pitted against one another. Blackness, she argued, is invoked with meaning through its relation to Asian-ness and whiteness. One example of this is the way that the "model minority" myth that painted Asians as well-behaved in the social order was used to racialize black 1960s activists as loud, angry and problematic, both in relation to a normative white model of behavior, and in contrast with East-Asians, who were seen as obedient, studious, and more willing to accept white supremacy.<sup>30</sup>

## The Spaces of Race-Class

In this section I look at the connections between race and class, and build towards a theory of the two that reveals their embeddedness. In the next section I'll connect this embeddedness to the reproduction of cities.

The clash of social groups is central to urbanity. One useful description of this aspect of the sociology of cities comes from Marshall Berman's classic work on modernity and the human condition. There is something fundamentally urban, he indicates, about the ways in which different kinds of people encounter each other, over and over again. The rich, he says, are regularly forced to interact with the poor, whose presence in the streets seems to be a constant irritant: "the trouble is not that they are angry or demanding. The trouble is simply that they will not go away."<sup>31</sup>

Though Berman's is a story about apparent economic/class relations, it's useful for our story because in the American context racial characteristics function typically as signifiers or symbols of economic relationships. When people talk about a Latino barrio, for example, it is generally assumed to be a poor neighborhood, even if the class character of the place is never explicitly described.

Separation and intermingling are, perhaps paradoxically, both key features of the city. Of course, cities are landscapes of social division – by class, race, gender and nationality – that often play out in political fights over the very right to exist and move through urban space. Sociological and colloquial understandings of what makes a city work are often tied to race-class boundaries, and the feel of cities is frequently defined this way: Chinatowns, Latino barrios, Irish neighborhoods, and black neighborhoods all supposedly offer a different, and perhaps predictable, experience to both residents and visitors. Still, whether we focus on race, class, or other boundaries, cities are places in which we can be thrown together with lots of people from other walks of life. Thus, amid social boundaries that keep people apart – as with poor communities with poor transit, or rich ones with gates and privatized social

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<sup>29</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-civil Rights America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics and Society* 27, no. 1 (March 1999): 105–138; Lai, "The Racial Triangulation of Space"; Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Viking Penguin, 1988), 153.

services that keep them sequestered – the historical tendency of migration to cities nevertheless foists people of many apparent “types” into one agglomeration where they may have to deal with each other on a regular basis.<sup>32</sup>

Like racialization, class formation is messy, episodic and uneven.<sup>33</sup> I discussed race and racialization earlier, pointing to its social construction and mutability through historical and political processes that interlock with economic structures like labor markets. Class is largely, but not solely, the product of economic relationships; Marx, for example, classically defines class as rooted to one’s relationship to the ownership of value-producing facilities (means of production).

Class, like race, is also a category of social visibility. Pierre Bourdieu makes the case that class is connected to the quality of one’s bearing, one’s knowledge, in addition to one’s connection to the production of economic capital.<sup>34</sup> The nature of class, in this view, includes appearances; it is not simply a matter of underlying economic relations. This is a useful framework that adds important dynamics to analyses like Karl Polanyi’s, whose critique of a society structured around capitalist markets – in which social relationships are stripped down to economic ones – misses an important dynamic. The industrial revolution was accompanied by the emergence of modern classes behaving in what E.P. Thompson called many “class ways.”<sup>35</sup> For Thompson, the working class people made itself out of economic position, the reservoir of popular culture, and workers’ own ingenuity. Even accepting the idea that class is based in relations of production, *the way it functions in society* necessarily includes cultural patterns and ways of life.<sup>36</sup>

Such class ways don’t exist in a vacuum. Rather they intersect with other “non-class patterns of social division,”<sup>37</sup> such as race and gender. Still, many analyses of capitalism ignore or downplay race. This is a mistake; the outcomes of capitalistic fights are not dryly economic; they are politically, culturally – and racially – divined.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> On the fast march to global urbanism, see Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, Paperback ed. (London: Verso, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Ethington found this to be true in 19<sup>th</sup> Century San Francisco, see: Philip J. Ethington, *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 51.

<sup>34</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Karl Marx, *Capital (Vol. I)* (London: Penguin Books, 1976).

<sup>35</sup> E.P. Thompson, “Eighteenth-century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?,” *Social History* 3, no. 2 (1978): 147., cited in: Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 18.

<sup>36</sup> Thompson, “Eighteenth-century English Society,” 147. Here’s the full quote: “Class, in my own usage, is a historical category: that is, it is derived from the observation of the social process over time. We know about class because people have repeatedly behaved in class ways.”

<sup>37</sup> Ira Katznelson, “Working-Class formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons,” in Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton University Press, 1986), 9.

<sup>38</sup> On capital expansion/competition in development: Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*; Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism”; Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. On the “right to the city”: Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991); Lefebvre, “The Right to the City.”; McCann usefully links the right to the city movement (which leans heavily on Harvey’s analysis) with race, see Eugene J. McCann, “Race, Protest, and Public Space: Contextualizing Lefebvre in the U.S. City,” *Antipode* 31, no. 2 (1999): 163–184.



I am therefore arguing that many of the same social relationships that shape class also shape race. Even so, there is no need to muddy race and class, but rather to develop an analysis that continuously links the two.

Like Stuart Hall, who sought to find modes of articulation between processes of capital and racial identity, my research builds on an agenda of revealing the connections between these processes, which deepens our understandings of each alone. Hall's theorization is that race is essentially the fractioning of classes, based in relations of production. Laying the groundwork for the social constructionist understandings of race that would follow his early writings, Hall insisted that race functioned as an ideology only in relation to other forces:

Racism is, thus, not only a problem for blacks who are obliged to suffer it. Nor is it a problem only for those sections of the white working class and those organizations infected by its stain. Nor can it be overcome, as a general virus in the social body, by a heavy dose of liberal inoculation. Capital re-produces the class (sic), including its internal contradictions, as a whole – structured by race. It dominates the divided class, in part, through those internal divisions which have racism as one of its effects.<sup>39</sup>

In his view race had a life of its own, which included a tendency to elide economics and other power dynamics in society. The tendential class characteristics of race (ie: black and poor) thus begin to appear to be inherent or natural. As Hall put it:

If it has performed the function of that cementing ideology which secures a whole social formation under a dominant class, its pertinent differences from other such hegemonic ideologies require to be registered in detail. Here, racism is particularly powerful and its imprint on popular consciousness especially deep, because in such racial characteristics as colour, ethnic origin, geographical position, etc., racism discovers what other ideologies have to construct: an apparently 'natural' and universal basis in nature itself.<sup>40</sup>

I bring Hall's ideas together with theorizations from linguistics and studies in geography of "everyday life," which help explain the naturalizing force alluded to above, and which also begin to connect race-class dynamics to space. I mentioned Bourdieu above, and his analysis of the visual aspects of class reproduction. Similarly, though it has a rootedness in relations built around capital, race is made and affirmed through processes of seeing and being seen. The problem with this is that what we see is guided by – or in this case quite literally colored by – what we believe. The context in which *seeing* takes place is crucial to the conclusions we draw, consciously and unconsciously, about each other and the world.<sup>41</sup> The 'seeing and being seen' qualities of race and class are a key part of the urban

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<sup>39</sup> Hall, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance," 341.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>41</sup> On the power of representation and more specifically representational *spaces*, see Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; on the role of experience in formation of metaphor and foundational concepts, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); also see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 2011).

experience, and often occur outside of strictly ‘capitalist’ activities. In the next section I offer some examples to flesh out these ideas.

Finally, it’s important to note that the patterns of racialization in a given place can only be fully understood through a historical tracing of power relations. California’s social hierarchy, for example, has long been unique, largely because of its proximity to both Asia and Mexico. Tomas Almaguer uncovers a historical record of racial ideology essentially inserted into a social mapping of class.<sup>42</sup> In a hierarchy that always placed blacks at the bottom,<sup>43</sup> race and class came to define each other, as Mexicans, Spaniards, Japanese and others were placed on a ladder of status that applied simultaneously to skin color/appearance and to employability in particular jobs (for example).

I have argued here that the geographies of class are interwoven with the geographies of race. Because of this, it may be useful to conceive not of racial segregation, but of race-class segregation. As a linguistic construction, *race-class* is a little awkward, yet the term highlights the embedded nature of the two; it is far too easy to forget one for the other without exposing it in the language. Race-class thus brings out the role of race in apparently class-based problems, and the reverse, showing the importance of class in situations where race seems to be the most dominant analytical category. Where possible, I use this term in this study – but generally it is my intention to highlight the connected and socially constructed nature of race and class. A big piece of this construction, in my view, emerges out of relations in and through the built environment, a topic I take on in the next section.

## Fitting Race and Space Together

For those who subscribe to the argument that a post-racial United States is in the works, it may be confusing to conceive of the racialization practices that remain in contemporary cities. Yet, in the years since segregationist and racist housing practices have been struck down in the US – that is, since a series of court cases tore through legal segregation between the late 40s and mid 70s – race-space balkanization persists, and may in fact be getting worse.<sup>44</sup> It may be that the revival of explicit racism that has come during the Obama years will only encourage the reproduction of policies that encourage or reward segregation.

Only a few urban studies pay enough attention to how race and space intersect.<sup>45</sup> Otherwise good research ends up viewing racial categories as static, missing how social groupings can be rendered concrete through space. At the same time, without an explicit racialization framework, or a critical approach to race as a construct, urban academicians are often loath to name racism in the stories that they tell, because acts by individuals are

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<sup>42</sup> Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>43</sup> This pattern was later named *colorism* by researchers: Evelyn Nakano Glen, *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> David M. P Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); D. O. McGovney, “Racial Residential Segregation by State Court Enforcement of Restrictive Agreements, Covenants or Conditions in Deeds Is Unconstitutional,” *California Law Review* 33, no. 1 (March 1, 1945): 5–39.

<sup>45</sup> Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear And Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2006); Freund, *Colored Property*; Chris Rhomberg, *No There There: Race, Class, and Political Community in Oakland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*.

viewed as personal and internal. But if we understand racism to be a structural problem produced in part through spatial relations, and not simply a malady born of personal interactions based on skin-color preference, then it's clear that identifying racist spatial processes can and must be done.<sup>46</sup>

In line with critical-race theorists, geographer Laura Pulido argues convincingly that racist decisions can be identified without attempting to prove racist intent by a particular person or governing body (like a city planning board or a highway commission).<sup>47</sup> By jumping scales beyond individual relationships, and beyond single-project dynamics, she suggests we can begin to see an outline of the *structural* racial economy that defines development. To therefore find that planning decisions – like the siting of a power plant, locational choices for a big-box retailer, or the routing of a freeway through the center of a working class neighborhood – disproportionately affect African Americans and Latinos, repeatedly, is to link those decisions to institutional or structural racism.<sup>48</sup>

What's more, each instance of racialized planning or each new moment of spatial production, re-invites racial ideology into the landscape, with broad material effects. As Barraclough puts it:

[T]he production of a specific place does not just shape the experience of the racial group with which it is associated but instead participates in the reproduction of the entire material and ideological system of racisms, past and present. This means, for example, that what appears to be a “black place” is thoroughly marked by historical and contemporary structures of white supremacy such as restrictive covenants, redlining, mob violence, and institutionalized environmental racism.<sup>49</sup>

With this kind of analysis at its root, there is a growing body of literature on the ways that race and space work together, in and out of the critical geography tradition.<sup>50</sup> This literature frames geographic problems as multi-scalar, with local processes understood in relation to broader movements and interactions of capital, culture and migration.<sup>51</sup> They tend

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<sup>46</sup> Critical-race theorists' legal-theoretic work insists that seeing racism as a matter of personal prejudice ignores its structural and systemic dynamics. For a discussion of CRT and the ways that redefining racism “from below” makes such a task imperative and obvious, see Kimberlé Crenshaw et al., eds., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: New Press, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.; Pulido, “Rethinking Environmental Racism.”

<sup>48</sup> R.A. Morello-Frosch, “Discrimination and the Political Economy of Environmental Inequality,” *Environment and Planning C: Government & Policy* 20, no. 4 (2002): 477–496.

<sup>49</sup> Barraclough, “South Central Farmers and Shadow Hills Homeowners,” 169.

<sup>50</sup> Melissa R Gilbert, “‘Race,’ Space, and Power: The Survival Strategies of Working Poor Women,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88, no. 4 (December 1, 1998): 595–621; Jim Glassman, “Critical Geography II: Articulating Race and Radical Politics,” *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 4 (2010): 506 – 512; Audrey Kobayashi, “Unnatural Discourse. ‘Race’ and Gender in Geography.,” *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 1, no. 2 (June 1994): 225; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; McKittrick and Woods, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*; Linda Peake and Audrey Kobayashi, “Policies and Practices for an Antiracist Geography at the Millennium,” *The Professional Geographer* 54, no. 1 (February 2002): 50–61; Pred, *The Past Is Not Dead*; Sherene Razack, *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Toronto: Between The Lines, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> Cox, *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local*; Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism”; Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*.

to follow Pulido and Gilmore, looking at race-space linkages from a structural perspective, rather than at the scale of individual relationships.

Still, too much geographic literature follows the trend in mainstream social science of sidelining or minimizing the relevance of race, and more importantly, the salience of racism. This is problematic because racial inequality is one of the fundamental processes that has affected human beings over the last 500 years – and because racialization is, as has been mentioned, and as Pulido so clearly puts it, “fundamentally a spatial relation.”<sup>52</sup> The classification and segregation of spaces as white, black or Chinese is again a key way in which we (re)create meaning, both about people and the spaces they inhabit.<sup>53</sup> Our knowledge of cities is typically, if often unconsciously, informed by racial stereotypes. Indeed, in the postwar period the very term urban – once used as code for modern, advanced and civilized – became imbued with a racial overtone. “Urban problems,” “urban music,” and “urban youth” were imagined to be non-white, and most typically have been coded in mainstream discourse as black or Latino – and violent.<sup>54</sup>

Material evidence of the “place-ness” of race and racism can be seen in clusters of industrial properties or concentrations of disinvestment in racialized urban zones. It may seem obvious: polluting industries and communities of working class or poor people of color tend to share boundaries. They are in the same place. How this came to be is perhaps less obvious. Such patterns did not evolve naturally according to some blend of climate and DNA. These urban patterns, replicated across the country, are the result of political-economic conditions that shape policy, law and social practice. The impact of segregatory patterns on health and well-being – which in turn impact job-readiness and life chances, as Gilmore suggests – is devastating.<sup>55</sup> It is also through these spatial practices that race and class re-embed.

George Lipsitz puts it simply but powerfully: “The lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension.” As he points out, race is one of the foundational ways in which jobs, neighborhoods, cultural experiences and life chances – all of which have spatial dimensions – are sorted in the city. Racial identity intersects with spatial identity through concrete practices that isolate racialized groups geographically – and that shape the political economy of cities. These include official and unofficial acts of housing and lending discrimination, and the myriad ways a cityscape is defined structurally by “school district boundaries, by policing practices, by zoning regulations, and by the design of transit systems.”<sup>56</sup> These choices go a long way toward

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<sup>52</sup> Pulido, “Reflections on a White Discipline,” 49.

<sup>53</sup> Kay J. Anderson, “The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77, no. 4 (December 1, 1987): 580–598; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*; Steven Gregory, *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>54</sup> James Kyung-Jin Lee, *Urban Triage: Race And The Fictions Of Multiculturalism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Steve Macek, *Urban Nightmares: The Media, the Right, and the Moral Panic Over the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

<sup>55</sup> Robert D Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990); Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*; Pulido, “Reflections on a White Discipline”; Sze, *Noxious New York*.

<sup>56</sup> Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race,” 12.

defining who has access to clean and safe public spaces, to living-wage (or better) jobs, formal political power, and other resources of the metropolis.

On how these choices are made, David Sibley amends purely structural analyses of racial segregation with attention to psychology and affect, looking at the ways that ideas about abjection and filth infiltrate mass psychology and play a role in promulgation and acceptance of segregation. As he explains: “Because power is expressed in the monopolization of space and the relegation of weaker groups in society to less desirable environments, any text on the social geography of advanced capitalism should be concerned with the question of exclusion. . . . Human geography, in particular, should be concerned with raising consciousness of the domination of space in its critique of the hegemonic culture.”<sup>57</sup>

To further illustrate these patterns, it will be useful to take a tour through Southeast San Francisco. That history offers multiple examples of the intersection of racialized segregation and institutional policies that re-enacts racisms of the past. Before we get to this, we’ll turn to a brief history of trends in urban research on race, to contextualize the problems of segregation and redevelopment in San Francisco within broader historical patterns.

## ***Part II. Making History***

### **A Century of Racial Binaries**

Scholars doing research on race and cities have shifted their analyses significantly over time. Understanding the trajectory of those changes, across disciplines, better situates contemporary urban geographic thought.

Early research on race in US cities focused largely on black-white segregation. The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century writings of W. E. B. Du Bois prophetically revealed the political quality of such segregation – even in northern states, predicting that the “color line” would be the key problem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and writing about black neighborhoods in places like Philadelphia as “a city within a city.”<sup>58</sup> Du Bois’ work, which has been foundational for disciplines like city planning and geography, but perhaps only well-recognized in sociology and ethnic studies, predicted many of the outcomes of segregation documented a century later by sociologists like Massey and Denton, whose studies usefully linked continued and perpetual segregation to a range of racialized social inequalities in jobs, education and health.<sup>59</sup>

From the 1910s onward the theories of the University of Chicago’s sociological giants prevailed in the scholarly conversation about race and urban change. Termed the Chicago School, the group encompassed a range of perspectives and methodological approaches to

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<sup>57</sup> David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1995), ix–x.

<sup>58</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Philadelphia: Published for the University of Pennsylvania, 1899); W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>59</sup> Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*; Douglas S Massey and Nancy A Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).

urbanism and racial studies.<sup>60</sup> Robert Park and Louis Wirth, among the most cited Chicago thinkers, excavated the demography of cities through an “urban ecology” metaphor that naturalized both human identity and racial segregation as a stage in the evolution of communities. The ecology metaphor, which offered a teleological-evolutionary model for social-group incorporation into the mainstream, was initially used to understand class shifts and immigrant assimilation – watching how new immigrants became “white” in American eyes. “Ecological” theorizing was eventually applied to comparative racial questions.<sup>61</sup> Later, sociologists noted that African American migrants to new places did not experience the same assimilation and acceptance as European immigrants who spoke little English, but could more easily blend in *visually* in a nation obsessed with skin tone and hair texture.<sup>62</sup>

Research that was published after 1945 brought important intellectual amendments, some stemming from the monumental research and writing of St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, whose *Black Metropolis* study fills two volumes with meticulous detail on Chicago just after the Great Depression. The text, written by two African American scholars, is often mentioned as foundational to urban historiography, but rarely noted for its literary style, which blends sociological data with ethnography and observation. Taking a structural-analytic approach, the book examines the connections between race and place, in one of the cities dramatically affected by the Great Migration of southern rural blacks to the urban north. Novelist Richard Wright introduced the text in an essay he wrote in 1945, describing his own participation in that same migration, which he said was fundamentally a move “to seek freedom, life.” As he put it:

[T]here in the that great iron city, that impersonal, mechanical city, amid the steam, the smoke, the snowy winds, the blistering suns; there in that self-conscious city, that city so deadly dramatic and stimulating, we caught whispers of the meanings that life could have, and we were pushed and pounded by facts much too big for us.<sup>63</sup>

In the 1960s, in a dramatic swing away from structuralism in urban race studies that may have shocked even the authors of a new paradigm that focused on culture as the root of urban poverty (and by extension persistent segregation). The new framework explicitly pathologized the social practice and daily life of black urban families. Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s 1965 study *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* – eventually known simply as the Moynihan Report – was interpreted as a call to transform the culture and habits of black people, while largely ignoring the importance of economic, political or other structural factors that create and perpetuate poverty.<sup>64</sup>

The Moynihan Report brought with it an intensified focus on black urban life – but rather than sort out the causes of segregation, the report named a “tangle of pathology” that

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<sup>60</sup> Howard S. Becker, “The Chicago School, So-Called,” *Qualitative Sociology* 22, no. 1 (1999): pp. 3–12.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Ezra Park, *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” *American Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (July 1938); Robert Ezra Park and E. W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago, Ill: The University of Chicago Press, 1921).

<sup>62</sup> Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*.

<sup>63</sup> Wright, cited in St Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis; A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, Rev. and enl. ed., A Harbinger Book, H 078-H 079 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), xvii.

<sup>64</sup> United States, *The Negro Family, the Case for National Action* ([Washington: For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Govt. Print. Off.], 1965).

was due to the legacy of slavery and the purported tradition of matriarchy in the black community. The effect was a deflection of attention away from broader urban or socio-economic dynamics (and away from capitalism) and towards personal actions. Moynihan himself, who was assistant US Labor Secretary when he published the report, was said by some black activists to have intended the work to be relatively anti-racist.<sup>65</sup> Even so, the impact of the report is still felt in social and urban policy choices nationwide as a force that perpetuates myths about African Americans.

One important historical fact that was neglected by Moynihan was the role of racially restrictive housing covenants, which were legal until a 1948 Supreme Court ruling overturned them, and which created deep patterns of racial-spatial division. It wasn't that such tools were unknown – researchers were writing about covenants in the 1940s<sup>66</sup> – yet the housing-policy landscape was overshadowed by the personal-responsibility narratives inspired by Moynihan's text. Civil rights leader James Farmer had this critique:

By laying the primary blame for present-day inequalities on the pathological condition of the Negro family and community, Moynihan has provided a massive academic cop-out for the white conscience and clearly implied that negroes in this nation will never secure a substantial measure of freedom until we learn to behave ourselves and stop buying Cadillacs instead of bread.<sup>67</sup>

Eventually, after a series of studies in the 1980s and 1990s documented the history and impact of legal tools of segregation, it became a cornerstone of critical urban geographic research to understand segregation not as natural, elective or predetermined, as the original ecology metaphor suggested. Instead, it was argued to be a product of policy and practice that included racially defined and government-approved lease, rental and lending restrictions.<sup>68</sup> (Chapter 3 explores these processes in Bayview-Hunter's Point.)

Nonetheless, cultural arguments live on and continue to be interpreted in various, often competing, ways. Massey and Denton's research found that segregated cities seemed to re-create and emphasize marginalization and difference – by culturally and material reinforcing marginality and poverty. For some, work such as that of Massey and Denton too strongly implies the presence of a “culture of poverty” that resonates with Moynihan's theory.<sup>69</sup> I argue, however, that to dismiss the power of culture would ignore much of the everyday

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<sup>65</sup> Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1984).

<sup>66</sup> Herman Long and Charles Spurgeon Johnson, *People Vs. Property Race Restrictive Covenants in Housing* (Nashville: Fisk Univ. Press, 1947); R. C Weaver, “Race Restrictive Housing Covenants,” *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 20, no. 3 (1944): 183–193.

<sup>67</sup> Excerpted from the Dec 18, 1965 edition of “The Core of It” a regular column of Farmer's in the *Amsterdam News*, a Harlem-based black newspaper; cited in Rainwater and Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy a Trans-action Social Science and Public Policy Report*, 410.

<sup>68</sup> Freund, *Colored Property*; Kevin Fox Gotham, “Urban Space, Restrictive Covenants and the Origins of Racial Residential Segregation in a US City, 1900-50,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, no. 3 (2000): 616–633; Arnold R Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>69</sup> Patricia Cohen, “Scholars Return to ‘Culture of Poverty’ Ideas,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 2010, sec. U.S., <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/18/us/18poverty.html>; Rainwater and Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy a Trans-action Social Science and Public Policy Report*.

experience of people. Rather than eliminating it because of the outdated use of stereotypes that past culture-of-poverty debates engendered, I find cultural explanations conditionally useful, as long as they are couched within a racialization framework and an understanding of political economy. The problem with many cultural explanations for poverty is that they ignore political economy and the structural forces that circumscribe communities. On the other hand, pure structuralism ignores the role of politics and other aspects of culture in shaping ideology, driving aspirations, and molding community response to events. I argue that the two analytical frameworks must be paired.

In fact, entirely lumping Massey and Denton into the cultural category would be unfair; their work unmask connections between multiple factors (including economy, geography, policy, and politics) with the cultures that emerge within segregated neighborhoods. One of their key findings was that segregation is so uniform across US cities that cultural-economic similarities are strongest between, for example, black neighborhoods in various cities, rather than between those neighborhoods and the racialized communities they live next to. The mis-interpretation of the role of culture has been to take information like this and to say: poverty is a culture, it is the fault of those involved in it, and if poor people would only eat or walk or dress differently, then they would be hired by employers more often, or otherwise accepted by the mainstream. In fact, poverty is an inherent characteristic of capitalist societies.<sup>70</sup> What is not inherent is the location of specific people (divided by race, etc) within the class structure. What the culturalists do get right is that segregation plays a role in reproducing material conditions, but they misunderstand why it matters. Poverty does not act like a disease of morals, contagious to the weakest who approach it. Instead, factors like depressed housing values and poor access to jobs, fresh food, and good schools – all spatial factors – are central to the reproduction of racialized poverty.

The shift away from the black-white binary in the research came long after cities themselves had embarked on entirely new demographic stories. As mentioned, California cities have long been mixed-race places. In the post-war period, which I address further in the next section, cycles of immigration transformed the nation at large.

Finally, most recently, a new chapter in the historiography of race in cities has emerged, which connects deeply to the life of Southeast San Francisco. Environmentally focused urban research, in synch with the environmental justice movement that kicked off in the 1980s, has expanded since the early 2000s. Such texts take seriously the political processes that have forced people of color to live in the most industrially polluted parts of cities.<sup>71</sup> These are the places like Southeast San Francisco where electric power plants, freeways, and ancient toxic remnants from gas stations and old industrial projects increase rates of cancer, asthma and other deadly diseases. They are some of the clearest examples of the ways that the political-economic choices we make about urban development become fused entirely with the experiences of race-class defined communities.

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<sup>70</sup> Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism”; Marx, *Capital (Vol. I)*.

<sup>71</sup> Jason Corburn, *Street Science: Community Knowledge and Environmental Health Justice* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005); David N Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002); Pulido, “Rethinking Environmental Racism”; Sze, *Noxious New York*.



## Waves of People, Waves of (Re)development

After WWII cycles of migration and cycles of built-environment investment began to take the form of state-led redevelopment. This section shows, empirically and historically, how race-class urban patterns have evolved, and sets the stage for understanding the role of redevelopment as both a social and physical force in Southeast San Francisco.

As mentioned, American cities have never been simply black and white spaces. This has long been evident in the west where racial diversity included American Indians, as well as Chinese, Mexican and Japanese immigrant urbanites in the late nineteenth century when the major west-coast cities were becoming established.<sup>72</sup> This partly explains why the efforts to curb immigration from Asia and Mexico often originated in San Francisco in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The city was the primary urban center of the west until the 1920s, and politicians there were listening to their racist constituents who fought dirty to protect the labor pool for white workers, especially in economic downturns.

In the post- WWII period, US cities became even more diverse as new waves of immigrants made it impossible to ignore what had been true all along – that cities forced people of a broad range of race-class backgrounds to cross paths on what was highly uneven economic ground. The so-called New Immigrants from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean swelled cities that had grown already with the second Great Migration of African Americans from the US South.<sup>73</sup> The immigrant influx racially transformed metropolises like Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, New York, Miami, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay Area.<sup>74</sup>

These in-migrations meant that cities saw repeated waves of spatial upheaval. Newcomers typically remade neglected corners of town and packed multiple families into single-family apartments. Industrial zones became mixed-use spaces, as working class migrant families inhabited urban margins. Then, in a trend that took off spectacularly after WWII, white families began to abandon central urban neighborhoods for the rapidly expanding suburbs, pulled by New Deal federal mortgage programs, and by industrial and commercial migration that shifted employment centers away from central cities.

The invitation to populate the suburbs came largely through Federal Housing Administration loans and other programs that explicitly used race as a qualifying factor.<sup>75</sup> White families formed explicitly restricted suburban reserves that in some cases served as political consolidators for significant racist conservative movements.<sup>76</sup> Though most

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<sup>72</sup> Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*; Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Santa Barbara [Calif.]: Peregrine Smith, 1973); Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: A Study of the Anti-Chinese Movements in California*.

<sup>73</sup> Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US City* (London: Verso, 2000); Robert C Smith, *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Roger David Waldinger, *Strangers at the Gates New Immigrants in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>74</sup> Broussard, *Black San Francisco: the Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*; Sugrue, *The Origins Of The Urban Crisis: Race And Inequality In Postwar Detroit*.

<sup>75</sup> Kenneth T Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>76</sup> Robert M Fogelson, *Bourgeois Nightmares Suburbia, 1870-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Freund, *Colored Property*; Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern*

commonly thought of as a period of “white flight,” because of white families’ apparent fears of their new neighbors, this era may more aptly be described as the age of the “white pull” – a term that seeks to make more visible the web of exclusionary policy that facilitated and encouraged the migration.<sup>77</sup>

Generalized postwar white suburbanization opened the door to big changes in central cities, which lost key elements of the tax base – revealing another powerful linkage between race and class. Struggling immigrant and migrant communities of color expanded into those thinning neighborhoods that did not cling to a white-only rental strategy – often through blockbusting, an active (and lucrative) realtor program of racial transformation. Many lived in worsening conditions, as absentee landlords kept property maintenance to a bare minimum. Robert Self documents intense policy battles over tax laws that erupted in Oakland and San Leandro as suburbanites sought to build new political boundaries around their white enclaves, in order to keep “white tax dollars” from supporting the urban *hoi polloi* of color; he describes the spatial pattern that emerged as a “white noose.”<sup>78</sup> Such fights were certainly not limited to “chocolate cities” like Oakland, though they had special significance there as part of the political-economic landscape that produced the Black Panther Party.<sup>79</sup>

It was within this shifting postwar geography that federally sponsored urban redevelopment emerged. In the US, the concept of government-led redevelopment as we now understand it – as part of the larger historical cycle of renewing built spaces that also restructures the social makeup of cities – was not new, and not uniquely American. Scholars often go back to mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century Paris where George-Eugene Haussmann dramatically remade that city, bulldozing undesirable spaces and framing the messy urban web of streets with the regal boulevards that Paris is known for today.<sup>80</sup>

Though the life of cities always includes cyclical evolution, the Haussmann program represented a significant shift in scale. Rather than allowing a city to evolve through gradual development – which admittedly could be very messy and highly contingent on the wealth of a powerful few – a central piece of the Haussmann prescription was to envision the city as a blank slate, and to then tear through disorganized spaces that got in the way of his visions. Beautiful, organized, fresh architectural spaces emerged, serving the needs of one sector of the urban public; but the other public, those that had been evicted from their homes and businesses to make way for these spaces, was subject to forced migrations, typically more than once over the years. The disappearance of messy streets through a surgical profusion of what eventually came to be understood as modernity therefore signaled the dispersion (but not the disappearance) of communities who had lived on them.<sup>81</sup>

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*Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*.

<sup>77</sup> Brahinsky, “Race and the City.” Thanks to Seth Lunine for helping identify the right word. For other pull factors, see Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, 100.

<sup>78</sup> Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, 256.

<sup>79</sup> “Chocolate cities” comes from Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, 6.

<sup>80</sup> A fuller historiography would go back to Bernini’s “radial city” in 17<sup>th</sup> century Rome.; see Franco Archibugi, *Rome: A New Planning Strategy* (Taylor & Francis, 2005).

<sup>81</sup> The boulevards did not replace the entire pre-Haussman grid, but whole neighborhoods were essentially erased. David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York; London: Routledge, 2003); Spiro Kostof, “His Majesty the Pick: The Aesthetics of Demolition,” in *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*, ed. Zeynep Çelik, Diane G Favro, and Richard Ingersoll (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Friedrich Engels summarized the process in 1872:

On ‘the method called ‘Hausmann’ ... I mean the practice, which has now become general, of making breaches in working-class quarters of our big cities, especially in those that are centrally situated. ... The result is everywhere the same: the most scandalous alleys and lanes disappear, to the accompaniment of lavish self-glorification by the bourgeoisie on account of this tremendous success – but they appear at once somewhere else and often in the immediate neighborhood.’<sup>82</sup>

The American iteration of Hausmann’s bulldozer emerged after WWII was vigorously employed by real estate and business leaders who formed alliances to revamp disinvested neighborhoods. These were places that had been largely abandoned by capitalists, but that were still inhabited by everyday people. Hundreds of small decisions linked up to a nationwide effort to restore land values in US central cities, an effort that accelerated after the close of World War II. Across the country downtown-government coalitions emerged to promote what was sold as a targeted urban makeover of the decaying spaces largely inhabited by working class and poor communities of color. The rise of business-class leaders as de facto urban planners was solidified through the formation of urban think tanks, which promoted targeted neighborhood revivals emphasizing demolition rather than preservation (until the late 70s when preservation became chic).<sup>83</sup>

Initially called slum clearance, the program undertook the first of many image makeovers with a name change to “urban renewal.” Proponents argued that the program’s purpose was to clear unsanitary slum spaces – and there was initially a federal commitment to develop alternative low-cost housing.<sup>84</sup> Critics, on the other hand, re-framed “urban renewal” as “Negro removal,” to highlight what they saw as the ultimate impact of the program, though blacks were not the only ones displaced. City officials, organized after passage of the federal 1949 Housing Act through locally-managed Redevelopment Agencies, legally justified their claims to these spaces by designating them “blighted,” and called for an urban reclaiming in the name of the greater public good. Significantly, the new redevelopment agencies wielded the legal power to condemn private property for demolition and clearance.<sup>85</sup>

Between 1949 and 1965 – the years in which the most widespread wholesale displacement took place – one million people lost their homes, and most of the evictees were people of color and poor.<sup>86</sup> The anger at dislocation was accentuated by repeated development delays that created long-term vacant spaces in the center of redeveloped areas. The delays hampered return migration, further solidifying the elimination of people from

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<sup>82</sup> Cited in Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 153.

<sup>83</sup> Pearl Janet Davies, *Real Estate in American History* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1958); Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*.

<sup>84</sup> National Commission for Urban Problems, *Building the American City: Report to the Congress and to the President of the United States* (Washington: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. Govt. Print. Off, 1969).

<sup>85</sup> Fainstein et al., *Restructuring the City*; Sugrue, *The Origins Of The Urban Crisis : Race And Inequality In Postwar Detroit*; Jon C Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

<sup>86</sup> Weber, “Extracting Value from the City.”

their homes and communities.<sup>87</sup> The racial and political overtones of the original choices made (in terms of which neighborhoods would be targeted for change) set off decades of community reform efforts (heralded by journalist Jane Jacobs).<sup>88</sup>

Under pressure, the practice of redevelopment evolved significantly. In some cities the use of state-managed redevelopment shifted from demolition to rehabilitation and construction, with quite different impacts on existing communities; this evolution has varied among cities. In general, more recent redevelopment-related displacements were less wholesale and more scattered; the degree to which these shifts took place varied tremendously across cities, each of which developed its own political character. The delays and evictions came to haunt redevelopment agencies through the 70s, 80s and 90s as some communities retained a deep lack of trust in redevelopment agencies – even if they had morphed significantly.<sup>89</sup> Resistance movements eventually transformed some redevelopment programs to serve as tools of community empowerment and as vehicles for significant affordable housing projects.

In rare cases, notably Boston's Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, those movements forced urban governments to hand the redevelopment reins to community members, transforming eminent domain from a power *used on* the community to one *used by* it.<sup>90</sup> Other challenges to redevelopment programs came as developers proved less willing to invest in renewing neighborhoods than expected, or ultimately because federal funds were yanked, beginning in the 1970s, from housing and urban development to other policy priorities.

In the rubble of federal mis-steps, planners eventually fled from some aspects of the redevelopment strategy that were most criticized, but retained many of the same processes of transforming working-class spaces (inhabited by people of color) into middle- and upper-class (and typically white) residential or pleasure zones.<sup>91</sup> This was not universally true, and places like San Francisco led the way in pushing redevelopment capital into affordable-housing programs that ultimately retained communities that would have been completely displaced.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*; Rachel Brahinsky, "'Hush Puppies,' Communalist Politics, and Demolition Governance: The Rise and Fall of the Black Fillmore," in *Ten Years That Shook the City: San Francisco 1968-1978*, ed. Chris Carlsson, 2011, 141–153; Gregory, *Black Corona*.

<sup>88</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).

<sup>89</sup> Ronald H Bayor, *Urban Renewal, Public Housing and the Racial Shaping of Atlanta* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Herbert J Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962); Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*.

<sup>90</sup> Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar, *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1994).

<sup>91</sup> Hannigan, *Fantasy City*; Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

<sup>92</sup> Brahinsky, "'Hush Puppies,' Communalist Politics, and Demolition Governance: The Rise and Fall of the Black Fillmore."

## Privatized Partnerships

It would be naïve to imagine that government, in any of its activities, is immune to the influence of private capital; the idea that these spheres are entirely separate is a fantasy of modern liberal thought, which is so insistent upon categorizing and separating human activities. Though government-led redevelopment has the sheen of statecraft, it was born out of the efforts of private profit-seeking parties. Thus, the politics of redevelopment are part of a long tradition of city building as power politics that can be traced back to ancient city-states, but which took on a capitalist inflection in the growth of the United States. In this section I overview some of the ways that private actors have strongly shaped apparently public-private coalitions through redevelopment, and thus have played a leading role in shaping the built environment of cities.

Redevelopment's most celebrated and most reviled example is mid-century New York, where Robert Moses – as a government official – tore through New York's boroughs, Haussmann-style, from the 1930s to the 1960s. But there, as with the reconstruction of Atlanta or the gutting of downtown Los Angeles, partnerships between developers and politicians worked to form what some have called a “growth machine” – an alliance of power to expand the city and force land values to rise.<sup>93</sup> As Logan and Molotch first defined it, the growth machine concept helps unpack the ways that that politicians, newspapers, utility companies, and others all have a stake in the remaking of the city, ultimately to benefit private capital. The growth machine represents a partnership in which public agencies are used to leverage the required legal clout to ease the way for development or raise funds for it with government backed financing. Elsewhere, private players finance political campaigns, and develop independent think-tank research to propel projects and political careers forward in tandem. Ultimately, they also own the land.

For understanding urban governance, several other models come close. Collectively they indicate the centrality of public/private partnerships in fostering growth, and in prioritizing the role of growth in consolidating political power at the expense of politically weak marginal communities. Yet there are important differences between them. Stone's “urban regime” theory, for example, highlights public-private partnerships as drivers for urban change. Stone's conceptualization of the process, based on his history of Atlanta, holds the business community at the center of power.<sup>94</sup> Alternatively, Mollenkopf's use of the “pro-growth coalition” concept comes closer, in that he emphasizes the idea that “widely different, competing and even conflicting actors and interests” are joined together to achieve urban development goals that each alone could not achieve.<sup>95</sup> Mollenkopf's emphasis, in contrast with Stone's is on the political aspect of power building, which he sees as leading what he calls “economic logics.”

The growth machine described by Logan and Molotch emphasizes multiple actors' roles in mediating the pressures of capitalist growth. That is, in cities, a team of people and institutions participate in directing the inherent push within capitalism towards expansion.

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<sup>93</sup> On NYC see Robert A Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1974)., On the “growth machine” concept: Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes : the Political Economy of Place.*; On Atlanta see Stone, *Regime Politics.*; On LA see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990).

<sup>94</sup> Stone, *Regime Politics.*

<sup>95</sup> Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*, 4.

This dynamic is evident in San Francisco, as will be come clear in later chapters, through coalitions of corporate leaders, real estate developers, unions and public officials. The revolving doors that persist between these realms make analysis of the San Francisco growth machine a puzzle that requires empirical/historical precision. There are historical moments in which the business community is more powerful, and there are others in which political maneuvering creates surprising twists.

In the last 40 years the long-standing dynamics of public-private partnerships have been transformed with the shifting financial dynamics of the times. From the 1970s onward global capital markets have played an ever-larger role in determining the texture of state-led redevelopment programs in at least three important ways. First, dynamics like the increased cost of loan acquisition (when controlled by non-local finance capital) gave leverage to those who wanted to reduce affordability and, in some cases, stifled community involvement.<sup>96</sup>

Next, the role of expanding economic globalization played out through a politicized development discourse that wedged communities into agreements they might have rejected. This marshalling of public anxiety around the specter of globalization – raising fears of losing tourist dollars or economic growth potential to other cities – generated an elaborate rhetoric that has “helped mobilize and put into play one vision of city growth and restructuring that emphasizes the production of affluent play spaces, upmarket residential communities, and conspicuous consumption zones.”<sup>97</sup>

Third, gentrification through cycles of private purchase and construction accompanied, intersected with or followed redevelopment projects. These projects created new waves of race-class migrations, shifting racialized communities around cities, often first to the urban fringes and then on to the exurbs.<sup>98</sup> In places where affordable housing kept residents near to home, the consolidation of displaced people of color into affordable housing, in tandem with the creation of spaces of middle-class conspicuous consumption, recreated racial segregation anew.<sup>99</sup>

In some cases local actors have argued that engaging in redevelopment processes will slow private investment in a location because developers fear eminent domain. This may be true in some cases, yet research shows that the tools of redevelopment finance may often have similar effects to gentrification itself. Since the 1970s (the same period in which widespread gentrification has been observed) redevelopment agencies benefitted from financing powers like Tax Increment Financing (TIF). TIF, a taxing mechanism typically endowed by state governments, affords agencies the unique right to borrow development capital using predicted future tax revenues as collateral. There are many variables involved

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<sup>96</sup> Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology and Development in American Urbanism*.

<sup>97</sup> Wilson calls this pattern the “global trope” – David Wilson, “City Transformation and the Global Trope: Indianapolis and Cleveland,” *Globalizations* 4, no. 1 (2007): 30. Also see Hackworth on the role of bond markets – arguably pan-geographical forces – in local urban decision making: J. Hackworth, “Local Autonomy, Bond-rating Agencies and Neoliberal Urbanism in the United States,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26, no. 4 (2002): 707–725. Of course, global competition is just one force. Hannigan, for example, offers a useful analysis of the intersection between changing class demographics and the push to view the city as a play space: Hannigan, *Fantasy City*.

<sup>98</sup> For an excellent overview of US gentrification history, see Lees, Slater, and Wyly, *Gentrification*.

<sup>99</sup> Though it does not make this argument, but the pattern I describe here is visible in the many terrific maps included in this report: Asian Neighborhood Design, *San Francisco Affordable Housing: A Historical Analysis Mapping Project*.

in analyzing TIF, so it's difficult to accurately summarize its impact. Still, scholars have begun to systematically demonstrate a general rise in property values in areas that surround mixed-use (a blend of housing and commercial) TIF zones.<sup>100</sup>

Because of the race-class patterns mentioned earlier – in which working class communities of color have disproportionately clustered near industrial sites or in crowded urban conditions with slumlords who let property deteriorate – the effects of TIF-related displacements, emerging from risen property values, have likely been racialized as well. TIF researchers are still testing whether TIF is merely a tool that has been misused, or whether aspects of its formulation are inherently race-class prescriptive (like the planning tools Barraclough analyzes<sup>101</sup>).

The role of TIF is key, and links to an important aspect of redevelopment and gentrification since the 1990s and more recently. TIF may play a role in raising land values, but it represents an alliance between public and private capital in defining the new shape of cities. Though in San Francisco TIF has largely been used to leverage affordable housing developments, that fact is a creature of local politics (political pressure has defined the way the city used this tool; see Chapter 6 for more on this).

In other cities, however, it has been used to pave the way for the gamut of profitable projects. Hackworth and Smith note that these alliances have become central, once again, in shaping urban space; following an era of private-led gentrification, public agencies have been more involved. They argue that this was necessary because private developers weren't interested in investing in risky places, which had become the next likely spaces for urban reconfiguration. To pave the way for a more comfortable investment, public bonding capacities were utilized, maxing out urban borrowing capacities for the sake of private profit.<sup>102</sup>

## Conclusion: Asking Questions of Space

Though the rhetoric of American society has long been that any person can achieve anything, there are clear historical patterns across US cities that locate people in particular places, with consequences in terms of economics and life chances. White folks often in the hills, with pretty views, far from the power plants and industrial trash that keeps their cities humming. This remains true even with a bi-racial President leading the nation. These patterns form aspects of relationships that are about much more than space – class, gender, religion, and tradition all play a role – but the spatial aspect is unavoidable.<sup>103</sup>

Redevelopment agencies didn't invent racial segregation, far from it. They were born in an era in which separation by race was viewed by the white majority as fundamental to the task of retaining and increasing property values in urban spaces. The segregation that had

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<sup>100</sup> Weber, "Extracting Value from the City"; Rachel Weber, "Tax Incremental Financing in Theory and Practice," in *Financing Economic Development in the 21st Century*, ed. Sammis B White, Richard D Bingham, and Edward W Hill (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 53–69; Rachel Weber, Saurav Dev Bhatta, and David Merriman, "Spillovers from Tax Increment Financing Districts: Implications for Housing Price Appreciation," *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 37, no. 2, *Regional Science and Urban Economics* (2007): 259–281.

<sup>101</sup> Barraclough, "South Central Farmers and Shadow Hills Homeowners."

<sup>102</sup> Hackworth and Smith, "The Changing State of Gentrification."

<sup>103</sup> On the role of tradition/history in fixing stereotypes (her focus is gender and labor, but there are important cross-categorical relevencies), see Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II*.

bred postwar urban conditions set the stage for the public-private coalition that branded redevelopment. The cycles of efforts to remake the city brought out intense fights over the right to the city; the lack of concern for the humanity of the racialized working class represented by redevelopment agencies fed the anger that burst into many of the urban uprisings and riots of the 1960s, for example.<sup>104</sup>

In the years that followed, segregation was supposed to disappear, as court victories overturned the racist legal and policy web that had structured urban spaces for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. But segregation remained. As others have observed, building on Du Bois's famous prediction of race's enduring importance:

In the United States, one might say, the problem of cities this century has been the indelible problem of the color line, while the problem of race has been inextricably tied to the making and remaking of the contemporary – the modern – city. ... Race still defines where one can go, what one can do, how one is seen and treated, one's social, economic, political, legal and cultural, in short, one's daily experience.<sup>105</sup>

Researchers continue to uncover ways in which segregation and separation are created and enforced in the contemporary moment – redevelopment is but one process of the city that plays a role. The nation's ever-changing immigration, education, employment and social welfare policies – along with its increasingly punitive and racially meted out criminal justice and prison system – all play important roles in re-inscribing racial boundaries of cities.

The racialized neighborhood divisions enforced through such programs continue to be studied, as researchers document the ways in which space-race boundaries re-constitute marginalization and difference, reinforcing material inequality. That is, they argue that perceived differences employed in creating urban segregation are culturally (visually and socially) reinforced by segregation. Racialized separation, in turn, is defined and recreated using those perceived differences as signposts that seem to explain social order. As recently as 2000 – long after the era of federal bulldozers and racially restrictive leases had been quashed – researchers are still finding that urban communities experience significant segregation and that black Americans are living in what has been categorized as “hyper-segregation.”<sup>106</sup>

I have discussed here how the material impact of segregation is multivalent. In addition to environmental and employment injustices, people of color remain in poverty cycles that are exacerbated by geographically determined economic patterns. For example, because of historical patterns of lending discrimination, Americans of color are less likely to be able to purchase property that will appreciate in value – even when they can afford it. One impact of this, over generations, is that white families are able to pass on far greater wealth to their

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<sup>104</sup> Sugrue, *The Origins Of The Urban Crisis : Race And Inequality In Postwar Detroit*; Paul Robinson, “Race, Space, and the Evolution of Black Los Angeles,” in *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities*, ed. Darnell M. Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 21–59; David Wyatt, *Five Fires: Race, Catastrophe, and the Shaping of California* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1997).

<sup>105</sup> David Theo Goldberg, “The New Segregation,” *Race and Society* 1, no. 1 (1998): 15 & 25.

<sup>106</sup> R. Johnston, M. Poulsen, and J. Forrest, “And Did the Walls Come Tumbling Down? Ethnic Residential Segregation in Four US Metropolitan Areas 1980-2000,” *Urban Geography* 24, no. 7 (2003): 560–581.



children than black or Latino families.<sup>107</sup> If economic security were a contest, then blacks would be starting out with a severe handicap, every time the race is run. This general story has variations of course, and there is more evidence emerging in recent research to reveal the importance of “colorism” – a bias based on skin tone within and between racialized groups.<sup>108</sup>

In San Francisco, and California more generally, the complexity of race-class relations has long been multi-layered. While southern and northern cities alike have had *dominant* black-white dichotomies, West Coast cities have had an important Asian and Mexican presence, going all the way back. Alta California was snatched from Mexico but Mexicans also built the American California. The Gold Rush drew in Chinese fortune-seekers alongside Europeans, and the development of the railroads in the 1860s pulled in thousands to work in life-threatening jobs exploding dynamite for tunnels and hillside byways, or back-breaking labor laying track for miles.<sup>109</sup> That presence was not incidental – the anti-Asian racism has been used to build white worker power, and to frame development in many eras – from the building and rebuilding of Chinatown, to the creation of Japantown, and the later selling of white-only developments as Asian free (I elaborate on this in the next chapter).<sup>110</sup>

Only a few urban studies pay enough attention to how racialization and spatial formation intersect; some of the best ones focus on the black-white binary.<sup>111</sup> Most exceptions to the black-white dynamic focus instead on Asian-white dynamics, rather than wrestling with the triangulated positioning that Kim identifies as central to racial formation.<sup>112</sup>

I have insisted here that race is a socially constructed identity – and that it is deeply intertwined with class, in ways that suggest that racial and economic problems cannot be considered separately. I then claimed that the racialization of people and the development of urban space function dialectically, with the case of postwar redevelopment as my primary empirical case – which showed a clear interlinking between racial and spatial projects. Adding these elements together builds a clear case for viewing the importance of race in a critical geographic reading of urban spatial change in the US. To insist on the basic directive nature of capital flows without also looking at the race-class dynamics of those same flows misses the human-scale experience of urban development.

In the next chapter we turn back the clock and hone in on the history of Southeast San Francisco. This history has been heavily defined by the problems outlined in this chapter:

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<sup>107</sup> Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*; Thomas Shapiro, *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>108</sup> *Shades of Difference*.

<sup>109</sup> Craddock, *City of Plagues: Disease, Poverty, and Deviance in San Francisco*; Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2007); Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: A Study of the Anti-Chinese Movements in California*.

<sup>110</sup> Craddock, *City of Plagues: Disease, Poverty, and Deviance in San Francisco*; Horiuchi, “Object Lessons In Home Building Racialized Real Estate Marketing In San Francisco”; Lai, “The Racial Triangulation of Space.”

<sup>111</sup> Freund, *Colored Property*; Gregory, *Black Corona*; Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*.

<sup>112</sup> This is not to flatly critique those studies, many of which are foundational for urban studies and geographic work on race. Rather, the lack of work that looks at the multilayered positioning of racial groups through space speaks to the difficulty of this kind of research as an academic project. See Kim, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans.”

race-class segregation, framed by a uniquely triangulated racial context, in which state-led redevelopment (under various monikers) has played a role for over 100 years.

## Chapter 3:

### Southeast San Francisco: A Place Apart?

“All cities create sinks.”

– Grady Clay

The Southeast is an “out of the way corner – which seems to have nothing whatever to do with San Francisco or civilization.”

–San Francisco Chronicle, 1889

“It stands on one of the famous seven hills of San Francisco, but it is hardly a part of that city, and has almost no part in the life of white America.”

–The Nation, 1966

“Most San Franciscans, even long-time residents, have never spent even 5 minutes in the notorious, conveniently isolated neighborhood known as Hunters Point.”

–Promotional materials for *Straight Outta’ Hunters Point II*, 2012<sup>1</sup>

### Re-telling the Story

The story of San Francisco’s Southeast is typically told in a sweeping way: it was an interesting but out of the way place. The 19<sup>th</sup> century development of the west coast’s largest dry dock, which brought shipbuilding to the area, infused the place with capital investment and set the scene for the place as an industrial node. The establishment of the Butcher’s Colony followed, bringing workers (who lived there) and road improvements to the district, which didn’t fill in with single-family homes until the 1920s-40s. But the big economic boom came with the expansion of the shipyard when the privately managed yard was transformed into a strong arm of the federal naval apparatus, enabling the residential in-migration of World War II.

In the histories that most people offer, the story ends with one more piece of information: the new migrants were mostly African American, and with their arrival everything changed. It’s almost as if, because of the socio-economic problems that became the hallmark of the place from the 1960s onward, history ended with the arrival of black San Francisco. In larger narratives focusing on black life, the Southeast is tacked on as an afterthought, an outlier within a larger story that centers around the Fillmore District.

These narratives are not entirely wrong, but they miss a lot. There are three absent elements I want to highlight in this chapter. First, the Southeast may have been cut off from

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, “Chinese Shrimpers: An Oriental Colony at Hunter’s Point,” *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)* (San Francisco, Calif., May 19, 1889); Donovan Bess, “No Way Downtown,” *The Nation*, December 6, 1966; Kevin Epps, *Straight Outta Hunter’s Point II* (Mastamind, 2012); Grady Clay, *Close-up, How to Read the American City* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), 143. (Grady, cited in Keally McBride, “Sanctuary San Francisco: Recent Developments in Local Sovereignty and Spatial Politics,” *Theory & Event* 12, no. 4 (2009).)

the rest of the city, but it was fundamental to the growth of both San Francisco and the greater Bay Area as an urban and urbane metropolis. Second, in the ethnic history of Southeast San Francisco, the Chinese are forgotten at our (historical) peril; from the beginning they had an important presence there, and today's political struggles are better understood with this knowledge. Finally, when African Americans arrived en masse, seeking both racial tolerance and economic stability, the Southeast was transformed – and yet it was not as wholly changed as most people think.

In this chapter I offer a broad history of the Southeast, focusing on demography and housing politics in Bayview-Hunter's Point. To clarify, when I use the term "Southeast" I am referring to the larger area from Islais Creek to the city's southern border (see Fig. 1). This includes Visitacion Valley and the micro-neighborhoods around Bayview, which have gone by different names at different times. Ultimately this is the larger story of the whole southeastern corner of the city – with Bayview-Hunter's Point held at the center of the narrative.

This story sets the stage for the racialized redevelopment fights of the 1970s and 1990s, which I cover in later chapters. More importantly, this history reshapes our understanding of an often-misunderstood neighborhood in ways that help us better understand the puzzle of contemporary redevelopment in San Francisco.

The rest of this chapter is structured in five parts. In the first section, "Continuity on the Coast," I further discuss the dissonance between popular understandings of the history of the Southeast, and the patterns that I uncover in this chapter. Then, I trace the historiography of the Southeast, with commentary on sources and my own research methods. Third, in "The Value of Land," I look at the way the Southeast has long been both separate and central to the city, as far back as 1849. Following that, "Imperial Footprints," takes seriously the idea that World War II changed everything in the area, and lays out how the development of the shipyard drew in both people and development capital. Finally, in "Making Segregation," I step back and talk about the role of race throughout this history. Although I argue that race matters, I also insist that the politics of the place were not "forever changed" by the WWII wave, given the continuity of the class politics that have threaded through this history.

## **Continuity on the Coast**

Although so much has changed in the landscape and demography of Southeast San Francisco in more than 160 years of urban history, there is a remarkable sameness in the descriptions of the place as written by outsiders, going back all the way to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *San Francisco Chronicle*, for example, sent a journalist down to the Southeast in 1889 to write up a report on life at one of the five Chinese shrimp camps that dotted the edge of the Hunter's Point peninsula from the 1860s through the 1920s. The language used to describe the people who lived and worked there was racist and jingoist, reflecting the mood of that era. But the general tale of traveling to the "far reaches" of the city – presented as San Francisco's own frontier – bears quoting at length. It's worth noting that the sense of the Southeast as frontier may have been exacerbated, in turn, by the presence of Chinese, who were simultaneously vilified and exoticized. This was written at a time when dirt roads and wooden drawbridges had recently made the swampy route viable from downtown San Francisco out to the Southeast. Yet it was a difficult journey:

San Francisco holiday makers and sightseers do not, as a rule, regard the Potrero and South San Francisco as desirable objective points. The roads are known to be bad, and the odors are not such as bespeak associations of flowery fields and basky glens. On the contrary, the whole journey, from the drawbridge at Fourth and Townsend streets down to Hunter's point (sic) itself, is a perpetual recurrence of boggy roads, clouds of dust, reeking malarious acres of black mud and stinks that baffle comparison or description. At the drawbridge the traveler is often compelled to hold his nose, but when he reaches Butchertown and winds up with the swineries of South San Francisco he is tempted to exclaim: 'Surely the bitterness of death is past.' ...

It is well to take the reader into confidence from the start, by remarking that those who would see the queer Chinese shrimp colony at Hunter's point must make up their minds to first battle heroically with the smells of Butchertown.

There is not much improvement in the prospect as the traveler journeys along Fifth avenue,<sup>2</sup> leaving the pig-pens and abattoirs behind him. The air is purer, but the scenery is of the savage and desolate rather than the pastoral type. A few houses, shrouded by grim, gray-green gum trees, the short, half-withered grass, the rocky, uneven roads, give the impression of a primitive Australian settlement rather than the suburb of a busy American city, and the gem of the Golden West at that. Now Hunter's point comes into view, with its dry dock and sugar refinery: otherwise there is nothing in sight except the distant shore line of Alameda county, and nearer to the right a number of low wooden shanties, with fishing boats drawn up on the beach, and dark-blue figures flitting among the hulls or on the docks. On and around the point there are perhaps 100 of these people. Nearer inspection reveals the fact that most of them are Chinese, and the impression is strengthened that this is a real Chinese colony by the sight of a double junk [boat] of unmistakable Oriental pattern beating up for the point, having evidently returned from a trip up the Sacramento river. ...

But while there are a number of fishermen, properly so called in this out of the way corner – which seems to have nothing whatever to do with San Francisco or civilization – the business of the majority is evidently the taking of shrimps.<sup>3</sup>

So began the written record of Southeast San Francisco – as a smelly, exotic place that doesn't have much to do with San Francisco proper in terms of race, class, culture or degree of civilization. It was a place, according to this 1889 observer, where even the scenery was savage – a counter to the larger narrative of San Francisco as a place of progress, a heart of civilization, and boom-town possibilities. This, of course, was affirmed by the quality of the people who in classic late-19<sup>th</sup> century form, were imagined as wild and unclean because of their Chinese language, customs, and dwellings. This was bolstered by a social and legal climate that refused full citizenship to Chinese immigrants – a climate fostered by anti-Chinese sentiment by elites and labor alike.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sic: Fifth avenue, Hunter's point, Sacramento river, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, "Chinese Shrimpers."

<sup>4</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the Workingmen's Party used Chinese workers as a foil for their own employment problems. Cf Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*; Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: A Study of the Anti-Chinese Movements in California*.

The stereotypes of the Chinese as savage or unclean (happy to live in crowded filthy conditions) were floated around with either ignorance or deception. The Chinese in California lived in slum conditions (in Chinatown, at Hunter's Point, and in towns across the state) because they were kept from living elsewhere, and prevented from owning land. This racial rule was enforced through vigilante violence. The shrimp camps in the Southeast were tolerated as long as the Southeast remained distant and foreign to the city proper. As expanded road development brought the Southeast "closer" to downtown, after the turn of the century, Chinese dwellers in the Southeast were disenfranchised of their land and businesses. Observers of the Chinese at the time documented this extensively, showing the feedback loop between spatial policies like segregation, land tenure limitations, and public health strategies with the cultural stereotypes attributed to Chinese people.<sup>5</sup>

The bigger point here is not just about the shrimpers or Chinese San Franciscans. Instead, I want to use this *outsider's* view of Hunter's Point to open up a set of questions about the history of the entire Southeast. Ultimately, whether the residents were Chinese, Italian, Maltese, or African American, and whether they were homeowners, renters, or small business owners, the long view of the history of this place shows a legacy of isolation from the center of politics and power. At the same time, through this long isolation, the Southeast has been central to the functioning of the city and is a place in which San Francisco's often-un-discussed racial problems are laid bare.

Compare the 1889 view above with another perspective, from more than seventy years later. Once again a white-Euro ethnic<sup>6</sup> newspaper reporter attempted to explain the mysteries of the Southeast to a largely white readership. The writer was, as above, focused on Hunter's Point, which still was an independent neighborhood, separate from the adjacent Bayview. This is from 1966, after the freeways and Candlestick Park had been built:

Hunters Point lies about [5] miles south of San Francisco's financial and shipping centers. It lies about a mile to the north of Candlestick Park, the stadium for the Giants' National League baseball team. When there's a home game you can hear the shrieking of the fans. Hunters Point is noticed by most San Franciscans only when they're going to or from a ball game, or if they happen to look east while driving along the freeway that runs down the prosperous Peninsula to San Jose. What you see from that that distance is a shining pattern of buildings that you imagine must be splendid hillside apartment houses, put there to take advantage of a view of San Francisco Bay that equals that from the rich men's apartments on Telegraph Hill, or from the mansions across the bay in Piedmont, above the city of Oakland. [But] When you visit Hunters Point you scarcely appreciate its view. Most of the apartment houses on the hill were built twenty-five years ago for the temporary housing of wartime naval shipyard workers. When the war ended, the hill became San Francisco's major social dump, a place of refuge from redevelopment projects in the central city and from the prejudice of white landlords. Most of the paint has worn off the flimsy outer walls of these two-story buildings. Garbage cans stand astride front doors. Steady winds from the Pacific Ocean blow variegated trash across the bare terrain. There is not 1 square yard of that customary American

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<sup>5</sup> Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*. Also see Craddock, *City of Plagues: Disease, Poverty, and Deviance in San Francisco*.

<sup>6</sup> Again, I use this term when possible to highlight the fact that "white" people also have ethnicities, though of course the term "ethnic" is most often used colloquially to describe people who are not thought of as white.

garden amenity, the residential lawn. There aren't even doorbells. Broken glass glitters on the steep curves of the street.

... This is the most biologically fertile area in San Francisco – it is even more fertile than Chinatown. ... Hunters Point is a 90 per cent Negro town. The other residents are chiefly Samoans, American Indians, a few whites. It stands on one of the famous seven hills of San Francisco, but it is hardly a part of that city, and has almost no part in the life of white America. ... Hunters Point abuts the somewhat less impoverished Bayview district lying on flat terrain just to the west.<sup>7</sup>

The article, published in the *Nation Magazine* – which means it was written for a white liberal audience that was probably supportive of the idea of racial integration – makes it clear that this is a place for outsiders in economic and racial terms. On the one hand the description is sympathetic: Hunter's Point residents are viewed as refugees, fleeing expulsion through redevelopment and finding solace in a place that was not really even San Francisco. On the other hand, it is weighted with the sense that the people of Hunter's Point are different, *other* – they are even more fertile than the Chinese! Whether intentional or not, the tone of this observation implies that Hunter's Point is a teeming, out of control place. The people are viewed as animalistic – and their fertility is noted as if it is perhaps something to fear. More to the point, it reduces the notion of "Hunter's Point" simply to a few public housing projects, when the community was always more than this.

The article went on to stereotype what it called the "hill people" who lived on the overlooks around the shipyard peninsula as primitive and unable to control themselves in the face of racist white-black encounters (in which black teens, when harassed by white ones, were unable to just walk away calmly). It compared the impoverished life on the hill with a cancer on the city, which needed attention from the outside to keep it from metastasizing. This may have been intended as helpful – to draw attention to the problems in the community that had been long ignored. The article ended on a somewhat hopeful note, assessing some of the latest War on Poverty programs that were attempting to enliven the cultural economy of the place – perhaps offering a platform for systemic change.

Yet the main message from the *Nation* piece, as with the *Chronicle's* tale, is that the Southeast is a place apart, a place with a tenuous connection to the rest of the city. As described in chapter 1, this is a very similar view to the one most outsiders still have today in regards to the Southeast – Hunter's Point, Bayview and Visitacion Valley alike. So despite 50 years of history, the socio-politics of the Southeast have played a familiar role in the larger San Francisco story – it has been viewed as the dumping ground – for uses and people that the mainstream did not want to see. And the entirety of the place is often reduced to the story of a few public housing projects on the hill.

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<sup>7</sup> Bess, "No Way Downtown."

## Historiography of an Untold History

How did we get from there to here? There is no book that adequately documents the history of Southeast San Francisco. In this section I review the existing sources and reflect on some of the limitations or challenges in these documents.

Two photo-based books provide a quick history of the Southeast, one on Bayview-Hunter's Point and the other on Visitacion Valley.<sup>8</sup> Part of a series of neighborhood studies that look at nearly every section of the city, they are sweetly put together with historical photographs and memorabilia. These are texts meant for popular consumption and not intended to be critical histories. Even so, it is unfortunate that the books tell a very partial story – hardly dealing with race and generally ignoring the larger forces (particularly capital flows) that have always intersected with local patterns of growth, destruction and renewal.

An odd quirk of the historiography of the Southeast – that is, the way that its history has been recorded and re-told – is that much of the data we have come from city-solicited reports, conducted multiple times over the years as part of the scoping process for redevelopment planning. The most recent one, a 197-page tome completed in 2009, is the best; it is well written and thorough. But as a city report, it is destined for reading by only the hardy souls who are hangers-on to redevelopment meetings and perhaps a handful of architectural preservationists and developers. The report is a useful accounting of patterns of land use and demographic change, and its authors offer interesting analysis of these patterns.<sup>9</sup>

Though most books on San Francisco ignore the Southeast, texts that explore the African American experience touch on the story of the place – but only briefly. Even Albert Broussard's richly-detailed work *Black San Francisco*, which is the only book that focuses exclusively on black San Franciscan life through the 1950s, doesn't pay that much attention to the Southeast.<sup>10</sup> Other works, including a few dissertations (written mostly in the 1960s and 70s) and papers written on housing politics and race in San Francisco, have also been useful sources for this period – though most of those focus exclusively on the heady politics of the 1960s or the 2000s.<sup>11</sup> When I began this project, there was essentially no contemporary work on the community; in the last several years others have begun to look at Bayview-Hunter's Point and some of that work has been useful to have in conversation with my own.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Tricia O'Brien, *San Francisco's Bayview Hunters Point*, Images of America (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005); The Visitacion Valley History Project, *San Francisco's Visitacion Valley* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Broussard, *Black San Francisco: the Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Agee, "The Streets of San Francisco: Blacks, Beats, Homosexuals, and the San Francisco Police Department, 1950-1968" (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2005); Benjamin Green Carmichael, *Hunters Point: A Participant Observer's View* (Berkeley, 1968); Daniel Crowe, *Prophets of Rage: The Black Freedom Struggle in San Francisco, 1945-1969* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000); Arthur Hippler, *Hunters Point: A Black Ghetto* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); Paul T. Miller, *The Postwar Struggle for Civil Rights: African Americans in San Francisco, 1945-1975*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Lindsey Dillon, "Redevelopment and the Politics of Place in Bayview-Hunters Point" (2011); Jackson, "Black Flight from San Francisco: How Race, Community and Politics Shape Urban Policy"; Christina Jackson, "Black San Francisco: How a Black Community Fights for Space in San Francisco" (Ph.D Dissertation in Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara, Forthcoming).



The researchers who have written the city's reports culled from multiple sources, including an interesting trove of oral histories completed at several key moments in redevelopment history. One feature of these reports is that the city's official histories are often copies of each other, with a bit of new research added. Each one updates prior redevelopment and planning department reports, some of which were first pieced together in the 1940's as redevelopment officials began to make the case for change across the city. The effect of this repetition is that in some cases there are facts that are misrepresented as true via citation of a prior report that lacks evidence. I've done my best to trace anything that could be at all controversial or questionable backwards to its original source, or have found additional sources to explain or confirm any controversies.

Like the Redevelopment Agency's in-house archives, which were a useful source for my research, the city's reports are remarkably thorough and detailed. The reports reflect a concern, on the one hand, to document both lived and living urban history. On the other hand, there is something incongruous when one sets down these two facts: the same agencies that plotted a total demolition and reconstruction of neighborhoods sought to carefully document what was there before the demolition. What was going on here?

It is, of course, impossible to accurately know the intent of all of the actors involved in soliciting, researching and writing the city's official histories – but even if it were, this knowledge would not actually tell us much about the way the information in the reports is generated and used. One could make the argument that producing a clear and detailed history could in fact serve to inspire developers and planners to take good care with the future of a place, to perhaps be more protective and preservationist of a place whose built landscapes still represent the long and complicated histories that came before.

Along these lines, the most recent city report (which is generally excellent, and which concludes with a list of recommendations of buildings to preserve and suggests modes of assistance to offer to retain existing community residents as the place begins to change) begins by declaring that Bayview-Hunter's Point is one of the "most historic" districts of the city.<sup>13</sup> To be fair, this appears to be an attempt by the report's authors (who are highly respected local historians and architects, and who seem genuinely interested in the history they were tasked with re-telling), to announce a need for preservation and care. And yet, what does this mean: "most historic"? Whether this sort of language comes from a researcher's desire to signal officials to take care, or from an institutional need to emphasize that it "cared" even as it marshaled grand changes in the place, is hard to say.

In any case, "most historic" is an empty aphorism. All places have a deep history, whether or not that history is known, and the forces of re-development work hard to erase and re-tell those histories. Seen this way, statements like this sound off-key amid a context of continual pressures by government and developers to transform the place. As with the histories in later chapters that I've pieced together from interviews and primary sources, the process of "doing history" that this chapter undertakes is as much about interpreting the ways in which history is told or recorded as it is about drawing a straight historical line through a set of winding, interlocking facts.

In addition to the city reports, I scoured oral histories, primary source documents, and archeological surveys, I conducted my own extended interviews with a few key actors who have also studied this history, and stitched them together with data culled from old

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<sup>13</sup> Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*.

photographs and wisps of information in the archival trove of the Bancroft Library. The archives on the Southeast are not coherent and not held in one place – they include newspaper clippings and photographs, pre-World War I history books, flyers and notes from community meetings, and business directories. Even so, in this section I have described how although there are multiple scattered sources on Southeast San Francisco’s history, none of the extant resources sufficiently tell the story that needs to be told.

## Isolation and the Value of Land

The physical and human geographies of the Southeast exist in dialogue with each other. Racism, isolation, and critical but offensive industries operated throughout this history, but that complex story is often ignored. Instead, contemporary accounts often insist that race – specifically blackness – defines the political and social territory of the Southeast. While a major piece of the larger argument of this dissertation rests on the notion that race matters in the analysis of urban political economies – I want to argue here that the defining feature of the long history of Southeast has been *isolation*.

Put another way, the Southeast’s role as an urban “sink,” has been key to the area’s identity. As urbanist Grady Clay explains:

Sinks are places of last resort into which powerful groups in society shunt, shove, dump and pour whatever or whomever they do not like or cannot use; auto carcasses, garbage, trash and minority groups... Sinks are special-purpose places produced in such predictable quantities by American cities that it would appear that a form of geopolitical conspiracy has been at work. For all cities create sinks.<sup>14</sup>

Sinks are what urban morphologists call “urban fallow,” abandoned or obsolete factories, housing or brownfields, the remains of industrial urbanism.<sup>15</sup> The mistake that is often made is that these places are viewed as outside of the norm, outside of the flow of capital. Instead, these sinks should be seen as integral to the function of capitalism and urbanism. They are what Richard Walker has called “lumpengeographies” – a “permanent reserve of stagnant places” awaiting reinvestment.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, the Southeast has been identified over the years as the place to push people and uses that were unwelcome elsewhere, a classic example of Clay’s concept. The Southeast’s status as sink or fallow – which has played out through multiple vectors of difference, including social class, land-use, and race – has produced remarkably similar politics over time, across epochs of industrial and ethnic change. So race matters, but to insist on its absolute primacy in understanding the Southeast may, in fact, be somewhat racist. Let me explain.

The nature of the isolation of the Southeast has changed over time, as swampy marshes and sharp rocky coastlines gave way to cycles of human development, infill, and shifting demographic patterns. Had the Southeast been less craggy, marshy and relatively inaccessible when the city was founded, there’s no question that it would have played a quite different role in the history of the city. At the same time, a human-led process – the

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<sup>14</sup> Clay, *Close-up, How to Read the American City*.

<sup>15</sup> Thanks to Nathan McClintock for pointing me to “urban fallow” & “lumpengeographies.”

<sup>16</sup> Walker, “Two Sources of Uneven Development Under Advanced Capitalism.”

whims and moods of capitalism – has been as important in this history. The location of the place and its capacity for resource extraction and what Harvey calls accumulation by dispossession<sup>17</sup> – has been central to the political tensions around which kinds of people or industries ought to be there.

There have been inhabitants in the area for about 7-10,000 years, beginning with many tribes, awkwardly grouped together by the Spanish under the name Costanoans (coastal people); later various tribes united under the name of Ohlone, though this title encompasses several groups with distinct languages and cultures. The Ohlone left shell-mounds and other remains that were unearthed as development changed the shape of the landscape. Fourteen out of the sixteen prehistoric shellmound burial sites identified in a 1909 survey of San Francisco were in the Southeast – but this high number is likely due to the late development of the area. Similar sites elsewhere in the city were already covered up or leveled in the early rapid expansion of the urban core.<sup>18</sup> There is still a small Indian presence today, and some locals have worked to remind the public of their existence and rights, though with little success.<sup>19</sup>

The Ohlone had been drawn to the Southeast by its fertile soils and rich estuaries, which also attracted the Spanish, whose conquest of San Francisco's indigenous communities was part of a bloody reign of terror and enslavement across the state in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>20</sup> Following that, the land claim frenzy of the Mexican period set the stage for a century of legal battles over the San Francisco peninsula.<sup>21</sup> Migrants were also drawn by water. Cesar Chavez Street, which connects the Bayview to the Mission District, follows the line of Precita Creek (now underground), which was freshwater and partly navigable by boat. This was just one of several sources of fresh water that made the area agriculturally viable.

The gold and silver rushes that created San Francisco as an “instant city” brought much more than just seekers of mining adventures. The rush was on to seize unclaimed lands for the possibility of riches contained therein (mercury, gold, silver – or even water) and for the right to capitalize on those riches through urban development, to house and employ the crowds that streamed in to Alta California. The dynamics of city building have always been a powerful source of value creation and capital accumulation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Dillon, “Redevelopment and the Politics of Place in Bayview-Hunters Point”; Jackson, “Black San Francisco: How a Black Community Fights for Space in San Francisco”; Jackson, “Black Flight from San Francisco: How Race, Community and Politics Shape Urban Policy.”

<sup>18</sup> Roger R Olmsted and Nancy Olmsted, *San Francisco Bayside Historical Cultural Resource Survey: Northern Bayside, Crosstown, Sunnyale/Yosemite and Hunters Point*, San Francisco Clean Water Management Program (San Francisco, 1982); Gerald Robert Dow, “Bay Fill in San Francisco: A History of Change” (Master’s Thesis, San Francisco State University, 1973).

<sup>19</sup> Francisco DaCosta, *Bayview Hunters Point Community Activist and San Francisco Resident*, vol. Interview with author, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> McWilliams, *Southern California*; Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*.

<sup>21</sup> The history of property regimes and their relationship to the settlement patterns of the city is worthy of more research in future projects on this topic. See W. W. Robinson, *Land in California: The Story of Mission Lands, Ranchos, Squatters, Mining Claims, Railroad Grants, Land Scrip, Homesteads* (University of California Press, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*; Walker, “An Appetite for the City.”

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the land we now call Bayview-Hunters Point was part of one of the city's major Mexican ranchos, a vast swath of the city claimed by Don Jose Cornelio Bernal, who petitioned the California Governor's office for the right to own the land where he had kept his cattle for some time in the 1830s.<sup>23</sup> Bernal, whose family home was at the present site of St. Luke's Hospital in the Mission District, later split the ranch, selling it off to speculators. He lived off of the labor of low-paid Indian workers through mid century.<sup>24</sup>

John Townsend (who was appointed *alcalde*, essentially mayor, of San Francisco for a few brief months of 1848) hatched plans for a new city south of the downtown core, with Corneille de Boom (a Dutch merchant with capital to invest). Townsend set up a deal to plat and sell the whole eastern flank of Bernal's rancho. An 1849 map shows a sea of identical blocks that extended into the bay – so the idea of filling out the city's edges was already in place, even as the gold rush had barely begun.

Robert Eugene Hunter and Philip Schuyler Hunter, brothers from the east coast (via a Paris education), worked as real estate agents for Townsend and DeBoom. The brothers threw themselves into turning the peninsula into a money-making paradise. Their most successful business was selling drinking water, which was extracted from an artesian well just inland from Hunter's Point and shipped around the edge of the city to downtown San Francisco. They were less successful at land sales, trying for years to encourage buyers of small lots, in a failed attempt to create a bustling "South San Francisco."<sup>25</sup>

The landscape was platted out into the bay: that is, an imagined future streetscape was designed and drawn up on maps designed to encourage buyers – creating "water lots" to inspire speculative purchases based on a vision of an expanded peninsula that has still only been partially realized. But the plan to separate the Southeast as an independent city never succeeded, and eventually the name was appended to the land south of the San Francisco county line.

The entire far eastern flank of the city – from Mission Bay, out to Candlestick Point (formerly the "Black Hills"<sup>26</sup>) and through Visitacion Valley – was part of what would become an industrial crescent from the South of Market to South San Francisco.<sup>27</sup> The crescent was a powerhouse of production; the Southeast's contribution centered around shipbuilding, animal processing and a major railyard in Visitacion Valley. The area became a center for production for the tools of mining and war.<sup>28</sup> The Southeast was not as densely developed as SOMA, however, which was packed with machine shops and warehouses even before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>23</sup> Olmsted and Olmsted, *San Francisco Bayside Historical Cultural Resource Survey*.

<sup>24</sup> Francis McCarthy, *Hunter's Point* (San Francisco Calif.: Flores Paramount Press, 1942).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Olmsted and Olmsted, *San Francisco Bayside Historical Cultural Resource Survey*.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Walker, "Industry Builds Out the City: Industrial Decentralization in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850-1950," in *Manufacturing Suburbs: Building Work and Home on the Metropolitan Fringe*, ed. Robert D Lewis (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*.

## Naming

After being labeled by Spanish explorers as *Punta Avisadera*, or beacon point, Hunter's Point took its new Anglophone title from a pair of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century real estate speculators – the aforementioned Hunter brothers – who settled in the nook of what was eventually called India Basin. Bernal's Rancho Rincon de las Salinas y Potrero Viejo, which also included the pasture lands of Visitacion Valley, later became Bay View, and then Bayview, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That name was later reserved for the inland section of the community, south and west of Hunter's Point but north of Visitacion Valley.<sup>29</sup>

As the area was tackled by developers who revved up residential and industrial construction in the building booms of the 1920s and 40s, smaller areas were named, like Silver Terrace, Little Hollywood, and Bret Harte, which emerged to package properties for potential home buyers. The naming evolution has continued over the years as city planners applied terms like South Bayshore that residents often rejected or ignored. In the 1960's, the title Hunter's Point-Bayview became more common; eventually that was flipped in common parlance to Bayview-Hunter's Point, or simply Bayview, referring to the area south of Islais Creek, east of Bayshore Ave and northeast of Highway 101.

The name Hunter's Point refers both to the peninsula where the shipyard was located and the side of Bayview Hill, which overlooks it, and which was viewed as integrated into the shipyard culturally, once African Americans lived there. Today either Bayview or Hunter's Point is used to refer to the entirety of Bayview-Hunter's Point. The Southeast includes both of these places, as well as Visitacion Valley; at times it has included a few micro-neighborhoods like Dogpatch to the north. Contemporary divisions are clearly made in zip code assignments – Bayview-Hunter's Point, for example, is fully within the 94124 zone – and often locals refer to it that way (as in, "I live in the 94124").

Bayview and Visitacion Valley today have a largely common history that extends to the communities that live among them; yet many residents of both places would balk at being linked together. Still, although very few non-black locals use the term, among black residents and members of the non-profit complex that serves low-income residents, the term Southeast is commonly used to include Visitacion Valley.

## The Birth of an Outlier

The evolution of place names came with new visions of what the place could be. Yet across time the Southeast, no matter the borders, has been flagged as outcast or even outlaw. News reports from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century indicate that the dry dock built out at Hunter's Point in the 1860s was a site of suspicion. It was occasionally mentioned as the place where shipping deliveries could be made out of sight of the State of California's port traffic managers. It was also a place where kidnappings were reported and where escapees, according to the rumor mill, had last been seen or seemed bound to re-appear.<sup>30</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the main reason people were interested in the Southeast was for its development potential. When it wasn't on the table as a possible new city, it was discussed as the future center of shipbuilding or industry. As chronicled by the local papers in the

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<sup>29</sup> McCarthy, *Hunter's Point*, 28.

<sup>30</sup> One of many small news items along these lines: "Men sought are not lost." (1902, Jun 17). *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)*, pp. 14.

1850s and 60s, the growth of the city's boundaries was a source of great interest to reporters, who were working for outfits that had financial interests in the city's growth.<sup>31</sup> Along with notes about which ship was in harbor, which elites had recently arrived in town, and which distillery had succumbed to scandal, the story of real estate expansion and turnover was a key narrative in the city's vibrant newspaper industry.<sup>32</sup>

The experience of watching land values soar had to have been a bit like living near Silicon Valley in the late 1990s – the numbers shot up so quickly it must have set minds aflame with dreams of instant wealth. Hundreds of stories fanned those desires. In one year a downtown San Francisco lot multiplied in value from \$16.50 to \$6,000 and then \$45,000, a nearly three-thousand-fold increase.<sup>33</sup> In that context, the developers' itch was preceded by land grabs in every direction – often fueled by mining wealth. The transformation of land into real estate was a key product of the gold rush.<sup>34</sup> At the same time: land *was* gold.

Southeastern San Francisco's development came relatively late, plagued by impassable creeks and acres of marshland that made road and rail development costly. Yet some had a vision of the place as an industrial engine if only they could get across the vastness of Mission Bay and the swamplands to the south of it.<sup>35</sup> And there were indeed clusters of residents and industrial enterprises in the area from early on. Poor transportation access remains a complaint today, though of course at an entirely different scale.

Families who made their fortunes on land acquisition and resource extraction tried to capitalize on the Bayview's undeveloped spaces. As one observer put it in 1942: "Successively the Townsends, the DeBooms, the Ralstons, the Hearsts, the Brandensteins and every generation of realtors had deeply interested themselves financially in its development, but all had failed to supply *the glass slipper* of transportation, the one magic means which would have led to the revelation of her beauty to the world."<sup>36</sup>

We should, of course, add the Hunters and their failed land scheme to that list. One small news item in 1869 noted that, even though investing in the "money market" was at that moment more profitable than real estate, the edges of the city were selling off rapidly: "In the northern and hilly portion of the city the increase in value of property has not been nearly as large as the south and east." South of Hunter's Point, the paper noted, the Tide Land Commission was set to auction off hundreds of "blocks" of largely undeveloped land.<sup>37</sup> The gold rush mentality permeated land sales. The railroad, and its potential expansion through the Bayview flats, was key to the value of the land, but rail expansion did not come quickly enough for the Hunters to enact their vision, and their scheme was a total failure.<sup>38</sup>

A decade later, following the advent of 1878 rail access across Mission Bay, the San Francisco Homestead and Railroad Association took a different tack in promoting the

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<sup>31</sup> Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*.

<sup>32</sup> On the 19<sup>th</sup> century newspaper milieu, see Ethington, *The Public City*.

<sup>33</sup> Oscar Lewis, *San Francisco: Mission to Metropolis* (Howell-North Books, 1980).

<sup>34</sup> Richard A. Walker, "California's Golden Road to Riches: Natural Resources and Regional Capitalism, 1848 – 1940," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91, no. 1 (2001): 167–199.

<sup>35</sup> McCarthy, *Hunter's Point*, 18.: "In 1850 lieutenant Buffum prophesied that Hunters point 'will soon be to San Francisco what Brooklyn is to New York.'"

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>37</sup> "The Real Estate Market," *The Daily Morning Chronicle (1868-1869)* (San Francisco, Calif., May 2, 1869).

<sup>38</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, Sept. 8 1869, cited in Olmsted and Olmsted, *San Francisco Bayside Historical Cultural Resource Survey*.

development of the place, trying to bring in a raft of working class investors in small plots, but this was largely unsuccessful as well. Instead, southeastern expansion happened slowly, unevenly – even as dreams for the landscape were drawn and re-drawn by developers over the years.<sup>39</sup>

Through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century residential development was haphazard, centered around a few important institutions. George Hearst used the Bayview's out-of-the-way status to develop a horse racing course, Bay View Park, where betting could take place out of sight. The racecourse, which featured small but elegant hotel, lasted about 15 years before it burned to the ground in the early 1880s, and was not replaced.

Though the presence of the racetrack meant that the place served briefly as a local vacation spot for local elites, the high-style hotel-horse complex was punctuated not by mansions for the rich, but by clusters of wood-frame housing. These were home mainly for the employees of the Butchertown complex and for the farmers and gardeners who began to cultivate the open spaces of the Southeast for truck farms that were a significant part of the city's foodshed. There were also a few church-run homes for orphans and wayward youth, which were connected to acres of hillside property that wasn't sold back to developers until the 1930s.<sup>40</sup>

The establishment of the Butcher's Reservation in 1867, which included animal rendering and affiliated businesses (hair-mattress suppliers, slaughterhouses, tanneries, glue-works, fertilizer plants, soap and tallow works), began the tradition of isolating industries in the Southeast that were essential yet reviled by the general public. The reservation was loud and smelly, and created a central node for *vaqueros* herding cattle up the peninsula. As the *Chronicle* reporter had noted, above, these were smells with which civilized city folk felt they must "battle heroically."<sup>41</sup>

And though it lacked attention from investors, the location of the Southeast – between downtown San Francisco and the southern peninsula - set it up as an obvious site for rail development. Indeed, the city's major rail lines cut through the Southeast in the 1870s, around the inner edge of Mission Bay, through the edge of Bayview to Visitacion Valley and into the peninsula below, with spurs that reached out into the industrial zones by the water. Third Street was once called Railroad Ave, and the Cal Train line and Interstate 280 today follow the original rail routes.

Meanwhile, the dry dock at Hunter's Point emerged with centrifugal force, pulling in people and capital; I'll discuss this in greater detail later in this chapter.

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<sup>39</sup> These associations and their role in the development of San Francisco's fringe neighborhoods deserve further research.

<sup>40</sup> Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 63.

<sup>41</sup> Anonymous, "Chinese Shrimpers"; David Bruce Iglar, "Industrial Cowboys: Nature, Private Property, and Region in the Far West, 1850-1920", 1996; Allan Richard Pred, *The Spatial Dynamics of U.S. Urban-industrial Growth, 1800-1914; Interpretive and Theoretical Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1966). (On the peripheral location of noxious industries in all US cities, see Pred 1966).

## Chinese Presence

One of the key stories that has been largely lost to general knowledge is the everyday life of the Chinese workers who established successful businesses on the periphery of the city, out of sight of mainstream (white Euro-ethnic) San Franciscans.<sup>42</sup> Nineteenth century San Francisco culture was forged in the intense worker-capitalist fights of the era, through which ethnic and racial tensions grew molten and nasty. The Chinese, as the city's largest non-European ethnic group, were the primary targets of racial hatreds and were forced to keep their work narrowly confined to certain locations in the city.<sup>43</sup> The targeting of Chinese was part of a racial-consolidation process for the motley Euro-ethnic crews that came to be known collectively as white. Euro-ethnic differences were mediated and softened through collective acts of racism.<sup>44</sup>

Many Chinese San Franciscans had immigrated to the US for the lure of gold and then labor – participating in the 49er craze and then building the roads and rail-lines that made California commerce possible. They paid a steep price, dying by the score in accidents in service of creating the stunningly beautiful routes we still enjoy, edging along sheer ocean-view cliffs and tunneling through mountains. After completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, there was a wave of migration into the city. In the gold rush era Chinese workers had been excluded from the most lucrative mining activities; they were later isolated in low-paying trades.<sup>45</sup> Across the state they were subject to violent *pogroms*, in which Euro-ethnic townsfolk ordered them out of their homes and marched them to town limits with torches – as Pfaelzer has meticulously documented.<sup>46</sup>

Within San Francisco the boundaries of Chinatown were policed officially and unofficially – with labor, residence and business-zoning regulations and with vigilante violence. In the 1880s officials outlawed the use of wooden buildings for laundries or defined a minimum square footage needed for lodging; those laws were typically only enforced on the Chinese, effectively shutting down certain businesses and limiting both wealth- and employment- generating activities for Chinese San Franciscans.<sup>47</sup> The presence of a delimited yet protected Chinatown kept many Chinese in the downtown core. Some, however, relocated to Visitacion Valley after the 1906 quake and fire created a wave of refugees.

In Bayview proper, one of the core activities for Chinese residents involved harvesting shrimp. Much of what we know about the shrimp camps comes from news accounts written

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<sup>42</sup> Olmsted and Olmsted, *San Francisco Bayside Historical Cultural Resource Survey*; Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 52.

<sup>43</sup> Craddock, *City of Plagues: Disease, Poverty, and Deviance in San Francisco*; Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: the San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*.

<sup>44</sup> Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*; R. Walker, "San Francisco's Haymarket: A Redemptive Tale of Class Struggle" 7, no. 1 (2008): 45–58.

<sup>45</sup> Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: A Study of the Anti-Chinese Movements in California*.

<sup>46</sup> Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*.

<sup>47</sup> The San Francisco Segregation Ordinance of 1890 may never have been enforced, but it is nevertheless instructive about the sentiments of the times: The law "mandated the removal of Chinese from neighborhoods close to downtown and ripe for redevelopment. The law ordered Chinese residents to resettle in isolated industrial areas of the city filled with waste dumped and other environmental hazards." Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 25; also see p. 232.



in the context of racial hatreds, with racial slurs used as mere descriptors.<sup>48</sup> Excluded from carrying out their work any further north on the waterfront, clusters of Chinese fisherman found their way to various nooks along the craggy Hunter's Point peninsula (some were large enough that outsiders called them villages) as well as farther south.<sup>49</sup> They weren't just fishermen; they were in the food production business, cooking, shelling and drying shrimp. An amazing 80 percent of the product was destined for export to China, probably along with the loose shrimp shell castings, which were used on mainland China for fertilizer.<sup>50</sup> The shrimpers were so productive that their export business caught the eye of local government, which pursued tax claims against fisherman whom they accused of shortchanging city coffers. It was another way local government was employed to put unique pressure on Chinese immigrants and to limit their wealth.

The Hunter's Point camps were part of a larger network of shrimping export activity. There were about 50 camps around the San Francisco Bay in the 1880s. That number dropped to 26 in 1896. Long before zoning laws existed, shrimpers faced challenges to their work through other official means. The State Legislature, for example, outlawed the bag net in 1910, and most of the shrimp fishermen abandoned the industry. A redesign of the net, which permitted trolling for shrimp, was introduced in the 1920s and by the 1930s the empty fishing villages were again active. No fewer than twelve fishing camps were observed along the Hunters Point shoreline in that decade. But the shrimping revival was short-lived.<sup>51</sup>

In 1939, the San Francisco Health Department, responding to complaints about the pungent smell of the camps, declared them unsanitary and ordered several of them burned. Fishing activity further declined with the expansion of the Hunter's Point Dry Docks and the movement of the Navy to Hunters Point in the 1940s. The last generation of shrimpers, under the aegis of the Hunters Point Shrimp Company, lasted until 1959.<sup>52</sup> There are still people around who remember visiting the dock as children in the late 50s; some would trade a few hours of work for buckets of shrimp.<sup>53</sup>

There was a period in which city leaders considered officially expanding the Chinese presence in the Southeast. For at least two decades, between 1900 and 1920, several schemes emerged to try to move Chinatown to Hunter's Point, first as a plan to create a new "Oriental City" on the edge of town and later as a way to manage rebuilding after the 1906

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<sup>48</sup> "Miserable things these villages are. Nothing but unpainted shanties, blackened by the weather and the sun. A three plank wharf sticks out seaward from the shore and inland from the planking is a platform with a long shelf or table, upon which the bearers that pack the fish from the junks to the shore dump the shrimps." *San Francisco Chronicle* (July 23, 1893), cited in Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 50.

<sup>49</sup> Fifteen pounds fresh shrimp yielded just one pound of dry meat – so it was extremely hard work, according to the *Chronicle* (Ibid.).

<sup>50</sup> "The Queerest Crafts That Plough the Bay the Fleet of Chinese Junks," *San Francisco Chronicle* (1869-*Current File*) (San Francisco, Calif., December 4, 1904).

Southeast San Francisco thus served as the *contado*, or productive hinterland to China – long before Chinese manufacturing dominance over the US would become a clear feature of the international landscape (On this use of the term *contado*, see Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*.)

<sup>51</sup> Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: A Study of the Anti-Chinese Movements in California*.

<sup>52</sup> San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and San Francisco Planning Department, *Draft Environmental Impact Report: Candlestick Point-Hunters Point Shipyard Phase II*, J-15, III.

<sup>53</sup> Oscar James, "BVHP Resident," Interview by Author, September 2010; Informant#4, Southeast resident, Interview by Author.

earthquake and fire, which burned the centrally located Chinatown to the ground.<sup>54</sup> The white San Francisco leadership wanted to isolate the Chinese but also wanted to benefit from any revenue they could. The idea stalled amid conflicts over control of the community's borders (would a Southeastern Chinatown simply balloon even further south? Perhaps better to contain it in the central city?) and of tax collection (again, there was a question of control, dictated by geography – and concern with how to manage this out-of-the-way place). Former mayor James Phelan supported it as part of Mayor Eugene Schmidt's Committee of Fifty, which oversaw post-quake rebuilding efforts.<sup>55</sup> (Phelan built his political career partly on anti-Asian politics, which carried him all the way to the US Senate.)

Ultimately, Chinatown was rebuilt essentially in its old location by 1910, with a new tourist-friendly architectural approach overdone with Chinese flourishes for the benefit of tourists.<sup>56</sup> Some would argue that keeping Chinatown centralized was mostly a containment strategy – but it was also the first of many moments in the city's history when the drive to lure tourists was considered in directing development capital.

Chinese workers in the Southeast also were involved in food cultivation. Gardens dotted the entire urban periphery at the time – in Cow Hollow, around Lake Merced – and, in the greatest concentrations, in the Southeast. The Chinese labored in these gardens, feeding the city. But Chinese gardeners could not own property; they were squeezed out by new land uses and new gardeners, mostly Italian, Portuguese and Maltese.<sup>57</sup> While most of these gardens disappeared through the building booms of the 1920s and 40s, in 1981 one garden remained on Williams Street<sup>58</sup> (by 2010 the space had gone to seed as a site for personal storage).

The gardening industry was supported by as many as 500 fresh water wells across the Southeast. The micro-geography was ethnically split, with Chinese shrimpers clinging to the coast, Chinese and Japanese gardeners working on Alemany Avenue (where a farm was rebuilt 100 years later to revive the tradition of local food<sup>59</sup>) and white-ethnics in the Portola district. The rest of Bayview was populated through the turn of the century with working class San Franciscans: Italian, French, Portuguese, Maltese, Swedish.<sup>60</sup>

## Shipbuilding and a Global Destiny

After decades of ignominy, the WWII era solidified Hunter's Point in the public consciousness. It is true that the presence of the Navy and its expansion of the long-standing

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<sup>54</sup> Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 64.

<sup>55</sup> "Plan to Build an Oriental City: Chinese Colony at Foot of Van Ness/ The Plan to Remove Celestials to San Mateo County Is Opposed.," *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)* (San Francisco, Calif., April 27, 1906). The dynamic of Italian and Chinese dominance in gardening was also visible in Oakland, see L. Eve Armentrout Ma, *Hometown Chinatown: The History of Oakland's Chinese Community*, Asian Americans (New York: Garland Pub, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> Peter Booth Wiley, *National Trust Guide-- San Francisco: America's Guide for Architecture and History Travelers* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000).

<sup>57</sup> Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 63.

<sup>58</sup> Olmsted and Olmsted, *San Francisco Bayside Historical Cultural Resource Survey*, 115–116.

<sup>59</sup> In the late 1990's, I helped manage the non-profit program that governed this farm. This work initiated my interest and commitment to understanding Southeast San Francisco.

<sup>60</sup> Olmsted and Olmsted, *San Francisco Bayside Historical Cultural Resource Survey*.

dry dock had a ripple effect in terms of employment and development across the Southeast. The dry dock built out at ‘the point’ in 1867 had been a source of civic pride from the first crush of Franciscan rock that made way for the behemoth operation. The local papers gushed, boosterforce, about the capacity and potential of the site (then the West Coast’s largest) for global-scale production.<sup>61</sup> Later expanded by the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, the ten-acre site produced and repaired ships, and was a longstanding pick for military development.<sup>62</sup> (Bethlehem, an eastern steel and shipbuilding firm, also snagged the Union Iron Works, closer to downtown on Potrero Point.)<sup>63</sup>

The idea that Hunter’s Point ought to be set aside for federal war preparations went as far back as the 1860’s, when there had been discussions about moving the US Navy’s operations to “the Point” from its beachhead at Mare Island, near Vallejo in the North Bay.<sup>64</sup> There’s evidence that city boosters were pushing for a naval purchase in fits and starts for some 80 years before the deal was finally arranged to sell the property. It was one of many sources of contention among Bay Area cities as they competed for capital investment and status – with San Francisco as the perpetual “one to beat,” long after its status as safe industrial center had been eclipsed by East Bay cities.<sup>65</sup>

In 1917, the *Chronicle* noted a high-profile trip by Naval managers to the city to assess the potential for the site to become the center for West Coast naval ship production. Federal representatives looked at the island of Alameda, at Oakland, and at other sites around the bay. The Hunter’s Point commitment was not finalized until years later, but in the meantime, city engineer M.M. O’Shaunessy (who oversaw some of the most significant urban structural developments of his era, including the construction of the city’s modernized water and streetcar systems) made the pitch. He and a member of the Board of State Harbor Commissioners, which regulated San Francisco’s massive Port operations (which still were the largest on the West Coast at that time), insisted that the “formation of the rock in the vicinity of Hunter’s Point, the protection from the wind, the railroad facilities, and a hundred other points,” made the site ideal, according to the *Chronicle*, which also noted that the naval guests had spent the night at the St. Francis Hotel.<sup>66</sup>

Though the newspapers didn’t highlight these relationships, it is worth noting that the St. Francis was one of a set of opulent hotels in the city that represented an internal competition among capitalists trying to prove both the elite status of the city (as, perhaps, the Paris of the

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<sup>61</sup> Anonymous, “Docking of the ‘Colorado.’: Established Success of the Hunter’s Point Dry Dock...,” *The Daily Morning Chronicle (1868-1869)* (San Francisco, Calif., November 13, 1868).

<sup>62</sup> Anonymous, “Deed Filed for Hunter’s Point: Union Iron Works Acquires San Francisco Dry-Dock Properties,” *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)* (San Francisco, Calif., November 16, 1909).

<sup>63</sup> “Hunters Point Drydock Merged With Union Iron Works: Schwab Pays \$1,875,000 For Plant And Aims To Build Greatest Shipyard,” *San Francisco Call* (November 12, 1908), p. 2, Cited in Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 72.

<sup>64</sup> Anonymous, “The Dry Dock: Proposal to Sell the Dry Dock at Hunter’s Point to the Government--Probable Removal of the Navy Yard,” *The Daily Morning Chronicle (1868-1869)* (San Francisco, Calif., January 20, 1869).

<sup>65</sup> Roger W. Lotchin, *Fortress California, 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Walker, “Industry Builds Out the City: Industrial Decentralization in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850-1950.”

<sup>66</sup> Anonymous, “Hunter’s Point Is Visited By Naval Experts: Board Named To Recommend Fleet Base Site Hears City’s Arguments Hearing At City Hall / San Francisco’s Claims Are Presented by Mayor Rolph and Others Naval Board Party On Hunter’s Point Trip.” *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)*, (San Francisco, Calif., December 12, 1916).

West), and their own position within the local power structure. It was originally built in 1904 by the family of late railroad magnate Charles Crocker, who had major real estate investments in the southern parts of the city.

The city's wooing of military urbanization relied largely on the conceptualization of the Southeast as an industrial place. San Francisco's first centralized zoning rules, passed in 1921, solidified the Southeast's long-held industrial position, affirming the industrial destiny of large swaths of the neighborhood, including "the Islais Creek Estuary, Butchertown, South Basin, and the entire Hunters Point shoreline. Commercial zones were established along Railroad Avenue (3rd Street) and Oakdale Avenue. What was left over, mostly Bayview, the interior sections of Hunters Point, and portions of the southern part of the district were earmarked for residential development."<sup>67</sup> The hills that were designated as residential development (aside from the ridges that were leveled for the filling of Islais Creek and the bay for industry) remain as such. This move coincided with the rise of zoning as both a land use and social controlling device in general in the US, often under the aegis of public health.<sup>68</sup>

In an effort to make the most of the flatlands for business, the city, with sway from the Board of State Harbor Commissioners (which oversaw decisions that would affect the Bay; *regulation* is probably too strong a term) offered to fill in thousands of acres of land in the Southeast, to make the place more appealing to military developers. Ultimately a plan to merge parcels and fill in parts of Islais Creek moved forward, wielding the state's right of eminent domain, which allowed it to force reluctant property owners to sell. Under the aegis of a public-private partnership of several different groups, the city combined 63-city blocks worth of property that had been held by multiple owners, and convinced the State Harbor Commission to open condemnation proceedings.<sup>69</sup>

Key elements of the 1920s land deal offer intriguing foreshadowing for today. First, the deal represented a move by public agencies to consolidate property under state ownership on behalf of private capital. Once the properties were united it took more than fifteen years before new development began. Centrally, this showed how important development of the area was to the shipping industry (which essentially ran the Harbor Commission)<sup>70</sup> even though this was an out of the way place. As one observer put it "unified ownership meant that the land [Islais Creek] could be more efficiently filled and graded prior to being sold back to private industrialists."<sup>71</sup> Once this project was underway developers throughout the

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<sup>67</sup> Zoning rules cited in Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 82.; also see Anonymous, "Proposed Zoning Ordinance to Be Considered Monday: Building Restrictions in Every Part of City Proposed." *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 6, 1921.

<sup>68</sup> Gary Hack, Eugenie L. Birch, and Paul H. Sedway, eds., *Local Planning: Contemporary Principles and Practice*, 1st ed. (International City/County Management Associates, 2009); Allan B. Jacobs, *Making City Planning Work* (Chicago: American Society of Planning Officials, 1978); Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890; a History Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the American Institute of Planners*, California Studies in Urbanization and Environmental Design (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Marc A Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

<sup>69</sup> Dow, "Bay Fill in San Francisco," 160.

<sup>70</sup> Michael R. Corbett, *Port City: The History and Transformation of the Port of San Francisco, 1848-2010* (San Francisco, Calif: San Francisco Architectural Heritage, 2010); Jasper Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront Since 1950* (Center for American Places, 2011).

<sup>71</sup> Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 77.

rest of the community moved forward with projects, having a sense of assurance that they were part of a growing district.<sup>72</sup>

City leaders employed nationalist rhetoric to marshal support for Hunter's Point's expansion and to pressure landowners to sell quickly and cheaply. The *Chronicle* noted that some landowners in the area appeared to be resisting a proposed government purchase: "The fear was expressed yesterday at City Hall that the prices asked might be 'unpatriotic' in size."<sup>73</sup> It was part of a larger campaign to find some way to use the space more profitably for capitalists, who suggested alternatives including setting aside the Point as a tax-free trade zone, to inspire a new wave of international commerce.<sup>74</sup> Like so many of the plans for the Southeast, this never came to fruition, but it represents the way the place was used in the broader vision of land capitalization and global dominance that spurred San Francisco's development dreams.

## A Place With No Voice

Though the tax-free trade zone idea never stuck, the continual press for industrial expansion continued with little recorded opposition. In 1929 the Western Power Company built a coal-fired electric power plant at Hunters Point, close to the shipyard.<sup>75</sup> Residents of the Southeast were blue-collar workers who were assumed to be supportive of industrial expansion, which could mean more work for them. Where the middle and upper classes joined the chorus of pre-war urban reformers arguing for the health benefits of clean air and parks, workers were assumed to be appreciative for the possibility for employment.<sup>76</sup> While they certainly wanted jobs, multiple generations of Southeast residents were also hopeful that new development would inspire new investments in infrastructure.

This positioning of workers at the bottom of political decision-making reflects one of the larger points of this chapter: that there has been a continuity in the politics of the Southeast, across lines of race and ethnicity, and that is a politics of disenfranchisement of working class and small-business owning residents in the area.

From as early as the 1850s, when residential development was tiny in the Southeast, residents expressed frustration with the lack of good roads and (later) transit. They claimed to be neglected by the city government, which they insisted cared less for them than any other community. This theme was very strong in the newspaper archives up to the early 1920s. It is striking because people today argue that the city's lack of interest in Bayview has something to do with race. And yet, the theme of frustration with the lack of city services goes all the way back to the city's founding.

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<sup>72</sup> On the role of the railroad and of the Mission Promotion Association in the development of the industrial district around the creek and India Basin, see: Ocean Howell, "In the Public Interest: Space, Ethnicity, and Authority in San Francisco's Mission District, 1906-1973" (Berkeley, CA, 2009).; Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 77.

<sup>73</sup> Anon. 1918. "Government Is Ready To Build Road To Hunter's Point: Enlargement of Union Iron Works Plant Is Part of Improvement U.S. Plans." *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)*, May 4.

<sup>74</sup> Anonymous, "The Hunter's Point District," *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)* (San Francisco, Calif., March 23, 1918), sec. Thought and Comment.

<sup>75</sup> Pacific Gas & Electric later bought the company, and took ownership of the plant, which would eventually be blamed for a range of serious health problems. The plant would join the shipyard in inspiring the emergence of environmental justice activism in the neighborhood in the 1980s and 1990s.

<sup>76</sup> Daniel M Bluestone, *Constructing Chicago* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

This was true in terms of open, publicly protected space as well. Though the community relied on hundreds of acres of open space for the creation of its agricultural belt, before 1914 Bayview did not have even one public park.<sup>77</sup> Centralized city planning as we know it today did not yet exist, and the homestead associations, which had been largely responsible for dividing and re-selling property, hadn't set aside space for public use.<sup>78</sup> The lack of publicly managed open space emerges in the newspaper archives as a steady complaint by working class residents through the teens, 20s and beyond. As the residential community grew and evolved, it remained largely working class – no matter what kind of people called the place home.

What we see here is the intersection of the politics of place with the politics of class. This has something to do with geography: the simple fact of Bayview's far south-eastern location, the barriers of Mission Bay and, later, the freeways (built in the 1950s), kept the place tucked out of sight. Even with the development of the plank road and Long Bridge from downtown that made the breaching of Mission Bay possible, and even with the expansion of the rail lines, for a long time it was expensive or simply difficult to get there. But there are lots of out-of-the-way places with great services and infrastructure: rich folks love to decamp to Bay Area-enclaves like Piedmont, the Berkeley hills, or Ross – and these locales have well-built and maintained roads, working sewers, and a loud, leading voice in the political process.

So geography alone does not suffice as an explanation. The class status of residents has always been central to the identity of the neighborhood and to the role that community was able to play in broader city politics. There were corporations in the Southeast that were connected to some of the Bay Area's most powerful capitalists, and others that provided essential services for the city, from the railroads to the shipyard, the race track to small businesses that fed San Francisco's economy with meat and vegetables. But the people who lived there were workers or small business owners. The voices of the Southeast were muffled by money and power, as well as location. One city historian put it this way:

Seemingly always in a game of catch up with the rest of the city, Bayview-Hunters Point had to fight for its share of city services even during the prosperous 1920s. In contrast with wealthier and more politically connected districts, which received infrastructure improvements as a matter of course, local community groups in Bayview-Hunters Point had to often raise a ruckus to acquire even the simplest of improvements, or do the work themselves.<sup>79</sup>

Though it is often simply noted in an offhand way, it is key here that wealth and political connectivity are linked, and the imbalance often caused residents to comment on the oddity of a piece of the city with stunning views and lovely weather – but low capital investment. In 1939 the president of the Hunter's Point Improvement Club complained:

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<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, the Southeast's major 318-acre sanctuary, McLaren Park, was built on land set aside by homestead associations there. Like the Bayview, however, Visitacion Valley lacked parks prior to the introduction of formal zoning in 1921. Officially proposed in the late 20s, McLaren Park was not completed until 1958.

<sup>78</sup> Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 80, 87.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 86–87.

We have been San Francisco's forgotten district too long. This has been largely the result of unintentional but abusive newspaper publicity, reference to Hunters Point linking it with slaughterhouse odors. ... The rest of the city apparently has forgotten the panoramic view to be enjoyed from the point, the wonderful residential district it might well become.<sup>80</sup>

Later that same year, residents began a grocery cooperative, in the absence of capital investment<sup>81</sup> – another move that would foreshadow problems faced by the African American community in later years.

One of the problems facing the Hunter's Point Improvement Club: the surnames of its membership. Just two miles west, over the other side of Potrero Hill, the Mission Promotion Association successfully plotted the future of the region. The MPA was a government-business alliance (another latter-day public private partnership) with a significant amount of clout – because its membership included politicians and capitalists. Even though the Mission was also an industrial and working class area, many of its capitalists lived in the Mission, so industrial land use questions impacted their daily lives.<sup>82</sup>

Keep this class continuity in mind as we move into the Imperial age of the Southeast. Historians of the Bay Area often claim that “everything changed” with the influx of African Americans into the Southeast during WWII.<sup>83</sup> There's an implication in this statement that the dynamics of racial change were the most important shift for the place. Rather, in this section I have begun to show how working-class continuity is perhaps the most central historical process in the political development of the Southeast.

## **Imperial Footprints: Racial Shifts, Class Continuity and Displacement**

The military influence on the Southeast began with the decades of buildup to World War I and of discussion over whether the Navy would purchase the dry dock – a lingering debate that surely influenced development in the area. This dynamic set up a waiting game that contemporary Southeast developers are familiar with. Imagine that you are a developer: On the one hand, if you know that an arm of the government (at that time, the Navy) might come in at any moment with legal proceedings to consolidate and claim private property, perhaps you'll wait to improve or further develop your property, for fear of losing your investment.

On the other hand, knowing that the Navy (or other public entity) is interested in developing the area, a move that would bring jobs and infrastructure, you might be enticed to wait, knowing that significant public investment was likely on its way, and your property could be leveraged for a decent price through eminent domain. The trick is: how long can

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<sup>80</sup> Bill Simons, “Hunters Point Projects Mapped,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (February 5, 1939), C6.

<sup>81</sup> “It's News to Me: Herb Caen's Column, Saturday Scrapbook,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (November 18, 1939), 7.

<sup>82</sup> Howell, “In the Public Interest.”

<sup>83</sup> Marilyn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Roger W. Lotchin, *The Bad City in the Good War: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego*, *The American West in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

you afford to wait? It depends on your personal wealth, of course. But your development plans also rely on the state of the market, or in the case of public annexation, the state of the state.

Ending the waiting game, World War II brought the Navy in full-force, first with the eviction of residents who had built homes near the dry dock before the war and then with the massive expansion of the site and recruitment of labor from the South to support production of warships and weapons. The military project left jagged scars, which became more obvious in the 1980s and 90s. The effects of the Navy's dramatic sweep through the Southeast – in terms of labor, land use, and toxicity – puts a hard frame around contemporary debates about the future of the neighborhood. In this section I look at the way that the Navy was able to play a role in transforming landscapes and demography – and yet, how the WWII period in many ways only solidified the political-economic relationships already embedded in the Southeast.

Just before WWII Bayview-Hunter's Point was majority "white" yet in fact a very diverse place, with Maltese, Italian, French, Swedish, Mexican and a few remaining Chinese residents. American racial constructions (and thus census forms), however, allow for very few vagaries, and so in 1940 the area was reported as 98 percent "white,"<sup>84</sup> inclusive of Mexican-born San Franciscans who were classified as white at the time.<sup>85</sup>

Stepping into this milieu – presaging the 1950s-style federal bulldozer yet to come – the US Navy moved people and property to shape the Hunter's Point peninsula for war duty (in this case the "bulldozer" was driven by military needs, a different overarching narrative than the urban demolitions yet to come). The pointy nub was widened, graded, and populated with a set of massive dry docks to facilitate the construction of war ships. With that, Hunter's Point contributed to the Bay Area's status as the largest shipbuilding center in the world for the World War II Pacific Theater.<sup>86</sup>

Under the federal War Powers Act, the Navy displaced 100 families living west of the shipyard in 1942. The effort consolidated more than 1,400 acres of land (over two square miles), some of which had been the product of bay fill and leveling of the hills in the preceding decades. According to one newspaper article, residents were told to be prepared to move within two weeks, but warned to be ready to vacate their homes on 48-hour's notice; illegal "aliens" – presumably Chinese fisherfolk, who may or may not have been citizens – had apparently already been removed from the site, though the article did not explain how or where to.<sup>87</sup>

This marked at least the third round of displacement of small property owners and residents by government in the area (first, the consolidation of property around the Islais

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<sup>84</sup> Bureau of the Census, Population and Housing Statistics for Census Tracts L4 and L5, San Francisco California (1940).

<sup>85</sup> This was before mass migrations from Central America forced government agencies like the Bureau of the Census to contend with classification of the so-called New Immigrants of the 1960s. It was a similar dynamic to that which happened with blacks in San Francisco, where they were accepted as long as they comprised a very small group; when mass migration tipped the ratio of white to black, mainstream San Francisco began to worry.

<sup>86</sup> Broussard, *Black San Francisco : the Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*, 133.

<sup>87</sup> "100 Hunters Point Families Out," *San Francisco News* (March 10, 1942).



Creek Estuary in the 1920s; next, the burning of the Chinese camps in 1939.<sup>88</sup> The next month it was reported that the Navy had taken over Treasure Island without negotiation with the city – officials were going to ask for better compensation, but with or without it, the deal was happening.<sup>89</sup> In the name of the greater good of the city, in terms of both its reputation and its potential capitalization, lands were consolidated and developed, pushing aside small holders.

With federal intervention, the shipyard soon became a part of the largest global warship production zone – with shipbuilding simultaneously taking place in Richmond, Oakland, and on Mare Island. The military transformation of the Bay Area was nearly instant, with longstanding health, environmental, and social effects.<sup>90</sup> The atomic winter that fell on Hiroshima emanated from Hunter’s Point, where the bomb was loaded, unassembled, onto the USS Indianapolis. Later, after the war ended the site became a collection zone for nuclear waste in the form of decommissioned warships contaminated at Bikini Atoll in 1946. Some of this waste was hidden in plain view in the waters surrounding the Farallon Islands just off of San Francisco, some was buried on-site, creating an enduring gift to the surrounding community of heavy toxicity in Bayview-Hunter’s Point’s soils, waters, and bodies.<sup>91</sup>

Long after the end of the war the Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory, a key site in the western geography of nuclear experimentation throughout the Cold War, worked out of an ominous windowless structure on the southern side of the Hunter’s Point property.<sup>92</sup> New information emerges continually about what happened as current reconstruction of the site unearths new archeological evidence of previously shrouded stories. Most of this is not reported to the public unless advocates force the information out, or when it is revealed suddenly through strange events that have spurred local fears, like the mysterious underground fire that burned for several months in 2000, “releasing a cloud of greenish-yellow gas into the air,” or the under-reported discovery of previously unseen chemicals in an underground stream in 2010.<sup>93</sup> High rates of environmentally-linked diseases like cancer continue to plague the neighborhood. Although there is an ongoing dispute about causes, it is impossible to ignore the role of the shipyard as a cornerstone of the area’s industrial-toxic legacy.

Meanwhile, the Islais Creek basin had finally lived up to its founders’ dreams, having become the largest industrial district in the city: warehouses and suppliers along Bayshore Boulevard stretching from Potrero Hill to South San Francisco.<sup>94</sup> Soon, the San Francisco

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<sup>88</sup> The official story is that complaints about sanitation in the camps inspired the city health department to burn them down. See: San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and San Francisco Planning Department, *Draft Environmental Impact Report: Candlestick Point-Hunters Point Shipyard Phase II*, III.J–15.

<sup>89</sup> “Treasure Isle Goes to Navy: City Upset Over Offer, May Dispute Price” *The San Francisco News* (April 17, 1942).

<sup>90</sup> Lotchin, *Fortress California, 1910-1961*.

<sup>91</sup> Lisa Davis, “Fallout: The Past Is Present - The Nuclear Witnesses,” *San Francisco Weekly*, July 31, 2002.

<sup>92</sup> See San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco History Room, for the most comprehensive collection of photos of the Southeast and of the active shipyard.

<sup>93</sup> Tom Zoellner, “Navy Admits Mistakes in Its Handling of Hunters Point Shipyard Fire,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 14, 2000.; Also see Tony Kelly, interview by Author, October 2010.

<sup>94</sup> Walker, “Industry Builds Out the City: Industrial Decentralization in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850-1950.”

Produce Market would be installed in the midst of this zone, trapped on two sides by hulking freeway overpasses that have ever since bounded the vision of what the place could be.

In 1937 when the Home Owner's Loan Corporation mapped San Francisco, coding neighborhoods by color, more than half of the Southeast was coded red, indicating that banks should be wary of loaning money for development there. This was not because of the race of residents, as was the case in many other "redlined" communities across the country, but because of social class and, for some sections, the presence of industry. Regarding a large 70-block section of the area that was mostly west of Third Street (which meant that it was far from the shipyard), the HOLC noted that in spite of an extremely high degree of owner-occupancy in the largely residential zone under discussion, the place was a risk for lenders:

The population of the area, while quite stable, is composed of lower-income groups, being largely 'white collar' and factory workers in the industrial districts which enjoin the area on the north, south, and east, whose incomes range from \$2,000 to \$2,400. While many of the inhabitants are of foreign extraction, no racial problem is presented and the likelihood of any is considered remote. The area, which has been developing in a heterogeneous manner over the past 45 years, is still less than 20% built up. ...Occasional winds from the northeast bring obnoxious odors from stockyards and packing plants located in that direction. While a few mortgage institutions consider it possible to make safe loans in the area, they are very careful as to moral risks and conservative as to terms.<sup>95</sup>

And so it was that on the eve of the first mass black migration in to San Francisco, much of the Southeast was already tagged as too risky for loans that, had they been offered, might have shifted the class character of the community.

## **Towards "The Warmth of Other Suns"**

Navy production jobs were sources of good income and were a major incentive for the second great migration of African Americans from the south. Famously, this was a time in which women and ethnic minorities were able to get well-paying industrial work – and it was a moment that, for people across the country, raised the possibility of deeper institutional change when it came to race and gender relations on the job. At the same time, from the perspective of long-term race-relations it wasn't a moment that "changed everything." African Americans remained "last hired, first fired" in war industries, even in the less-discriminatory North.<sup>96</sup> Still, there were many reasons to leave the South at that

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<sup>95</sup> *Home Owner's Loan Corporation Map of San Francisco and Summary File D-16*. Accessed via: Richard Marciano, David Goldberg, Chien-Yi Hou, "T-RACES: A Testbed for the Redlining Archives of California's Exclusionary Spaces."

<sup>96</sup> Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II*; Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *To Place Our Deeds: The African American Community in Richmond, California 1910-1963* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Charles Wollenberg, *Marinship at War: Shipbuilding and Social Change in Wartime Sausalito* (Berkeley: Western Heritage Press, 1990).

time, with Jim Crow and unemployment at the top of the list. The pull to the cities, for work and hope, was strong.<sup>97</sup>

The war economy was a draw for all kinds of people. Between 1940 and 1943, 94,000 people – of all backgrounds – migrated to the city; San Francisco’s population grew 30.4 percent in the first half of the decade. The rise of the black population was the most dramatic, however. While the white population rose by 28.1 percent by 1945 – Black San Francisco grew by nearly seven-fold in those same years.<sup>98</sup> Put another way, as a percentage of the whole city, the black population, less than 1 percent in 1940, swelled to 10 percent by 1960. Most of them came from the US South (from places like East Texas, Western Louisiana and southern Arkansas), bringing southern culture and customs to the far west.<sup>99</sup>

The historical timing escalated the drama of the war effort: following the Great Depression, which had asphyxiated global growth and further squeezed agricultural labor opportunities in the South. In the Bay Area, the general influx shocked the system, overwhelming the housing and infrastructure capacity of the region. Workers swarmed to the Bay Area from across the country. The dramatic in-migration has been called a “second gold rush” for the ways in which it replicated the processes of the instant city of 1849, another time in which a tsunami of newcomers generated rapid development of infrastructure and housing, built quickly – not built to last. Narratives of the time are rich with tales of overcrowding and blink-of-the-eye development to accommodate the flood of people to the Bay Area.<sup>100</sup>

In Southeast San Francisco, funding and development stimulus from the Federal War Powers Act yielded a wealth of cheaply made, infill housing development. The periphery of the shipyard was dotted with quickly built apartments; they were built for urgency, not for posterity.

## **Making Segregation**

As the city transformed into an arm of the war machine – not only hosting the Navy at the shipyard, but serving as the administrative and logistical seat for the Navy’s Pacific operations – black San Francisco began to emerge as a social force. This was not only because of the shipyard’s growth, but also because of the segregation of San Francisco’s urban core. Segregation emerged out of two processes. First, blacks faced legal and social limitations set by the white majority, as described in Chapter 2 and in some depth below. Second, San Francisco’s black newcomers behaved much like any immigrant group to a foreign land: they packed multiple families into single-family apartments, they created a network of “mutual aid” for relatives or others from their hometowns, and they worked hard.<sup>101</sup> In this final section of this chapter, I lay out the framework for the development of

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<sup>97</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2010).

<sup>98</sup> “Nearly seven-fold” refers to 665.8 percent.

<sup>99</sup> Broussard, *Black San Francisco : the Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*, 133–135; Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II*.

<sup>100</sup> Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II*.

<sup>101</sup> Broussard, *Black San Francisco : the Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*; Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II*; Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*.

black-white segregation in the city, in the wake of nearly a century of Chinese- and (later) Japanese-white segregation.<sup>102</sup>

The challenges facing black war migrants in finding housing were legion. In some ways it was as difficult to find good homes as it had been 40 years earlier. Back then, as a 1906 article in the *San Francisco Call* newspaper showed, the city's very tiny black population was shut out of good housing. The *Call* reported on a black pastor trying to establish a homesteading association for blacks in the Southeast, as a way to evade the discrimination they were faced with elsewhere. In the article Pastor James Kelley insisted that African Americans needed their own place, because in the central city they were "living in condemned homes, for which they are paying an enormous rent, and in numerous cases they are made to pay more than is asked of the white man."<sup>103</sup> The southeastern black sanctuary Kelley envisioned never materialized before WWII.

The informal discrimination that Kelley described was compounded by formal rules and limitations that were implemented during the building booms of the 20s and 40s. Though there is not a lot of documentation of racial restrictions on housing built within San Francisco (this is a major gap in the available data), the years in which the Southeast went through its biggest growth spurts were the years in which the American building market was shaped by the introduction of race-restrictive covenants. From sea to shining sea, as it were, local governments at that time were using race as a core principal in zoning regulations. Such rules – when written in city codes as local law – were declared unconstitutional in 1917, and so they went "underground." Declarations of the racial purity of space were no longer on the law books but were embedded in leases and deeds, known by the pleasant sounding term covenant.<sup>104</sup> The intent and influence of these deeds was far from pleasant: they told certain families that they weren't welcome, and did it in quiet way that was impossible to see at street level.<sup>105</sup> Covenants were not solely focused on race and ethnicity; in fact racial purity was but one of a series of guidelines that aimed at making properties uniform, predictable and saleable.

The strongest research on racially restrictive development in San Francisco comes from Lynne Horiuchi, who documents this process on the northwestern side of San Francisco, showing how builders around the turn of the century explicitly marketed racial purity as part of the package offered in their Presidio Heights developments. Focusing on the notion of making a space dependably "safe" to attract investors, developer Baldwin and Howell explicitly marketed the new development as a charming, bucolic – and white – suburb, just a 20-minute transit ride from downtown.<sup>106</sup>

Horiuchi shows how advertisements for the neighborhood, which was San Francisco's first gated community, contrasted images of pristine new homes with rough and crumbling images of Chinese and Japanese spaces, warning potential homebuyers that the city was changing in scary ways. Presidio Heights was sold as an escape from the chaos – and the

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<sup>102</sup> In Chapters 4 and 5 I look at the ways that this resilience took shape in the face of postwar decline.

<sup>103</sup> "Negroes to Locate in Rural Outskirts," *San Francisco Call* (February 22, 1906), cited in Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 69.; David Harvey talks about this dynamic as a "spatial monopoly" – see Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*.

<sup>104</sup> Freund, *Colored Property*; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*; George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

<sup>105</sup> Fogelson, *Bourgeois Nightmares Suburbia, 1870-1930*; Freund, *Colored Property*.

<sup>106</sup> Horiuchi, "Object Lessons In Home Building Racialized Real Estate Marketing In San Francisco."

ethnic and racial heterogeneity – of the city, particularly as the Japanese began to establish themselves in the Western Addition, which had served as the temporary heart of the city after the 1906 quake.<sup>107</sup> The case of the Southeast is unique in that housing marketers were dealing with a different population. But Horiuchi clearly shows that San Francisco’s housing markets thrived on racial exclusion – and we know that this was true across California.<sup>108</sup>

Horiuchi’s work focuses on the shifting racial geography of the Western Addition, in its first phase of racial transformation. The place had become home to Japanese migrants in 1906, when the relative lack of damage from the quake and fire in the Western Addition forced racial mixing among displacees from other neighborhoods. The presence of Asian “aliens” was a consistent source of anxiety for white San Franciscans, thus feeding the developer’s claims for creating a white-racial paradise in Presidio Heights.<sup>109</sup> Japanese Americans were expunged to wartime internment camps in the interior as enemies of the WWII-defined state, African American migrants moved into their vacated homes, pushed there by widespread discrimination in most parts of town. Two or three families typically roomed together. The overcrowding was a product of restricted housing and of mutual aid among migrants.<sup>110</sup>

Still, with its twin causes, the multi-family dynamic very quickly created an overcrowding situation that had two important effects. First, in the public mind, the crumbling housing and close quarters of the district would become associated with blackness; this was part of the racialization process in which spatial practice – overcrowded conditions due to segregation – became associated with black culture itself. A *race-class dynamic* in which economic conditions drove people to the city en masse in a situation that forced overcrowding, in turn created its own stereotype that fanned the flames of racism later on.

Second, the conditions created in this period set the stage for urban renewal, beginning just a decade later; that is, overcrowding and landlord neglect of the streetscape was used against the migrants in the postwar period. The Western Addition was the seat of black San Francisco for about 20 years, and it was the destruction of the area, beginning in the late 1950s, that propelled African American families to join the Southeastern settlement that had begun during the war. This destruction was enabled by the conditions of life established during the dramatic war migration. I look with much more attention at this aspect of the Western Addition story, and its role in creating the Southeast, in the next chapter.

Even before urban renewal, however, those who could not find housing in the Western Addition sought homes elsewhere, and the new structures that sprouted up near the Hunter’s Point Shipyard were key. As mentioned, this housing was born out of a process of legal condemnation and consolidation of properties under the aegis of several public agencies. The National Housing Authority, the Navy and the San Francisco Housing Authority had

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid. Baldwin and Howell were seeking top dollar in what would become one of the city’s most exclusive neighborhoods, home to Senator Dianne Feinstein and her husband Richard Blum.

<sup>108</sup> Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*; Broussard, *Black San Francisco: the Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles From the Great Depression To the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>109</sup> Lai, “The Racial Triangulation of Space.”

<sup>110</sup> Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Toronto ; New York: Bantam Books, 1985); Broussard, *Black San Francisco: the Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*; Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*.

condemned most of the extant properties on Hunter's Point Hill and speedily constructed 4,000 units for families and 7,500 dorm units for single workers. By war's end, the government-built – racially segregated – wartime housing stock had soared to 12,233 units of housing, including projects on Potrero Hill, in Visitacion Valley, and on the edge of the Yosemite Slough, near Candlestick Point.<sup>111</sup>

## Moving Off the Hill

In the Southeast, the public infusion of development to support the war migrants was accompanied by a burst of energy in the private market as well, with 8,188 privately built homes appearing in Bayview in 1940-41 alone.<sup>112</sup> Racial restrictions on the housing stock limited African Americans to the war housing on and around Hunter's Point Hill. As of 1945, after the close of the war, 42 percent of the 26,000 residents in such housing were African American.<sup>113</sup> Later, as the white-ethnic families living in the Bayview district began to head out to the suburbs in the 1950s – and then more quickly through the 60s – black families snapped up homes all over the Bayview. Eventually, Bayview and Hunter's Point merged in the public mind. The racial economy, it seemed, provided a key mode of measurement of neighborhood continuity.

Just after the war another chapter in the Southeast's Asian history was written when Japanese-Americans returned to the city from their wartime imprisonment. Many Japanese-Americans found that their Western Addition homes had been taken, re-rented or sold. Adding to the list of “dumped” people sent to live in the “sink” of the Southeast – some returnees were temporarily offered homes at Hunter's Point. Photographs of the landscape reveal a scripted institutional environment, not unlike the internment camps themselves. (The structures are boxy and unnaturally clean, with no adornment; there is the sense that these are not places to live, but instead places in which people are held, cultureless.)<sup>114</sup>

In the period immediately following the war, most of the remaining undeveloped (mostly hilly, at this point) landscape of the Bayview was peppered with new housing. Such homes were not, as a rule, built for African Americans. According to one 1945 article, only one builder was willing to build racially-unrestricted homes in San Francisco. The role of the state, in its various forms, was key here: this was not just a dynamic perpetuated by developers seeking profit. Although, for example, the FHA insisted that 25 percent of new homes be built without racial covenants, the agency refused to back loans for African

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<sup>111</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle* (November 1, 1945), 135.

<sup>112</sup> Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 97., using data from the San Francisco Assessor-Recorder's Office.

<sup>113</sup> “Project Offers Housing to Public,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (November 1, 1945), 11., cited in *Ibid.*, 99. Since 1940 the total population of Bayview had tripled, growing from 14,000 to more than 43,000 in 1945; a little more than a fifth were labeled by census-takers as non-white, most likely most of these people were African American. See U. S. Census Bureau, “Population and Housing Statistics for Census Tracts L4 and L5, San Francisco California”, 1945.

<sup>114</sup> Bancroft Library Collection, *War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement, 1942-45*, 1945. To my knowledge nobody has researched this fully.

American families that bought homes in white neighborhoods.<sup>115</sup> Plus, de facto segregation was quite alive, via realtor marketing practices, and through vigilante violence.<sup>116</sup>

In the postwar period the San Francisco Housing Authority, which manages federal public housing programs, took control of the war dwellings and embarked on new construction of public housing.<sup>117</sup> Covenants in private housing were shot down by the US Supreme Court in 1947, but the SFHA stuck to its longstanding policy of both restricting its projects by racial group and trying to match projects racially with their surrounding ethnic communities. This meant that African American seekers of public housing continued to have limited options, making Hunter's Point one of a handful of possible sites available to them. Hunter's Point Hill itself, overlooking the shipyard property, had solidified as a largely black community. Several new churches had appeared through the end of the 40s, serving the new black population.<sup>118</sup>

In oral histories collected by the Redevelopment Agency over the years, former residents recalled the early public housing projects as well-built and, with their fantastic views of the bay, were a welcome relief from crumbling war housing.<sup>119</sup> Unlike the dense, overcrowded Western Addition, the hill was described as feeling relatively quiet and safe, in many ways a haven for migrants from the rural south who reported being overwhelmed by the chaos of the city. It was one of the positive attributes of the Southeast, something that residents there talked about in nearly every era, reflecting that although the place felt isolated, the quiet of that isolation was also wonderful. Although by the late 40s Bayview was more crowded than ever, it still was far less dense than the Western Addition.

In 1950 Bayview-Hunter's Point's 17,541 black residents mostly still lived in the former war dwellings and the new public housing projects. This meant that the majority of what people called Bayview (not Hunter's Point), dominated by relatively small, private single-family homes was still "white."

In the late 1950s the landscape of segregation began to change. But the precise route of black residents from war housing into the single-family homes of the surrounding neighborhood cannot yet be tracked due to a quirk in data access: individual US Census schedules for 1960 won't be available until 2030.<sup>120</sup> However, the process is recorded sharply in the memories of my informants, many of whom look back at that time as an uneasy moment of transition, which held moments of remarkable integration and racial peace alongside moments of charged hatreds and fear that later crystallized in the late 60s economic slump. By 1960 African Americans represented about half of the population of the

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<sup>115</sup> "Segregation Issue Halts San Francisco Building," *San Francisco Chronicle* (June 5, 1945). More generally, see Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*.

<sup>116</sup> Broussard, *Black San Francisco: the Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*; Steve "Woody" LaBounty, "Streetwise: The Burned Cross," *Outsidelands.org*; - *Western Neighborhoods Project - San Francisco History*, March 2004.; "Sun Reporter" (San Francisco Public Library, Archive 1944-54).

<sup>117</sup> Note that public housing was originally not targeted for people of color – it emerged as a segregated safety-net program. It later lost policy support as it became dominated by African Americans.

<sup>118</sup> Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 106.

<sup>119</sup> Bayview-Hunter's Point Residents and Business Owners, "Oral History Interview Collection," interview by Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, 2010; Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Southwest Division, *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Disposal and Reuse of the Hunters Point Shipyard: Vol. 1: Main Text and Appendices* (San Diego: BRAC Operations Office, Southwest Division, 2000).

<sup>120</sup> US Census office; Kelley & Verplanck

Bayview “flats” and about three-quarters of the population of one of the census tracts to the south of Hunter’s Point Hill.<sup>121</sup>

With the close of the war in 1945 the workforce at the naval shipyard immediately began to shrink, from its peak of more than 18,000 during the conflict to 6,000 in 1949, leaving two-thirds of its peak workforce to search for other means of support.<sup>122</sup> (Those that remained employed were likely involved in even more dangerous activities – testing weapons for the Cold War.)<sup>123</sup> The march outward of jobs – first from the shipyard and later from San Francisco industry more generally – was painfully felt in the Southeast and exacerbated racial tensions.

Although war work had been an important site of employment integration for women and African Americans, this was still the era in which blacks were fired first, which meant that black community unemployment figures rose to their typical, disproportionately high level. Putting added stress on the Bayview economy, workers from the south continued to arrive, hoping for better straits than they could find in the dwindling agricultural economies of their hometowns.

Though the move off of the hill is not well recorded, stories collected in oral histories and in my own interviews paint a picture of a complicated process, with glimmers both of racial tolerance and discrimination. In the following chapters I look at some of the stories of these experiences in greater depth, but I address some of them here.

The shift in demography in the Bayview was not without conflict. When I interviewed old-timers who had been part of the migration, very few wanted to talk about the difficulties of that time; they preferred to tell stories about the relative kindness of San Francisco. One looked askance when I asked about racism and mumbled, “Discrimination, eh? It’s been a long time since I thought about that. Yeah.”<sup>124</sup> I tried to talk about it in a few different ways, but he was immune to my side-door questions. The sense that I got from him (as with others) was that he wasn’t interested in being reminded of any difficulties of the past and was more interested in sharing stories about his successes in arriving in San Francisco as a young man, finding work, a wife, a home. His narrative was very glossy and perfect. This was a common attitude among the people I spoke with who had experienced the migration themselves. They seemed to, understandably, want to hold the experience in a place of honor in their memories.

While I appreciate and respect my informants’ contributions to the community, and their memories of integration and positive change, these stories of acceptance were probably outside of the norm. It is clear from news reports and from the research of Broussard that the experience of finding housing, and of incorporating into the mostly white Bayview community, was highly uneven and often extremely difficult. Suddenly, there was a general awareness that “ghettos” were developing in the Western Addition and in Hunter’s Point. Yet, in spite of calls for integration and for attention to the pitfalls of segregation, white war workers found themselves able to secure regular housing both in San Francisco and in the

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<sup>121</sup> Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 108.

<sup>122</sup> Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Southwest Division, *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Disposal and Reuse of the Hunters Point Shipyard: Vol. 1: Main Text and Appendices*, D-14.

<sup>123</sup> Davis, “Fallout: The Past Is Present - The Nuclear Witnesses.”

<sup>124</sup> Informant#5, Longtime Southeast resident, Interview by Author.



rapidly growing suburbs as the war wound down, while blacks had less luck and remained in the “temporary” projects.<sup>125</sup>

## Freeway Fights and Other Sporting Events

Black migration to the Southeast did not create a ghetto on its own. Instead, the racialization and isolation of Bayview-Hunter’s Point was facilitated by four key land use shifts that built on the history of the place as an industrial dumping ground and as a place with no voice. These were the replacement of Butchertown with dumping grounds for old cars, and the installation of three major landmarks: the freeways, the baseball stadium, and the produce market. The effect of all four was to reinforce and exacerbate the district’s isolation, which was felt by many as racialized.

The Embarcadero produce market, which was demolished to make way for the Golden Gateway redevelopment project, was re-located in two parts. The retail business moved into the Castro District and the wholesale market was installed on the industrial edge of the Bayview (where it remains today), marking another moment in which a land use that officials wanted to move out of sight made its way down to the Bayview. This project began in 1953 and took a full decade to finish, finally realizing the 1920s vision of the Islais Creek zone (along what we now call Cesar Chavez) as industrial space. By the time it finished, in the early 1960s, it was bordering a new kind of place.

In 1955 industrialists proposed leveling Candlestick Hill and using the debris to fill in the cove north of Candlestick Point, between Candlestick and the shipyard. This never happened, but two years later the ballpark was developed at the point. At the time the project was perceived as a non-desirable entity, which angered locals who felt they were once again being dumped on.<sup>126</sup> More significantly, the development of the park left the city in debt for billions, while the private developers and the Giants baseball team made tremendous profits at taxpayer expense.<sup>127</sup>

California state highway engineers pushed freeways through the southern part of the city in the late 1950s and 1960s. The nation’s first well-organized opposition to a 1957 proposal kept the original plan, which would have crisscrossed the entire city, from moving ahead. But proposals for expansion of the Bayshore Highway created a hard edge on the western border of the Southeast; the development of elevated U.S. Highway 101 created a permanent division between the Mission and the Bayview and displaced hundreds of homes along the western edge of Potrero Hill. Interstate 280, which crisscrossed 101, slicing further into the Southeast, was complete by 1968. Planners insisted that the plan for the freeway routes involved a rational metric of paths with the least resistance, from a development perspective. Critics insisted that the freeways were part of an overall race- and class- biased development program that ignored the needs of residents, yet again.<sup>128</sup> Whatever the intent, which there is no room to explore here, certainly the effect of the freeway placement was to sequester the

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<sup>125</sup> On the growth of the white Bay Area suburbs, see Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*.

<sup>126</sup> Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 109.

<sup>127</sup> Burton H. Wolfe, “Candlestick Swindle,” *FoundSF*, N.D.

<sup>128</sup> “New Vistas to be Opened,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (July 17, 1954).

Southeast, and to create an effective way for people to get through the city without ever knowing that Bayview-Hunter's Point exists.

Finally, Butchertown lingered through the end of the 1960s, when the Redevelopment Agency raised funds to demolish what was left of it for the India Basin Industrial Park. By then the move away from Butchertown was obvious. The Butcher's Reservation had begun to shrink 50 years earlier, after the 1906 earthquake's destruction motivated some industries to move to South San Francisco. Its relevance continued to decline as refrigeration improved, making "local meat" anachronistic<sup>129</sup> (until the local-food revival of recent years). The remaking of Butchertown was one of the least-contested projects of the Redevelopment Agency. It is still a site of production and distribution – the US Postal Service has its largest sorting facility there, alongside recycling retailers and light industrial uses that border Evans Ave, which leads from Third Street out to the shipyard, on the north side of Hunter's Point Hill.

By 1960, nearly half of the Bayview district was black, and with the rise in African American presence in the community came a growth in black business ownership and black activism. In 1954 residents founded the Bayview Neighborhood Community Center, calling it the Crispus Attucks Club. In 1966 the club would move down to Third Street into the historic Victorian Era Bayview Opera House, but at its start it was a few blocks up the hill, and it attracted community-minded people who began to organize around many problems facing the community. The women of the Big Five and their followers met at this time at the club; as I describe in Chapter 5, they would go on to be important players in neighborhood politics for two decades.

But within the hierarchy of places, Bayview, and the Southeast more broadly, remained fringe – even within Black San Francisco. In my perusal of the *Sun Reporter*, the Bay Area's largest black paper, I was struck by the lack of Bayview institutions in what one might call the "honor roll" of churches – the paper regularly featured pastors and mentioned events, and often seemed to exclude the Bayview.<sup>130</sup> This dynamic began to shift as the forces of urban renewal pushed residents across town and beyond – though somehow, even when Bayview later became the *demographic heart* of black San Francisco, it remained somehow on the fringe politically, socially, and economically.

## Conclusion: Race in Place

In this chapter I have tried to simultaneously challenge and support the claim that Southeast San Francisco is a wasteland in progress, an isolated perch where not much has happened beyond a brief moment of international WWII glory. However, although it has been presented as such in multiple ways over time, the Southeast has never been a wasteland. The area was a highly productive zone of the city, in terms of agriculture, resources, industry and culture, since the city's founding. Indeed, it has been a place apart, left as an afterthought, an urban *sink*, dwelling in the shadow of the great golden city. Even

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<sup>129</sup> Gary Fields, *Territories of Profit: Communications, Capitalist Development, and the Innovative Enterprises of G.F. Swift and Dell Computer* (Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>130</sup> "Sun Reporter."

so, it was central to the success of the city and its aspirations of imperial importance through the expansion of the shipyard for naval use and global significance.<sup>131</sup>

In the next two chapters, I tell parallel stories. The first is the story of the Fillmore Ghost – the one that has come to dominate local development politics. It is a classic story of urban renewal at its worst, one of which developers and residents alike remain critical. Yet, though it is has a bittersweet tinge throughout, and a patently bitter ending, it is a story that brings to mind the possibilities for community self-determination. The Fillmore case gives rise to important legal decisions that affected urban renewal efforts across the city and indeed the country, and which has forced San Francisco redevelopment to be more humane.

While the Fillmore was experiencing what many have described as an ethno-cultural cleansing, the Bayview had a very different relationship with redevelopment. Somehow, however, the Bayview story – which offers what I call a narrative of the possible – never became the meme of choice. Though it is not entirely forgotten – the Legend of the Big Five and its redevelopment victories has been largely buried in local lore beneath the weight of the Fillmore Ghost.

The Fillmore and the Bayview were intimately connected – by race and redevelopment, racial covenants, migration, and circumstance. They were both products of the intersection between the wartime migration and the segregatory policies of mid-century American cities. When the city bulldozers swept through the Fillmore, African American displacees found themselves seeking housing. Family connections, housing costs, and racially bounded steering of prospective homebuyers by realtors drove blacks to the Southeast.

But the middle class Bayview of the war years did not last. A combination of blockbusting, white flight, and fears generated by the economic shifts of the late '60s made the Bayview poorer and less appealing to longtime middle class residents. Even so, as the Fillmore community shrank, social movements emerged in both places, revealing multiple efforts to push back against what Almaguer has called “social closures”<sup>132</sup> – policies and practices that were driving black San Franciscans away.

In Chapter 4, we head deeper into the stories of the Western Addition/ Fillmore District, named for the street that served as the main thoroughfare. We'll look at the formation of that community and then the shock to the system of the nascent west coast black cultural scene when the bulldozers of urban renewal crunched through forty city blocks, leaving a visible urban scar and many largely invisible stories of displacements and lost hopes. The chapter traces some of the political formations of the time, the responses to urban renewal and they ways that land use politics connected to other political fights.

The black migration to the Southeast from the Western Addition was uneven and chaotic, and dealt a blow to the other quietly forming community. In this case it was the poverty of the 1960s and the refugees of urban renewal who transformed the Southeast. But out of this chaos emerged a social movement that marshaled public resources for the poorest San Franciscans, while building a sense of togetherness and community strength – even as the Fillmore community disintegrated and dispersed. This story, the Legend of the Big Five, is the subject of Chapter 5.

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<sup>131</sup> Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*; Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (New York, NY: Blackwell, 1984).

<sup>132</sup> Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*.

## Chapter 4:

### The Fillmore Ghost: San Francisco in the Age of Urban Renewal

“Ghosts hate new things.”

–Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*

“San Franciscans would have sworn on the Golden Gate Bridge that racism was missing from the heart of their air-conditioned city. But they would have been sadly mistaken.”

–Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*<sup>1</sup>

Though it is thought of as African American, the demography of the Western Addition/Fillmore continues to change. In truth, it is a wildly diverse place, but it’s also true that in 2012 there are still larger pockets of black residents there than in most other parts of San Francisco outside of the Southeast. This is partly due to the presence of vast blocks of affordable and public housing, built in thick concrete slab styles that convey institutional thrift. The product of years of community struggle that emerged out of the era of urban renewal, the projects keep poor, old and outcast people relatively near the center of the city. There they live on the edge of some of the wealthiest and whitest nodes of San Francisco, especially Pacific Heights and places like Sea Cliff.

The Fillmore’s project housing, which serves a range of incomes, is threaded through with remnants of the old city – churches, stores, and the occasional stunning Victorian apartment, with gilded doorways and effusively decorated window frames and pointy gates, the kind that scream San Francisco from a million postcards.

The neighborhood is speckled with awkward altars to 1970s urbanism: the flailing shopping complex on Fillmore Street that was meant to be an homage to black capitalism in the 1970s, the apartment buildings across the street that were imagineered<sup>2</sup> as pillars of hope in the 1990s.

Some of the churches withstood the blast of mid-century urban change, surviving from the pre-war period with vaulted ceilings, unique storefront facades, or Victorian detailing intact. Others are a product of urban renewal – viewed by some as symbols of the buyoff of community leaders by the Redevelopment Agency during the 1970’s. Walk past them today, and you may find that the thick concrete walls are cracking and the paint is peeling.

Tucked in between, in a building once hailed as the capstone of the Redevelopment Agency’s efforts, a high-end restaurant honors the city’s educated palates with a southern-

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<sup>1</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, cited in Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xix. Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 181. The next paragraph in Angelou’s text reads: “A story went the rounds about a San Franciscan white matron who refused to sit beside a Negro civilian on the streetcar, even after he had made room for her on the seat. Her explanation was that she would not sit beside a draft dodger who was a Negro as well. She added that the least he could do was fight for his country the way her son was fighting on Iwo Jima. The story said that the man pulled his body away from the window to show an armless sleeve. He said quietly and with great dignity, ‘Then ask your son to look around for my arm, which I left over there.’”

<sup>2</sup> The term “imagineer” refers back to Walt Disney; imagineer began to populate the urban academic literature in the 1990s.

black twist. At \$80 a plate (\$125 with wine pairing), the special 2012 Black History month dinner of sweet potato gnocchi, wild arugula-Dungeness crab salad, and olive oil poached lamb chops could be seen as a great moment in California foodie fusion. It would be easier to enjoy the meal, though, if it weren't for the sight of the abandoned subjects of "urban renewal" who stroll past the restaurant with hungry eyes – the unemployed, the struggling, and the drifting.



In Chapter 3, I told a macro-scale story of Southeast San Francisco leading up to World War II. I traced the evolution of the place – from isolated urban edge to an industrial zone where land-use patterns and distance from the center of the city became metrics for working class and racial ghettoizations. I talked about how this happened in several waves, with Chinese, working class Euro-ethnics, and African Americans all finding home in the area, alongside the offal of Butchertown, the belching smoke of the power plants, the ongoing threat of city-led eminent domain – and finally the concentration of the military complex at Hunter's Point. Finally, I closed with the birth of Black San Francisco – and with a discussion of the ways that racial segregation created two geographies in which black people could live.

In this chapter I focus on the Fillmore/Western addition, which was the primary home for African Americans when they first became a social force in San Francisco. The Fillmore is about five miles from Bayview-Hunter's Point, yet the two are inextricably linked. The events of the 1950s and 60s in the Fillmore fundamentally defined the Southeast that we see today. Thus, the next episode in the story of the Southeast necessitates a geographical detour through the Fillmore. It was there, beginning in the 1950s, that San Francisco first began to work out its role in the national Urban Renewal program – and it was there that the vibrant activist housing movements of the contemporary city were born.

The expulsions and political turmoil that took place in the Fillmore were both destructive and productive. From the perspective of community building, revitalization, enhancement of neighborhood character, and – fundamental to all three of those goals – retention of existing residents, the Fillmore's transformation was top-down, clunky and deeply traumatic. Even for those who might measure development's success by capital value alone, without concern for the fate of residents, the Fillmore experiment was poorly executed.

Conversations with residents and pastors who lived through the redevelopment fights uncover something of a community-scale existential crisis that is intimately connected to "black flight," and which is blamed for eroding, or even gutting, the city's black cultural and economic base. Although the problem is existential, its roots run deep in the formation of the racial state, and in the economic injustices that produced the "blight" of the mid-century Fillmore. Planners then used the presence of those crumbling structures to justify the area's clear-cutting.

At the same time, the experience of life in the Fillmore was not entirely about the crushing of a community. Out of the ashes of the Fillmore experiment in urban renewal, a community housing movement emerged, which was refined over the long years of fighting. That movement saved some of the Fillmore community and created a base for community involvement in urban redevelopment nationally. Bayview-Hunter's Point residents learned from the errors of the Fillmore. But the legacy of Fillmore history is so important that it has

been a specter, haunting every committee hearing and community gathering dealing with black history or redevelopment in San Francisco ever since.

Along with the African American struggle over in the Fillmore there was another struggle, separated from the black experience by institutional and structural factors, yet spatially, politically and historically intertwined. This was the Japanese-American community's experience with redevelopment. The Fillmore Ghost that this chapter focuses on is the specter of black dispossession. Behind that story, however, is a story of Japanese-American dispossession during WWII.<sup>3</sup>

## The Black Fillmore

The Fillmore in the 1960s and 70s was in many ways a hotbed for black radicalism, a center for the Black Panther Party, the welfare rights movement, and emergent Civil Rights groups. Activists had their hands in many pots, and were deeply connected to organizations, movements, and religious institutions throughout San Francisco and nationally. At the same time, and not coincidentally, it was a community in crisis, in the midst of a fight with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency over the soul of the neighborhood.

The area is also known as the Western Addition, a title left over from the days when the streets were platted in the western most slice of the city in 1858.<sup>4</sup> Fillmore Street rose in importance following the 1906 earthquake when it became a refuge to a multi-ethnic and multi-class crowd that fled their destroyed homes in other parts of the city. For a while it was the city's new Main Street, and arches built across Fillmore Street announced its importance.<sup>5</sup>

Those arches were melted down as part of a show of patriotism during World War II, a spatial transformation that coincided with the congregation there of African American migrants and the forced evacuations of Japanese and Japanese Americans to concentration camps.<sup>6</sup> In her autobiographical work *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou recorded the racial transformation of the community:

In the early months of World War II, San Francisco's Fillmore District, or the Western Addition, experienced a visible revolution. On the surface it appeared to be totally peaceful and almost a refutation of the term "revolution." The Yakamoto Sea Food Market quietly became Sammy's Shoe Shine Parlor and Smoke Shop. Yashigira's Hardware metamorphosed into La Salon de Beaute owned by Miss

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<sup>3</sup> Lai, "The Racial Triangulation of Space"; Clement Lai, "Between 'Blight' and a New World: Urban Renewal, Political Mobilization, and the Production of Spatial Scale," *Institute for the Study of Social Change, Working Paper* (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Mel Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: a Metropolis in Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Mel Scott, *Western Addition District: An Exploration of the Possibilities of Replanning and Rebuilding One of San Francisco's Largest Blighted Districts Under the California Community Redevelopment Act of 1945*, Community Redevelopment Studies (San Francisco: San Francisco City Planning Commission, 1947); Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area*.

<sup>6</sup> Broussard, *Black San Francisco: the Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*; Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (University of California Press, 1991); Lai, "Between 'Blight' and a New World: Urban Renewal, Political Mobilization, and the Production of Spatial Scale."

Clorinda Jackson. The Japanese shops which sold products to Nisei customers were taken over by enterprising Negro businessmen, and in less than a year became permanent homes away from home for the newly arrived Southern Blacks. Where the odors of tempura, raw fish, and *cha* had dominated, the aroma of chitlings, greens and ham hocks now prevailed. . . .

As the Japanese disappeared, soundlessly and without protest, the Negroes entered with their loud jukeboxes, their just-released animosities and the relief of escape from Southern bonds. The Japanese area became San Francisco's Harlem in a matter of months.<sup>7</sup>

The street that served as the central axis of the area lent the place its new lasting name. Even so, city planning documents typically hold onto the old moniker, as did the bureaucrats of the Redevelopment Agency. After decades of public skirmishes over the place, most people use the names Fillmore and Western Addition interchangeably.

The city's redevelopment scheme for the area, initiated back in 1948, produced a wave of evictions and bulldozings in the late '50s and early '60s, and brought on a strong, if at first scattered, response by community members.<sup>8</sup> By the 1970s, the community fight became more coherent, as residents amplified their struggle for permanence, drawing on the larger narratives of ethnic solidarity that were ascendant in San Francisco and nationally at the time.<sup>9</sup>

The neighborhood struggle was set off against a backdrop of rising downtown skylines, the result of the influx of corporate-backed development capital flooding into the city. The rising downtown was the new strategy for developers in the city, who were beginning to give up on industrial projects (which were heading to the East Bay suburbs and overseas) to invest in downtown office spaces and other more profitable real estate ventures.<sup>10</sup> In that context, which put pressure on communities to produce economic value for the city, disinvested communities like the Western Addition/Fillmore District became embroiled in a battle for the right to exist in San Francisco.

Looking back as an outsider, it is difficult to call much about the redevelopment plan a success. A walk down the drab, beige, cement-heavy lower Fillmore—a study in contrasts between a few remaining low-rent businesses and high-end restaurants that pay homage to the decimated 1940s Jazz district—reveals a muffled sense of place. The community would feel entirely different had the Victorians that once lined these streets remained, as they do just a few blocks to the north, south, and west. The select blocks where old structures still stand remain as a testament to the persistence of community advocates who transformed the urban planning vision of the city.

As the old structures fell, residents revolted quite dramatically in the 1960s, laying bodies in front of bulldozers and clogging the Redevelopment Agency's demolition program with lawsuits. Through the 1970s, residents worked to embed humane values into the city bureaucracy: they wanted the agency to prioritize affordable housing above other

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<sup>7</sup> Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 177–8.

<sup>8</sup> Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*.

<sup>9</sup> Jason Ferreira, "'With the Soul of a Human Rainbow': Los Siete, Black Panthers, and Third Worldism in San Francisco," in *Ten Years That Shook the City: San Francisco 1968-1978*, ed. Chris Carlsson, 2011, 30–47.

<sup>10</sup> Beitel, "The Transformation of San Francisco"; Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*.

development. Activists had some positive results that transformed projects in other parts of the city. These are some of the contradictions that make up the socio-geographic landscape of the Fillmore District: it was the worst of times for the community, but some important San Francisco policies were born out of the Fillmore housing fights.

Of course, it's not just the buildings that would be different had the demolitions been stopped—the population, had the city done more to fund rehabilitation than demolition, might be quite different as well. Without the multiple complexes of affordable housing that now fill out the area, most black families—and nearly all of the low-income families that still live in the Fillmore outside of federal public housing projects—would probably be long gone. Much of this housing was a concession from the agency in response to intense community pressure.

## History and Memory

Many San Franciscans have seen the 1999 KQED television documentary on the neighborhood that came to be known as the Fillmore, which lays out the history of redevelopment's failures.<sup>11</sup> The KQED project told the story of a city agency that overstepped its bounds, and it was critical of the capital-government alliance that pushed for a policy of eviction and exclusion to remake the city. The film lacked structural analysis of redevelopment, however, leaving viewers to see the event possibly as a one-time occurrence, the result of a nasty set of bad actors working in cahoots.

There was another film on the topic, a 1974 black and white documentary, dubbed “Redevelopment: A Marxist Analysis,” which, as the title indicates, was focused on the economic structures that the producers saw as undergirding the city's plan for the Fillmore and other neighborhoods that had been tagged for redevelopment. Opening with a bouncy warble of horns and voices, the film follows the San Francisco skyline as it rises from the 1940s onward—until a band of voices chants in social movement-style folk rhythm: “Stop! We don't want what you have to offer!” With that, the singers announce the presence of political resistance, and the camera begins to pan through the empty lots and crumbled bricks of the early-1970s Western Addition—an apocalyptic, disintegrating landscape.<sup>12</sup>

Later in the film, the camera settles on the face of a young black man named Arnold Townsend, who offers a sharp critique of San Francisco's plans for his neighborhood. “The problems of urban decay that face the Fillmore... were manufactured,” he insists, noting that the first public step in the crusade to tear down the Fillmore was a newspaper campaign highlighting isolated examples of deterioration and extreme over-crowding. Images of boarded-up businesses and vacant lots shared space on the pages of the *San Francisco Chronicle* with 1940s and '50s headlines reading “San Francisco Slum Areas Breed Disease,” “More Blighted Housing Found in SF,” and “City Planners to move 10,000 out of Slum Area.”

Those headlines, as Townsend pointed out, had presaged the initiation of a complete re-scaping of the neighborhood, a concept that was first hatched back in the 1940s when business leaders formed an alliance focused on revamping a few key neighborhoods.<sup>13</sup> Other

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<sup>11</sup> Peter L. Stein, *The Fillmore*, videorecording (KQED Inc, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Resolution Film Center, *Redevelopment: A Marxist Analysis* (California Newsreel, 1974).

<sup>13</sup> Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*.



early redevelopment zones included the old produce market near the Embarcadero (now developed as the Golden Gateway), the South of Market (home to working-class single room occupancy hotel [SRO] dwellers and gay leather bars, now the Yerba Buena Center), and the old war housing out in Bayview-Hunter's Point.

City officials—organized after passage of the federal 1949 Housing Act as the Redevelopment Agency—first identified what would be named “Western Addition A-1” by the mid-'50s, in tandem with the city's plan to widen Geary Street into a four-lane boulevard. The 44-block area of A-1 included a small chunk of lower Fillmore Street, from Japantown out to St. Mary's Cathedral at the corner of Geary and Gough. (The present-day Japantown mall, many nearby hotels, and the massive cathedral were all products of the A-1 plan).<sup>14</sup> Redevelopment czar M. Justin Herman, by all accounts both brilliant and autocratic, was the agency's most infamous director. He was hired to push the city's plans, which had been crafted by the agency's first boards, which had been appointed by two-term Mayor Elmer Robinson (one of only five Republicans to hold that office since 1895).

The population boom that came with the World War II labor surge had transformed what was once called the city's “little United Nations,” and what was once home to a large Jewish population, into primarily African American space, a shift that was enabled by the forced removal of Japanese families, the lack of racial covenants on the housing stock, and the large number of rental housing units.

Though they shared community boundaries and a common struggle against the Redevelopment Agency's program of community removal, the story for black and Japanese residents was very different. There was a tension that went back to the beginning of the war. Angelou described it this way:

A person unaware of all the factors that make up oppression might have expected sympathy or even support from the Negro newcomers for the dislodged Japanese. Especially in view of the fact that they (the Blacks) had themselves undergone concentration-camp living for centuries in slavery's plantations and later in sharecropper's cabins. But the sensations of common relationship were missing. . . . No member of my family and none of the family friends ever mentioned the absent Japanese. It was as if they had never owned or lived in the houses we inhabited.<sup>15</sup>

Some have described more positive cross-cultural connections in the years after the war.<sup>16</sup> But when the Redevelopment Agency began to enact its plans, officials played the two groups off of each other, and there were at least two fundamental factors separating the two that divided people.<sup>17</sup> First was the availability of capital: the Japantown scheme, laid after Japanese-American citizens returned from WWII internment camps, was designed to draw in Japanese capital, in a show of post-Hiroshima intercultural peace. The mall complex built there did not revive much of the pre-war residential community, but international capital made a difference in creating something that African Americans, just a few blocks away in the same neighborhood, could not replicate. Second, the political fallout from

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<sup>14</sup> Scott, *Western Addition District*.

<sup>15</sup> Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 178–9.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> On the ways the agency used difference to squelch community power, see Lai, “The Racial Triangulation of Space.”

wartime internment had the effect of silencing some Japanese-Americans (terrified of returning to enemy status) and of raising public sympathy for returnees.<sup>18</sup>

Property owners in the district – starting with red-lining that made rehabilitative loans impossible, and after the area was defined as blighted and targeted for demolition – stopped or slowed repairs in anticipation of the neighborhood overhaul. While SFRA policies called for the purchase of structures and payment to families to leave rentals, displaced families and businesses reported intimidation tactics and long struggles to keep their structures whole – struggles that typically ended with their displacement. Many were not technically evicted, but they argue that by virtue of facing a system that refused to help them maintain and upgrade, their properties crumbled and were easily devalued as slum structures by the SFRA.<sup>19</sup>

By the mid-60s, most of the A-1 demolition was complete, with 4,000 people displaced— and Geary Street had become a “Mason-Dixon Line” dividing a poor, black lower Fillmore from the largely white and wealthy Pacific Heights. By then a larger redevelopment project, A-2, was underway. The new project increased the SFRA zone by an additional 60 square blocks, from Van Ness Avenue on the east side to St. Joseph’s Street out west (near Masonic), and north to south from Bush to Grove Streets.<sup>20</sup>

The A-2 program did not move forward with the same pace and vigor as A-1, largely because the A-1 experience had politicized the community, generating a lawsuit that forced the SFRA – and ultimately the federal government – to promise replacement homes. The 1968 lawsuit was a cornerstone for legal efforts nationally that gave displacees the right to insist on relocation assistance and on one-for-one replacement of demolished housing. The trick of holding the SFRA (or any agency) to that goal has been a continual challenge, but the Western Addition decision was used in cases across the country to support arguments for housing replacement.<sup>21</sup>

The shock of the A-1 demolitions, and the swiftness of urban renewal’s motion offered a template for community resistance in the next round. The fight over A-2 would be materially different, with more community participation and more affordable housing built. Through both phases the Redevelopment Agency would demolish hundreds of structures by 1970, displacing thousands of people. One assessment puts the number of displacees as high as 21,500, removed from 11,000 low-rent housing units.<sup>22</sup>

## **Building the Fillmore**

The World War II black in-migration had turned the Fillmore community into a central space of entertainment and cultural production for the city at large. Local commerce supported a black merchant class with a western- experimental mindset (similar to that

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; Seigel, “Nihonmachi and Urban Renewal.”

<sup>19</sup> *Queen of Fillmore: The Leola King Story*, Forthcoming; Stein, *The Fillmore*; Wade “Speedy” Woods, interview by author, January 2010.

<sup>20</sup> San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (San Francisco, Calif.), *San Francisco Redevelopment Program: Summary of Project Data and Key Elements* (San Francisco: San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Chester W Hartman, “Relocation: Illusory Promises and No Relief,” *Virginia Law Review* 57 (1971): 745.; National Commission for Urban Problems, *Building the American City*; Calvin Welch, interview by author, January 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Seigel, “Nihonmachi and Urban Renewal.”

which permeated most migrant San Francisco communities); a black professional class emerged, as well.<sup>23</sup> It wasn't a utopia—though nearly every interview I've done or read about with people who remember this time (or those who remember their parent's stories of it) is full of longing and magical descriptions. It was a time and a place that supported black-owned businesses (which were not supported downtown) with a thriving nightlife, and that delicate creature that we call a sense of community beginning to take root.

That sense was just budding—blacks had come from Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Alabama, and more, settling with cousins and others from their hometowns. The same social networks that helped people get on the right train out west, find their way from the Oakland train depot into San Francisco (which was not as easy back then), and to find housing and jobs in the temporarily black-friendly economy, were nurtured by the close quarters of the Fillmore and round-the-clock factory shifts. Here's how Angelou remembered it:

On Post Street, where our house was, the hill skidded slowly down to Fillmore, the market heart of our district. In the two short blocks before it reached its destination, the street housed two day-and-night restaurants, two pool halls, four Chinese restaurants, two gambling houses, plus diners, shoeshine shops, beauty salons, barber shops and at least four churches. To fully grasp the never-ending activity in San Francisco's Negro neighborhood during the war, one need only know that the two blocks described were side streets that were duplicated many times over in the eight- to ten-square block area.<sup>24</sup>

In the decade that followed Angelou's description, the African American Fillmore grew to about forty square blocks. Even at its peak, though, the black Fillmore was remembered by residents as having a small-town feeling amidst the bubbling of the city.<sup>25</sup> In that sense it was no different from many other San Francisco neighborhoods. That sameness is significant. That African Americans felt as connected to the prototypical San Francisco small-town-in-the-big-city experience as any other group matters quite a bit. On a certain level that story helps to shatter the hegemonic narrative about San Francisco's past as either a white working class haven or as a harbor for white elites – with a few isolated black and Chinese zones.<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, the Fillmore's coziness was not self-selected; it took shape because of exclusion. Even where there were no racial covenants, blacks reported that landlords wouldn't rent or sell to them – or, as several of my interviewees said, realtors discouraged them from even seeking housing in most places, telling them that they would simply not be comfortable.<sup>27</sup> Most famously, baseball hero Willie Mays faced racially exclusive covenants

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<sup>23</sup> Broussard, *Black San Francisco: the Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*; Crowe, *Prophets of Rage: The Black Freedom Struggle in San Francisco, 1945-1969*; Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites*.

<sup>24</sup> Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 179.

<sup>25</sup> Informant#6, Fillmore resident, Interview by Author; Informant#7, Fillmore resident, Interview by Author; also see Stein, *The Fillmore*.

<sup>26</sup> On the white working class, see Kazin, *Barons of Labor: the San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era*; David F. Selvin, *A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strikes in San Francisco* (Wayne State University Press, 1996). On the entrenchment of the white elite, see Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*.

<sup>27</sup> Doris Vincent, interview by author, May 2010; Informant#8, Southeast resident, Interview by Author.

when he tried to buy a house in one of the tony suburban enclaves west of Twin Peaks, as did young attorney Willie Brown some years later.<sup>28</sup>

Racist housing dynamics were part of a larger process that produced a sense of connectedness within the “black community” in San Francisco. For many, the shared experience of surviving the praxis of American racism offers a cultural-political bond that can transcend any other alliances. Yet there were intra-community divisions, of course. The developing rhetorics of civil rights and of black nationalism brought people together around positive notions of race as culture. At the same time, the infamous class divisions of California’s first city (labor’s famous victories were defined against a strong capitalist class) were present among black San Franciscans as well – and became further entrenched over the years.

A geographic analysis of this social division is only partially useful. Bayview-Hunter’s Point was so far from the central city, and so much smaller than the Fillmore, that the two places produced different cultures. But both communities, because of the spatial logic of racism, were containers for cross-class communities. The Fillmore is remembered as economically integrated, with middle class and poor families living amongst each other; the common bond was race.<sup>29</sup>

In the Western Addition newcomers crowded into Victorian flats, often squeezing many families into one home, sleeping and cooking in shifts to share the space. It was the kind of experience that brought people together – and which simultaneously engendered stereotypical racialized thinking on the part of the white majority. A similar race-space conflation had produced stereotypes of Chinese-American residents who had been imagined to enjoy or prefer – or at least to passively accept – crowding into small spaces with tiny alleyways, or out at Hunter’s Point in ramshackle fishing villages. The Chinese had been maligned for “disease-spreading” behaviors that included their crowded housing conditions in the local press, which naturalized the living conditions that had been created largely by white-majority planning practices.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, because blacks were forced to crowd together, the racist notion that black people tend to live in overcrowded, crumbling homes was one of many racially-inscribed memes that later provided support for redevelopment. The notion of “blight,” which activists took to be code for the presence of people of color, was built on real conditions of deterioration in the community. What was missing in the blight discussion was a historically accurate conversation about how it had been produced. Such an analysis would have acknowledged the role of slumlords, red-lining during the New Deal, the lack of black homeownership, and the way that the imminence of redevelopment’s demolitions accelerated the disinterest of landlords in keeping up their properties.

The Fillmore Jazz District was lively and world-renowned, luring Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Dinah Washington, and others to play in its clubs. Like the east coast’s thriving black urban culture centers in Harlem, racism inserted contradiction into everyday life. In local memory it was a place that attracted and welcomed people of all backgrounds, but it was one of the few places in the Bay Area with a wealth of businesses

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<sup>28</sup> James Richardson, *Willie Brown: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> Arnold Ellis, interview by author, January 2010; This was by no means a solely local pattern, see: Michael C. Dawson, “A Black Counterpublic?: Economic Earthquakes, Racial Agenda(s), and Black Politics,” *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (September 21, 1994): 195–223.

<sup>30</sup> Craddock, *City of Plagues: Disease, Poverty, and Deviance in San Francisco*; Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*.

welcoming to black customers. The unwritten rule was that blacks stayed west of Van Ness to socialize – not because they preferred it, but because they feared vigilante violence if they crossed the Van Ness line.<sup>31</sup> Clubs to the east of Van Ness, in North Beach or downtown, maintained segregated stages. Somewhat awkwardly, the Fillmore was therefore a social center for blacks living in other small pockets of the city. The clusters of African Americans living out at Hunter’s Point and the small quiet community of Ingleside, near Lake Merced, had few venues for socializing, so they traveled across town to visit Fillmore theaters and bars.

Ultimately, to make way for the Redevelopment Agency’s projects, one count shows that at least 883 Fillmore businesses closed, 4,729 households were forced out, and 2,500 Victorian homes were demolished.<sup>32</sup> Another estimates that at least 20,000 people were displaced.<sup>33</sup> In the wake of the destruction, the map of San Francisco segregation began to shift. With the decimation of the southern half of Fillmore Street, blacks turned to Divisadero Street, which was already a central secondary economic zone in the black community. But Divisadero never grew to be the thriving social center that Fillmore had been.

## Politics and Networks

The double blows to Civil Rights politics represented in the slayings of Martin Luther King, Jr. and presidential candidate Bobby Kennedy in 1968 were felt throughout black San Francisco, as they were nationwide. Fillmore residents had become increasingly radicalized through the formation of the Western Addition Community Organization (WACO) a few years earlier, in a political milieu that was heavily inflected with the national and international movements of the times – across the political spectrum. Amid the everyday people of the neighborhoods, who were not self-defined as political, and those involved in Civil Rights activism, there were leftist cooperative houses where residents tried carving out alternative lifestyles and social visions. James Farmer’s Congress on Racial Equality had an active local chapter, and many residents were embroiled in the San Francisco State fight for ethnic studies that erupted that same year. The Black Panther Party had an office on Fillmore Street, near the intersection of Eddy Street (where Yoshi’s jazz club now stands<sup>34</sup>), alongside neighbors who had played a key role in electing a young and relatively radical, African American Willie Brown to the very white California State Assembly back in 1964.<sup>35</sup>

In the context of the federal War on Poverty, which created funding streams for social programs and had a huge impact on San Francisco, many of the keystone ideas of the affordable housing movement emerged during this time, and the Western Addition housing

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<sup>31</sup> *Queen of Fillmore: The Leola King Story*; Stein, *The Fillmore*.

<sup>32</sup> Leslie Fulbright, “Sad Chapter in Western Addition History Ending,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 21, 2008, sec. B.

<sup>33</sup> Seigel, “Nihonmachi and Urban Renewal.”

<sup>34</sup> Woods, interview.

<sup>35</sup> Richardson, *Willie Brown*.; I want to further disentangle Brown’s politics from this era. He was radical in that he fought for civil rights, and formalized black power. But by all accounts, including his own, he was primarily focused on himself, his career, and his climb to power – from the moments of his first taste of power in the assembly in 1964. Also see Willie L. Brown, Jr. *Basic Brown: My Life and Our Times*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008).

battles — which influenced policymakers like Brown and US Congressman Phil Burton— played a key role. This included policies like inclusionary zoning (which requires a portion of new housing developments contribute to a city’s affordable housing stock), local hiring requirements (so that development projects employ local residents), and the mandate that governments provide replacement housing for redevelopment evictees.<sup>36</sup>

The black political community in the Fillmore was largely made of three wings, as activist Wade “Speedy” Woods remembers it. The ministers and a few remaining business owners made up one flank. The Afro-centric cultural nationalists (following Kwanzaa creator Maulana Karenga) formed another. Woods was part of a third, highly politicized wing, made up of the Panthers and others who were focused on class struggle. The three were not necessarily at odds with each other, though they sometimes inevitably were; it was a time during which African-American politics was consciously expanding and evolving.<sup>37</sup> All three camps were connected to the greater California black political scene, where blacks were challenging the white power structures of the East Bay and gaining some institutional success through the election of black—and self-defined socialist—Ron Dellums to the US Congress in 1970,<sup>38</sup> and visibility through the unsuccessful campaigns of Black Panthers Bobby Seale and Elaine Brown for Oakland City Council in 1972.<sup>39</sup> They were also connected to the much larger black community in LA.<sup>40</sup>

Terry Collins, who migrated from Indiana via Los Angeles in 1967, remembers study groups where people read Marx’s *Capital*, and where political consciousness was crafted through a collective education process. Collins was sucked into the redevelopment fight immediately, and became an active member of WACO. Through that activism, Collins and others connected their own survival to the survival of the neighborhood itself. “We watched Victorians on Gough Street ripped to the ground. I actually cried,” he recalled.<sup>41</sup>

Collins was part of a movement that stood in stark opposition to the plans of the Redevelopment Agency. A multi-racial group steeped in Saul Alinsky’s organizing model and inspired by the anti-bulldozer writings of Jane Jacobs, WACO was the central organization for radical anti-Redevelopment activism.<sup>42</sup> Redevelopment chief Herman disliked WACO, calling it a “passing flurry of proletarianism.” Herman argued for a politics that valued the scale of the city over the scale of the neighborhood: “There must come a time in any community’s life when the interest of the total community must dominate those of the neighborhoods.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Calvin Welch, “The Fight to Stay: The Creation of the Community Housing Movement in San Francisco, 1968-1978,” in *Ten Years That Shook the City: San Francisco 1968-1978*, ed. Chris Carlsson, 2011, 154–169.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Charles Smith, *We Have No Leaders: African-Americans in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*; Woods, interview.

<sup>38</sup> Richardson, *Willie Brown*.

<sup>39</sup> Jane Rhodes, “Women in the Black Panther Party.” In *African American Women Confront the West, 1600-2000*, edited by Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, 346–362. University of Oklahoma Press, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Darnell M Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón, eds., *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Woods, interview.

<sup>41</sup> Terry Collins, interview by author, January 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Saul David Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago press, 1946). ; Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

<sup>43</sup> “Renewal Official Responds,” *Journal of Housing* 4 (Nov 1969), p 602, cited in Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*, 193.

Collins had linked up with WACO as a member of the Black Students Union (BSU), at San Francisco State. The SF State branch was a largely working-class group, part of a national web of BSUs that were devoted to tying student members to local community struggles. (The Black Student Union's national mission had been sealed at the 1967 Black Youth Conference in Los Angeles—the same event that spawned the boycott threat against the 1968 Olympics.)<sup>44</sup> Graduates from this time were among the founders of KPOO radio (89.5 FM), the first black-owned independent radio station in the west, which is still headquartered in the Fillmore today.

For some BSU students, co-op housing in the Western Addition was home. One such place was called the Big House, at 560 Page; another was called the Black House. Recalls Collins, “We lived collectively, had meetings there, we did political education. We’d have fundraising parties. We thought internationally and globally.” Members of the movement made connections between global conflicts and national liberation efforts in South Africa, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Cuba, and the fight with the Redevelopment Agency.<sup>45</sup>

WACO, originally founded by White activist ministers, but later taken over by blacks, had grown increasingly militant at the end of the decade. Its organizing efforts spawned a key lawsuit that took the Redevelopment Agency to task for failing to consider replacement housing during the first round of demolitions. When the plaintiffs won, federal funds were halted for the Western Addition until the Redevelopment Agency developed a substitute-housing plan.<sup>46</sup>

Though I was only able to interview men from the Fillmore redevelopment struggle – in contrast with my interviews in Bayview-Hunter’s Point – several women played central leadership roles. One of the key figures in the WACO lawsuit and in the community at-large was Mary Rogers, a neighborhood icon self-schooled in redevelopment legalese. Rogers was one of many residents who risked their lives in front of the city’s bulldozers, and she remained an outspoken advocate until her death in 2006.<sup>47</sup>

“Mary was the one,” remembered Collins. “She knew more about this stuff than anybody. She saved so many houses. A lot of the 236 [federally funded affordable] housing was built because of her. She was involved in education, housing, welfare rights, everything.” Rogers stood out, but she was only one of a political cohort that included many female leaders. “There were a lot of women who were really something in those days, really strong women who’d get out and fight against any injustice: Inez Andres, Lily Ransom, so many others. These people are all gone now.”<sup>48</sup>

## Negotiating Participation

On the heels of the WACO lawsuit, Redevelopment Agency chief Herman and Mayor Joe Alioto—who had once headed the Redevelopment Agency’s board—decided to try a new tactic to deal with the active and angry Fillmore community. Thus was born the PAC-system of community participation in the Redevelopment Agency that is still used today.

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<sup>44</sup> Douglas Hartmann, *Race, Culture and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath* (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> Collins, interview.

<sup>46</sup> San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (San Francisco, Calif.), *San Francisco Redevelopment Program*.

<sup>47</sup> Stein, *The Fillmore*.; Multiple interviews.

<sup>48</sup> Collins, interview.

The Western Addition Project Area Committee, (WAPAC), created an institutionally accepted—and funded—venue for community involvement. The formalized process brought community members onto an appointed volunteer board, presumably to solicit community input and to serve as a vehicle for communicating institutional progress to the broader community. Bit by bit the key players in WACO were brought onto the PAC, where they hoped to have institutional power from within. The PAC had more than 70 members at one point, including Hannibal Williams, and others who had been WACO leaders.<sup>49</sup>

WAPAC soon became the primary venue for Fillmore development politics, signaling a potential end of widespread radical anti-redevelopment activism in the community. By creating an official bureaucratic venue through which community members could participate, the Redevelopment Agency co-opted community power, offering radicals an insider seat. When “Speedy” Woods and then Reverend Arnold Townsend (the young man from the Marxist documentary had later become a church leader) tried to win a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, they based their citywide pitch on their experience with WAPAC, not WACO, which would have given them a far-left shroud.<sup>50</sup>

WAPAC was formed out of a new Redevelopment Agency requirement to involve community members in redevelopment decisions. At the outset WACO had a lot of control over membership and scope, and for a short time both groups had the same chairman, Hannibal Williams. But alliances within WAPAC deteriorated to the point that a staff member “was murdered and its offices burned down by an arsonist.”<sup>51</sup>

Townsend remembers WAPAC’s formation as the death knell for WACO and the radical politics that it represented: “The way that it was set up was so brilliant. You create WAPAC and you put the money in WAPAC—so everybody went there and WACO kind of died out. Before any development can go forward, the rule was you have to go through the PAC – but if the PAC can’t make a decision in 45 days then the Agency can do what it wants.” Indeed, if one wanted to make it hard for an opposition group to succeed, one might create a board like the early WAPAC. It was so huge that a simple majority vote on a given redevelopment proposal was hard to come by, as each project bidder lobbied board members under the 45-day rule. Says Townsend, “By the time I became chair [in the early 70s] there were 54 people. With that number you still have a tough time getting a quorum.” By its very structure the PAC both allowed people to have a say and diluted their participation. During Townsend’s tenure as chair, he says he oversaw a reduction in the board’s size to 25, and then 15, which he thought was more manageable.

Though the rage of the ’60s was tempered by WAPAC, and by the new protections that appeared to be coming for the second redevelopment zone, Western Addition politics were not always civil and ordered. In a lecture 20 years later former Black Panther Bennie Stewart painted the community-agency tensions as extremely high:

There was one occasion where Justin Herman was attacked at a public meeting. There was this guy named Christopher Lewis (in those days he was a ‘jammer’). He was about 6’2”, weighing about 225 lbs., not a small guy. There was one occasion where Chris leaped over a lectern and collared Justin Herman and threatened to slap

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<sup>49</sup> Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*; Arnold Townsend, interview by author, January 2010.

<sup>50</sup> *San Francisco Ballot Handbook 2000* (San Francisco, Calif.: San Francisco Department of Elections, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*, 194.



the shit out of him. Some people say Justin never really fully recovered from that threat.<sup>52</sup>

Herman died from a heart attack not long afterwards, in 1971. But the violent overtones of Fillmore development meetings remained for years. Townsend remembers running meetings as chair of WAPAC years later, where he believes he was the only person in the room without a gun. Whether or not that was ever true is not important. What lingers, undoubtedly, is the feeling of the time. As Townsend put it: “As far as we were concerned, it was a life-and-death struggle.”<sup>53</sup>

The point is that in the memory of people, the development fight was about survival. Behind the doors of the Redevelopment Agency neighborhood change could be envisioned as a challenge of city planning – an apolitical, utopic process.<sup>54</sup> I imagine many employees of the agency at the time thought of themselves as participating in a project of greater good. The community that had been so decimated by the first redevelopment wave was also internally split. Some community members wanted to participate in the city’s redevelopment process, perhaps genuinely believing in it. Others wanted to get in on development deals for themselves, or to force the city to funnel some of the development wealth to black Fillmore residents.<sup>55</sup>

Some of those efforts were successful among preachers who had access to capital or political prestige through their church institutions, which helped link them to the Redevelopment Agency’s economic stimulus plans. Even those relatively well-placed entrepreneurs, however, faced a real estate market that was still essentially rigged racially. It wasn’t just tenants and homebuyers whose blackness was used against them; developers dealt with a web of lending, bonding and insurance demands that required them to deal with the white banking institutions that determined what projects would move ahead.<sup>56</sup>

## “Hush Puppies”

Of course, it wasn’t just the radicals who were pulled in to work within the Redevelopment Agency. The Fillmore community had many more centrist political leaders—some of whom were best known for their Sunday-morning work behind the pulpit. Some were pulled in because of their centrist positions, others embraced the rising faith in government institutions to build community justice; they framed it as pragmatism. After he emerged out of the anti-redevelopment left politics WACO, Rev. Wilbur Hamilton made his way through the power structure beginning with a position on WAPAC. He eventually was promoted to Agency head in 1977.<sup>57</sup> Hamilton was just one of many pastors who tried to

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<sup>52</sup> Bennie Stewart, speaking at public lecture at New College of California in 1994. Calvin Welch, “WACO Attacks Redevelopment,” *Foundsf.org* (n.d.).

<sup>53</sup> This mood was confirmed by many others in formal and informal interviews.

<sup>54</sup> Hack, Birch, and Sedway, *Local Planning*; William Fulton and Paul Shigley, *Guide to California Planning, 3rd Edition*, 3rd ed. (Solano Press Books, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> On how this process played out racially between African Americans and Japanese Americans, see Lai, “The Racial Triangulation of Space.”

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*; Jacobs, *Making City Planning Work*.

<sup>57</sup> Hamilton is still alive but he was not available for interviews; he was deputy director from 1974-77.

work from the inside. It was part of a process of incorporation taking place across the country.<sup>58</sup>

Given religious leaders' importance in the black community, the eventual involvement of nearly all black Western Addition pastors in the Redevelopment Agency web—either as employees, leaders, or as development bidders—was probably inevitable. It seemed to suck the life out of any potential radical opposition leadership as the last of the major bulldozing tore a multi-block gash in the center of the district that was to remain for more than a decade.

The spatial politics of demolition were central, then, in affecting the quality and direction of racial politics. That is, with the visible evidence of the power of redevelopment in vacant lots, and with the disappearance of black families and businesses, the urban planning choices of the Redevelopment Agency were necessarily socio-political choices. There was no blank slate.

Some versions of the Fillmore story blame the preachers —along with labor unions—for linking up with the Redevelopment Agency by sponsoring housing developments and getting a piece of redevelopment's housing-subsidy largesse. Looking back, survivors who still live there see it differently. Townsend, for example, reflected on the contradictions inherent in joining with the Redevelopment Agency: "Preachers were integral in the community. They were misunderstood. In a lot of ways they were cheated. They were inexperienced. But the housing that they built is what kept some people here."<sup>59</sup> There were multiple dimensions to the process: it was in the preachers' financial interest to sponsor initiatives to keep congregation members in town, but their efforts also helped people stay who could never have otherwise afforded San Francisco housing in the '80s and '90s.

The churches were important community spaces for many reasons, including survival in a racist society, especially for those not interested in experimenting with the Hippie variation of collectivist living. The Reverend Amos Brown, who arrived in San Francisco late in the decade, puts it this way: "Blacks were not accepted anywhere. The only place where blacks could be somebody was in church on Sunday morning."<sup>60</sup> Brown's words echoed the analysis of sociological giants Drake and Cayton who went even farther – they saw the church as compensatory institution giving a false sense of power to people who would continue to be locked out of the governance of their own communities.<sup>61</sup> This position is, of course, controversial. While Gunner Myrdal and others have insisted that the church is an "opiate," others have insisted on the important role of churches in consolidating political power and in building a language of participation and collectivity through the regular practice of call and response.<sup>62</sup> And, of course, the best known black leaders of the Civil Rights period, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., came from religious institutions.

To be sure, Rev. Brown did not leave the church, and he has personally benefitted from his position at the head of Third Baptist, a San Francisco church that was founded in the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See Smith, *We Have No Leaders*.

<sup>59</sup> Townsend, interview.

<sup>60</sup> Amos Brown, interview by author, January 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, cited in Melissa Victoria Harris-Lacewell, *Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 35.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 35 et seq.; Harris-Lacewell offers a terrific summary of the literature on the institution of the black church.

century. In the 1970s he tried his hand at redevelopment and found that even the title of Reverend didn't entirely smooth the road to accessing investment funds, leaving him with a bitter story of racial redlining. His focus was the vacant six acres between Turk, Steiner, Eddy, and Fillmore Streets that now includes Safeway and the massive Fillmore Center. "When I got here we had exclusive negotiating rights, but lenders wouldn't support our efforts there. It was vacant for years. There were [impromptu community] gardens down there when I got here. But then Don Tishman shows up wanting to do that area."

Essentially, Rev. Brown says that the Redevelopment Agency pushed his development group together with Tishman, who is white. "We were over a barrel, so we reluctantly became partners with him. We insisted that there be one black-owned building in that complex—and there is *one*," although Tishman, he says, couldn't finance the project entirely through local banks. Part of the problem was that federal housing dollars were shrinking from the mid-'70s onward. New forms of redlining by public and private institutions exacerbated the problem. Townsend and Woods also blame lending discrimination on the racial makeup of the developers and the community they were trying to serve.<sup>63</sup>

Rev. Brown—who later used his pulpit to launch a brief political career on the Board of Supervisors during the Willie Brown era—also views the role of church leaders critically. For Rev. Brown, involving pastors in development was the Redevelopment Agency's not-so-subtle attempt to silence opposition to the city's plans and to muffle anger about racism in lending. Bluntly put, he saw it as an attempt to get preachers to sell-out the community's goals. "Involving the churches was part of a 'hush puppy program,'" Brown recalled, using a loaded phrase that has etymological roots in slavery:

When they had fish fries in the South, when they had cornmeal left around, they'd roll it in the grease and throw it out to the dogs who were yapping and barking outside, and say 'hush puppies.' And the slaves that were out there that couldn't get enough to eat would snatch up the food for themselves. That's where it came from, 'hush puppies' were supposed to shut them up.

And so we did throw some hush puppies out to black ministers, to shut up the masses to keep them docile. ... You look at these churches that were gotten under redevelopment, and you look at some of this housing. What was not done [alongside those projects] was what was necessary to give blacks the economic security that was needed, through jobs, through loans, so that businesses could develop. They didn't give that to us.

Indeed, the continual degradation of African-American economic stability has challenged efforts at community uplift. "Black people couldn't get loans," for housing rehabilitation, for business expansion—for much of anything, says Collins, who was once embroiled in his own multi-year struggle to buy his Webster Street home, which he says was tied up because of loan troubles.

Ironically, Rev. Brown later became a politician aligned with the more conservative forces in the city. When he was on the Board of Supervisors he typically stood in opposition to housing and economic policies that might have kept black families in the city. In the 1990s Brown also supported a range of policies that attacked the poor, including Quality of

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<sup>63</sup> No matter the racial makeup of the development team, they argue, developing in the Fillmore remained difficult, even with the assistance and blessing of the Redevelopment Agency.

Life crimes that criminalized people without homes for things like lack of toilet facilities. Because of that, Brown's experience in trying to participate in the Fillmore's reconstruction as a developer is notable. His politics aligned him with the Chamber of Commerce. His alliances with Willie Brown should have connected him to the most flush development capital. And yet, the story he tells, looking back at decades of trying to play the game, was that blackness trumped these connections.

Once the well-paying jobs of the war years had disappeared, there were only a few options for those interested in experiments in community. Collins participated in one of a network of collectives called the Food Conspiracy on Downey Street in the Haight- Ashbury and took advantage of the free clinic movement for health care. But those 1960s innovations weren't accessed by everyone. Many just gave up on San Francisco, moving to the East Bay and beyond. Some, like Townsend and Woods, stuck around, trying to influence redevelopment in any way that they could. "It was a time of resistance in the community. But because we knew it was a *fait accompli*, we were trying to make it work for us," Townsend says. And although in theory the Redevelopment Agency was simply in charge of remaking a few structures in the community, it had become the patron of the Fillmore; for better or for worse, the agency's choices would determine who would live there, and what institutions would be available to them.

Anecdotal stories about the late 60s and early 70s are shocking in their drama. Nobody that I interviewed was willing to speak in depth on the record about that period, but many people have hinted at the idea that the agency was a largely totalizing force – hiring community members onto the payroll and then using them against each other. They paint a story worthy of a season of *The Wire*. Those same people were more willing to discuss in depth the ways that the agency changed over time.

As early as 1971, after Herman's death, the Redevelopment Agency was never quite the demolition-happy entity it had been, and there was some space for reformers who forced their way in, although it was uneven. Part of the story was the mood of the times, a confluence of racial anger and a Jacobsonian rage against unjust urban planning. The demolitions of the 1950s and 60s had sparked outrage in black communities across the country, and the riots and uprisings of the 60s struck fear in the minds of white-led agencies. At the same time, the Jane Jacobs-style anger at centralized planning struck a chord.

In 1970s San Francisco, the agency's attention was dispersed across many sites citywide. The long and heated struggle in the South of Market soon became the next emblematic story of the Redevelopment Agency's use as a tool against poor and working class San Francisco neighborhoods.<sup>64</sup> The Fillmore had become, quite quickly, the old model for redevelopment. Furthermore, the insistence by reformers there on community involvement benefitted every project that began after it. John Elberling today runs the South of Market nonprofit housing corporation that was created out of that district's own epic redevelopment fight.<sup>65</sup> As he puts it, "A-1 [the first phase of Fillmore redevelopment] was clearly racist; then, times change. And with A-2 the city powers-that-be had two things in mind: Yes, slum removal—but maybe also the ability to build a better African- American neighborhood."<sup>66</sup>

The interplay between a morphing agency—which had the protection of urban land values as a core concern, but which was under pressure by the affordable housing

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<sup>64</sup> Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*.

<sup>65</sup> The acronym TODCO stands for Tenants and Owners Development Corporation.

<sup>66</sup> John Elberling, interview by author, January 2010.

movement—and a desperately struggling community, happened against the backdrop of deepening economic insecurity. In that climate Woods says blacks in the Fillmore used, and were used by, minority contracting programs:

You'd have blacks that wanted to become developers and get in on the development boom and you'd see them go to the agency and the guy would say, 'this is my 30 percent minority partner.' Then when they'd go back to the agency after the project was approved and everything, and they'd say that because of the financial markets, things like that, he only owns 1 percent now. You had a lot of people just going out for themselves instead of looking out for the community.

And then a lot of people died during the '80s—but in the '70s it was an exciting time, you'd get a lot of groundbreaking ideas.

The big thing that didn't happen that everybody had hoped for was the commercial opportunities. You walk down Fillmore Street now, and all the businesses that were replaced, you can count them on one hand. The economic opportunities that people hoped for never materialized—or they didn't go far enough. That happened across the country; you'd see communities that went through urban renewal, but they never got going economically.

The progressive impulse in the Western Addition was further stymied by one of the strangest plot twists in the city's history. Jim Jones and his People's Temple—located on Geary, in the center of the Fillmore District—captured the political and social imagination of many black Western Addition residents.<sup>67</sup> Lured by Jones's promise of an antiracist, egalitarian society—and deeply frustrated with the decimation of the Fillmore—many radicals, according to longtime housing activist Calvin Welch, were among those who died in Jones's 1978 mass suicide.<sup>68</sup>

Success in the Fillmore is, then, best measured in doses—small projects pushed forward, small victories for individual families or businesses who managed to survive. Woods takes pride in having convinced the Redevelopment Agency to preserve a few unusually well-kept Victorians, which were moved to a mid-Fillmore locale. Dubbed Victorian Square, the group of buildings was mostly black-owned at the time, including the site where Marcus Books—the West Coast's oldest black-owned bookstore—still remained in 2012. But each success like this comes wrapped in stories of black-led development partnerships that were denied contracts or delayed for so long that they could never get off the ground.

Woods and Townsend didn't win their citywide bids for Supervisor in 1973 and 75, respectively, but the pitch for district elections was successful, ushering in progressive reformers from the city's disenfranchised communities. Ella Hill Hutch (the board's first black woman) and Harvey Milk (the first openly gay man) joined the Board of Supervisors in 1977, on the heels of the election of George Moscone as mayor in 1975.<sup>69</sup> Yet as the decade wore on, the visible symbol of redevelopment's failures glared out from empty development sites like Rev. Brown's—some of which stayed vacant well into the 1980s.

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<sup>67</sup> Rebecca Moore, *Understanding Jonestown and Peoples Temple* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2009).

<sup>68</sup> Welch, interview.

<sup>69</sup> Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).

The ghost town feel of those vacant lots would haunt political leaders. In an interview with KQED in the 1990s then-mayor Willie Brown conceded that one of the worst mistakes he and others made in the Fillmore (while he was the leader of the State Assembly) was allowing the bulldozing to happen without clarity on how quickly new projects would move forward.<sup>70</sup>

(Mayor Brown refused my attempts – about ten phone calls and emails, over three years – to interview him for this project, but political pop psychology tells me that the failures of the Fillmore, the neighborhood from which he emerged as a political player, may have a lot to do with his later obsession with development as mayor. Yes, he was focused on land markets because that’s where capital flowed – and yes, he was mayor during the dot-com boom, which made development dreams possible. Still, he could have focused on many things, but he, more than any of his predecessors, was the Development Mayor. Growth, more than any other issue, set his political barometer.)

## **The Haunting Legacy of the Fillmore**

Though there’s room for debate on the metrics of success for such things – sure, lots of affordable housing was eventually built – some Fillmore projects took forty years to come to fruition. Looking back, it’s hard to imagine what that feels like. In a society with no memory for history and politics, forty years is a lifetime. The displacement of residents and businesses created a socio-spatial rift, a gap in urban space and a hole in the heart of the displaced communities. As bulldozed spaces lay vacant well into the 1990s, the Fillmore remained a sore reminder of the ways in which state-led planning can fail both communities and capital. Yet, because development took place in two phases, enough political space opened up for community involvement that sparked the city to directed significant amounts of redevelopment capital into affordable housing.

Most accounts of urban renewal blame a walled-in and imperial Redevelopment Agency for the failures of the Fillmore. This is an appropriate target, but much too easy, since most of the key players are gone from the spotlight or have died. But the agency was not the only actor on the redevelopment stage. This chapter has shown that it was a scene populated by actors with competing tendencies – both dynamic opposition and determined cooperation emerged among residents as they struggled to be a “community,” while reforming and challenging the top-down politics that characterized urban planning in the 1950s and ’60s.

Looking back, officials I have interviewed insist on noting the broader context that played out in the Fillmore. The decimation of the neighborhood was not entirely due to one city agency’s dreams of change or its indelicate wielding of eminent domain. Urban renewal was a national project propelled by much larger forces: the pressures of developers and the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB), the pull of the suburbs that decimated the urban tax base and transformation of urban economies, the deterioration of old housing stock, and the practice of residential segregation. Redevelopment defenders, then, argue that it is unfair to label the redevelopment apparatus with the burden of the Fillmore Ghosts – ghosts of community dislocation and institutionalized racism.

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<sup>70</sup> Stein, *The Fillmore*.

Those larger forces, however, worked on the landscape and culture of the Fillmore through the Redevelopment Agency. The Fillmore community was torn apart in the 60s and 70s. The Redevelopment Agency's bulldozers were the material enactment of state-led creative destruction. Even the city's defenders acknowledge openly that for 40 years or more the Fillmore was a failure – though it may have been different had developers been more successful at recreating the place from scratch, as in some other redevelopment zones. Of all of the city's redevelopment projects, this is the one in which officials have been forced many times to publicly acknowledge the agency's culpability. Nobody really will argue that it was successful, although the boosters do look to recent developments, including the restaurant at Fillmore and Eddy, and the arrival of Yoshi's Jazz Club (another beautiful place, but largely financially inaccessible to the general population of the neighborhood).

For four decades, from the 1960s through the 90s, as city officials moved to inject other neighborhoods with redevelopment capital, the mistakes of the Fillmore dogged officials. Although new agency leaders allowed for greater community involvement through a set of formal committees focused on each redevelopment zone – inevitably someone would call up the Fillmore Ghosts, warning of both the mal-intent and ineptitude of the agency that had forced so many people out of their homes in the past.

The changing agency and its impacts will be detailed further in Chapter 6. Still, here I want to highlight some of the questions raised by placing the story of the Fillmore Ghosts in the middle of a larger narrative about Southeast San Francisco. The ghosts represent at least two main threads. Some view the story of the Fillmore as representative of an ideology of racial and economic cleansing, and a warning about the ways that government turned against black people in the post-Civil Rights era. Although redevelopment was conceived in the 1940s, the Fillmore struggle went on for so long that city administrators of the 1980s and 90s are blamed. Often, it seemed an apt warning, an appropriate metaphor for a top-down development process veiled by layers of bureaucracy. It was a warning to remember the past in a culture that frequently refuses to do so.

Others, as I have mentioned, saw the Fillmore spectres as overblown stories of an outmoded past that have clouded otherwise rational minds. At other times, the warning appeared to clog the wheels of development democracy, spreading fear of annihilation among people who might benefit from engaging with the city on redevelopment rather than locking horns. Yet hardened Redevelopment Agency opponents have come, through years of bad experiences with government-led development, to believe that although the bulldozers of the 1960s are long gone, the positive effects of the new redevelopment will be, they argue, the same. It is only the tools that have changed.

The messiness of these questions about the Fillmore became clear to me as I started to unpack the history of the Southeast. The more I learned about the Bayview in the 1960s and 70s, the more I wondered about the role of the Fillmore Ghosts in the current debate over Bayview development. While the Fillmore dealt with bulldozers and violence-threaded politics, the Bayview-Hunter's Point community seemed to have an entirely different experience with the same agency: Bayview leaders took charge of the process of transforming wartime barracks into an entire hill of affordable and cooperatively managed housing – with stunning views of the San Francisco Bay.

The group that made it happen was led by women – mostly poor, mostly African American – at a time when San Francisco's city hall complex was still largely white and male. Bayview's transformation took place even as a second generation of redevelopers

bumbled through the Fillmore, often in quite different ways. Somehow, my informants said, the women of the Bayview got more of what they wanted out of the Redevelopment Agency than their counterparts in the Fillmore. Looking back, they speak of this achievement with pride and a sense of power. The Bayview story, it seems, offers an alternative narrative that might better explain the contemporary debate.



## Chapter 5:

### Bayview's "Big Five" & the Gendered Defense of Racial Politics

“When we got back to my room I thought I had died: I had never had so many beautiful flowers – and a note from that young man [that I had yelled at], saying, ‘I’m sorry I know you have feelings and I have feelings too.’ I’ve still got the note. I went to sleep. When I woke up they was shaking me up saying, ‘Here, you got a telegram from Mayor Alioto,’ and it said, ‘Come home baby, we got the money!’”  
–Elouise Westbrook, telling the story of wrangling \$40 million from Nixon’s HUD in 1971.<sup>1</sup>

While the fight in the Fillmore raged on, another struggle was taking place in the far southeast corner of the city. Despite many connections between the Fillmore and Bayview as poor black neighborhoods experiencing the turmoil of postwar disinvestment, the experience of redevelopment was not parallel. Even today when people talk about urban renewal, they struggle to explain why it was that these two communities were dealt such different hands. As I began to unravel the story, I came across a woman named Elouise Westbrook, a black migrant who left the Texas cotton fields in 1949 and quickly entered the world of San Francisco politics. Westbrook was one of many accidental activists who emerged in the city, inspired by the community action in black neighborhoods nationwide, and by the bread-and-butter issues that formed the base of the Civil Rights movement: the right to decent housing, affordable health care, employment and education without discrimination, and equal access to civic space.

Lying in her in-home hospital bed in 2010, Westbrook still managed to convey something of the sense of power that she wielded in the 1960s and 70s. A large woman who stood nearly six feet tall, Westbrook was a powerhouse whose voice boomed over all others at community events and political forums.<sup>2</sup> Never a diplomat or an elected official – and probably never thought of as a potential mayoral candidate like some of her community-minded male neighbors – Westbrook became the iconic figure of a group of black community mothers known as “the Big Five,” who made full time work out of meetings on housing and economic justice in the Bayview.<sup>3</sup>

Westbrook’s experience, like that of most leaders, was the chance intersection of a life of refusing to take orders with larger social movements that supported her efforts. Westbrook was both a product of her community and a key actor in it. Though the movement that she participated in was based in action, there’s no question that Westbrook’s

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Gordon, *Tellin’ It Like It Is: The Work of Elouise Westbrook*, Film (South of Market Health Center, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Though histories buried in the obscurity of government reports briefly mention the role of a few prominent women, none tell the full story of their work, and none examine why their efforts remain relegated to the sidelines. One good source is an 11-min film, made to promote community health centers, cited above (Gordon, *Tellin it Like it is...*). Also see Pat Womack, as quoted in: Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Southwest Division, *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Disposal and Reuse of the Hunters Point Shipyard: Vol. 1: Main Text and Appendices*.

capacity for resilience and persistence played a huge role in creating space for Bayview women to get involved politically.

When the Redevelopment Agency moved to tear down war housing that had first been condemned twenty years earlier, the Big Five women formed a committee and sought public funding and official standing, ultimately forcing their way into the city bureaucracy – which had been sensitized to public relations after its debacle in the Fillmore. Their control of the process was so strong that some community members recall the neighborhood’s redevelopment story as reversed, believing that the Big Five had invited the Agency into the community.<sup>4</sup>

Westbrook, through a combination of personality, persistence, lucky timing – and maybe because of her gender – momentarily transformed the experience of San Francisco redevelopment for her community. Her role as a woman advocating for an isolated and largely impoverished African American community in a white-dominated San Francisco was unusual, and she was a key player in soliciting federal funds to develop affordable housing. Her name (and the names of her Big Five colleagues) is held up in local lore as representative of the power of the past. Somehow, though, her deeds have been largely lost to history; few seem to know that she successfully raised funds for health centers and for much of the housing that still stands on Hunter’s Point Hill. Also occluded is the fact that Westbrook and others participated as beneficiaries in a pattern of patronage politics that built their status through reliance on largesse from outside of the community.

This chapter aims to rectify the historiographical record on the Big Five and the experience of redevelopment in the Bayview. There are no detailed histories of this time, and the few records that do exist largely sit in the obscurity of government agency reports, which tend to paint redevelopment as something that was “done to” the community and that identify primarily male leaders as emerging out of the post redevelopment years.<sup>5</sup> Though these sketchy histories briefly mention the role of a few prominent women, none tells the full story of their work, and none examines why their efforts remain relegated to the sidelines.<sup>6</sup>

Without seeking to romanticize the work of the Big Five, this chapter works through the stories that are told about them and what the telling of those stories means for the future of the community that they worked to save. In multiple interviews with informants at all levels of the local political scene, I’ve heard a wide range of opinions about Westbrook and her colleagues. Were they pure-hearted activists who achieved gains against tremendous odds? Or were they sellout neighbors who allowed displacement in the wake of a few favors from the powerful? What matters most, rather than some decisive judgment on their work, is how the stories of the past inform the present. To that end, we need to head back to the WWII and postwar labor migrations when black southerners followed family and friends to cities that seemed to hold the promise of a better life.

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<sup>4</sup> Espanola Jackson, “Bayview Hunters Point Community Activist and Resident,” interview by author, January 18, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Pat Womack, as quoted in Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Southwest Division, *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Disposal and Reuse of the Hunters Point Shipyard: Vol. 1: Main Text and Appendices*.

<sup>6</sup> The best version of the story told thus far appears in a short film that was made to promote community health centers; it had a very small circulation. See: Gordon, *Tellin’ It Like It Is ...*

This chapter is structured in three main parts. First, I look at the relationship between the Redevelopment Agency and Bayview-Hunter's Point, and tell one story about the Big Five's insinuation into the power politics of development there. Next, I look at the meaning of gender in the politics of the Big Five, and step back to contextualize the Big Five in the broader strands of welfare rights politics and race-gender intersectionalities. Finally, I return to the story of housing politics on Hunter's Point Hill and reflect on the meaning of the Legend of the Big Five for the contemporary development politics.

## **Fitting In to Bayview**

“A riot is the language of the unheard.” Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>7</sup>

Elouise Westbrook's path to San Francisco matched that of some 40,000 African Americans who traveled to the Bay Area in the 1940s, drawn by the booming WWII urban economy, and fleeing Jim Crow and shrinking agricultural labor demand in the South. After brief stints in a few other neighborhoods, including SOMA and the Fillmore, Westbrook landed in Bayview-Hunter's Point.<sup>8</sup> Remember that, by contrast with the cosmopolitan Fillmore – with its late-night music and bar culture, and densely packed Victorian apartments – Bayview was still one of the city's many sleepy “suburban” enclaves. Like the Outer Richmond or Glen Park, it was a place where residents didn't feel the need to lock their doors, and where three-story buildings stood out as metropolitan.

Its industrial history made it atypical among the quaint neighborhoods of San Francisco, but it retained the sense of a community that was focused on work and family concerns, rather than political power or social status. Because Bayview was so far from the central city, and because of some cultural-geographic quality that is hard to pinpoint, the emergent black political elite was largely based in the Fillmore, even after the Redevelopment Agency crashed (and burned) that party.<sup>9</sup> For these and other reasons, Bayview lacked strong political advocacy, which compounded its geographic isolation. Many would say this has changed very little over the years.

As the naval shipyard shrank in the post-war years, so did the economy of the Bayview, with a disproportionate effect on the employment of black San Franciscans. One writer described the place for a guidebook in 1961. At that time, the description by a white outsider was positive, comparing the Bayview with Ingleside, near Lake Merced, which was another place where Fillmore escapees had made new homes:

As the old Fillmore district has been demolished by the wrecking crews, rival centers of Negro population have developed. Negroes have moved south to the Oceanview or Ingleside district, into the neat little houses of a middle-class

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Other America, Transcript,” trans. Grosse Point Historical Society (Grosse Point High School, March 14, 1968).

<sup>8</sup> Please note that Westbrook, like most of my informants, elected to have her real name used in my research and publications.

<sup>9</sup> Because blacks were restrained from housing elsewhere, all walks of life could be found on one block, or within a few blocks. This economic integration was a source of both pleasure and pain for people living there. See Arnold Ellis, author interview, Jan 2010.

residential area. The white population quickly moved out, leaving behind a developing Negro ghetto with the familiar problems of ghettos everywhere – juvenile delinquency, gang fights, unstable family life.

Negro leaders see more hopeful signs in the Bayshore district in the extreme southeast, near Candlestick Park. Negroes have long owned small homes here among Italian and other white families. Although more Negroes have moved in, few white families have moved out. Real estate values have not declined. Negro and white neighborhoods generally get along, belong to the same community improvement clubs and P-TAs. But, on the whole, there is a wide gap between San Francisco's self-image of tolerance and the reality of discrimination blighting the city.<sup>10</sup>

This account may only refer to Bayview and not the war housing residents on Hunter's Point Hill. Even so, it is striking in comparison with accounts from a few years later, when the results of discrimination were more visible to outsiders. The second wave of Fillmore evictions sent thousands scrambling in the mid-late 1960s, and the place that once had a small town feel became crowded with evictees, many of whom swelled the ranks of the local unemployed. By 1966, one writer expressed the view of most outsiders – even progressive ones – calling it the city's "major social dump."<sup>11</sup> It was a status that was only reinforced with each wave of Fillmore demolitions.

Through that decade, state and city officials entrenched federal poverty programs in the neighborhood, spending millions on job training and community aid.<sup>12</sup> Yet, in spite of all of that work (and money) Bayview remained unmoored. Young people came out of programs with job skills. Without bus fare, lunch money, or a calm place to sleep, however, they found entering the job market nearly impossible. Adults faced ever-shrinking employment possibilities as the city's job base began its shift away from industrial labor, which was the primary field open to blacks; the unemployment rates in the Bayview hovered at 2-3 points higher than in the rest of the city.<sup>13</sup> The anti-poverty programs of the late 1960s were unable to generate ongoing economic recovery (a task they never could have accomplished on their own). Even so, a tradition of community involvement emerged that propelled Westbrook and others into local politics.<sup>14</sup>

A reporter for the *Nation Magazine* described it this way: "Hunters Point abuts the somewhat less impoverished Bayview district lying on flat terrain just to the west. An anti-poverty program for both districts is conducted by one OEO board. [This was the federal Office of Economic Opportunity, part of the War on Poverty.] Before the OEO program got underway in November, 1965, the Hunters Point-Bayview Area had so little status that it

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<sup>10</sup> Ben Adams, *San Francisco; an Informal Guide*, 3d rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Bess, "No Way Downtown," 606.

<sup>12</sup> See Agee, "The Streets of San Francisco"; San Francisco (Calif.), *Mid-Term Planning Statement / Bayview-Hunters Point Model Neighborhood Agency* (San Francisco, Calif: Bayview-Hunters Point Model Neighborhood Agency, 1970).

<sup>13</sup> Bess, "No Way Downtown," 609.; Also, on the role of youth-centered organizations in building a neighborhood power base, and the troubled state of Bayview male leadership, see Agee, "The Streets of San Francisco."

<sup>14</sup> For a finely detailed account of how this played out in the public housing movement, see John Baranski, "Something to Help Themselves: Tenant Organizing in San Francisco's Public Housing, 1965-1975," *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 3 (2007): 418-442.

could get no official help for its tiny community center, and was totally dependent on donations and volunteer time from the women leaders who kept it going for several years in a bungalow.”<sup>15</sup>

The growing desperation in the Bayview was most vividly demonstrated in a youth-centered 1966 uprising that exploded after a white police officer shot and killed a black teenager in the back. The community – along with the Fillmore, the Mission District and Haight Ashbury District (where whites were arrested alongside blacks) – erupted in sporadic looting and standoffs with police for five days. White political leaders were slow to respond, tentative in dealing with a community that had little clear adult male leadership, and afraid of instigating a real riot like those in Watts and Detroit the year before.<sup>16</sup> Even black leaders like Assemblyman Willie Brown struggled to connect to the angry crowd of teenagers.<sup>17</sup> Race, it turned out, was not entirely unifying across the gaps of education, generation, and political power.

Although the event was overplayed in the white press – and by the police force, which called in the National Guard – the uprising still marked the mid-60s as a moment of intense dissatisfaction in the Bayview neighborhood. The economic fallout from the uprising lingered for years. There was brief interest by the Chamber of Commerce in spurring jobs for Bayview youth.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, many non-black residents and business owners that had remained in the Bayview flats took the event as their final exit sign.<sup>19</sup>

Mayor John Shelley was criticized for his weak response to the uprising and for trying to keep community members from taking control of the anti-poverty programs that worked to re-organize the community in the wake of the violence. Learning the political lessons of the new racial order, Joe Alioto ran for mayor with a campaign that showed he was more attuned than his predecessor to the benefits of patronage in the city’s neglected southeast.<sup>20</sup> As mayor, Alioto lent his support to the Redevelopment Agency’s move to tear down the deteriorating – yet still overcrowded – war barracks on the hill. The rotting state of that housing, for more than a decade, was a core source of community anger. The Agency had barreled through the Fillmore with Alioto as president of the Redevelopment Commission in the early 1960s. After the riots, it encountered an unusual welcoming committee in the Bayview.

“They came in here and said, ‘Here’s what we’re going to do,’” recalled community activist Essie Webb years later:

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<sup>15</sup> Bess, “No Way Downtown.” Model Cities did have a program in the Bayview – in fact, a young Danny Glover got to know Elouise Westbrook while working as a Model Cities volunteer – but it was weak and by all accounts the programs did not have a lasting effect. (Glover spoke at Westbrook’s 2010 memorial, and told this story.)

<sup>16</sup> On media exaggerations, the role of youth in community leadership, and for the “police perspective,” see Agee, “The Streets of San Francisco”; Ford E Long et al., *128 Hours: A Report of the Civil Disturbance in the City & County of San Francisco* (San Francisco, Calif: San Francisco Police Department, Planning and Research Bureau, 1966).

<sup>17</sup> Richardson, *Willie Brown*, 136–7.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen R. Weissman, “The Limits of Citizen Participation: Lessons from San Francisco’s Model Cities Program,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (March 1, 1978): 32–47.

<sup>19</sup> Betty Jones, interview by author, September 2010; Tom Galante, “Oral History Interview,” interview by Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, March 8, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Bess, “No Way Downtown”; Richardson, *Willie Brown*.

We disagreed. We said, ‘No, you don’t come in here and do what you want to do. But if you can work with us, OK.’ That’s when people from the Redevelopment Agency started meeting with us. Justin Herman would come to our meetings. We said, ‘No we’re going to tell you what you can do, and if you can’t do that, well then, goodbye.’<sup>21</sup>

Thus greeted, Redevelopment Agency head Justin Herman befriended the Big Five, who claimed control of the redevelopment process. It’s safe to say the women of the Big Five had timing on their side: the Agency had been fighting with Fillmore residents over community participation for nearly a decade. By the time the Agency’s operation in the Bayview was underway, director Herman was well aware of the public relations benefit of ceding some control. Still, in other redevelopment zones across the city, most significantly in the South of Market District, Herman’s agency would fight community control through the end of the 1970s.<sup>22</sup> The way that Westbrook and Company imbricated themselves into the planning process was possibly unprecedented, and the degree of cooperation between the community and the Agency has never really been repeated in any of the contested redevelopment zones. One of the community’s secrets: the bombastic personality of Elouise Westbrook.

This is illustrated dramatically in the Big Five’s most impressive feat, which was tipping the balance of a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) decision that released \$40 million for a set of affordable homes on the hill, when no elected official had been able extract the needed promise of seed money. The story of the maneuver tells a lot about the way the Big Five worked, and hints at why they were able to make some political inroads despite their marginality.

The plan for the hill had been in the works for years, but in 1970 nobody had been able to secure funding to finish the project, and it looked like the files of proposals and designs might languish for many more years. As Westbrook remembered it, George Moscone, who was then a State Senator, traveled to Washington to lobby HUD for the funds. As she recalled from her sick bed years later:

Moscone came back and said, ‘Westbrook, we went to Washington and they turned us down, they’re not ready to build no houses now.’ Justin Herman was the director of the Redevelopment Agency back then. He said ‘I’ll go.’ About a week or so he come back and he go, ‘Westbrook, they turned me down too, like they did the mayor.’ So I said, ‘I’ll go!’ And, oh they started laughing, a bunch of white guys. They said, ‘How *you* gonna go?’ So I said to some of the contractors, I said, ‘If you want to build on this hill, will you be willing to send some of us to Washington?’<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Essie Webb, interview by author, July 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Herman died of a heart attack in 1971 but his policies set the tone for many years.

<sup>23</sup> Elouise Westbrook, “BVHP Resident and Activist,” interview by author, June 2010; “Clippings Files, San Francisco Chronicle and San Francisco Examiner, 1970s & N.d.”, 1970s.

## Myth, Memory, and the DC Delegation

With travel dollars raised, a delegation of fifteen people, including a reporter from the *San Francisco Examiner*, headed to Washington D.C., where the group first called on congressman Phil Burton, who had built his San Francisco political machine in part by being the first to recognize the potential in consolidating the city's black vote.<sup>24</sup>

The secretary said Phil Burton couldn't meet with us, that he had another meeting. I took the phone and I said to the secretary, 'Tell us that again,' and I said, 'No, we'll be there at ten o'clock and if he's not there – listen to this real good – if he's not there we're gonna throw all the furniture out of his office, and throw your ass out too.' And she got kinda scared, I think. When we got down there he was standing on the steps. He met with us, and then he took us to another office. It was a long walk – it was hot – I remember that.

They took us on over there to Senator [Alan] Cranston [another liberal California Democrat]. I guess they must have called and told them we were on our way, because when I walked in, she said 'Oh, you must be the Elouise Westbrook delegation. You can sit right here, and the rest of you can sit in the hallway.' I said, 'Look around here and find us a room for us to sit in. We're not going to sit in no hallway.' So they found a big room – and we took it over. A young black man came in and said, 'The Senator's not here right now, so I'm gonna take some notes on what you have to say.' I said, 'I don't know where he is but we'll wait right here until he comes.'<sup>25</sup>

Eventually another staffer came to the waiting room and offered to set up an appointment with HUD representatives that afternoon. While they waited, Westbrook and her crew took on another Washington institution: the power lunch.

There was a beautiful café and it said 'Senators Only,' for the senators to meet and have lunch. I said 'Come on, let's go in and get some food.' [Delegation member] Mr. Brady said to me, 'That sign up there says it's for senators only.' I said, 'That's alright, I ain't no senator, but *I'm Only*.' We all had a big laugh over that. I went over and rang the bell and the young man who answered said 'Yes?' I said, 'I understand this café is only for senators.' He said, 'Yes.' I said, 'Move out of the way young man,' and I pushed the young man to the side, and the fifteen of us walked in. I said 'Get ya'll some seats.'

And, well, *we had lunch*. Everybody was shocked, because here we were... So then we got in a cab and went to the housing office and when we got there, they were waiting for us.

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<sup>24</sup> Richardson, *Willie Brown*, 59. Alioto acted on Burton's advice on racial coalition building, according to Richardson.

<sup>25</sup> Westbrook, "BVHP Resident and Activist."

The end of Westbrook's story – which involved two days of intensive lobbying that included yelling matches and a fainting spell (by Westbrook) – is documented in the minutes of meetings of the Joint Housing Committee, the Redevelopment Agency group that Westbrook occasionally chaired (there was a rotating leadership). When the delegation finally got in to see HUD officials, the already glaring power imbalance of the meetings seemed even starker. Westbrook and John Semler (special assistant to the Assistant Secretary of HUD under Nixon) engaged in an angry exchange.

First, Semler kicked out the *Examiner* reporter. Then, after Westbrook opened with a statement about the need for new Hunter's Point housing and a reminder of the fact that HUD had already promised to fund it, "Semler immediately screamed, 'Who was in the White House at that time?'" Westbrook shot back: "'Not Tricky Dick – Johnson.'" Semler later scoffed at the group, noting that if they responded to every such request, the agency would need something in the realm of a billion dollars, to which Westbrook responded, "Although you can carry on a war in Cambodia, you do not have money to build housing for poor people?"<sup>26</sup>

Semler insisted that Cambodia was irrelevant, and, according to the minutes, which Westbrook probably helped write, "He could care less about what she wanted." Westbrook later recalled: "At that time Richard Nixon was the president. I said, 'you owe us to have decent and sanitary housing. One man, he said, 'Mrs. Westbrook: We didn't promise you a damn thing. It was those Democrats who promised you.'"<sup>27</sup>

As the meeting wore on, Westbrook grew angrier: "When I got through talking I said, 'Open that window. I'm gonna throw your so-and-so out the window.'" Then, as the Joint Housing Committee minutes tell it, "Westbrook got very nervous and was helped out of the room crying." Westbrook later recalled being taken to the hospital for high blood pressure, where again she faced a two-tiered system. The first hospital, she said, was filthy, and she refused to go, insisting on being seen by a Senator's doctor.

Perhaps it was her persistence, or maybe the show of emotion touched – or scared – the Republican HUD staff. Perhaps under the delegation's pressure, Cranston and Burton were empowered to cut a deal, or another city suffered a loss of funds instead. Whatever it was, with Westbrook deposed to the hospital, her delegation (both men and women) stepped up, defending her dignity, which they insisted had been insulted. They demanded confirmation of new funds for housing. When the HUD team caucused for 20-30 minutes and then offered word within a week, the San Francisco delegation insisted on knowing the outcome before they left for home. Westbrook described the moment she learned about the likely deal:

When we got back to my room I thought I had died: I had never had so many beautiful flowers – and a note from that young man [that I had yelled at], saying, 'I'm sorry I know you have feelings and I have feelings too.' I've still got the note. I went to sleep. When I woke up they was shaking me up saying, 'Here, you got a telegram from Mayor Alioto,' and it said, 'Come home baby, we got the money!'

Incredibly, HUD set a series of meetings for the next day and promised to be certain about funds in the afternoon. The next morning, the San Francisco team met with

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<sup>26</sup> "Meeting Minutes, Joint Housing Committee of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency", June 8, 1970.

<sup>27</sup> Kevin Gordon, "Westbrook Log, Unpublished Interview Transcript for Tellin' It Like It Is: The Work of Elouise Westbrook", 2009.



approximately twenty-five HUD employees to discuss the dynamics of citizen participation in HUD-funded projects, with the idea that the Bayview model of citizen-agency collaboration was to be emulated elsewhere.<sup>28</sup>

Though Westbrook was reputed to have a razor sharp memory, and though I was able to corroborate her stories through other sources, her narrative of the housing victory glosses over the years of planning that led up to the D.C. delegation. More importantly, it elides the negative aspects of federal money's role on Hunter's Point Hill, where families were evicted to make way for the new housing regime. The displacement was nothing like what happened in the Fillmore, and The Big Five worked hard to insist on a humane and generous housing replacement plan; even so, several hundred families left the neighborhood and never came back, though some seem to have wanted to return.<sup>29</sup> Records in the Redevelopment Agency's files indicate that in addition to the war barracks, other housing was eliminated. It is unclear what happened to the tenants and owners of those structures; there is evidence of a series of eminent domain-driven negotiations, but more research needs to be undertaken to determine which residents got a fair deal.<sup>30</sup>

## Chasing After the Big Five

Historically, very few Bayview residents dipped into the world of citywide San Francisco politics. In interviews, residents talk about the geographic isolation that made it harder for people to develop political networks, and the sense that they felt disconnected from the larger city. As the area became more dominated by black people and black culture, it may have seemed natural that the black church – traditionally a center for political and social action – would be a power center in Bayview. Instead, residents talked about a leadership vacuum. Some complained that Bayview preachers and pastors weren't fulfilling their potential as social glue and inspiration.<sup>31</sup>

Because of this dearth of Bayview leadership, when I first heard about the Big Five, I was obsessed with finding them – struck by a vision of a group of poor, black, welfare-dependent women, boldly facing off (as I imagined it) against a white-led redevelopment department that was angling to take their homes. What I found – through interviews, newspaper archives and a long trip through the Redevelopment Agency's microfilm stacks – was a less dramatic but no less meaningful story of a community that, through intensive pressure, squeezed some public good out of the city's development maw. The texts that helped me piece together that history – a barrage of public relations materials, calendars,

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<sup>28</sup>“Meeting Minutes, Joint Housing Committee of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency.”

<sup>29</sup> Under community pressure by the Osiris Coalition and others, a Redevelopment Agency committee was formed in the 1990s to track displaced Bayview residents.

<sup>30</sup> “San Francisco Redevelopment Agency Archives, San Francisco, CA. Housing Appraisal and Demolition Records, Multiple Files (organized by Block and Lot)”, n.d. In recent years, leaders of Bayview-based nonprofits have made a public show of trying to identify people who were displaced, but more research is needed to track displacees. Some efforts were made by journalists over the years for the occasional news story about the black exodus. One of the best of these: Yogis, Jaimal. “What Happened to Black San Francisco?” *San Francisco Magazine*, September 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Southwest Division, *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Disposal and Reuse of the Hunters Point Shipyard: Vol. 1: Main Text and Appendices*, D-33; Kelley & Ver Planck Consulting, *Bayview-Hunters Point Area B Survey Town Center Activity Node*, 114–115.

photographs and minutes from meetings led by the Big Five, along with interviews and analysis of oral histories and newspaper reports – reflect the racial and gendered tensions of the time, and within those constraints offer a narrative of the possible.

Westbrook met her co-conspirators through their work as board members of the Crispus Attucks Club, a community center at 1201 Mendell Street, right near Third Street, at the nexus between Bayview and Hunter’s Point Hill. It was named, as other black-community clubs across the country have been, for the runaway slave and revolutionary war martyr whose story is often held up as a symbol of black freedom and potential. Both a social and political hub, the club was a focal point for residents organizing social events, agitating for improved local schools and childcare, and watchdogging various City Hall meetings that affected the neighborhood. Though the issues they worked on fit in to a universal civil rights metric that was gaining credence at the time, the emergence of the Big Five women at the community’s head was not uncontroversial.

Articles in the local *Spokesman* newspaper from 1966 and ‘67 show the mixed texture of community relations between Westbrook, her colleagues, and the Bayview community. In one piece, the left-leaning editor wrote a defense of the Big Five – naming them in print perhaps for the first time: “At this point it would be in order to state that these women are not running the community and allegations of this nature are not based on fact but are based on envy and distortion from individuals who for the most part have no idea of what is involved in community work.”<sup>32</sup>

The reputation of overstepping bounds may have been due to the gender of members of the Big Five; it may have also had something to do with their methods. Looking back, Westbrook’s granddaughters remember her as highly controlling, both in personal and political spheres. She pushed through life, they insist, with confidence that she could shake through whatever power structures had been erected in her path, for better or for worse. The D.C. delegation story, they say, was typical.<sup>33</sup> Then again, men who pushed through obstacles to achieve their goals, at the same moment in history, were praised for their ingenuity.

All of the Big Five women were migrants from the South to San Francisco; some of them were displaced from the Fillmore by redevelopment. When I first began to research their activities I came across at least two different lists of “members” of the group, most of whom had already died. *The Spokesman* newspaper named Julia Commer, Rosalie Williams, Oceola Washington, Ruth Williams, and Eloise Westbrook as the Big Five; in interviews other names were mentioned as either part of the group or fundamental to it, like Bertha Freeman and Marcelee Cashmere. Others, including Ethel Garlington and Essie Webb, also played an integral role in the work of the group. One community member argues that the title should be Big Six, with Webb as a key player. Indeed, Webb and Westbrook both talked about their teamwork, saying that that Webb was the calm voice of reason to Westbrook’s fire, that Webb would step in and cool down situations that Westbrook had spiced up with her tendency to yell and curse. Espanola Jackson was younger; inspired by the Big Five, Jackson became a welfare-rights organizer and longtime community activist.

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<sup>32</sup> “The Big Five,” back page, *The Spokesman*, vol. 1, no 15, Hunter’s Point Bayview Spokesman: San Francisco, CA, 1966.

<sup>33</sup> Westbrook, “BVHP Resident and Activist”; Loretta Goodin, interview by author, 2010; Brenda Parrish, interview by author, 2010.

Doris Vincent was also younger than the Big Five women, but dealt with the same struggles as she raised her children in public housing on Hunter's Point Hill. For Vincent, the status of the Big Five in the community was tricky. "They just happened to have been a group that was very vocal, and saw a need, and tried to do something about it. When you talk about the Big Five, it has always been problematic for me. Actually it was more than five... Westbrook spearheaded everything. Marcelee was there. Espanola had all those children, and she actually started the welfare part of it. Mary Rivers – she was quite a lady..."<sup>34</sup>

Whether there were five or six – or ten – or whether there were competing ideas of who was counted among them is not as important as trying to understand the role that the story of the Big Five played, and still plays, in the Bayview community. Like the Fillmore Ghosts, the story is still referred to by community members challenging official power, or by family of Big Five women who speak proudly – though often vaguely – about the way that the women "ran the community."<sup>35</sup>

Unlike the Fillmore Ghosts, which warned of the overstepping ways of government, referring to the Big Five became a way to announce bottom-up power. This was vital in the world of black poverty of the late '60s and '70s, in which an endless alphabet soup of federal agencies (replaced today largely by a similar list of locally-based non-profits) tried to manage people's lives. With the story of the Big Five to wield, the regime of welfare, housing and job programs could be envisioned as potentially genuinely community-run.

## Gendered Power

Westbrook was still living and capable of having a conversation when I was doing my research, although her illness kept her from talking for long, and her memory, which had been famously exact well into her senior years, seemed to take a bad turn after her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday, when I first met her. Westbrook's philosophy wrapped poor people's rights in the mantle of the larger Civil Rights narratives that were ascendant in her day; there is little evidence that she considered herself a radical. Moreover, it seems that she saw herself as an outsider to formal structures of (mostly white male) power, as a black woman with little formal education, but with an abiding belief in the rights of all people to have access to basic services.

In a short documentary that was made to celebrate her work organizing community health centers, Westbrook talked about her theory of power, which centered on a general refusal to buckle to people with titles and official power: "I don't care if you're the president of the United States. Listen Mr. President: you're not God. Listen Mr. Whoever-you-are-in-high-position: You're not God. You can't make it rain. You can't make the sun shine. You can't make the moon go down. ... We all have rights."<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, in interviews with the Webbs, with Westbrook and her family, and with others like Oscar James who knew them (and who married Essie Webb's daughter), the work of the Big Five was framed as selfless and community minded. There were others (as evidenced by the *Spokesman* article referenced above) who saw things differently. There was a nexus

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<sup>34</sup> Vincent, interview.

<sup>35</sup> William Palmer, interview by author, Jan 2011

<sup>36</sup> Gordon, *Tellin' It Like It Is...*

between white researchers of the era who pathologized black women with power and an internal black-community dialogue that was wary of women's strength and leadership. So while Westbrook was taken to task for being overly brash or cursing too much, Willie Brown had a very different experience in his climb through the political ranks.

It would be a gross understatement to say that Brown, a younger migrant from Texas to San Francisco, was more successful in garnering official power than the Big Five women. Brown was first elected to the California State Assembly in 1964, and was speaker of the Assembly for fifteen years before becoming a two-term mayor of San Francisco in the 1990s. It's worth asking: Did the Big Five women ever aspire to such official heights? It's hard to say. Essie Webb told me that she turned down an offer to run for the school board, an elected position in San Francisco, because she felt like it was more than she was ready for, even though she had spent her adult life working on education and advising school managers. Westbrook's narrative of her own power is typically tinged with a commentary about her lack of education, held up with a sense of pride, given all she had accomplished:

[After] Dianne Feinstein become supervisor, I don't think there's a commission in this city I haven't been on. She sent me to Chicago to be on the National Association of Community Hospitals. Can you believe that? A woman who don't have no Ph.D, CD, ED – or no kind of D. Dianne sent me there. I didn't know what the hell they was talking about.<sup>37</sup>

Higher education was, of course, beyond the reach of many poor women. Though it's hard to imagine, this was a time in which there apparently were not even women's bathrooms in the Capitol Building in Sacramento, which was Brown's power base.<sup>38</sup> There's no doubt that gender, in addition to race, circumscribed both Westbrook's ambitions and the way that people saw her. It may have been an advantage. Somehow, the combination of being female – and perhaps less threatening – yet being tough and demanding, positioned the Big Five to build power in the community and gain the respect of Redevelopment Director Herman.

It is difficult to find documentary evidence of Herman getting along with Fillmore activists, but there are multiple files of reports emphasizing his collaboration in Bayview. Still, Herman was not always seen as the community ally that he was presented to be in the HUD delegation story. In Webb's memory, Herman received his share of swearing from Westbrook as well.<sup>39</sup>

## Why Women?

Though a few African Americans like Willie Brown broke through the segregated public sphere, the borders restricting black San Francisco were stark for the majority in the 1960s

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<sup>37</sup> Gordon, "Westbrook Log."

<sup>38</sup> See Richardson for a thorough exegesis of the development of Brown's power over the years. Richardson, *Willie Brown*.

<sup>39</sup> Public relations brochures emphasized Herman and the Big Five in cooperation. See Ruth Williams, *Collaborative Planning at Hunters Point* (San Francisco, Calif.: San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, 1966). Also see Jacobs, *Making City Planning Work*.

and '70s. The powerful rhetorics of Civil Rights (as they gained legal traction) and of Black Nationalism (as it evolved and was reinterpreted through a range of afro-centric political and cultural movements) engaged both the overtly political and those who saw themselves as quiet, everyday people.<sup>40</sup> Still, the mood of the times was towards change that would challenge racist social structures, though such change often came in fits and starts, and against great resistance. And although there were Bayview-Hunter's Point based African American men who were community leaders (including Orville Luster, Sam Jordan and Adam Rogers, among others), the women of the Southeast rose to the Redevelopment challenge in a unique way.

Westbrook's work, then, was situated within a milieu of activism that must have supported her motivation to push for change. Within the Bayview, one group formed a food co-op, which may have been the first black-owned cooperative of its kind. Others marshaled funds from President Johnson's War on Poverty to pay for the production of *The Spokesman* newspaper.<sup>41</sup> The Big Five and others agitated for tenant's rights and coordinated the local arm of the California welfare rights movement.<sup>42</sup> Unlike the work taking place over in the Fillmore, however, the Bayview's activists – or “community workers,” as the *Spokesman* called them – seemed to be thinking less about revolution than about fighting for basic needs for the poor. Their efforts, however, did serve to channel government dollars to their causes; the newspaper, for example, was highly critical of the War on Poverty, although it was funded by it.<sup>43</sup>

While there was some talk about Black Panther-style social change that called for systemic transformation, the dominant Bayview discourses were about rights for welfare clients, healthy and affordable housing and better access everyday services, like the grocery stores and retail outlets that were lacking along the post-riot Third Street business district.<sup>44</sup> Some of the male leaders of youth organizations were explicit in trying to shield the community from “outside agitators” in the Fillmore or Oakland who might be more radical.<sup>45</sup> And with few Bayview residents rising in the city's political structure, the power that was built in the Bayview was often contingent and geographically contained.<sup>46</sup>

Both within and without San Francisco, the axis of gender was also under challenge as the feminist movement began to break barriers. Yet for black women the double challenge of dealing with racism in the culture and sexism at home and in the public sphere was exceptionally difficult– and the second-wave feminist movement of Westbrook's day was not hip, in the parlance of the day, to the necessary cultural dynamics of movement racial

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<sup>40</sup> For an in-depth discussion of class dynamics in San Francisco's black community see Broussard, *Black San Francisco: the Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Simms, *Public Lecture by Former Editor of the Spokesman* (Bayview/ Anna E. Waden Branch Library, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> Jackson, “Bayview Hunters Point Community Activist and Resident.” Also, for a series of profiles on local community workers and articles on progression of community activism, see *Archive of The Hunter's Point Bayview Spokesman*, Vol. 1-4, 1965-69 (San Francisco, 1969), Bayview/ Anna E. Waden Branch Library, San Francisco.

<sup>43</sup> Simms, *Public Lecture by Former Editor of the Spokesman; Archive of The Hunter's Point Bayview Spokesman-1969*.

<sup>44</sup> Vincent, interview.

<sup>45</sup> Agee, “The Streets of San Francisco,” 364–65.

<sup>46</sup> This continues to plague the district.

integration.<sup>47</sup> How the role of black women would unfold, then, was not immediately obvious.

In the explicitly economic-justice focused poor people's movements of the day, however, black women were emerging as community leaders on major urban problems – because they had to, though they weren't often credited for community leadership.<sup>48</sup> To explain this apparent anomaly, academics and the press were willing to postulate that black women's leadership was a product of their innate matriarchal tendencies – a position legitimized by the 1965 Moynihan Report and its dissection of black family dynamics. Moynihan's project kicked off a torrent of studies that built on the culture of studying “the black family” as a subject of (social) science.<sup>49</sup> Significantly, out of that culture of analysis, the concept of welfare dependency gained traction and perpetuated the idea that black men were incapable of caring for their families, in part because black women were supposedly so domineering.

The pathologizing of black family traditions and responses to slavery, segregation and Jim Crow still pervades public opinion. This emerged in my research when I presented early data on the Big Five at a senior citizens' event. Afterwards I was told by an older white man that I shouldn't have been surprised (or even interested, the subtext seemed to be) to find black women leading activism of the 1960s because, as he put it, “black people are matriarchal.” The man – who was around the right age to have been reading about the Moynihan Report in the paper as he made his way through college – patted me on the arm and walked off.

Perhaps I should have responded with a quote from scholar and activist Angela Davis, who took on the charge that black women are innately emasculating or aggressively matriarchal in a 1972 essay. As she wrote, “The designation of the black woman as a matriarch is a cruel misnomer. It is a misnomer because it implies stable kinship structures within which the mother exercises decisive authority.” This, she argued, ignores the ways in which the economic system, through slavery and its aftermath, has torn families apart for the profit of others.<sup>50</sup>

To be clear, the problem wasn't with the idea that black women could be leaders or heads of households – but the Moynihan-type of framing of black families as *necessarily*

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<sup>47</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241–1299.

<sup>48</sup> On the Civil Rights movement and the significant role of women who went unrecognized, see Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*; Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1999). On social movement dynamics, and the role of race and gender, see the classic text by Piven and Cloward: Frances Fox Piven and Richard A Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

<sup>49</sup> Angela Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves,” *The Massachusetts Review* 13, no. 1/2 (Winter - Spring 1972): 81–100. Also see the Moynihan Report itself: United States, *The Negro Family, the Case for National Action*. On the Moynihan debates, see Rainwater and Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy: a Trans-action Social Science and Public Policy Report*.

<sup>50</sup> Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves,” 84. It also ignores the reality that even for black women who were in leadership roles at the time – either within their families or in the larger community – most had no access to wealth or resources; that's why some in anthropology would argue against the term matriarchal, which implies a level of official power that wasn't available. Perhaps, instead, the term matrifocal – centered around women – better describes the lives of these women. At the same time, matrifocal recognizes the incapacity to pass on property, a significant point when looking at poor people's power structures.

matriarchal signaled a critique of black women for strength, of black men for apparent weakness, and any family arrangements that potentially undermined patriarchy. There are many other problems with this construction, including the ways in which it elides gay lives. But the main relevant concern is the way that the matriarch stereotype obscures the marginalization that forced poor black communities in the '60s and '70s to function in conditions of devastating under-employment and welfare check subsistence.

This came up when I sat with my tape recorder in Essie Webb's Bayview kitchen. Webb (the "sixth member of the Big Five," according to her son-in-law Oscar James) lives today in Silver Terrace, a Bayview development where some of the better-off war housing displaces moved when construction began on the hill. In addition to the early housing struggles, Webb devoted her life to education, serving on multiple boards and committees to shape the local elementary school climate. I asked her why the Big Five and other dominant leaders at that time were women. What did it mean for the community that these housing activists were female, while the bureaucracy they dealt with was largely male – and white? Before she could speak, her middle-aged son, walking by the kitchen, intervened: "It was racism. Women could say stuff and get away with it. Men couldn't."

Could it be that simple? I pointed out that the Black Panther Party was, at the same time of the emergence of the Big Five, growing out of the political culture of Oakland just across the San Francisco Bay. There were prominent Panther women like Kathleen Cleaver, and in fact many of the Panther's programs focused on what are often stereotyped as "women's issues" like school lunches. But the public Black Panther image (with leather jackets and guns) was heavily male and stereotypically masculine. Webb's son said he thought the difference was partly cultural, partly generational. "Well, there were youngsters over there. Over here, if a man said too much – well, he had to watch out for his family. Women knew more. Men, all they did was work a lot."<sup>51</sup>

That didn't entirely work either, because it was the Bayview that was known back then for having an unusually low median age, a high number of unemployed youth, and quite a few female-headed families living on welfare. Finally, Essie Webb jumped in with another analysis, "The women were more together. There were just more of us. We worked together. We went to meetings because we didn't have to worry about going to work. We could go to meetings any time." She remembered that some of the early actions for housing rights, including a rent strike in the late '60s, were woman-led.

It was mostly women that did the rent strike. There were twelve families, but most of those were headed by women. We put our rent money in the bank, together, and demanded repairs. People over in Alice Griffith heard about the Hunter's Point rent strike and they started following us, and we helped them out."<sup>52</sup>

Essie Webb's recollections about a culture of collectivity among women in her community are reminiscent of a sympathetic sociological account of black family life by Carol Stack. Stack's key finding, evident in the title of her study, *All Our Kin*, was that the black, culturally produced, idea of family went far beyond the nuclear household. Survival – of poverty, and of the racism that partly confined them to their class positions – drove the

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<sup>51</sup> Webb, interview.

<sup>52</sup> Webb, interview.

culture to be collective. Women shared clothing and food with each other, and there was an *expectation* of sharing. Individualism was seen as selfish, and as counter to the deep need for community subsistence and survival.<sup>53</sup>

Something like this was happening in Bayview, as well, where the mothers of Hunter's Point Hill saw their commitments as larger than themselves and their immediate blood relatives. They weren't drawing on Marxist narratives of global unity like Rev. Townsend and Speedy Woods in the Fillmore, but instead they called on socially-expansive visions of shared work, community building, basic human rights, and racial-cultural pride.

There are some aspects of the story that are muddled by time and perspective. It's not clear whether the men in these families were at work – or hiding so that women could collect welfare benefits (while the men fought over jobs that weren't being shipped out of town). What is clear is that these women were caring for families and trying to gain permanence in San Francisco at a time when the economic base was deteriorating. (If women were unemployed that also must have meant there was a dearth of domestic labor – one of the fields in which black women were funneled into.)

With this shift, the urban north reneged on the promise of the Second Great Migration, which had been motivated by work opportunities and by a perception of racial integration.<sup>54</sup> In 1970, the same year that Westbrook's team hustled money from a Republican HUD, San Francisco's black community began its steady exodus. Black flight began with a trickle as the promises of redevelopment in the Fillmore failed to materialize. Nevertheless, from around 13 percent in 1970, the black San Franciscans began to leave, even as the total city population grew. The speed of the exodus gathered pace in the 1990s, as we'll see in the next chapter.<sup>55</sup>

## **Aftermath, and the Meaning of Marginality**

The housing successes of the Big Five delegation to Washington were later seeded in the streets of Hunter's Point Hill, which are named after the women of her delegation and other community workers. Linking the hundreds of apartments that lace the hill are Comer Court, Garlington Court, Oceola Lane, Westbrook Court and others that document the role of these women in reshaping the landscape. In a 1997 report a community member traced the history of all of the black-origin street names citywide, arguing that their presence should be a source of community pride. Though few today know the stories behind the names, the majority of such streets are in Bayview-Hunter's Point.<sup>56</sup>

The housing success quickly became bittersweet when hundreds of those who had been displaced for the hill's reconstruction never returned. This came in spite of Big Five-

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<sup>53</sup> See Stack's slim volume: Carol Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

<sup>54</sup> Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*.

Wilkerson, Isabel. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. 1st ed. New York: Random House, 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Blacks represented 12 percent of the population in 1980, 11 percent in 1990, and about 6 percent in 2010. Census Bureau, U. S., 2006, 2000, and 1990; and Leslie Fulbright, *S.F. Moves to Stem African American Exodus*, vol. A-1, 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Christian Brent-Armistead, *What the City Maps Don't Tell You: The Streets Named After African Americans in San Francisco* (San Francisco, CA: Unpublished Community Report, 1996).



negotiated government promises that all efforts would be made to keep residents in the community (a promise which was bolstered by the federal Uniform Relocation Act, a Phil Burton-backed law that came out of a Fillmore lawsuit). Those who did come back found themselves living in well-designed developments with stunning views of the bay. Photos tucked away in the archives show that the transformation was dramatic. From haphazard rows of deteriorating war housing – built in boxy barracks style with no adornment – the hill became a warren of windy cul de sacs, each nestling its own development. Most of the housing was “permanently affordable” or cooperatively owned with bucolic seacliff names like Mariner’s Village or Northridge Apartments.<sup>57</sup>

With the shiny new housing, and the bright yellow sundial and playground celebrated in multiple Redevelopment Agency brochures, came a new kind of isolation. The hill, once desolate and redolent with broken glass, was orderly and organized, with fresh paint and new windows. But the few economic institutions on the hill, including a small grocery store, went un-replaced. Kids growing up in the late ‘70’s and ‘80’s on the hill, most of whom were black, lived isolated lives, not just from the broader city – but even from the Bayview streets down below. Improbably, many would only leave the hill when forced to commute across the city for high school.<sup>58</sup> The Third Street corridor down below struggled through the ‘70s, and ‘80s as heroin and crack cocaine took two generations.<sup>59</sup> Today, visitors avoid Bayview and are warned away from the hill because of fears of youth violence – a lot like in 1966.

Westbrook’s life story and the successes of the Big Five offer a narrative of the possible. I have wanted to see their stories as proof of the prospect of change from below and of the potential of a city’s most marginalized people to prevail. This narrative haunts me as I have tried to sort out the historical meaning of this activism in Bayview, where economic recovery remains elusive today.

Seeing Westbrook in her sick bed forty years later brought to mind the limits of the structural marginality that she and her peers function within. She lay in a spare, small apartment in one of those Fillmore District affordable-housing developments, telling me about her close friendship with Dianne Feinstein. It was more than plain old braggadocio; I’ve heard stories from others about DiFi (as some people call her) throwing birthday parties for Westbrook, and tales of the time, “back in the day,” when Westbrook could productively call on Feinstein for help, and would squeeze out a donation for a health center or some political pressure for a government contract that would help the community.

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<sup>57</sup> See the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency archives on Hunter’s Point and India Basin. On affordable housing: Typically, San Francisco affordable housing is restricted from sale or lease at market rate for 30-50 years, at which point it can potentially be released back to the market. Affordable housing advocates never put this terminology in quotes but that’s where it belongs – already homes built in the Fillmore in the early 1970’s are reverting back to market rate, and residents are at risk of eviction.

<sup>58</sup> James, “BVHP Resident.”

<sup>59</sup> Gary Webb, *Dark Alliance: The CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion*, Seven Stories Press 1st ed. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998). Webb doesn’t talk about San Francisco, but about the role of the CIA in importing drugs into urban centers; today many blacks in Bayview repeat the refrain (another meme) that the government brought in the drugs to poison them. Agee (2005) deals with the San Francisco police response to drugs and describes the introduction of heroin to the Bayview in the late 1960’s and its affect on community advocacy work. Also see Jackson, “Black Flight from San Francisco: How Race, Community and Politics Shape Urban Policy”; Erlich, “The Disappearance of Black San Franciscans: 1970-2010.”

The DiFi connection gives her – and her family, who also repeated the story to me – a sense of power and pride, and connection to the largesse of elite San Francisco; it once got Westbrook funding to join a delegation to a sister city in Africa’s Ivory Coast. And it seems, from the interviews that I’ve done, that Feinstein probably valued Westbrook not simply because she was a strong and iconoclastic character (San Francisco has plenty of those). It’s possible that Westbrook and her Big Five were truly good organizers, and that when they went to Washington they weren’t simply bold and brash, they had a community of people behind them.

At the same time, DiFi got political mileage out of the relationship. Feinstein appointed Westbrook to oversee public housing and to other commissions over the years, eventually naming one day in July 1983 after her. Others like Herman put Big Five members on their payroll – giving a small piece of control in return for a degree of loyalty. Westbrook offered ongoing political support for Feinstein, who listed her as a primary ally when she ran for San Francisco mayor for the first time.<sup>60</sup> It could not have hurt the campaign to have a sense of community credibility. When Westbrook died, a significant portion of her funeral was devoted to commentary on the amazing relationship that the two women had. Rev. Cecil Williams spent most of his four-minute allotment talking about how incredible it was to be the intermediary between the two. The intensity of their connection, he said, was unlike any he had seen.

What troubled me about this part of Westbrook’s life story, however, was that while Feinstein moved on to serve as U.S. Senator, the woman she called “mama” in the press was left behind. And the community Westbrook fought for – and won quite a bit for – is at least as far down in the hole (in terms of unemployment, a new lack of affordable housing, and racialized inequality) in 2010 as it was back in the 1960s when the Redevelopment Agency first came calling. At the memorial, Feinstein sent a video eulogy, and was mentioned by many speakers as having been an important person in Westbrook’s life. But there was no comment about her lack of attention to black flight, nor to her role in the new era of redevelopment in the Southeast.

## **Lennar and the Structures of Political Abandonment**

What was Feinstein’s role in the Southeast? As mayor she oversaw the early phases of conceptualizing and planning for change at the shipyard, and as a US Senator she has played an important collaborative role in shaping federal funding streams towards San Francisco development. The redevelopment of the shipyard is central to any development vision of San Francisco heading in to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Feinstein and others have played an important, conflicted role in directing the project. They have pushed for it, they may profit from it in various ways – and yet they have also let it founder on the rocky shores of San Francisco politics, proving once again that the Southeast is San Francisco’s Polanski-style “Chinatown,” where old-school power plays – power centered *outside* of the neighborhood – are over-determinative.

The next and final chapter looks, then, at what I call the structures of political abandonment in the San Francisco black community. In the 1980s the Southeast struggled

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<sup>60</sup> “San Francisco Voter Information Handbook, Arguments, Statements, Election Nov. 4 1975” (San Francisco Department of Elections, 1975), 17.

like many black urban communities, and the response from San Francisco government, ultimately, was to again use the tools of redevelopment. In setting those tools in motion, San Francisco chose a process that might uplift the community to a certain extent, but one that fundamentally relied on the rising value of land markets in the city as its central tool of social transformation.

In the late 1990s, under the leadership of Feinstein ally Willie Brown, the city chose a private developer to lead the process of taking over the shipyard and involving the surrounding neighborhood in a total transformation. The Lennar Corp. stepped in, and holding hands with a reconfigured Redevelopment Agency, served the role of patron in Bayview Hunter's Point, where the continued leadership vacuum remained a problem. That patronage position, which has included handing out hundreds of thousands of dollars to neighborhood nonprofit organizations, sits uneasily with some residents, who are part of an increasingly fringe political movement that aims to maintain an anti-capitalist, community development position.

The Redevelopment Agency, until it was absorbed into the Mayor's Office of Housing (after Gov. Jerry Brown dissolved such entities across the state) claimed that its efforts in the Southeast would inhibit gentrification. And there are ways in which that assessment could be spot on – just as in the 1920s, when the city threatened to take land under eminent domain, developers have been restricted by the power of the state.

Yet, all along, black flight was transforming the community such that, by the time the Lennar project was set to be fully operational, the community had an entirely different class and complexion. And the memories of the past, the ghosts of the Big Five and the Fillmore, the ghosts of industrialism and of racism, haunted at every turn.

## Chapter 6:

### Ghosts in the Machine

A drive over Bayview Hill on a summer's evening reveals ethereal gray and gold-shaded views of the San Francisco Bay that compete with those seen from the peaks of Pacific Heights. The fog snakes in from the west, sifting through the hills that surround the Mission District, threatening to cool the twilight hours.

At the end of one dead-end street near a hilltop ridge, a worn-down wooden sandwich-board sign announces the significance of the view. The "Window on the Shipyard" sign is torn and most of the words, which had been part of a campaign to educate the public about the clean-up of the toxic shipyard, are no longer legible. The overlook offers a sweeping vision of the shipyard itself as well as the southern cone of Bayview-Hunter's Point, where Candlestick State Park converges with the 49ers football stadium. Looking down at the neighborhood from this distance it is impossible to see the cracks and creeping mold on the ballpark walls. The crumbling public housing project stands out amid a sea of aging but active warehouses.

You know by now that this is a temporary view, one that will be entirely transformed in the next twenty years, if not by redevelopment, then by the grinding wheels of the California economy. In addition to formal plans for change, in mid-2012 the state park was set to close for lack of state support, and the future of the ballpark was still in question, as Silicon Valley cities vied for a commitment from the 49ers.



It is from heights like these that Kofi Bonner, head of the Lennar Corporation's San Francisco development arm, must have envisioned the transformation of the community, back when Lennar Urban hired him in 2006.<sup>1</sup> From the hilltop it is not hard to imagine the neighborhood below as a proverbial blank slate, a place demanding the planner's promise of renewal. The area is beautiful, crumbling, and laden with potential. This is a perspective that strikes fear in the hearts of activists concerned about the shape of Lennar's development plans, which promise to plant an entirely new community into the rocky sands of southeast San Francisco. At the same time, Bonner's interest in the area offers hope to those who have despaired the failures of grassroots solutions for community change in the neighborhood.

I have shown in prior chapters that it is an anomaly of history and happenstance that these classic California coastal views do not belong to the wealthy. In this final chapter I come back to the contemporary Southeast, looking at the move towards a new wave of city-led redevelopment in the 1990s as the naval shipyard's future became a central concern to city officials.

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<sup>1</sup> Bonner had close ties in both public and private spheres – he had lead the mall- and condo-centric redevelopment program for the city of Emeryville in the 1990s, and had developed ties with community groups in the Southeast as well as Willie Brown and Co. Lizette Wilson, "Former Player Gets Back in the Game: Bonner Returns to Bay Area on Behalf of Lennar," *San Francisco Business Times*, July 17, 2005.

With the interest of politicians in Washington, the Southeast again became a central part of a regional development vision, after decades of deepening disconnection. With the organizational powers of the Redevelopment Agency, capital was marshaled towards a new urban transformation. And yet, the Southeast resisted this change. Other parts of San Francisco hurtled towards the New Economy, becoming both bedroom and playground for Silicon Valley's young Titans. Meanwhile, the Southeast remained the least-tended corner of the city. After some fifteen years of formal discussions, planning reports, ballot measures and marshalling of both political will and capital – the Southeast remained barely touched by the modern planner's knife.

How could it be that such precious land was both fought over, and left fallow? How, in the midst of the dot-com economic boom of the late 1990s – a time in which it seemed that anything that lay in the path of Silicon Valley's expansion would be either crushed or absorbed – was Southeast San Francisco still an anomalous place? Why was it still a place that seemed to produce fear and confusion among politicians and community leaders?

I have argued thus far that the anomalous development patterns and the cultural-political isolation of the Southeast emerged out of the histories of industrialism, racial exclusion, and city-managed redevelopment. These histories have hovered, ghostlike, over conversations on all sides of the Southeast development debate.

The shifting demography of the Southeast heightened the anxiety brought by Lennar's operation. It seemed to affirm the notion that any new development would be for "outsiders" – even though black flight began long before Lennar arrived and continued to accelerate before Lennar's development plan was approved. Though urban renewal had sparked black flight in the past, shrinking job prospects and a volatile housing market became powerful push factors that swept the black middle class out of the city.

In the context of this shifting demography, this chapter looks at the entrance of the Lennar Corporation into the Southeast in the late 1990s, situated within the histories that we have looked at in previous chapters. After looking at the reforms of the Redevelopment Agency, which transformed the official city development mission in the late 1980s, I question the position of those reforms in the case of the Southeast, where the toxicity of the shipyard required the entrance of major capital investors. I focus on the role of politicians and politics more broadly in directing and shaping capital investments in the community.

This chapter begins with a snapshot of Southeast San Francisco in the post-Westbrook era: What happened in the wake of the Big Five's successes? I first look at the problem of black flight, and the history of toxic urbanism that has framed the redevelopment fights of the moment.

Next I look at the entrance of the Lennar Corporation in the late 1990s, tracing its evolution from development partner to community patron, environmental assessor, and city planner – with the help of politicians like Willie Brown. I then look briefly at the evolution of the Redevelopment Agency; I tell the story of local housing activists who saw redevelopment as a vehicle for community participation and affordable housing development, and I focus on the role of shifting financial strategies in the outcome of development plans.

Finally, I come back to questions of racial politics and the triangulation of people and space, in the context of major financial and political shifts – including the wholesale closure of California's Redevelopment Agencies in 2012 – as part of my concluding comments.

## “The Last of the Mohicans”

Growing up in the 1980s in the Southeast meant living with the drug war, which was raging in cities across the US. That struggle wended its way deep into the hill and throughout the public housing projects that dominated a few key zones in the Southeast. For kids growing up at that time, formative social experiences included evading or joining gangs and prison, both of which were central pillars of socio-economic life. Despite the small size of the black population in San Francisco, the city’s rate of incarceration among black youth has long been very high, twice the national average, according to one study.<sup>2</sup>

It was what Gilmore calls the “age of human sacrifice,” a time in which black men were singled out as primary subjects of policing and incarceration.<sup>3</sup> The Southeast was of course not alone in suffering this climate, even within San Francisco. But as home to four extremely troubled and decaying public housing developments – Sunnyside and Geneva Towers in Visitacion Valley, Alice Griffith in the shadow of the shipyard, and Hunter’s View, up on Hunter’s Point Hill – the neighborhood provided one of the main backdrops to some of the rougher scenes of San Francisco’s drug wars.<sup>4</sup>

One of the ways San Franciscans have been introduced to these places is through the films of Kevin Epps, a filmmaker who was born and raised in public housing in Hunter’s Point. Epps’ 2003 film *Straight Outta Hunter’s Point* shows the community at its most desperate, with young men yelling at the camera, showing off their cars and doing “donuts” (driving in circles at high speeds). Most of the subjects in the film are male, and nearly all are African American, like Epps.<sup>5</sup>

Nine years later Epps released a sequel to the film, which had become so popular among teens in the neighborhood that some had tattooed the film’s title on their bodies, though they had never met Epps in person.<sup>6</sup> *Straight Outta Hunter’s Point 2* was equally raw, leaving viewers with a grim sense of the neighborhood. Through Epps’ lens the Southeast was limited to a few blocks of Third Street, where black men gather in front of storefronts, sometimes selling drugs, and to the housing projects on the hill. The story he told in the second film was of a deeply troubled community, one that was on its way out.

One teen in the film suggested that black San Franciscans are part of what he thinks of as a community under threat, like so many communities of color in the past: “We’re the last of the Mohicans,” he said. Others that Epps interviewed built on that metaphor, arguing that redevelopment, which they said was visible through the reconstruction of the public housing

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<sup>2</sup> C Hewitt, K Kubota, and V Schiraldi, *Race and Incarceration in San Francisco: Localizing Apartheid* (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Gilmore, “Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference,” 16.

<sup>4</sup> Geneva Towers was demolished in the late 1990s. The two Bayview District projects are slated for demolition and reconstruction connected to the Bayview redevelopment plan; the other is a source of constant conversation about renovations – even as it remains a central site of violence and deeply felt poverty. Though advocates felt like this piece offered too much of a caricature, it does suggest the contours of life in one of the public housing projects, and it certainly signifies the divide between mainstream San Francisco and the Southeast: Leslie Fulbright, “Life at the Bottom: S.F.’s Sunnyside Project,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 3, 2008.; Sharen Hewitt, interview with author, July 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Epps, *Straight Outta Hunter’s Point* (Mastamind, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Tamara Palmer, “Kevin Epps on His Life-Changing Straight Outta Hunters Point Documentaries,” *SF Weekly Blog*, February 24, 2012.

projects on the hill, was designed to push African Americans out of the city – and that it was succeeding.<sup>7</sup>

The Epps films are revealing in multiple ways. Most significantly, they record the fear held by at least one sector of the population that the government is after them, and that the redevelopment of the community is symbolic of a larger effort to push African Americans out of town. Epps tells a story from the inside, revealing scenes that outsiders to the community rarely witness. They thus offer an incredible record of one slice of daily life in Hunter's Point. On the other hand, the story that they tell, in all of its rawness, is of a small group. Epps' teens are living precisely the way that outsiders imagine the entire Southeast: full of people selling drugs, fighting with the police, lacking much hope for the future. But they represent a tiny fraction of the population. The second Epps film documents the broader community rising up against violence (police and gang violence), and shows a small crowd marching down Third Street to protest against a killing. In the end, the dominant message is still that Hunter's Point is a lot like the mainstream media presents: tough and scary.

Epps' stories do not explore the lives of people involved in the political fights of the moment, dealing with the shipyard or the power plants or current real estate development. They also didn't look at the lives of everyday middle class people, living south and east of the hill. The Chinese immigrant owners of car repair shops and dry cleaners, the women like Doris Vincent and Essie Webb, black homeowners who remember the Big Five and who still have faith in the capacity of government to make change. And though there are good reasons to question the potential for the redevelopment of the neighborhood to help the lion's share of existing residents, the Lennar plan does seem to give some of them hope.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, there is also good reason for Epps' subjects, and Epps himself, to be afraid. I have mentioned already that San Francisco's black flight has been unprecedented in its speed. Though African Americans began to leave the city in 1970, it wasn't until the late 1990s and 2000s that city government and media outside of the Southeast began to notice the demographic shift as a problem. But long before Mayor Gavin Newsom created a task force to investigate the problem of "African-American out-migration" the pressures of a changing city were having their impact.<sup>9</sup>

## Why "flight"?

There are seven main reasons blacks have left the city. In this section I overview six of them, and turn to the seventh in the following section. The first three drivers for black flight have affected families of all backgrounds: problems with the Proposition 13-starved public education system, poor access to living wage jobs, and a persistent dearth of affordable housing.<sup>10</sup> These three challenges feed and exacerbate each other: without the resources for

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<sup>7</sup> Epps, *Straight Outta Hunter's Point II*.

<sup>8</sup> There is much more later in this chapter on the Lennar plan, and on the different factions within the community.

<sup>9</sup> Nanette Asimov, "Rev. Amos Brown Says S.F. Needs a Marshall Plan for Black Residents," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 24, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Ginwright and Akom, *African American Out-Migration: Initial Scan of National and Local Trends in Migration and Research on African Americans*; San Francisco Mayor's Task Force on African-American Out-Migration, *Report of the San Francisco Mayor's Task Force on African-American Out-Migration*.

private schooling, black kids are stuck in depleted schools.<sup>11</sup> Plus, the legacies of segregation, as described in Chapter 2, include depleted family wealth, which left black San Franciscans with weak access to better housing markets outside of the Fillmore and the Southeast (aside from a small middle-class black cluster in Ingleside, west of Visitacion Valley).

Meanwhile, the small black middle class was struggling to remain middle class. The move away from manufacturing and towards an economy based in finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE) was transforming cities across the country.<sup>12</sup> San Francisco was a core center for this shift, which had dramatic impact both on the people dependent on industrial work and on the types of development projects that could secure financing.<sup>13</sup> This employment shift disproportionately affected African Americans, who had relied heavily on manufacturing sector labor.

The move away from industrial jobs that paid family-scale wages coincided with what one affordable housing advocate has called a “scorched earth policy” towards housing programs in the Reagan era, which involved the elimination or dramatic reduction in every program designed to help low-income people find housing, a move that happened in tandem with the persistent reduction the social safety net.<sup>14</sup> Neoliberal urbanism was in full swing, even in liberal San Francisco, where advocates managed to create small niches of support to fill in the gaps of state and federal retrenchment. And although the affordable-housing legacy discussed in prior chapters did create significant housing opportunities for black San Franciscans in the Fillmore and elsewhere, the general trend in San Francisco has been to allow the development of high-end residential properties that lure ever-wealthier residents.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, there was something unique happening for black families, which brings us to the fourth and fifth main reasons for black flight: violence and cultural isolation. Through the 1980s, as in segregated communities of color across the country, the crack-cocaine epidemic and associated gang violence polarized and stratified the black community in both the Southeast and the Fillmore. The segregation patterns previously described had historically pushed middle-class black families into the same communities as poor blacks. As the violence intensified, and as the city’s police response involved increased criminalization of black youth – whether or not they were involved in violent activities – the public housing projects became the war zones depicted by Epps. Middle-class families that could leave for the calmer suburbs often chose to do so.<sup>16</sup> This was true in similar communities across the country.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Schrag, *California: America’s High-Stakes Experiment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Beitel, “The Transformation of San Francisco”; Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology and Development in American Urbanism*.

<sup>13</sup> Beitel, “The Transformation of San Francisco”; Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*.

<sup>14</sup> “Low-income Housing Aides Hit Reagan Cuts,” *Sun Sentinel/ United Press International*, March 23, 1985.

<sup>15</sup> Beitel, “The Transformation of San Francisco.”

<sup>16</sup> Ginwright and Akom, *African American Out-Migration: Initial Scan of National and Local Trends in Migration and Research on African Americans*.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Pattillo-McCoy, “The Limits of Out-Migration for the Black Middle Class,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 22, no. 3 (2000): 225–241; Rachael A Woldoff, *White Flight/Black Flight: The Dynamics of Racial Change in an American Neighborhood*, Cornell Paperbacks (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2011).



The sixth and most urgent problem at the end of the period of this study is the mortgage and foreclosure crisis, which has had a heavily disproportionate affect on black residents, and which has been blamed for the decimation of the black Southeast since 2009. Bayview is often cited as having one of the highest rates of homeownership.<sup>18</sup> But that has shifted as affordable mortgages lured black families out of the city to the rapidly out-creeping suburbs of the east bay. Tragically, the fringe suburbs that some had fled to – the places that expanded frantically with the availability of easy-to-sell mortgages – were the same places hardest hit with the first wave of foreclosures in the mid-2000s.<sup>19</sup> Others were forced out by San Francisco’s own foreclosure crisis, when hundreds of foreclosures were concentrated in the Southeast in 2009-12.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, some black San Franciscans found themselves pulled to the South – to the places their families had migrated away from fifty years earlier. Citing a frustration with the urban north, with gentrifying cities and with a cultural environment that kept them on the margins, they made the trek out to fringe suburbs and eventually away from California.<sup>21</sup>

### **Toxic Urbanism: Known Knowns and Unknown Unknowns<sup>22</sup>**

The seventh driver for black flight is the legacy of industrial toxicity of Southeast San Francisco. I have described how the Southeast was long the dumping ground for the city, and how that status contributed to the segregated conditions that emerged there during and after World War II. The pairing of racial segregation with industrialism produced a lingering and lethal set of discourses and practices that naturalized a conflation of blackness and toxicity. Yet residents have not accepted this pairing passively. Beginning with the fights over Pacific Gas & Electric’s aging power plant at Hunter’s Point, and continuing through to larger campaigns around the naval shipyard and micro-industrial sites throughout the community, questions of toxic urbanism and environmental racism have tarnished the last 25 years of history in the Southeast.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Clifford Rechtschaffen, “Fighting Back Against a Power Plant: Some Lessons from the Legal and Organizing Efforts of the Bayview-Hunters Point Community,” *Hastings W.-Nw. J. Env’t l L. & Pol’y* 14 (2008): 537.; San Francisco Energy Co. Cogeneration Project, *Final Staff Assessment, Application for Certification*, City and County of San Francisco (June 1995). In 1996 the rate was still 46 percent, 12 points higher than the city average. In 1996 Bayview Hunter’s Point had about 28,000 residents; Sixty-two percent of residents were African American at the time.

<sup>19</sup> Darin Jensen, Madeleine Theriault, and Mike Jones, “Map: The Bay’s 50-year Boom — Population Growth, 1960-2010 | SF Public Press”, June 29, 2012; Alex Schafran, “Race and Foreclosure on the Edge of the Bay Area”, December 1, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Aequitas Compliance Solutions, Inc., *Foreclosure in California: A Crisis of Compliance*, February 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Hunt and Ramón, *Black Los Angeles*; Wiese, *Places of Their Own*; Yogis, “What Happened to Black San Francisco?”

<sup>22</sup> Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld’s infamous quotation, made in reference to the possible presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq has become a referential meme for official double-speak used to mask problems. Full quote: “...there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns -- the ones we don't know we don't know.” Donald H. Rumsfeld, “DoD News Briefing - Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers, Transcript”, February 12, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Lindsey Dillon, “Research in Progress on Hunter’s Point Shipyard,” unfinished Ph.D Dissertation (Department of Geography, University of California at Berkeley, forthcoming).

Through the years residents of the Southeast educated themselves about the sources of industrial poisons and have organized to eliminate those sources. Some stayed to fight; others left, pointing to the problems of living in close quarters to power plants, naval shipyard, freeways, sewer and a host of toxic brownfields that seemed linked to the overflowing of health concerns in the community. In this section I explore this history briefly; I then connect the history of industrial toxicity and environmental racism to the political fight over redevelopment in the Southeast more broadly.



In the late 1980s a new awareness was crystallizing nationally about the importance of industrial uses in creating waves of cancers and asthma among urban communities of color.<sup>24</sup> Diverging from the mainstream white-dominated environmental movement, the Environmental Justice (EJ) movement sprouted up as a homegrown force in communities of color nationwide, emphasizing the links between race-class segregation and environmental pollutants that were the byproducts of industry. In many cases women led the fight, as with groups like the Mothers of East Los Angeles, which defeated the proposed construction of a toxic waste incinerator in 1988.<sup>25</sup> The crescendo of concern earned some national prominence in 1994 when President Clinton recognized environmental injustice as a pressing national concern.<sup>26</sup> Even so, EJ has never become a standard metric for measuring the impact of urban growth or industrial development projects, and citizens concerned about environmental racism continue to be in the underdog position with each new fight.

In Southeast San Francisco awareness about the community's capacity to have an impact on development projects that presented environmental problems grew as officials began to consider installing another electric power plant in the community. Residents who had endured mysterious cancers and high rates of asthma, exacerbated by poverty and a generalized lack of decent health care, began to organize themselves into a sometimes-haphazard political movement. Like the Big Five women, who self-educated on housing laws, the new generation of advocates taught themselves how to read government reports and how to deal with the intricacies of the hundreds of commission hearings that would populate their lives for more than a decade.<sup>27</sup>

The dynamics of the power plant fight are worthy of their own in-depth study.<sup>28</sup> Here I want to outline the story of the rise of the largely female-led movement that included elderly former members of the Big Five. In many cases, women in the community who had the motivation and energy to fight for their communities spearheaded the Southeast's environmental justice movement. As with the activism of the 1970s, men were involved, and some were leaders – but some of the most persistent voices over the years were women like

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<sup>24</sup> The environmental justice movement has deeper roots in 1960s struggles against racial preferences in industrial zoning.

<sup>25</sup> Laura Pulido, S. Sidawi and R. O. Vos, "An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Los Angeles", *Urban Geography* (2006), 17(5): 419-439.

<sup>26</sup> Rechtschaffen, "Fighting Back Against a Power Plant," 545.

<sup>27</sup> Marie Harrison, interview by author, May 2010; Jackson, "Bayview Hunters Point Community Activist and Resident"; James, "BVHP Resident"; Sophie Maxwell, interview by author, March 2012.

<sup>28</sup> A great paper written by a legal scholar focuses on political strategies focused on the power plant. More research is merited: Rechtschaffen, "Fighting Back Against a Power Plant."

Marie Harrison, Espanola Jackson, Dr. Ahimsa Sumchai and Sup. Sophie Maxwell, though they were not all in agreement about solutions.

In the 1990s the San Francisco Health Department began its now-long engagement with the community, identifying Bayview-Hunter's Point as ground zero for cancers and asthma, with breast and cervical cancer rates that were double that of the rest of the Bay Area. At the same time, various agencies began to document the concentrations of carcinogens in the air and water of the community.<sup>29</sup> The links between disease and industrial toxins were not directly provable, and officials were (and still are) often slow to connect industrial zones to illness. It is often argued that it's just too difficult to know, since air and water-borne pollutants can drift so far from their original source. As a reporter in San Francisco in the late 1990s and early 2000s I heard this argument from city supervisors and from commissioners on the California Energy Commission, among other places. And it was true that the science had not yet caught up to the experience of people; this is still the case with many potential carcinogens.

But over the years there was growing evidence and understanding in the medical community about the dangers of ongoing exposure to lead, mercury and other toxins connected to the myriad industrial sites in the district.<sup>30</sup> On an anecdotal level, for those who got out of their cars and experienced the Southeast firsthand, it was clear that something needed to change, and that the everyday experience of living next to active power plants, for example, was not tenable. Residents brought this experience to life in hearings and press conferences where the women of the Bayview told their stories. It was clear in their testimony that the pollution in the area was not occasional or subtle:

The air pollution in Hunter's Point is so bad I can't hang my laundry outside. I've tried and it gets so filthy that I have to wash it again.... I have breast cancer. How many little girls who go to school across the street from me will grow up and become victims of breast cancer because of the filthy air they breathe? If filth sticks to my sheets as they dry in the 'fresh' air, think about the filth that adheres to the lungs. I can wash my sheets but I can't wash my lungs.<sup>31</sup>

The impact of being close to industry is also financial. Contaminated property loses value, and bay-front property with a power plant in view is not a good investment. Those

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<sup>29</sup> Eva Glaser, Martha Davis, and Tomas Aragon, *Cancer Incidence Among Residents of the Bayview-Hunters Point Neighborhood, San Francisco California, 1993-1995* (California Department of Health Services, January 1998); Mitchell H. Katz, MD, *Health Programs in Bayview Hunter's Point & Recommendations for Improving the Health of Bayview Hunter's Point Residents* (San Francisco Department of Public Health, September 19, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Direct connections between toxic sites and specific incidences of cancer and other problems remain challenging to prove definitively, given latency periods for diseases and the confusion produced by multiple sources of contamination. Still, the links are not ambiguous, and the medical community is increasingly confident in linking industrial pollution to the kinds of health problems experienced in the Southeast. Also see Rachel Brahinsky, "Potrero Poison," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, July 17, 2002., San Francisco Bureau of Epidemiology, Disease Control, and AIDS, *Comparison of Incidence of Cancer in Selected Sites between Bayview/Hunters Point and San Francisco and the Bay Area*, 1995.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Imogene F. Hubbard to Louise Renne, City Attorney, Jan. 5, 1995, cited in Rechtschaffen, "Fighting Back Against a Power Plant," 543-4.

lucky enough to own property in Bayview, then, had special concerns. As one resident explained in testimony to the state energy commission:

When I bought my property, I was told by my realtor that there were plans to build a marina in the area of the proposed power plant. I expected boats, yachts, a boardwalk, commercial buildings, ferries, and parks. I believed that it would someday be similar to Fisherman's Wharf, but without so many tourists. I thought there would be ownership of companies and businesses by people from the community along the boardwalk. I never expected another power plant. If this power plant is built, I envision my community becoming a heavy industrial beltway.<sup>32</sup>

Testimony like this made it clear that the fight was multilayered. Residents were concerned about disease and everyday quality of life. They were worried that they might continue to “witness a decline in their property value and suffer the stress and anxiety that naturally accompanies injury to one's most significant economic asset.”<sup>33</sup>

What's striking about these experiences is how ordinary they are. There seems to be an expectation or a belief in the general population that people living in proximity to pollution are willing to put up with it. Through this testimony, however, it became clear that the people of Bayview-Hunter's Point, though they were too poor to get elected to public office, and with little formal power, were everyday people with everyday dreams.<sup>34</sup> Though the rest of the city had a notion that the Southeast was a separate place, with different rules and customs, the environmental justice movement elevated the idea that residents in the Southeast, no matter their racial identity, were not exotic or unusual.

In the mid-2000's the several groups of Southeast residents formed the Bayview Hunters Point Mothers Environmental Health & Justice Committee. Some of the main leaders had developed their political organizing through the power plant fight, and they came together with others who were concerned about the future of one of the housing projects on the hill. It was the same public housing development that Epps would later refer to in his films. The place had been falling apart for decades. Residents there, along with several other housing developments in the community, both public and private, had been complaining about toxic mold, crumbling infrastructure, raw sewage leaking between the buildings, and a general state of disrepair.<sup>35</sup>

Drawing on the resources of the non-profit Greenaction, the Mothers put together a report documenting the types and locations of industrial pollutants across the neighborhood. The report came as part of their larger project of showing connections between poverty, disease, and the industrial footprint in the neighborhood, which in the mid-1990s had about 500 micro-industrial sites, including dry cleaners, car repair and iron works businesses.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Francine Carter, Testimony before the California Energy Commission 3, July 5, 1995, cited in *Ibid.*, 545.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 544. Also see Anthony Roisman & Gary Mason, *Nuisance and the Recovery of "Stigma" Damages: Eliminating the Confusions*, 24 ENV. L. REP. 10070 (Feb 1996)."

<sup>34</sup> Bayview Hunters Point Mothers Environmental Health & Justice Committee, *Pollution, Health, Environmental Racism and Injustice: A Toxic Inventory of Bayview Hunters Point, San Francisco* (Greenaction for Health & Environmental Justice and Huntersview Tenants Association, September 2004).

<sup>35</sup> A.C. Thompson, "A Place Called Despair," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, October 19, 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Bayview Hunters Point Mothers Environmental Health & Justice Committee, *Pollution, Health, Environmental Racism and Injustice: A Toxic Inventory of Bayview Hunters Point, San Francisco*.

The power plant fight also revealed the geography of class divisions within Bayview-Hunter's Point. As the Mothers pointed out, about a third of Bayview residents living on the east side of Third Street live within the most heavily industrialized blocks. By 2004, though the community was already less than half African American, 70 percent of those living on the east side of Third Street were black; they also represented one of the poorest concentrations in the community. "Two-thirds of the approximately 1,110 households within a one-mile radius of the PG&E power plant," lived in public housing.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, informally, it was clear that the owners and employees of the hundreds of tiny businesses in the area were more often Latino, Asian and white.<sup>38</sup> So there was a stark contrast between those who lived and those who worked in the industrial zones. So even though workers may have also suffered from exposure to industrial toxins, the majority of blacks in the area did not also see themselves as beneficiaries of the presence of industry. This is an essential point because the main argument for industrial growth or retention in general, and for the Lennar redevelopment plan that I describe later in this chapter, is that the community will or should benefit from employment opportunities.<sup>39</sup>

Ultimately, the community won the power plant fight – in 2008 the Hunter's Point Power Plant was demolished, opening up the edge of the waterfront for the first time since 1929. Over the next couple of years proposals for a new power plant in the area were also stalled, though new power plant proposals re-emerge on a regular basis. As with the Lennar fight to come, the pro-power plant forces exploited divisions in the community. PG&E's lobbyists convinced some to support the power plant with the idea that it would bring much needed jobs to the area and paid others to create the false impression of grassroots support.<sup>40</sup>

The power plant closure was a stunning victory. For activists in the Southeast, it was validation of years of demonstrations and meetings that were largely ignored by the mainstream population. In fact, most would probably have insisted that the crew of Bayview mothers, with speech patterns that revealed less formal education, were fringe players in the highly technical negotiations that played out at agencies like the California Energy Commission. Yet, as with the redevelopment fights in the 1970s, the women of the Southeast persisted and succeeded in many ways.<sup>41</sup> A few of them moved out of the realm of citizen activism to the halls of formal power.

Like many women in the community Sophie Maxwell had a child sick with cancer. She later lost her son to Hodgkin's Lymphoma. As she described:

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<sup>37</sup> Rechtschaffen, "Fighting Back Against a Power Plant," 544.

<sup>38</sup> Saul Bloom, interview by author, October 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Rechtschaffen points to the counter argument: "For an argument about why areas like Bayview-Hunters Point should welcome polluting industries, see Christopher Boerner & Thomas Lamber, *Environmental Injustice, The Public Interest*, 61, 74-76 (Winter 1995) (arguing that prohibitions or limitations on siting polluting industries in minority and low-income neighborhoods harms communities by denying them the economic benefits associated with hosting industrial and waste plants, and that community residents may find it in their best interest to endure 'nuisances and minimal health risks' associated with facilities in exchange for substantial economic benefits)." Rechtschaffen, "Fighting Back Against a Power Plant," 545, note 41.

<sup>40</sup> Jane Kay, "Energy Firm Paid Ringers at Hearing," *San Francisco Examiner*, February 1, 1995.

<sup>41</sup> One article quotes Big Five member Osceola Washington speaking out in 1994 about the power plant: "It is a dump yard out here. This is the dump yard of San Francisco. Everything they don't want, they send here. They would never build this plant in Pacific Heights or the Marina District. I keep wondering why they're going to continue making Hunters Point a dumping yard when we were [sic] just beginning to clean up." Cited in Rechtschaffen, "Fighting Back Against a Power Plant," 559.

When my son (Rama) contracted cancer, I started thinking, “You messed with the wrong mother’s son.” And, I got really active and started working on power plants and sewage plants and decided I was not going to let this happen to anybody else’s child. ... He had Hodgkin’s lymphoma, which is cancer of the lymph glands. But, I always felt it was the power plant, the sewage plant, all those things. Lymph glands filter. They clean. And so I thought, whatever this is, it got into him and his body could not filter, couldn’t clean. So I started thinking about the environment and realized I had to do more. And, so, if any one thing has been my mission, it’s been cleaning up our environment, passing legislation on dust control and fighting to get the Bayview Power Plant and the Potrero Power Plant closed and those types of things.”<sup>42</sup>

Maxwell’s experience with environmental illness propelled her into politics, and her concerns about similar possibilities in the shipyard solidified her interest. Maxwell first joined the community advisory committee to oversee the shipyard development and later ran for public office. The daughter of prominent Potrero Hill community advocate Enola Maxwell, Sophie Maxwell won a seat on the Board of Supervisors in 2000. As she told me over a decade later, “I got involved in politics because of the power plant. I ran for office because of the shipyard. I went to City Hall to make the Lennar project work.” She insisted that it was the way out for the troubled community, and in her retirement from the board, she still continued to insist that this was true.<sup>43</sup>

## **The Shipyard: the End and the Beginning**

Let’s go to 2009, to a moment when a series of approvals was moving forward to make the new Hunter’s Point area redevelopment proposal come to life. The enthusiasm in the real estate blog *Curbed SF* was characteristic of real estate developers regarding this project; developers held up the notion that the project was set to revive a “dead zone” in the city:

One giant leap forward for Lennar-kind: the Hunters Point/ Candlestick redevelopment's draft environmental impact report for Phase II went online yesterday. The project, which encompasses a total of about 790 acres in the southeastern portion of the city, is so huge it's about twice the size of Treasure Island, which incidentally is also supposed to get redeveloped by Lennar. Phase II follows the comparative drop in the bucket of Phase I, in which the 247 condos as first described in April and in another render reveal just a couple weeks ago belong.

The impetus behind the massive redevelopment: pumping life back into the southeastern portions of the city (cough: Bayview) via 10,500 homes and an infusion of 24,465 residents with which to jelly-fill those donuts.

And still key to this very plan: a 49ers stadium, located in Hunters Point rather than its current Candlestick spot.

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<sup>42</sup> Michael Condiff, “In Depth with District 10 Supervisor Sophie Maxwell,” *The Potrero View*, May 2010.

<sup>43</sup> In my interview with Maxwell in 2012, she affirmed her political commitment to – and unwavering faith in – the Lennar-centered redevelopment process. Maxwell, interview.

Will it be enough to keep the 49ers in the city, even as they negotiate with Santa Clara on moving their stadium there? That remains to be seen— if the Hunters Point stadium falls through, Lennar and the city will simply fill in the hole with more housing and offices. Construction on Phase II — an estimate, mind you — could go from 2010 through 2023.

During that span of time, 10,000 trees will be planted, and 336 acres of new and rehabbed park and open space will be created (including the football stadium). The tab for all this: \$2 billion.<sup>44</sup>

The above gushing narrative sits in contrast with the long shipyard history of handling and decommissioning toxic materials, which have left their mark on the landscape. Though it had been closed since 1974, the process of cleaning and re-defining the space did not begin for decades. The tangle of agencies and committees involved in defining and shaping the fight are worthy of their own study; at least one is underway that should illuminate the complexities of the process of uncovering the truth about toxic waste there.<sup>45</sup> The tension between the greater good of the city and the needs of the local community was evident all along.

There were a few aspects of the project that defined the scope of the political fight. First, the size and scope of the project arguably necessitated pulling in a developer with deep pockets and a long list of contacts. The project called for developing hundreds of acres laden with waste (the size of the project has changed over time; see below for more detail). Years of secret weapons testing, deconstruction of toxic materials and industrial-scale shipbuilding had left a deeply dangerous stew of radiological and other waste that posed both political and material challenges.

But choosing such a developer almost certainly meant selecting a corporate actor without long ties to the local community. Even more important: that actor would inevitably have economic interests far beyond the scope of the Southeast or San Francisco itself. Indeed, through the years the project scope was expanded so much that this dynamic was exacerbated (the original plan focused on the shipyard itself; over the years it became a neighborhood-wide plan).<sup>46</sup>

Plus, the location of the shipyard invoked political and social dynamics beyond the project itself. It sits, not coincidentally, as I've shown, in a politically and socially marginalized community.<sup>47</sup> It also sits in a place with a tremendous environmental load, unrelated to the shipyard. The relationship between that cleanup and the “clean-up” or reconstruction of the community at large was sealed through the redevelopment process. The redevelopment plan grew from its origins as a shipyard reconfiguration to a wholesale neighborhood transformation.

Politics aside, the cleanup of the shipyard was never going to be simple. As I described in Chapter 3, knowledge about the extent and content of the materials used in weapons testing, production and have been slowly understood and even more slowly disseminated to the public. The information flow regarding what happened and what compounds linger in

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<sup>44</sup> Hunters Point Report Drops, 49ers Stadium Still in the Works, *Curbed SF*, Nov 13, 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Dillon, “Research in Progress on Hunter’s Point Shipyard.”

<sup>46</sup> San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and San Francisco Planning Department, *Draft Environmental Impact Report: Candlestick Point-Hunters Point Shipyard Phase II*.

<sup>47</sup> This is typical of military landscapes.

the landscape has been an ongoing challenge in the process of public participation and decision-making.<sup>48</sup>

For those not following every twist and turn, it can be difficult to know what landscapes are even under discussion. For example, the naming and re-naming of the shipyard property itself is a moving target. The land was divided into six parcels and labeled with letters of the alphabet, A through F. Over time, these names have shifted. One parcel would be described as clean, while others contained the materials that won the shipyard its designation as a federal superfund site in 1989.<sup>49</sup> As new information was discovered about each parcel, the parcels were divided again and again. Parcel A changed in size and shape, but it retained its designation as “clean” – and was the first piece of land transferred with a green light for development. Meanwhile, it sat next to Parcel E, which even the Navy agreed was too dangerous for transfer. This is significant because the Navy, through its various boards and representatives, has resisted agreeing to a total clean-up of the property and has instead suggested that significant portions of the toxic landfill should simply be capped; Lennar and the Redevelopment Agency have generally supported this claim.<sup>50</sup>

The fight over whether any part of the shipyard is clean enough for development, whether “capping” toxic fill in an earthquake zone is sufficient, and whether the process in place will create a safe living situation for any of the new shipyard residents is worthy of much more examination. Here I want to simply outline the contours of that struggle, and suggest avenues for further research.

The battle over knowledge about toxics has taken place in the context of a fight over land and control over the transition away from decades of military industrialism. That transition has taken place with the assent and pressure of officials at the highest levels, including behind-the-scenes negotiations between the navy and San Francisco representatives that remain mysterious. Then-mayor Willie Brown was a central player; his role in channeling capital cannot be underestimated, even as it remains largely shrouded in secrecy.

The public face of the transition has included hundreds of community meetings, formal and informal citizen participation that have literally spanned two generations of residents. Through the 1990s the city began to formalize citizen participation in the shipyard redevelopment process, in the tradition of the groups first created in the Fillmore. In 1990 Mayor Art Agnos created a formal Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to create a forum for a community conversation, managed through the Redevelopment Agency. In 1993 the navy created a Hunters Point Shipyard Restoration Advisory Board (RAB), which was meant to be another place for citizen input. Finally, in 1995 the Bayview-Hunter’s Point Project Area Committee (PAC) formalized the Redevelopment Agency’s commitment to community input.

Through these groups, residents have been able to observe and participate in many levels of discussion on the plan. The quality of that participation has been described to me in dramatically different ways. Some participants told me that they felt satisfied with the

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<sup>48</sup> Davis, “Fallout: The Past Is Present - The Nuclear Witnesses” (also see entire series by Davis).

<sup>49</sup> Naval Facilities Engineering Command, BRAC, “Former Naval Shipyard Hunters Point”, n.d.; “NRC: Hunter’s Point Naval Shipyard”, n.d.; United States Environmental Protection Agency, “Superfund Site Overview Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, Pacific Southwest, US EPA”, n.d.

<sup>50</sup> San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and San Francisco Planning Department, *Draft Environmental Impact Report: Candlestick Point-Hunters Point Shipyard Phase II*.



process, saying that it enabled participation by those who took the time to show up for meetings (they often spoke of people who didn't come to meetings with some resentment). Others felt that the meetings were overly controlled by officials with sharply defined goals. Several redevelopment officials who requested anonymity during interviews told me that they thought the community-input process was problematic, but they struggled to reform it. Officials who spoke "on the record" told me that the process was just fine.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, various community organizations, like the Mother's group, Greenaction, Arc Ecology, and POWER formed shipyard/ redevelopment campaigns at different stages of the project and played roles as advocates, challengers and advisers to the Redevelopment Agency over time. As the fight grew more visible in the mid-2000's nearly every non-profit or advocacy group with any toehold in the Southeast was involved in some way, pro or con.

Though for a while the cleanup and re-use of the shipyard were seen by many San Franciscans as a problem of the Southeast, the political fight leapt out of the neighborhood on several occasions. Proposition P, a ballot measure passed in 2000 defined a community process for approval of the shipyard's transfer. Many hoped that it would control the cleanup, such that property transfer could not take place until the property was safe for residential use, which is the highest standard for clean-up. Prop. P was a city-level ballot measure, but it placed the burden of the cleanup on the US Navy. After 87 percent of voters approved it, the Board of Supervisors affirmed its message the next year. Since it's passage, however, there has been tremendous debate about what it called for and how to enforce it.<sup>52</sup>

Several other key agreements also shape the conversation about cleanup. Two agreements between the city and the navy, signed a decade apart in 1993 and 2003 defined the way that the property transfer could take place.<sup>53</sup> The debate is deeply nuanced, fraught with disagreements over what constitutes clean enough. As of 2012, less than 10 percent of the property had been declared clean enough to transfer ownership away from the Navy.<sup>54</sup>

Community unrest grew over the years and a division was visible within the community. On one side, there were those who participated in the official process, and who believed that their concerns were heard by the Redevelopment Agency. To their credit, these people put in hours and hours of volunteer time to share concerns and look at plans and generally participate in the process. On the other side was a diverse collaboration of groups who challenged the city's plans for a litany of reasons – and some of whom charged that the participants were either limiting the debate or essentially working on behalf of the developer. The question of cleanup was at the heart of the debate, but equally challenging

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<sup>51</sup> This is another aspect of the process that deserves deeper research. Some of this work is underway in another doctoral study, currently underway: Informant#9, Southeast resident, Interview by Author.; Jackson, "Black San Francisco: How a Black Community Fights for Space in San Francisco." Francie Covington, Interview by Author.

<sup>52</sup> "Proposition P," *San Francisco Department of Elections Ballot Handbook*, City and County of San Francisco, Nov. 7, 2000.

<sup>53</sup> "Conveyance Agreement Between the United States of America Acting by and Through the Secretary of the Navy United States Department of The Navy and the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency for the Conveyance of Hunters Point Naval Shipyard", March 2004; Also see the DDA: by and between Redevelopment Agency of the City and County of San Francisco and CP Development Co., LP., "Disposition and Development Agreement: Candlestick Point and Phase 2 of the Hunters Point Shipyard", November 18, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> *San Francisco Ballot Handbook 2000*.

was the status of future development: who would win the construction jobs? Who would live in the new housing? What kinds of services would be represented?

After nearly a decade of meetings, in 2008 Lennar and pro-Lennar city officials, including Maxwell, put a measure on the ballot for voters to approve the Redevelopment Agency's plan. It was partly an attempt to draw in community dissenters, and to settle the question of the role of Lennar in the community's future. With the voters' blessing, the Redevelopment Agency might be able to move forward. Critics of the plan and of Lennar's role in the community thus far, rallied together and came up with an alternative ballot measure, which called for a higher percentage of affordable housing.

The Proposition F - Proposition G ballot fight ended with a public affirmation of Lennar and the Redevelopment Agency, when the Lennar measure won. Lennar spent about \$5 million to win leaving it open to critics who argued that Lennar had essentially bought the election. Sup. Maxwell, on the other hand, later said that Lennar's funding enabled the telling of a different story about the Southeast, that it was a moment in which San Francisco heard something about Bayview-Hunter's Point that did not include violence or drugs.<sup>55</sup> The ballot fight revealed the community's fissures to the rest of the city, but it also put pressure on the Redevelopment Agency to increase community benefits within the plan.<sup>56</sup>

The community coalition that emerged out of that campaign called itself the Stop Lennar Action Movement (SLAM), making clear in their name that they were not opposed to redevelopment in general – but to Lennar's role in the city's program. The coalition prominently included the editors and publishers of the local *San Francisco Bay View Newspaper*, People Organized to Win Employment Rights, and the Bayview chapter of the Nation of Islam and its leader Christopher Muhammad, who I quoted in Chapter 1.<sup>57</sup> The SLAM operation met weekly at Town Hall meetings in local churches and schools. Muhammad was one of several leaders, but became the most cited voice in opposition to the city's plan.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *San Francisco Ballot Handbook 2008* (San Francisco, Calif.: San Francisco Department of Elections, 2008).

<sup>56</sup> An expanded version of this study will include a much more detailed description of the ballot fight and what it meant for the Southeast. These articles represent two opinions on the ballot fight, from opposite ends of the spectrum: SPUR, "Proposition G - Bayview Hunters Point Development Plan - Ballot Analysis", June 2008.; Patrick Monette-Shaw, "Proposition G's False Promises: Lennar's \$3.3 Million Chump-Change Financing May Yield Itself Billions," *Fog City Journal*, May 28, 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Muhammad was married to a granddaughter of Elouise Westbrook, a fact that stopped some of her grandchildren from electing to be interviewed for this project. They told me that they were worried about being misrepresented and attacked, they way that they felt Muhammad had been in the white-dominated press throughout the campaign. It is hoped that for future research on this topic those people may be willing to participate as their perspectives would be very useful to include. Lauren Smiley, "The Man Who Cried Dust," *San Francisco Weekly*, July 1, 2009.

<sup>58</sup> There is a very interesting study to be done on gender and religion within the SLAM movement. Christopher Muhammad took charge in many ways, and Muhammad's opponents at City Hall made a lot of political hay out of the sight of African American Nation of Islam men in identical suits flanking Muhammad at press conferences and government meetings. The women of SLAM were prominent, but went less-noticed by the media, and were not called up to the front of the Town Hall meetings nearly as often as the men. Arguably, female-led movements have fared better in the Southeast. Cf Rachel Brahinsky and Christina Jackson, *Rebuilding Southeast San Francisco: Capital, Community, Science, Faith, and Race* (Urban Affairs Association, annual meeting, 2011); Sarah Phelan, "After the Deadly Dust," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, November 28, 2007; Sarah Phelan, "The Corporation That Ate San Francisco," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, March 14, 2007.

There isn't space here to fully explore what happened, but it's worth noting that some pro-Lennar participants publicly admitted that they had been paid by the developer to support the city's plan, while others insisted that they simply agreed with the plan.<sup>59</sup> It's likely that many weighed the options presented to them and simply were convinced that the Lennar/SFRA-backed plan was the most likely to move forward. A hegemonic common sense perspective was thus produced through a combination of politicking and payoffs, meetings and public press events. (As one geographer explains it, too perfectly to amend, Gramsci's conception of hegemony argues for "a prevailing common sense formed in culture, diffused by civic institutions, that informs values, customs, and spiritual ideals and induces 'spontaneous' consent to the status quo."<sup>60</sup>)

One of the dominant threads of discourse that emerged through years of critique was a sense that the whole thing was rigged, one way or another. Muhammad often noted connections between city politicians and development capitalists. In the middle of it all Willie Brown remained a central figure.

### **Matchmaker, Matchmaker**

In mid 2012 *Washington Monthly* published a long article painting Willie L. Brown Jr, the one-time Mayor of San Francisco as a Svengali, working out deals behind the scenes. Brown was no longer in a position of formal political power when the piece came out and no longer was thought of as the charismatic leader of the Brown-Burton political machine that dominated city politics through the 1990s and beyond.<sup>61</sup> Still, the article insisted, Brown wielded control from his law offices downtown, and through his role as close adviser and fundraiser for Mayor Ed Lee. The political machine that he had helped consolidate as mayor was still eeking along, and had suddenly revived with Lee's installation into the mayor's seat in 2011 when Gavin Newsom left the mayor's seat early.<sup>62</sup> One might quibble with the way it depicts Brown overall, but it's true that for decades he has acted as much behind the scenes as in the spotlight, leaving the impression, whether true or not, that he is pulling the strings on most major political decisions affecting San Francisco.<sup>63</sup>

As one of the state's rare black politicians, and as a hometown soldier, Brown was well-regarded in the Bayview – and still is respected simply for being a black man who has held on to money and power for half a century. In interviews with black community members, even many of those who were critical of Lennar and of the city's work on redevelopment, critiques of Willie Brown were tempered and careful. Brown's name, even in the context of critique, generally raised a sense of pride.

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<sup>59</sup> Informant#10, Resident of the Southeast, Interview by Author.

<sup>60</sup> This comes from Richard Peet citing Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (International Publishers, 1971), 412–3. Peet adds, "Gramsci included, in hegemony, types of economic behavior: economic rationality, he says, responds to material necessity by constituting a complex of convictions and beliefs from which concrete social goals are proposed to collective consciousness." See Richard Peet, "Ideology, Discourse, and the Geography of Hegemony: From Socialist to Neoliberal Development in Postapartheid South Africa," *Antipode* 34, no. 1 (2002): 56.

<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Lesly Stevens, "The Power Broker," *The Washington Monthly*, August 2012.

<sup>62</sup> Newsom was elected to serve as California Lieutenant Governor before his second mayoral term ended.

<sup>63</sup> Richardson, *Willie Brown*.

Brown benefitted from presiding over economic development at a time when capital was slamming its way through the city and region. The Silicon Valley boom and the rise of the internet economy was felt nowhere as intensely as it was in San Francisco.<sup>64</sup> As mayor, Brown was known for a few things – one was hiring and firing at will, another was padding the city employment rolls with “friends.” But he was also known for development. The completion of building projects across the city that happened during his tenure, including many major public projects like the Embarcadero waterfront and City Hall itself, was supported by a budget flush with internet-boomtime dollars.

But boom times always have a dark side, and the evictions that swept through the Mission and SOMA came in a tidal wave that was unforgettable. Loft living tore through the built spaces of the city, and the first phase of internet glitterati swarmed the region in the late 1990s and early 2000s, capable of paying ever-higher rents. Forced out into the streets, many evictees – who were disproportionately families of color, with kids – left the Bay Area for the far-flung suburbs.<sup>65</sup>

At the same time, when there was money, there was money for almost everything. The affordable housing movement leveraged new development from the boom. Advocates lobbied continuously, and city law moved creakily towards its current position, where new developments come with a requirement to either include affordable units or set aside money for an affordable complex elsewhere.<sup>66</sup>

The problem with the Svengali vision, however, is that it makes Brown seem all-powerful. Instead, he has become powerful through building multiple alliances. He managed to be central in mainstream political institutions like the Democratic Party. He also remained connected to disaffected elements of his African American constituency, which stayed relatively loyal even though his housing and economic policies often played a key role in a phenomenon like black flight. His participation in dual political worlds, including what some view as a “black counterpublic” made him a flexible player.<sup>67</sup> This flexibility has been an important aspect of his ability to exert pressure at many levels.<sup>68</sup>

One example of this “flexibility” is in the way that Sophie Maxwell became connected to Brown and his agenda after she was elected. When she ran for the Board of Supervisors she was originally an insurgent candidate, running as part of a pack of anti-Brown candidates taking advantage of the renewed district-election process. Brown’s support went to another candidate, but Maxwell emerged victorious after a relatively bitter campaign.

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<sup>64</sup> Walker, “The Boom and the Bombshell: The New Economy Bubble and the San Francisco Bay Area”; Solnit and Schwartzberg, *Hollow City: The Siege of San Francisco and the Crisis of American Urbanism*.

<sup>65</sup> Francine Cavanaugh, A. Mark Liiv, and Adams Wood, *Boom: The Sound of Eviction* (Whispered Media, 2002).

<sup>66</sup> Asian Neighborhood Design, *San Francisco Affordable Housing: A Historical Analysis Mapping Project*.

<sup>67</sup> Dawson, “A Black Counterpublic?”.

<sup>68</sup> Future research will offer a more in-depth history of Brown’s tenure as a city leader as well as the ways that his work fits in to a broader schema of black political power, particularly the rise of black men as big-city mayors. For more on this, conceptually, see J. Phillip Thompson, *Double Trouble: Black Mayors, Black Communities, and the Call for a Deep Democracy* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2005). On Brown’s power-building years in the assembly, see: Richardson, *Willie Brown*. On his reputation and history as mayor, with emphasis on the connection between money and political decision-making, also see Larry Bush, “Inside the Willie L. Brown Money Machine,” *CitiReport*, April 3, 2012.; Williams and Finnie, “Willie Brown Inc. How S.F.’s Mayor Built a City Based on ‘Juice’ Politics.”

Brown congratulated her and worked, successfully, to win her over. He was, and remains alternately loyal and politically deft.<sup>69</sup>

In the mid-90s as the Redevelopment Agency was searching for someone to take on the Hunter's Point reconstruction, the Lennar Corp. emerged in northern California. The company's first win was the Mare Island Naval Base reconstruction, which was hailed as its flagship project for northern California. Though it may have been corporate hyperbole, it turned out to be a well-placed claim. Within just a few years Lennar had won the rights to develop both the Treasure Island and Hunter's Point former naval properties – both huge projects that would take years, but which would extend Lennar's monopoly over newly developable land. There was some logic to the selection of Lennar, which manages home-building projects across the country, and which was identified as having the financial stability and the political-fiscal juice needed to oversee development on a massive scale.<sup>70</sup>

All of these projects were naval re-use missions, which involved multi-million dollar clean-ups of sites with significant unknowns, in terms of the toxic landscapes themselves, and the community response to development proposals. They each had different contours – the Treasure Island project was seen as potentially less controversial because of the relatively small residential population compared with Hunter's Point. And yet, both projects were destined to wallow for more than a decade. Lennar might argue that the delay emerged out of the slow wheels of decision-making that characterize San Francisco planning processes, clogged by endless waves of opposition. These minority opinions were central, however, to the process of making the plan for the area increasingly fair. Possibly even more important to the speed of development was the housing crash and Lennar's role in it.

But why Lennar? Some of the first newspaper articles to mention Lennar in San Francisco, back in 1998, were focused on the controversy that swept the company into the Redevelopment Agency's offices. While the agency's consultant suggested that the city go for Forest City Enterprises, the commission overruled the consultant's advice and unanimously went for Lennar instead.<sup>71</sup> The deal may have looked like a moment in which a better-qualified developer was pushed out by "juice" politics that benefitted Lennar. This was true, but it wasn't that simple.

All three competitors for the bid were connected to Willie Brown and the development infrastructure of the city. Hunter's Point (just the shipyard – without the addition of the Bayview neighborhood) was slated to be the largest development undertaking the city had ever seen, with its approximately 500 acres of re-makeable, though questionably toxic, land. Because of the scale of the project it was the sort of endeavor that only a few well-capitalized developers might be able to handle. The final three under consideration all had connections to Brown and to other key decision-makers – the Cleveland-based Forest City had recently nabbed the bid for redeveloping the old Emporium shopping mall complex downtown, and Catellus was already well-embedded in the Mission Bay redevelopment project, transforming an abandoned railway zone into a new UCSF campus.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Maxwell, interview. The Ed Lee story is another great example of this shifting positionality. Brown has tended to be loyal until it is no longer expedient to be so.

<sup>70</sup> Allison Hawkes and Bernice Yeung, "Through Two Mayors, Connected Island Developers Cultivated Profitable Deal," *SF Public Press*, July 1, 2010.

<sup>71</sup> Ray Delgado, "Miami Group Gets the Nod to Transform Hunters Point," *San Francisco Examiner*, March 31, 1999. The Emporium site was consolidated into the Westfield Mall project.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*; Phelan, "The Corporation That Ate San Francisco."

It would be better, then, to look at the fight over land and development rights in the Bay Area as a fight between developers – *a tussle from above* of capitalists seeking new circuits for accumulation.<sup>73</sup> Now, it may be that Lennar was able to grease more pockets than Forest City or Catellus in that round – the company certainly was able to ingratiate itself more thoroughly in the community. This is in the context of a decade of politics in San Francisco, which some have characterized as a star-studded fight between corporations angling for rights to public lands that have been abandoned by industrialists. The *sinks* of the Bay Area had been identified by developers as ripe for reinvestment after abandonment and poisoning by capital – Treasure Island, Mare Island, and the San Francisco waterfront.

The Lennar-Redevelopment Agency alliance eventually precluded the participation of certain prominent critics in the formal planning process. For example, the Agency cancelled a city contract with the non-profit ArcEcology after several years of community outreach contracting (one of its projects was the previously mentioned “Window on the Shipyard”). ArcEcology director Saul Bloom and others argued that the contract, which represented a significant portion of his organization’s revenue, was cut for political reasons.<sup>74</sup> This was complicated because at that point Bloom actually supported the larger project and was on record as saying that the cleanup of the shipyard was potentially going to be a model for other similar sites. At the same time, he was critical of some of Lennar’s plans, and had funded a major study the year before that provided alternatives that would not destroy parklands and endangered habitats that Lennar has slated for paving and bulldozing.<sup>75</sup>

Bloom’s exile from formal participation was one of several claims that defined the political dynamics of 2010-12. POWER and Greenaction also brought a suit against the city, citing problems with environmental monitoring and claiming that emails between the San Francisco Health Department and Lennar revealed collusion on the part of the city to mask some of the dangers of the development project.<sup>76</sup>

Officials locked out community input in other ways as well. In 2009 the Navy dissolved its community group, the RAB, with officials citing rowdy crowds. The dissolution became a flashpoint in the community, with some vowing to recall Supervisor Maxwell for supporting the Navy’s claims.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*.

<sup>74</sup> Sarah, Phelan, “Thrown Under the Bus, Arc Sues Redevelopment.” *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, December 6, 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Bionic, *Alternatives for Study* (San Francisco: Prepared for Arc Ecology, January 2009); Associates Hargreaves, *From Pollution to Parkland: Alternatives for a Waterfront Park at Hunters Point Shipyard* (Arc Ecology et al, 2006).

<sup>76</sup> For example: *POWER & Greenaction V. San Francisco Planning Department, San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and San Francisco Board of Supervisors* (Superior Court of the State of California, County of San Francisco 2011).

<sup>77</sup> It’s important to note that there has not been a unified message coming from the various agencies involved in this process, and that in a development project that spans decades the people involved continues to shift significantly. The Navy’s secrecy is not surprising, given the history of military information control, but is worth interrogating. See Dillon, “Research in Progress on Hunter’s Point Shipyard.” The recall against Maxwell never made it to the ballot after the Department of Elections ruled that proponents had not gathered enough legitimate signatures to qualify.

## “Community Benefits”

While there are legitimate questions about whether Lennar’s community benefits plan will be successful, it has been lauded as one of the best in the country, and as a model for urban development.<sup>78</sup> If this is by any means a fair assessment, it is largely due to the pressures exercised on the city by activists who remain critical of the plan. These pressures came through the much-debated community meetings as well as through external pressures like the proposition campaigns.

Employment tops the list of needs in the Southeast and one iteration of the proposal suggested that 10,000 jobs would be created.<sup>79</sup> If that comes true, it will be a windfall for a community with the grimmest unemployment statistics in the city. The 10,000-job promise is highly problematic, however, for several reasons. First, the development proposal remains undecided, with multiple options contingent on financing, the housing markets, the Navy’s cleanup and political will. Plus, the method of counting jobs in past city projects has been variable. Temporary jobs, as short as a couple of weeks, could be counted as individual jobs; what is clear is that it’s not clear what the labor output will be for the Lennar program.

Lennar has also been asked to give about \$15 million to community groups, and to give \$28 million to the city’s affordable housing fund. On top of that the company has been giving money to community groups on its own. Supporters view this as evidence of the company’s good will and opponents see it as evidence of Lennar’s efforts to buy community support. The company won’t provide an accounting, but Lennar Urban chief Bonner gave me a short list, which he prefaced with this statement, indicating an unwillingness to paint a full picture: “We have donated to several but here is a small somewhat random sample of some of the entities.”<sup>80</sup>

The community-benefits aspect of the plan is designed to cushion and enhance the meat of the proposal, which may include around 10,000 units of housing, hundreds of acres of restored waterfront park lands, 885,000 square feet of commercial development, with a so-called “green” tech campus at its center. About 30 percent of the housing is slated to be affordable, which could be around 3,345 units.<sup>81</sup> This number includes public housing that Lennar is demolishing and re-constructing, so the net addition of affordable housing for the community is not as high as this. However, it is not clear what will be built, and promises

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<sup>78</sup> Ken Jacobs, *Raising the Bar: The Hunter’s Point Shipyard and Candlestick Point Development Community Benefits Agreement* (UC Berkeley Center For Labor Research and Education, May 2010). Add cite to recent articles (two)

<sup>79</sup> Michael Cohen, “Memo to the Planning Commission Re: Hunters Point Shipyard Phase 2-Candlestick Point Integrated Development Project”, May 6, 2010.

<sup>80</sup> E-mail on file with author, from Kofi Bonner to Rachel Brahinsky, “Details on Lennar’s Community Giving?”, June 18, 2012. “We have donated to several but here is a small somewhat random sample of some of the entities: Family Restoration House, Old Skool Café, Young Community Developers, Renaissance, Asian Pacific American, Heritage Foundation, City of Hope, Instituto Laboral de la Raza, John Burton Foundation for Children Without Homes, Laguna Honda Foundation, Mission Language & Vocational School, Inc., NAACP – SF, Rebuilding Together San Francisco, American Red Cross Bay Area, Self -Help for the Elderly, Asian American Donor Program.”

<sup>81</sup> Cohen, “Memo to the Planning Commission Re: Hunters Point Shipyard Phase 2-Candlestick Point Integrated Development Project.”

continue to shift with the markets. In the early stages of development, on Parcel A, the Redevelopment Agency permitted Lennar to reduce its affordable housing quotient.<sup>82</sup>

One of the challenges in discussing and assessing the plan is that Lennar and the city have yet to offer one single plan.<sup>83</sup> This was the source of one of the most powerful complaints against the process as the Redevelopment Agency pushed the Board of Supervisors to approve a required environmental assessment in 2010. The multiple options presented in the plan would each have different impacts. One included a sports arena, another included extra housing; one plan involved building a bridge over Yosemite Slough, destroying an endangered habitat.<sup>84</sup>

City and Lennar officials wanted to keep options open so that the project could be flexible. The proposed sports arena was contingent on a political deal to keep the 49ers football team in San Francisco; at last count the team was headed to Santa Clara, but that was part of an ever-evolving game. The problem with having so many options in a key environmental assessment document may be obvious: without knowing what the plan is, the potential impacts of the plan cannot be studied accurately.

Above all, though, perhaps the most important changeable factor: the financing of the project. This is a challenge that has its roots in the days of Eloise Westbrook, a time when the financing of redevelopment projects began to dramatically shift. Where urban renewal began as a program seeded with public dollars, federal and state-level commitments to urban growth took a sharp turn under Presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Oversight for urban renewal was deregulated and largely privatized, bit by bit.<sup>85</sup>

In California the 1978 passage of Proposition 13 further delimited the scale of public participation in development by both shrinking public budgets and limiting the kinds of property taxation schemes that local governments could use. Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) emerged as a route for localities to shape their own urban projects. In San Francisco local advocates angled for increased community control of the Redevelopment Agency.

These advocates had witnessed and participated in the fights against Redevelopment in the 1970s; they saw the agency as both an enemy, and as their only hope. And they saw TIF as one of very few possibilities for increasing local control over the financing of development projects.

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<sup>82</sup> There was significant debate after this authorization about the impact of the switch, from affordable rental housing to units for sale. It seemed clear that the general shift was away from helping the most needy in the community, in the service of maintaining Lennar's 25 percent profit margin. Even supporters of the decision acknowledged that this was the case, although they also insisted that it was the best possible outcome, given the realities of the housing markets. Challengers claimed that this was a cop out; this dispute framed the proposition debate that followed. Years later, none of the housing had been built. The memo approving the switch is here: Marcia Rosen, *Authorizing (1) A Second Amendment to the Disposition and Development agreement-Hunters Point Shipyard Phase I Between the Redevelopment Agency of the City and County of San Francisco and Lennar-BVHP LLC, (2) Compilation of All Approves Amended Provisions in an Amended and Restated Disposition and Development Agreement- Hunters Point Shipyard Phase I, and (3) Adopting Environmental Findings Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act; Hunters Point Shipyard Redevelopment Project Area*, vol. 450-05106-002, 2006.

<sup>83</sup> Cohen, "Memo to the Planning Commission Re: Hunters Point Shipyard Phase 2-Candlestick Point Integrated Development Project."

<sup>84</sup> San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and San Francisco Planning Department, *Draft Environmental Impact Report: Candlestick Point-Hunters Point Shipyard Phase II*.

<sup>85</sup> Fainstein et al., *Restructuring the City*.



In the next section I step out of our narrative on Southeast San Francisco to look at that Redevelopment Agency reform effort, and to consider why Southeast residents have not known much about it, even though the reforms ostensibly helped cement what I think of as the Westbrook-legacy of community benefits.

## Calvin Welch's Dream

In the annals of bureaucratic reform, San Francisco may hold a special position. Filled with believers in government and in the possibilities for social change that lie therein, the city is stacked with an outsized population of political reformers who can recite, in great detail, the internal workings of a given agency or commission that was created or reformed, often in an effort to make the city more humane.

Calvin Welch is one of these people; he could write his own book full of reform stories, good and bad. Welch has been a cornerstone, working behind the scenes crafting bonds for affordable housing, advising whatever mayors and city supervisors that would listen, helping design campaigns for political office that foreground housing and economic justice. One of the agencies with which he has worked closely is Redevelopment, and he has a story about the Agency that very few people know. Though he is focused on economic and social justice more broadly, housing has arguably been the central conceptual and material challenge of Welch's activist reign. The reason is simple, though not simplistic. As he explains it: "Who lives here votes here."<sup>86</sup>

It's an axiom that, arguably, the city's elites have long understood. Particularly in the eras of district-based local elections, the residential makeup of the city has been a central political battleground. In San Francisco, there's a unique calculus to this: the east side of the city has more renters than the west, which is packed with homeowners. The voting patterns, on social and economic issues, trend clearly: the homeowners vote to the right of renters, relatively consistently. And in San Francisco, the "right" end of the political spectrum leans toward urban development patterns that prioritize profits and developers' interests.<sup>87</sup>

So the calculus works this way: if you can transform a renter-heavy San Francisco neighborhood, for example, into a place that's laden with homeowners, you can potentially transform the political atmosphere such that development-friendly supervisors can be elected. This then accelerates the possibilities for further transformations in land use that value profit over grassroots community concerns. It is a political approach to land-use planning that enables the "growth machine" to persist.<sup>88</sup>



Chester Hartman introduces the notion of elite dominance of urban planning in San Francisco in his seminal book *City for Sale* by telling a story about a developer with a 1940s dream. In the wake of the drama inflicted on the geographies of the city through the

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<sup>86</sup> Welch, interview; Welch, "The Fight to Stay: The Creation of the Community Housing Movement in San Francisco, 1968-1978."

<sup>87</sup> Richard E. DeLeon and Sandra S. Powell, "Growth Control and Electoral Politics: The Triumph of Urban Populism in San Francisco," *The Western Political Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (June 1, 1989): 307-331; DeLeon, *Left Coast City: Progressive Politics in San Francisco, 1975-1991*.

<sup>88</sup> Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: the Political Economy of Place*; Stone, *Regime Politics*.

disinvestment of the Great Depression and the overwhelming in-migration of World War II, San Francisco's capitalists were reimagining San Francisco. They were concerned about some of the San Franciscans that I focus on in this dissertation, many of whom were still arriving from the US South. But while black working-class San Franciscans were dreaming, from their overcrowded quarters of making the city their own, real estate developers like Ben Swig were plotting ways to disperse the city's working class from prime real estate.<sup>89</sup>

In 1949, when she first landed in San Francisco, Elouise Westbrook lived in a crowded South of Market (SOMA) apartment. As the city's oldest industrial district, it had long been home to the working class and to new immigrants (often one and the same). Though it never became a largely black district, parts of SOMA were slated for major changes. As a working-class residential and industrial zone, SOMA sat uncomfortably close to the city's downtown and high-end hotel districts. The city's hotel and real estate developers saw the communities of SOMA as obstacles threatening the future of the city.

Ben Swig had been a real estate developer in Boston before his own recent arrival, and as a member of the development class, Swig felt entitled to promote his vision for San Francisco. Swig's dream was not about extending working class jobs and decent housing to African Americans in SOMA or the Fillmore. Instead, Ben Swig's dream was centered on remaking San Francisco's image as the golden center of the West Coast. Like the urban boosters of the early 1900s who worked to lure development capital and tourist dollars to the city through events like the Panama-Pacific Expo, Swig envisioned remaking districts like SOMA – which had begun life as the city's first industrial/warehouse district and had historically housed single working men in residential hotels – into a tourist hotel and conference district worthy of a more globally-focused urban metropolis.

Swig presented his plans to city officials, who took the ideas to Washington, seeking development funds. Although the federal urban renewal agency rejected his initial plan, eventually Swig's vision became a cornerstone of the Redevelopment Agency's strategy for remaking the neighborhood into the museum, conference and hotel district that it is today (Yerba Buena and Moscone). As Hartman documents in his book, the fight against the SOMA program, which carried through the 1970s and 80s, ultimately became an important rallying point for the city's growing affordable housing movement. Like the Fillmore demolition program, the redevelopment prescription for "urban blight" in SOMA eliminated housing for thousands of working class people, but in the process it became the foundation for education of a generation of advocates on the ins and outs of city planning.<sup>90</sup>

Redevelopment and its displacements were central galvanizing points for the affordable housing movement, and organizers insisted on placing those changes within the context of the economic transformation of the city at large. This was exemplified in the disappearance of industrial jobs associated with the Port of San Francisco. This happened as both new modernization arrangements reduced the workforce, and as port jobs moved across the bay to Oakland. Meanwhile, the strategy for urban growth counted on a new boom in office space downtown – "the explosion of commercial office buildings as the driving force of the City's economy" was a centerpiece of the larger effort to "transform San Francisco into the corporate headquarters of the Pacific Rim."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*.

<sup>90</sup> Welch, "The Fight to Stay: The Creation of the Community Housing Movement in San Francisco, 1968-1978."

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

Some in that movement saw the potential for harnessing the institutional power of the Redevelopment Agency. The agency had slithered to a near halt in the 1980s, slowed by the confluence of declining federal support, continued attacks by activists and a lack of focus on by then-mayor Dianne Feinstein.<sup>92</sup>

Welch and others worked to transform the agency from the inside; it is a struggle that he calls “the fight to stay” and though there is no explicit connection to the Right to the City Movement, the messages of the two efforts are resonant with each other.<sup>93</sup> It was a time in which many of the activists of the 70s were finding their way into the halls of official power in San Francisco.<sup>94</sup> Under Mayor Agnos, these advocates convinced the ailing Redevelopment Agency to prioritize affordable housing and community input. The agency devised a new mission that, although it had to retain state and federal requirements to use the blight metric, emphasized affordability as its primary goal.<sup>95</sup> With the stroke of a pen, this could have been the moment that largely removed the sting from the words urban renewal. The Agency was on record promising:

...to use over 50% of the total tax increment funds allocated for Agency activities by the Mayor and Board of Supervisors for low and moderate income housing. ... [and] that neighborhood citizen organizations be consulted and advise the Agency on all proposed housing undertakings in their area.<sup>96</sup>

When Welch told me about this policy shift twenty years later, however, it came as a surprise. It was not something that advocates in the Southeast had mentioned or even seemed aware of. Instead – even after the Redevelopment Agency had signed off on agreements eliminating eminent domain as an option on Bayview housing – many of them spoke with fear about the possibility that the city might be coming for their homes. One of the original posters announcing opposition to the shipyard proposals includes a massive red bulldozer, destroying everything in its wake.

How could this be, when Lennar’s plan carefully avoids the terminology of Westbrook-era urban renewal. Lennar is not a social service agency; it is a private developer, seeking profit – it has demanded the right to retain 25 percent profit, no matter the community’s needs. Though Lennar’s efforts are managed by the Redevelopment Agency, it is not, in the end, accountable to voters, and it has embedded itself so deeply into the development infrastructure in San Francisco that it’s hard to tell who leads the public-private partnership between Lennar Urban and the city. Long before the “community benefits” plan in the Lennar deal was inked in, the developer had rattled community goodwill by backing off on early promises for affordable housing and non-toxic development.

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<sup>92</sup> Feinstein had taken the mayor’s seat in the wake of George Moscone’s 1978 murder (killed, along with city Supervisor Harvey Milk, by dethroned Supervisor Dan White).

<sup>93</sup> Welch, “The Fight to Stay: The Creation of the Community Housing Movement in San Francisco, 1968-1978.”

<sup>94</sup> For example (this is an incomplete list, meant only to be suggestive of this pattern): Tom Ammiano (Board of Education, then Board of Supervisors & State Assembly), Harry Britt (Board of Supervisors), Sue Bierman (Planning Commission, coming out of the freeway fights in the Haight-Ashbury District).

<sup>95</sup> San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, *Mission Statement: Housing and Economic Development Policies* (Redevelopment Agency of the City and County of San Francisco, May 1989).

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, Housing Policy (1) & (3).

## Opposition Politics

Between 2008 and 2010, when I was doing fieldwork in the community, Lennar's deadbeat development pattern was Topic A at SLAM's weekly "Town Hall" meetings. Railing against the city's lost promises, and Lennar's failings in its development projects across the country, the SLAM leadership offered weekly lessons in urban development politics.<sup>97</sup>

In the summer of 2010 SLAM was also focused on the race to replace Supervisor Sophie Maxwell, who was vacating her 10-year seat on the Board of Supervisors. Maxwell had begun her first term in City Hall determined to lay the groundwork for the Lennar program. Ten years later the race to replace her was wide open, and was competitive until the bitter end. In July 2010 candidate Nyese Joshua spoke before a small Town-Hall crowd, which had gathered to discuss progress with raising awareness about how Lennar's early construction had stirred up asbestos dust near the Nation of Islam school at the top of the hill.<sup>98</sup> Joshua said she was running for office to represent the community without fear and without being beholden to the moneyed interests she believed were taking over the community.

Describing a recent hearing on the Lennar redevelopment plan, Joshua began her comments about the contemporary fight over affordable housing (which she referred to simply as "housing") by invoking the Fillmore Ghost: "There's no housing in here, it's gonna decimate the community, the way it was in the Fillmore."

Muhammad, Joshua, and others regularly spoke about Lennar as a "rogue corporation." The term is strong – it has emotional appeal. And it recalls the years of complaints against Lennar that have been logged in California and beyond, including channeling cash out of public pension funds for its own profit.<sup>99</sup>

But focusing on the problems with Lennar deflects from a very important aspect of the problem. The long-term challenge in the Southeast comes from the intersection of the nation's top real estate market (when the rest of the country crashed, San Francisco's crash was limited) with the race-class politics of the past, which concentrated poverty amid a community of color in an isolated part of town. Lennar is a part of that story, but as a huge housing developer, it acts as part of a system that is reliant on profits, first.<sup>100</sup>

In the late 1990s when Lennar was pulled in, the the mayor and supervisors were habitually divvying up tax-increment funds among city services in need, leaving Redevelopment foundering on a financial plan that counted on those same funds for its operating budget.<sup>101</sup> Initially developed in 1952 as "tax allocation," Tax Increment Financing (TIF) became a work-around, used to finance projects under the property-tax regime of Prop 13. TIF empowers an entity (in this case, the Redevelopment Agency, on behalf of the City

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<sup>97</sup> Again: SLAM is the Stop Lennar Action Movement

<sup>98</sup> Phelan, "After the Deadly Dust."

<sup>99</sup> Victoria Schlesinger, "Bay Area Development Giant Lennar Accused of Fraud," *SF Public Press*, August 5, 2010.

<sup>100</sup> Future research will include more detail about other actors. This will include Nancy Pelosi and Dianne Feinstein on the national level, and, locally: Charlie Walker, Willie and Mary Ratcliff, and other longtime residents of the Southeast who have played important roles in shaping the politics of development

<sup>101</sup> Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*, 280.

and County of San Francisco) to borrow investment capital, using expected future tax revenues on a defined area of the city as collateral.<sup>102</sup> In order for TIF to work, the project must move forward in a timely way, and must generate an increase in property values in the surrounding area in order to pay back the loan. TIF is meant to stimulate development in troubled areas where developers are shy about investing.

The raising of land values, one of the central goals of redevelopment from the start, is contradictorily, both beneficial for existing residents, and poses a challenge to them. For middle class families who have stayed and who have managed to keep from re-mortgaging their homes, the rise in value may be beneficial. For those already living on the edge of poverty, or who are not homeowners (in the Southeast, at least half the community), the rise in land values fuels anxieties that have been propelled forward by the sudden spike in foreclosures in the community in 2008-11, when nearly 1,500 homes went into foreclosure.<sup>103</sup>

Foreclosures had been rare in San Francisco through the early stages of the national mortgage crisis. Now, as they faced the new landscape of evictions, initiating a new forced migration out of the city, black Bayview-Hunter's Point residents tried to help each other remember the past. Although Lennar and the redevelopment program were not directly linked to the pattern of foreclosures, the two were expressed as united. This dialogue among neighbors comes from an article in the *San Francisco Weekly*, published in May 2012. The reporter noted that residents saw foreclosures as a new kind of bulldozer:

'Like they did to Fillmore,' says James Pace, whose sister used to live across the street from Cato before she was foreclosed on. He leans against the house as he chats with Brown.

'You look at it now, where'd all the people go?' asks Brown.

'Went down to Pittsburg, went down to Antioch,' replies Pace.

'It's all about money,' deadpans Brown. 'They're trying to get us out of here so they can develop.'<sup>104</sup>

The dialogue continued, with residents expressing a strong feeling of betrayal and a belief that the various factors pushing their families away from the city are a part of a coordinated effort. There is very little belief in the possibility of government intervention to help:

'It's like they just plotted on us, just preyed on us,' says Cato, his voice rising and brow tightening into a scowl. 'They been tryna get this hill for the longest. All this new redevelopment — the palm trees, the light rail, Candlestick going down, the condos, the fancy restaurant — we know what they're doing. That ain't for us.'<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Jack R. Huddleston, "Tax Increment Financing as a State Development Policy," *Growth and Change* 15, no. 2 (1984): 11-17.

<sup>103</sup> Aequitas Compliance Solutions, Inc., *Foreclosure in California: A Crisis of Compliance*, February 2012.

<sup>104</sup> Albert Samaha, "The Dispossessed: Bayview Homeowners Fight Foreclosures." *SF Weekly*, May 2, 2012.

<sup>105</sup> Samaha, "The Dispossessed: Bayview Homeowners Fight Foreclosures."

Noting that Bayview families fear what they think of as a Fillmore-style “whitewash,” the reporter alluded to the race-class shifts in the community that have framed both emotional and political responses to the advent of foreclosures.

In 1980, Bayview was 65 percent black, and nearly two-thirds of that demographic owned a home. By 2010, the neighborhood was 34 percent black, and less than a third of them owned a home. The foreclosure crisis, many residents believe, is enabling the final thrust that pushes black people out of San Francisco. ... This time, though, it's not city leaders and developers forcing them out. It's the free market.<sup>106</sup>

The tone of the article appeared to be a set-up, an attempt to make black Bayview residents look ignorant for conflating redevelopment with the weakly-regulated market forces that were driving them out of their homes.

I want to argue that the conflation is misguided, but understandable. The ghosts of the Fillmore and the legacies of industrial urbanism created a culture in which stories like that of Eloise Westbrook – stories that speak to the possibility for positive government intervention – are regarded as legends, rather than possibilities.

## Conclusion

It is just as important to consider how geographical differences are being produced in the here and now as it is to dwell upon the historical-geographical raw materials handed down from previous rounds of activity. Speculators (with international financial backing) seeking to maximize gains from increases in land rent, for example, are now radically re-shaping metropolitan environments in Shanghai and Moscow as well as in London and New York.

– David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*<sup>107</sup>

The Redevelopment-Lennar project may bring millions in investment and community benefits to the Southeast, a place that is starved for cash – and yet the project is a part of a process that is pushing people out of the Southeast. Ultimately, this is the contradiction that weighs heavily on the outcome of the redevelopment conundrum in Southeast San Francisco. This challenge takes us back to the problem I posed in Chapter 1: How can cities grow, without pushing out vulnerable populations? How do we create socially-just urban development? Has San Francisco, the purported bastion of progressive politics, found a way to do it?

The ghosts of the past lurk behind the debates about the toxicity of the naval shipyard and the quality of the financial instruments that will re-valorize the shipyard and surrounding property. The ghosts of the Fillmore have shaped conversations around the planning process, making it difficult for people to see that the Redevelopment Agency reforms could be harnessed in their favor. The ghost of industrial pollution sickens people, making it ever-harder to develop a coherent community response to development.

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<sup>106</sup> Samaha, “The Dispossessed: Bayview Homeowners Fight Foreclosures.”

<sup>107</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, California Studies in Critical Human Geography 7 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 78.

Westbrook's ghost has faded to become a story that is held up by old-timers who believed in 1960s-style politics; but many of them have left the community, or no longer have a platform. The polarization that has emerged among advocates both speaks to the difficulty of the process and the ineffectiveness of city leaders in helping the Southeast use government, rather than be bulldozed by political maneuvers.

There are other ghosts that I have not mentioned here. I wrote earlier about the Epps films and his focus on violence. This is arguably one of the most important elements of life in the Southeast, and deserves its own study. Amid the violence – the fear of violence, the day-to-day experience of police and gang tensions, and the shock of dealing with the death of young people – residents of the Southeast have tried to manage their own destiny.<sup>108</sup>

What they are dealing with is no longer a local project, however, and this limits residents power to control the fate of the Lennar program. Like all American cities, San Francisco is nested in a financial system that now relies heavily on global financial markets.<sup>109</sup> One pundit intimated that Lennar never intends to build much of anything in the Southeast – that instead the corporation is using the project as part of a financial shell game.<sup>110</sup> I am not suggesting that this is happening, but the presence of such rumors is indicative of the instability of the markets that advocates are hoping to reign in for the purpose of developing affordable housing.

More concretely, there is news about yet another shift in governance and financing that will introduce new race-class dynamics to the project. In 2011-12 the state of California moved to eliminate redevelopment agencies, with an attack on TIF and on corruption in the disbursement of TIF funds.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, San Francisco had quietly begun to seek other avenues for development dollars.

Two possibilities on the table in mid-2012 would bring Chinese development capital to the table in both the Southeast and Treasure Island, two Lennar-managed redevelopment projects. One plan involves channeling investments as an exchange for visas. Through the EB-5 federal visa program, Chinese citizens who can produce \$500,000 to invest in a blighted zone are fast-tracked through the process of obtaining a green card. Willie Brown has again been at the center of this proposal, as part of a team winning the right to create a “regional center” to directly link the Lennar projects to potential investors. “Regional centers can aggregate EB-5 investment from many investors, handle paperwork and immigration questions, and apportion jobs created to ensure as many as possible receive permanent U.S. residency rights.”<sup>112</sup>

Representing a dramatic new turn for growth-machine politics in the Bay Area, a second strategy was also still unfolding in the summer of 2012. After negotiations with city officials

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<sup>108</sup> The main organization working on violence in the Southeast is the Community Leadership Academy and Emergency Response Project, or CLEAR, run by Sharen Hewitt.

<sup>109</sup> Hackworth, “Local Autonomy, Bond-rating Agencies and Neoliberal Urbanism in the United States.”

<sup>110</sup> I won't argue here that this is true, but the idea that Lennar could back away, citing shifts in financial markets, is intriguing, especially now that the Redevelopment Agency has been dissolved. The pundit in question has financial interests in Bayview real estate that pose a challenge to his objectivity, but it's still an important point. See Shaw, Randy. “Decline of Mills Corp. Offers Lessons for San Francisco.” *BeyondChron*, February 12, 2007.

<sup>111</sup> Josh Stephens and William Fulton, “A Quickie Divorce: Local Government and Redevelopment Agencies in California,” *Planning & Environmental Law* 64, no. 6 (2012): 9–10.

<sup>112</sup> Ron Leuty, “Chinese Pay to Play Visa Game.” *San Francisco Business Times*, March 16, 2012.

and Lennar, the Chinese Development Bank was considering pouring \$1.7 billion into Lennar's two San Francisco redevelopment projects.<sup>113</sup> The effect of such a plan on local needs remains an open question. How will bringing in foreign investment capitalists change the playbook for advocates trying to regulate and shape the San Francisco development governance structure? Will the concerns of local residents to clean the shipyard, to prioritize local jobs and community benefits remain at the fore?



In closing I want to come back to a few key points. In this chapter I've talked about the structures of political abandonment that stranded black San Franciscans in a toxic community, with a destiny contained by the industrial and political histories described throughout this dissertation. Those same structures pitted African American and Asian-Americans against each other, in both the Fillmore and the Southeast. The triangulation of space and race thus became interwoven processes.<sup>114</sup> This exacerbated a pattern of what Gilmore calls "organized abandonment," the neglect of communities of color by the mainstream that I have described here, which left those communities gasping for capital.<sup>115</sup> In desperation, Southeast residents were divided as to how or whether to accept top-down urban planning. Race was used as a lever that divided communities that needed to find unity in order to build the power to control state-led development.

Although the city threw money at the problems of poverty and violence plaguing the Southeast of the 1980s – in the form of contracts with non-profits – the 1990s only saw improvements in fits and starts. Race-class defined political dynamics consistently undermined the work of these agencies. The work of activists and non-profit managers to assuage the pains of poverty, unemployment, and educational failure were not the bulwarks they hoped to be. The flight of African Americans and their jobs continued.

There were other race-class complications. After the first wave of demolitions in the Fillmore tarnished its image, the Redevelopment Agency began to hire African Americans and Asian-Americans. While these jobs were certainly appreciated by the families that they supported, one effect of this dynamic – given the continued difficulties of displacement – was to pit communities of color against each other, and to turn the apparently impersonal bureaucratic processes of the Redevelopment Agency into intra-community processes. So while the leadership was not from the affected communities, many of the enforcers of the worst of urban renewal lived in the same places that were affected by it.<sup>116</sup>

And the foundations of development, the economic structures of urban land markets continued to shift. In an era of government retrenchment, the city fundamentally relied on the rising value of land markets as its central tool of social transformation. This left the

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<sup>113</sup> Bruce Katz and Robert Puentes, "The Future of U.S. Redevelopment Financing: China?," *The Atlantic: Cities*, July 18, 2012; Dinny McMahon and Robbie Whelan, "China in Talks With U.S. Home Builder," *Wall Street Journal*, June 25, 2012, sec. Commercial Real Estate.

<sup>114</sup> Lai, "The Racial Triangulation of Space."

<sup>115</sup> "Organized abandonment" comes from Gilmore, in her writing about the political economy of prisons in California. See: Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*.

<sup>116</sup> Informant#11, former Redevelopment worker, Interview by Author.; Welch, interview.



Southeast vulnerable to appeals from corporations like Lennar that are fundamentally profit-motivated. Politicians like Maxwell and Brown enabled that relationship. Yet within that process of enabling, contradictorily, lies some of the hope for a shifting consciousness around the role of government. With political leverage comes the possibility for shaping development projects. It is the embeddedness of politics and contracts that disables public input – but that embeddedness is not inevitable.

Redevelopment has become a stand in for all that ails the black community, yet the undertow pulling black San Franciscans and others from San Francisco was not centrally a problem created by the Redevelopment Agency. Even if the economic situation in the community had not worsened, and even if the levels of violence and disease had not worsened, the lack of improvements over time produced a sense of rift from the general polity. The “structure of feeling” in the community was one of distance from central institutions and power.<sup>117</sup>

Thus far, the Redevelopment Agency has played twin roles. It has acted as both an arm of the developers (clearing way for projects and promoting them) and an arm of political intervention to manipulate markets (dictating type/location of growth). In the wake of the first dot-com boom and its pressures on real estate markets in the Bay Area, advocates thus saw the agency as one of the few venues for re-inserting public control into development.

The tug by markets away from this control, however, is indeed powerful. As the move towards the Chinese Development Bank shows, the financing of urban reconstruction is shifting in ways that create new paradigms for both displacement and for citizen involvement.

These shifts are also likely to exacerbate the race-class dynamics of urban politics. For example, under one scenario, the EB-5 visa program could bring in a wave of Chinese immigrant investors to live in housing built on shipyard property. Current African American residents of the community might resent that the new housing has gone to people that they see as outsiders. Meanwhile if the property is not cleaned to the standards that Greenaction and POWER and others are calling for, then those new Southeast residents could be living on toxic soils, a prospect that is ever more concerning in an earthquake liquefaction zone.

I offer this scenario not as a doomsday prediction, but as a warning to consider the history laid out in this study thus far. San Franciscans can shift the development dynamics in the Southeast towards social justice. To do so would be to begin to remedy a century of injustice in urban planning and development choices.

Governance in San Francisco reveals a continuing tension between proponents of neoliberal and Keynesian/ New Deal urban economics. While there is no question that we see the imprint of neoliberalism in the San Francisco landscape, “big” government proponents are also deeply embedded in the bureaucracy and are active in the political sphere. San Francisco continues to contain the possibility of public control that might make development programs serve the community, rather than displace it. The lesson of the Big Five and the Fillmore is that the public needs to claim that power forcefully and continuously, in order to keep it.

The history of the Southeast offers us a study in unjust development. But it also offers us a narrative of possibility. San Franciscans could choose to take on the responsibility of managing and regulating corporations like Lennar, rather than leaving the fate of the most

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<sup>117</sup> “Structure of feeling” comes from the theoretical work of Raymond Williams: Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), 133.

vulnerable communities in places like Southeast San Francisco to corporate decision-making.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> The argument of Chapter 6 is that the controls exercised on Lennar thus far are not reliable and could have gone farther to truly protect the community. At the same time, controls on housing markets outside of Redevelopment's sphere in the Southeast are necessary too, given the impact of private-market foreclosures on residents.

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## **Appendix: Notes on Method and List of Informants**

### **On Method**

This is a mixed-method dissertation, founded in political-economic analysis. I drew upon the methods and idioms of historiography, conducted formal and informal key-participant interviews (including life histories in some cases, and multiple interviews in other cases), and carried out an in-depth study of several archival collections.

I drew from archives that included troves of documents including photographs, ephemera, news clippings, memos, and letters. Many of the items I found are not cited in this dissertation but discovering them was essential in sorting out the historical importance of my data. Many of those items are on file, in animation of further development of this research. In addition to the personal collections of several private individuals, I benefitted tremendously from the collections assembled in the Bancroft Library, the San Francisco Public Library History Room, the California Historical Society, and the Bayview/ Anna E. Waden Public Library.

### **List of Informants**

A portion of this project relied on a set of interviews that were essential for my understanding of this history. In both structured and semi-structured interviews, dozens of people offered me their insights and perspectives for this project. I sincerely appreciate their time and effort. All of these conversations shaped my understanding of the histories told here, whether or not they are cited directly in the text. Names released here are done so in accordance with the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects guidelines that were approved for this project.

This list includes only those who agreed to extended formal interviews. I benefitted from dozens of short informal conversations with others as well.

#### **1. Named Informants (in alphabetical order)**

Kofi Bonner  
Saul Bloom  
London Breed  
Rev. Amos Brown  
Terry Collins  
Francee Covington  
JC Criswell  
Julian Davis  
Francisco Da Costa  
John Elberling  
Arnold Ellis

Alicia Garza  
Loretta Goodin  
Marie Harrison  
Sharen Hewitt  
Oscar James  
Espanola Jackson  
Betty Jones  
Tony Kelly  
Willie Kennedy  
Alex Lantsberg  
Fred Martin  
Sophie Maxwell  
Russell Morine  
Jim Morales  
Brenda Parrish  
William Palmer  
Sarah Phelan  
Mary Ratcliff  
Willie Ratcliff  
Marcia Rosen  
Arnold Townsend  
Doris Vincent  
Essie Webb  
Elouise Westbrook  
Calvin Welch  
Wade “Speedy” Woods

## **2. Anonymous informants**

**A:** Some informants were willing to be quoted, but not named. They are cited in the text as follows:

Informant#1, Bayview worker, interview by Author.  
Informant#2, Fillmore resident, interview by Author  
Informant#3, Fillmore resident, interview by Author.  
Informant#4, Southeast resident, Interview by Author.  
Informant#5, Longtime Southeast resident, Interview by Author.  
Informant#6, Fillmore resident, Interview by Author  
Informant#7, Fillmore resident, Interview by Author  
Informant#8, Southeast resident, Interview by Author.  
Informant#9, Southeast resident, Interview by Author.  
Informant#10, Resident of the Southeast, Interview by Author.  
Informant#11, former Redevelopment worker, Interview by Author

**B:** Some of the consultants, developers, residents, and officials I spoke with asked for complete anonymity. In accordance with the OPHS guidelines for this project, I am not sharing information about these subjects and their affiliations to respect their request for

confidentiality. I sincerely appreciate their time and insights, all of which contributed to this project.