

Head for the Hills: Race and Property Value in Oakland

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UCSB History Honors Thesis, Spring 2018
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Although the San Francisco Bay Area is well known for its liberal identity, it is less well known for its role in upholding racial segregation. Beginning with Oakland's development as a city in the early 1910s, this thesis explains how business leaders in local government, white residents, and the federal government marginalized black residents and simultaneously displaced them from the West. Oakland neighborhoods to which black residents were segregated. This combination of circumstances created a "black belt" in Oakland, which was a result of a series of events that began in 1910 with urban renewal. Although Oakland attempted to solve this problem in 1959 with urban renewal, it addressed neither segregation nor displacement, leading to its failure as a policy solution. This narrative is important to understand continuing housing segregation in Oakland and the United States today. Lillian L. Jackson, who lived on her street "before white flight," lived in the neighborhood attending Cole Elementary School, she would go home after school, do her homework, and go back to the school's playground.¹ Under the supervision of the Playground Director Ma LaRue, kids could do their homework and play games: boys played basketball, and Ernestine herself, Ernestine played baseball.² These are some of her favorite memories growing up in West Oakland.

West Oakland, located in the flatlands along the San Francisco Bay, was one of the city's first neighborhoods to be developed. Looking at photographs around 1900, Sociologist Dr. Floyd Hunter states in his 1950 report on housing discrimination in Oakland that it was a beautiful, middle-class residential area.

Tree-lined streets leading to the Berkeley Hills and to beauty spots along the eastern shores of San Francisco Bay. Two- and three-story Victorian houses east of Peralta

¹ Ernestine Nettles, interview with Ernestine Nettles, February 24, 2018.

² Nettles.

³ Nettles.

⁴ Nettles.

⁵ Nettles.

⁶ Nettles.

⁷ Nettles.

Abstract

Although the San Francisco Bay Area is well known for its liberal identity, it is less well known for its role in upholding racial segregation. Beginning with Oakland's development as a city in the early 1910s, this thesis explains how business leaders in local government, white residents, and the federal government marginalized black residents and simultaneously disinvested from the West Oakland neighborhoods to which black residents were segregated. This conflation of circumstances created blight by 1949. Although Oakland attempted to solve this problem in 1959 with urban renewal, it addressed neither segregation nor disinvestment, leading to its failure as a policy solution. This narrative is imperative to understand continuing housing segregation in Oakland and the United States today.

Introduction: The Story of Oakland

Ernestine Nettles's story is the story of Oakland and its long history of black marginalization and housing segregation. At the same time, Ernestine's story is highly personal. It is not a story defined by her hardships, but by her life in what was once a vibrant community in black West Oakland. Ernestine Nettles's parents came to Oakland in 1944 when her father was discharged from the military at the Oakland Army Base, or "Camp Night," where black GIs returning from Europe were sent.¹ She was born at 1009 Wood Street in what is now known as the Lower Bottoms neighborhood in West Oakland, then moved with her parents as a kid to Union Street in the Oak Center neighborhood in 1955.² Speaking in our interview, Ms. Nettles said "my world was very diverse at that point."³ White people, a mixed-race couple, Portuguese, Spanish, and black people all lived on her street "before white flight."⁴ Like most other kids in the neighborhood attending Cole Elementary School, she would go home after school, do her homework or chores, and go back to the school's playground.⁵ Under the supervision of the Playground Director Ms. LaRue, kids could do their homework and play games: boys played basketball, and a tomboy herself, Ernestine played baseball.⁶ These are some of her favorite memories growing up in West Oakland.⁷

West Oakland, located in the flatlands along the San Francisco Bay, was one of the city's first neighborhoods to be developed. Looking at photographs around 1900, Sociologist Dr. Floyd Hunter states in his 1960 report on housing discrimination in Oakland that it was a beautiful, middle-class residential area:

Tree-lined streets leading to the Berkeley Hills and to beauty spots along the eastern shores of San Francisco Bay. Two- and three-storied Victorian houses east of Peralta

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⁷ Nettles.

and along Adeline Streets looked out at ferries crossing the Bay carrying cargoes and passengers to and from 'the City', San Francisco.⁸

The character of the area changed as Oakland's industry began developing in the 1910s and 1920s, leading to a large influx in the city's population.⁹ Oakland became home to "one of the nation's largest canning and packing industries" in addition to manufacturers of "chemical, electrical, wood, and paint products."¹⁰ After World War One, auto manufacturers and shipbuilding arrived and the city's industry took off.¹¹

Jobs created by this industrial development started to fill Oakland with people. In 1860 it was just a small town of 1,543 people, increasing steadily to 66,960 in 1900 and quadrupling in size to 284,063 by 1930.¹² In 1940, the city's population had grown to 302,163, whites making up 95.3 percent of the population, and blacks representing the largest nonwhite group at 8,462 people, or 2.8 percent of the population.¹³

According to historian Robert O. Self, Oakland's shipbuilding industry, established after World War One, would cement the city's importance during World War Two. It became a "major center of shipbuilding, troop transportation, food processing, and naval supply," which added "tens of millions of dollars annually to the economy" in Alameda County and Vallejo.¹⁴ Industrial war production and troop transportation during World War Two brought half a million people like Ernestine's parents to the Bay Area.¹⁵ During this period, Oakland's population jumped to 384,575 people.¹⁶ Notably, its black population saw the largest increase, growing by almost five times from 1940 to 1950, "joining a small, but well-established prewar African American community."¹⁷ A

⁸ Floyd Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California: A Study Prepared for the Oakland Mayor's Committee on Full Opportunity and the Council of Social Planning, Alameda County* (Berkeley, California: Floyd Hunter Co, 1964), 8-9.

⁹ Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 27.

¹⁰ Self, 27.

¹¹ Self, 27; Floyd Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 9.

¹² "City of Oakland -- 1860 to 1940 Census Data," accessed March 11, 2018, <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/cities/Oakland40.htm>.

¹³ "City of Oakland -- 1860 to 1940 Census Data."

¹⁴ Self, *American Babylon*, 27.

¹⁵ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles; Self, *American Babylon*, 27.

¹⁶ "City of Oakland -- 1950 to 1960 Census Data," accessed March 11, 2018, <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/cities/Oakland50.htm>.

¹⁷ Self, *American Babylon*. 51.; <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/cities/Oakland50.htm>.

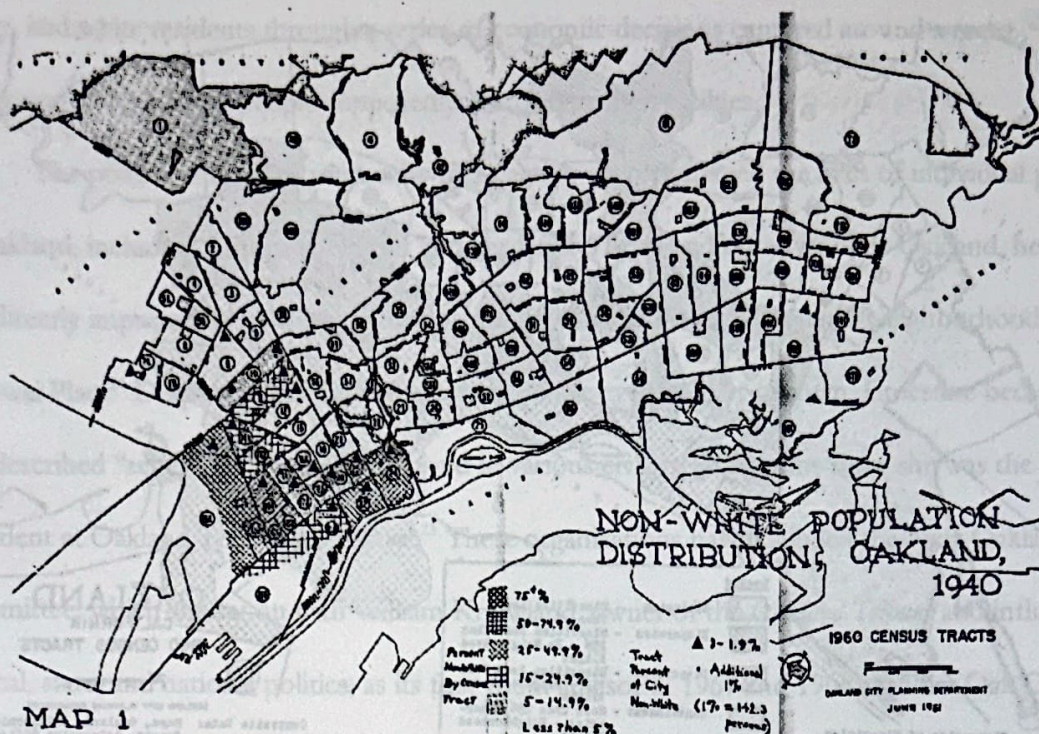


Figure 1. Oakland non-white distribution in 1940. R. Bryce Young, "Oakland's Changing Community Patterns: A Report on Changes in the Non-White Population, Changes in the Non-White Owner Occupancy, Comparisons Based Upon 1940, 1950 and 1960 Census Tract Data" (Oakland, California: Coro Foundation, 1961), unpaginated 7.

serious demographic shift was occurring. By 1950, whites and blacks accounted for 85.5 and 12.4 percent of the city's population respectively.

This change became more pronounced in 1960. For the first time since the census was taken, Oakland's total population and white population decreased. The city's population decreased by 17,027 people total, while the white population decreased by a staggering 58,274.¹⁸

Simultaneously, Oakland's black population almost doubled from 47,562 to 83,618, over six times larger than all other minority groups put together.¹⁹ In the span of just two decades, Oakland had changed dramatically, going from 95.3 percent white and 2.8 percent black in 1940 to 73.6 percent white and 22.8 percent black in 1960.²⁰

¹⁸ Self, *American Babylon*, 51; "City of Oakland -- 1950 to 1960 Census Data," accessed March 11, 2018, <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/cities/Oakland50.htm>.

¹⁹ "City of Oakland -- 1950 to 1960 Census Data."

²⁰ "City of Oakland -- 1950 to 1960 Census Data."

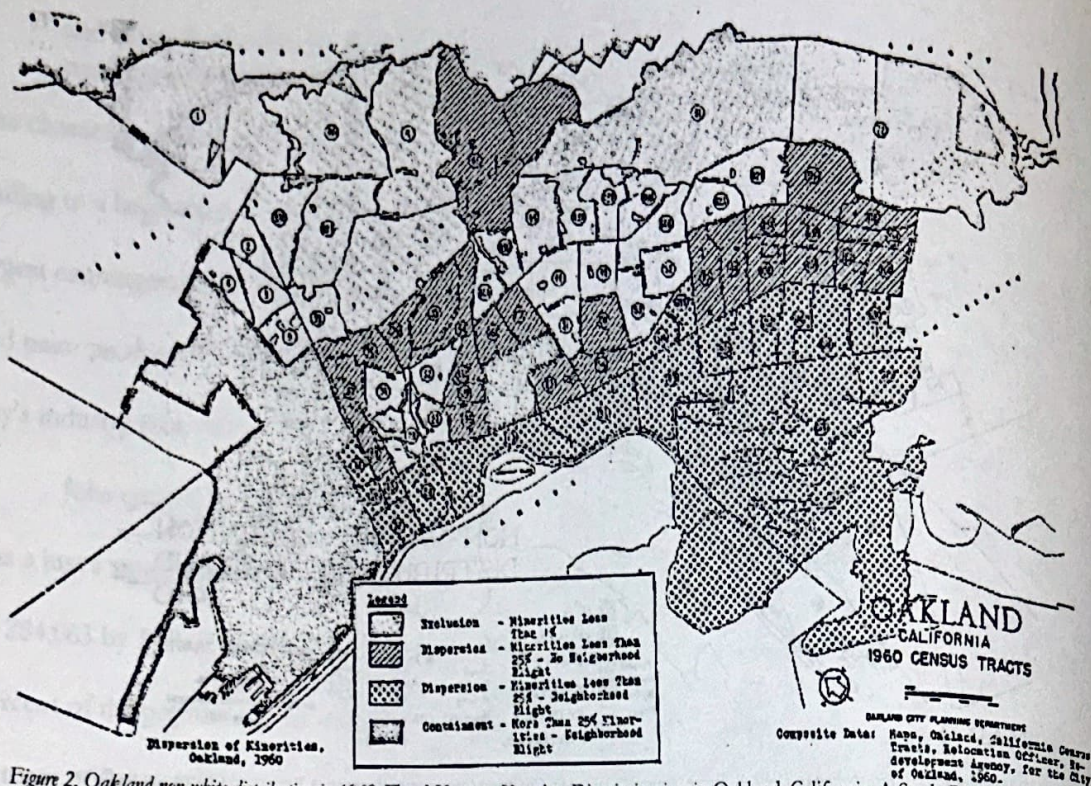


Figure 2. Oakland non-white distribution in 1960. Floyd Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California: A Study Prepared for the Oakland Mayor's Committee on Full Opportunity and the Council of Social Planning, Alameda County (Berkeley, California: Floyd Hunter Co, 1964)*, 23.

As these new migrants arrived in the developing city, they continued to settle in West Oakland, one of the city's older, more affordable neighborhoods.²¹ Beginning after World War One, West Oakland's early migrants moved-out to new homes being constructed between the Bay-flatlands and the hills.²² Like their white predecessors, as black migrants such as Ernestine's parents arrived in the city, they settled in West Oakland. But unlike the white migrants before them, black migrants could not leave as their incomes rose. In fact, according to Robert O. Self, 90 percent of Oakland's black population in 1950 was concentrated in just 22 percent of the housing tracts in the city.²³

Although it was a Northern city, Oakland was undeniably segregated. This segregation was created and maintained by the structure and organization of city government, federal government

²¹ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 9.

²² Hunter, 9; Self, *American Babylon*, 42.

²³ Self, 51.

policy, and white residents through a series of economic decisions centered around a racist perception of how black people supposedly changed property values.

The politics and policy written by these actors deeply affected the lives of individual people in Oakland, including Ernestine Nettles and her family. Born and raised in West Oakland, her family was directly impacted by housing discrimination and Oakland's 1959 General Neighborhood Renewal Plan.²⁴ Despite these circumstances, or maybe even in light of them, Ernestine became a self-described "rebel" and has been involved in various civic organizations since she was the Class President at Oakland Tech High School.²⁵ These organizations have included the New Oakland Committee, which she sat on with William Knowland, owner of the *Oakland Tribune* and influencer in local, state, and national politics, as its first youth advisor in 1967 and 1968, and the Oak Center Neighborhood Association, created in response to the 1959 General Neighborhood Renewal Plan.²⁶ The story of Oakland Ernestine Nettles gives us is shaped by the dynamics of decision-making in the city, and by powerful white business men such as the Knowlands and Fred Reed, involved in the city in the 1920s as an early promoter, residential developer, and leader in the local and national chamber of commerce and real estate associations.²⁷

Although the San Francisco Bay Area is well known for its liberal identity, it is less well known for its history of racial segregation. As Ernestine Nettles said in our interview, "Oakland in 1964 was highly racist, and highly segregated. It had a façade of racial and economic equality."²⁸ This paper seeks to explore the long history of how this segregation developed, and to understand how it was maintained in 1964 and has persisted today. Through an examination of local leaders' paper collections, national reports on housing segregation, and city reports covering topics from residential

²⁴ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles.

²⁵ Nettles.

²⁶ Nettles.; Self, *American Babylon*, 7.

²⁷ Marc A Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 118, 121.

²⁸ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles.

development and blight to community organizing in Oak Center, it becomes clear that black residents' interests were severely marginalized by local government, federal government, and private residents, and that racist economic arguments were central to justifying segregation and disinvestment in Oakland's black communities.

In the organization of this paper, I first investigate how business leaders came to dominate local government in Oakland and how they politically, socially, and physically marginalized black people with the help of white homeowners and the federal government. I then analyze how these institutional barriers first fostered the establishment of a segregated Oakland, and later the creation of blight. Next, I analyze the 1959 General Neighborhood Renewal Plan, Oakland's urban planning solution to blight, looking at how the problem of blight was identified, who spearheaded urban renewal, what their philosophies were, and what their policy looked like. Then, I show the fundamental importance of upholding segregation for white homeowners in California and Oakland. Finally, I examine residential life in West Oakland and illustrate how residents there tried to exert their interests in city politics in order to save their homes.

I argue that because local government and white homeowners defined "public interest," their racial politics shaped the development of segregation in Oakland. Having marginalized black residents through a variety of means, the city along with white residents and the federal government took active measures to promote high value white areas while disinvesting from segregated West Oakland. The city, representing white, business interests, isolated and ignored problems in West Oakland until housing conditions there hurt their scheme to foster economic development. When the city did try to address West Oakland's housing problems, it was to promote industrial and white, high-income residential use, at the expense of, and without consulting, the black residents who made their home there.

Ernestine Nettles helps us understand racial politics as they existed in Oakland in 1964, but these racial politics were not wholly unique, nor have they gone away. These barriers are still present and continue to impact fair housing. Analyzing the development and maintenance of housing segregation in Oakland in the first half of the twentieth century helps us understand how the old, invisible institutional barriers to fair housing continue to marginalize black residents *today* through gentrification.

Chapter One: Establishing "Public Interest" & Marginalization

Furthermore, it is our contention that there are two central organizations in every city – the City Government and the quasi-public body, the Chamber of Commerce. We know that city planning must ultimately be done by the City Planning Commission and the City Council. We have for years kept in contact, here in our Berkeley Chamber of Commerce, with these two official bodies, so far as our city planning interest and activities have been concerned. – Charles Keeler²⁹

Business interests held a privileged position in Oakland city politics. In fact, according to Charles Keeler, the General Manager of Berkeley's Chamber of Commerce quoted above, the chamber of commerce was one of the "central organizations in every city." He relates the chamber's importance in a letter to a man who would have understood this fact of city government all too well: Fred Reed, "one of Oakland's leading downtown realtors and a major residential subdivider," the head of California Real Estate Association's (CREA) City Planning and Zoning Committee, former CREA president, a National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB) Vice President, and organizer of the recent 1927 California Planning Conference in Oakland.³⁰ It was these people – business leaders and large developers – who defined the city's public interest. They could do this thanks to structural government and electoral reforms instituted during the Progressive Era that gave significant political advantages to conservative, business-led growth machine politics.

The growth machine was comprised of large businessmen and defined by their interests in continued local economic growth, achieved, for example, by controlling local land-use.³¹ They set the policy direction for the city with the goal to "please capital," not people.³² The growth machine sought to accomplish this with increased property values and lower taxes to attract business.³³ Their racial politics would also ensure that these reforms and policies would marginalize blacks politically,

²⁹ Charles Keeler, "Letter to Fred Reed," April 4, 1927, Fred Reed Papers, Folder 1, Oakland Public Library History Room, 1-2.

³⁰ Marc A Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 118, 121.

³¹ John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*, 20th ed. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2007), 42.

³² Logan and Molotch, 42.

³³ Logan and Molotch, 42.

FRED E. REED Stands for—

Good Government, Enforcement of Law, A Business-Like Administration, The Development of Oakland's Waterfront, Building Oakland into the Principal Seaport and City of the West.

LOWER TAXES

THIS MEANS INCREASING THE VALUE OF YOUR PROPERTY AND ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES BOTH FOR THE BUSINESS PEOPLE AND THE LABORING MAN.

—VOTE FOR—
FRED E. REED
FOR MAYOR

Figure 3. Fred Reed 1923 campaign flyer. "Fred Reed 1923 Campaign Flyer," 1923, Fred Reed Papers, Folder 7, Oakland Public Library History Room.

socially, and physically. Their vision of economic development in Oakland was predicated on increasing property values in white spaces, not black ones. Ironically, disinvestment in black space would ultimately create blight and lower property values in surrounding areas such as downtown, where members of the growth machine had their investments and office spaces. To understand these complex dynamics and how they shaped segregation, blight, and policy solutions, it is important to understand this growth machine structure and how they effectively marginalized black populations in Oakland.

Political Marginalization: Growth Machine Politics

In his campaign flyer, emblazoned with "LOWER TAXES" front and center, Fred Reed, candidate for mayor in 1923, clearly outlined his intentions for the direction of Oakland. He was running on a platform for "Good Government," with "A Business-Like Administration" and "Development of Oakland's Waterfront."³⁴ Reed claimed, in all capital letters, that his policies would increase "the value of your property and additional opportunities for the business people and laboring man."³⁵ Reed's good government would be efficient, operate like a business, and encourage investment that would elevate the value of property and lower taxes to attract more investment. According to growth machine theory, increasing property values had the effect of increasing total tax revenues.³⁶

³⁴ "Fred Reed 1923 Campaign Flyer," 1923, Fred Reed Papers, Folder 7, Oakland Public Library History Room.

³⁵ "Fred Reed 1923 Campaign Flyer."

³⁶ Citizens' Committee on Residential Development, "A Report on Residential Development in the City of Oakland" (Oakland, California: Citizens' Committee on Residential Development, 1942), 8; James Weinstein, "Organized Business and the City Commission and Manager Movements," *The Journal of Southern History* 28, no. 2 (1962): 166–82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2205186>, 180.

If services were conservative and not increased, this would allow cities to decrease tax rates.³⁷ The cities would essentially be returning unnecessary revenue to property owners, to either buy more or invest and stimulate further development, while simultaneously attracting more capital seeking cities with the lowest tax rates.³⁸ He claimed this form of economic development would benefit everyone. An economic-centric platform, Fred Reed's growth machine plans addressed the city's fiscal health and benefits to property owners. They were manufactured to serve the business communities first and foremost as opposed to general welfare of the city, apart from implied potential job growth for workers.³⁹

This was the growth machine: policies that centered on "A Business-Like Administration," increasing efficiency, and lowering taxes. It was central to the movement that would replace the party machine, rising to prominence during the Progressive Era in Oakland and cities across the United States. To accomplish this objective, business-interests changed the structure of government and instituted electoral reform to make it more difficult, if not impossible, for workers and minority voters to win representation in government. Fundamentally, the growth machine changed the rules for Oakland city politics. These reforms allowed business to dominate elections and city policy, ensuring the city would serve the selected few business leaders who thought their interests were the public interest. In the process, they would politically marginalize black interests in West Oakland.

Council-Manager Government

Oakland adopted the commissioner form of governance in 1911 in an effort to combat what was seen as the party machine's "corruption and inefficiency."⁴⁰ The commissioner style of government was a Progressive Era reform adopted first in Galveston, Texas in 1901 and spread

³⁷ Weinstein, "Organized Business and the City Commission and Manager Movements," 180.

³⁸ Citizens' Committee on Residential Development, "Report on Residential Development," 16.

³⁹ Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, x, xi.

⁴⁰ Edward C Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy: Who Rules in Oakland?* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 10.; Weinstein, "Organized Business and the City Commission and Manager Movements," 166.

across the nation with the help of local chambers of commerce.⁴¹ To address corruption, the commissioner government was modeled after the business-corporate structure “to make government more businesslike and to attract businessmen to government.”⁴² This type of government was formed as “America emerged as the world’s leading industrial power” and reflected a business approach to government, thinking of voters “as stockholders,” and the commission government as the corporate city’s board of directors.⁴³ Business elites in government considered themselves the city’s largest stakeholders who knew best how to run it. As such, government needed to be organized around their interest.⁴⁴ This government determined public interests not by citizenship or elections, but by the size of financial stake in the city’s corporate organization. Any city policies needed to garner the support of the majority of the corporate city’s major stakeholders. This fundamentally changed government’s role and responsibilities from maintaining the public good, to maximizing profits and tax revenue, while minimizing costs and government services. It defined public interest as belonging to the major taxpayers in Oakland, thereby enabling the business elite to direct city politics on their terms.

Establishing these governments was fundamentally about consolidating power in the hands of business leaders as opposed to addressing corruption. They were a product of the Progressive Era structural reform movement, which sought to professionalize government and “take city government out of the hands of neighborhood and ethnic leaders.”⁴⁵ While Oakland’s business elites had been the “decisive decision makers,” according to Hayes, without rivals prior to adopting the commissioner form of government, a growing socialist movement threatened their control.⁴⁶ Business elites with the chamber of commerce’s backing made a move to consolidate their power

⁴¹ Weinstein, 169.

⁴² Weinstein, “Organized Business and the City Commission and Manager Movements,” 169.

⁴³ Weinstein, 166, 168-169.

⁴⁴ Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, x.; Weinstein, 179.

⁴⁵ Chandler Davidson and George Korbel, “At-Large Elections and Minority-Group Representation: A Re-Examination of Historical and Contemporary Evidence,” *The Journal of Politics* 43, no. 4 (1981): 982-1005, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2130184>, 987.

⁴⁶ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 10.

with the commission-style government to "lower taxes and encourage greater industrial development" and "destroy the power of the revolutionary Socialist party."⁴⁷ Capital investments in the city would pay off in the increased private investments the city would see. Fundamentally, by shaping itself as a business, fiscal considerations reigned supreme and were organized to benefit the wealthy leading the change. They were promised "a stable and less expensive alternate to the old system of graft and complicated legislative procedures."⁴⁸ As business expanded and modernized, city services such as sewers, water, paved roads, and harbors had become necessary to operate their business smoothly.⁴⁹ Their main concern was that these services operate more efficiently, because to maximize profits, the costs of these services needed to be kept down.

Ironically, however, commissioner governments bred corruption in Oakland and elsewhere in the United States, like the party machines they replaced. Commissioners, gave "excessive appropriations in order either to strengthen their own departments or simply reward their supporters with city jobs."⁵⁰ In the case of Oakland, opposition to commission government broke out in response to a government contract scandal, in which *Oakland Tribune* characterized the mayor as a party boss.⁵¹ When the commission stopped serving its purposes and created inefficiencies in the provision of city services due to corruption, business stopped supporting it. Instead, the business elite compared it to the party machine in order to engineer its take down. And it worked. With the *Oakland Tribune* and the Lions Club's support, the new council-manager government was easily adopted in 1931.⁵² This new form of government that placed executive power in an appointed manager and "augmented the power of business over city policy generally and of the Tribune over political elections."⁵³ The council-manager government Oakland adopted was the new and improved

⁴⁷ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 11.

⁴⁸ Weinstein, "Organized Business and the City Commission and Manager Movements," 168.

⁴⁹ Weinstein, 167.

⁵⁰ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 14.; Weinstein, 169.

⁵¹ Hayes, 13.

⁵² Hayes, 13.

⁵³ Weinstein, "Organized Business and the City Commission and Manager Movements," 170.

model of the commissioner government. Like the commissioner-style government, it still gave business interests priority, but this model also provided safeguards against council-member corruption by professionalizing and removing executive power from politicians altogether.

According to corporate business logic, the manager appointed with these executive powers could not act corruptly because he represented the interests of the business community which supposedly prioritized efficiency over bribes and favoritism. Ultimately, the council-manager was just as corruptly prioritizing a new interest group: businesses.⁵⁴ These business-oriented governments made policy calculations based on whether or not they fit "the local growth strategy" with the justification that the rising tide of growth would lift all boats because it "brings jobs, expands the tax base, and pays for urban services."⁵⁵ The business administration-city, pursued development strategies that would bring investors while opposing "any intervention that might regulate development on behalf of use values."⁵⁶ This approach typically did not care about the associated costs of this economic development, such as spillover effects, and as a result "typically undermines local people's standard of living."⁵⁷ By prioritizing industrial development favored by the growth machine, for example, revenue might have increased and the city might have been able to decrease taxes, but this was at the cost of non-fiscal considerations important to residents. These problems included environmental pollution created by the steel, canning, and automobile factories in Oakland as well as the noise pollution and wear on city streets created by trucks driving through their neighborhoods to deliver goods. As a corporate modeled city, Oakland fundamentally put a premium on cost cutting over public service provisions which, according to business leaders, unnecessarily raised taxes.

⁵⁴ Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, x, xi.

⁵⁵ Logan and Molotch, 33, 65.

⁵⁶ Logan and Molotch, 32, 33.

⁵⁷ Logan and Molotch, xi, 32.

At-Large, Non-Partisan Elections

The council manager system remolded city government in the image of a business and streamlined their power over the decision-making process. But the growth machine needed to control politicians elected to this new government to complete their control over city politics. Businessmen, such as the Knowlands, owning the *Oakland Tribune*, completed their corporate-city government domination with electoral reforms. These electoral reforms went hand in hand with the adoption of a council-manager government; 40 out of the 50 cities with a council-manager government adopted them by 1938.⁵⁸ In similar style to their campaign to institute council-manager governments, Progressive structural reformers attacked the party machine for corruption and their district-based style of government. Inherently, according to History Professor Samuel P. Hays writing in 1964, attacks on the party machine also represented an attack on "the political power of lower-and middle-income groups which lay behind it," district representation-systems increasing the representation of these communities interests and their influence in government.⁵⁹ While structural reformers in the Progressive Era saw party machines as cost-inefficient, community members saw it as a way to ensure services, jobs, and elected representatives were sensitive to their demands. Representation of these interests would change with the council-manager system, enabling the passage of at-large and nonpartisan ballot electoral reforms which benefitted the growth machine's interests.⁶⁰

Inherently, these reforms also represented an attack on minority political participation. Structural reforms, emerging first in the south, "coincided with the peak of racial reaction."⁶¹ At-large and non-partisan reforms politically marginalized poor and minority residents by making it more difficult for them to elect their chosen representatives. As opposed to district elections in

⁵⁸ Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (1964): 157-69, 163.; Davidson and Korbel, "At-Large Elections and Minority-Group Representation," 985, 986.

⁵⁹ Hays, 163.

⁶⁰ Davidson and Korbel, 986.

⁶¹ Davidson and Korbel, 987.

which representatives were elected by specific neighborhoods to represent their district in city government, at-large elections pitted all council candidates against each other in a citywide election. In this system, descriptively representative candidates could no longer win a seat by carrying a segregated black or low-income district. Instead, candidates with name recognition in the entire city, like elite businessmen, typically won. Adoption of at-large elections generally coincided with the introduction of the nonpartisan ballot, which removed party affiliations from ballots, reinforcing the importance of name-recognition even further. Using these reforms in Oakland, elite businessmen effectively marginalized black political participation and neutralized the socialist party challenges to their power in 1914.⁶² Nonpartisan and at-large party election ballots made it more difficult to be an informed voter. By presenting voters with a list of candidates from outside their neighborhood and without a political affiliation, voting cues were eliminated along with political parties' roles in campaigning. In this scenario, without voting cues, people would select the most recognizable name.

J.R. Knowland took advantage of these reforms to increase his conservative influence in city politics. His paper, the *Oakland Tribune*, had near-total control of news coverage and information in Oakland.⁶³ Already a rich man on the "board of directors of several leading Oakland area banks," his purchase of the *Tribune* in 1938 helped the Knowland family consolidate power at the local, state, and national levels of the Republican party.⁶⁴ These connections helped his son and successor William Knowland become a United States Senator.⁶⁵ Specifically, with the nonpartisan ballot and J.R. Knowland's ownership of the *Oakland Tribune*, Republicans controlled Oakland City Council, even though, by 1940, the city itself was majority Democrat.⁶⁶ Without party affiliation to guide these voters, they selected names they heard, which almost inevitably would have been conservatives

⁶² Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 12, 40.

⁶³ Hayes, 13.

⁶⁴ Hayes, 14.

⁶⁵ Hayes, 15.

⁶⁶ Hayes, 29.; Robert O Self, *American Babylon*, 249.

with J.R. Knowland's endorsement in the *Oakland Tribune*.⁶⁷ In fact, between 1941 and 1965, just five members of city council were elected more than once without an *Oakland Tribune* endorsement.⁶⁸ Once these seats were won, they were not easily lost. Oakland had a high incumbency rate. Furthermore, even there were openings on the council, half the time these seats were filled by appointment as opposed to elections, which led to business groups comprising the "most heavily represented single group" of these appointees.⁶⁹

By controlling the members who could get elected to city council, business interests and Knowland could also control the executive branch in the council-manager government. In the council-manager government, the manager overseeing all executive functions was appointed by and responsible to the city council, as opposed to voters.⁷⁰ Because the *Oakland Tribune* "coalition" "dominate[d] council elections" and the council's appointment of the city managers, the *Oakland Tribune* had "direct or indirect approval" over the manager's selection.⁷¹ City managers in Oakland represented the business interests that appointed them, typically businessmen themselves and creating policies to benefit businessmen.⁷² For example, the first manager decreased taxes by cutting government wages, and the second manager was the "Vice President of a leading Oakland bank."⁷³ Business interests, with *Oakland Tribune's* control of information, used the tools of structural and electoral reform to control politics in Oakland, manipulating election outcomes to make sure conservative candidates would win seats on the council to then select a city manager sympathetic to their business interests. These reforms ensured conservative business interests would reign supreme in Oakland city government.

⁶⁷ Self, *American Babylon*, 64.

⁶⁸ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 33.

⁶⁹ Hayes, 31.

⁷⁰ Weinstein, "Organized Business and the City Commission and Manager Movements," 170.

⁷¹ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 36.

⁷² Hayes, 13.

⁷³ Hayes, 13.

Furthermore, these electoral reforms kept voter turn-out low.⁷⁴ The role of parties was affectively minimized by eliminating the party machine with the council-manager government and at-large, non-partisan elections. By eliminating parties from ballots and campaigns to "reduce corruption," party competition evaporated. This eliminated partisan organizing and get out the vote efforts to drum up voter participation and support for their candidates. Decreased voter-turnout was likely a result of the council-manager system as well. Voters did not elect the city manager, and yet this person was vested with all executive powers. Not having direct influence over the manager or their decisions in government discouraged voter participation. Votes did not impact policy anyway. This had measurable effect in Oakland. For example, the average voter participation rate for local elections was a low 40.8 percent, meaning, candidates only needed 20 percent of the city's support to win a seat with a simple majority.⁷⁵ Instead of looking at decreased turnout as a problem, threatening the legitimacy of their government, the growth machine saw this as an accomplishment. For the business elites, and progressives professionalizing public service, good government did not mean representative government like the political machine city.⁷⁶ Low voter turnout centralized decision-making in business hands, minimizing voter interests and corrupt party influence in the city council, and allowed them to prioritize profit-centric growth in running corporate-city government.⁷⁷ The growth machine judged its government on its business-like administration, not its representativeness.

These were not reforms that benefitted minority and working-class interests in Oakland, or across the United States. At-large voting reform had a marked impact on levels of black and worker political participation, and consequentially, their political representation as well. This electoral reform, like the council-manager movements themselves, started in the Jim Crow United States

⁷⁴ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 29.

⁷⁵ Hayes, 29.

⁷⁶ Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," 169.

⁷⁷ Hays, 165.

South in response to increased black voter participation.⁷⁸ This period also saw the introduction of poll taxes and white primaries, universally recognized electoral tools disenfranchising black voters.⁷⁹ These electoral reforms, including poll taxes, were meant to eliminate the "corrupt" political machine from politics.⁸⁰ They took government "out of the hands of neighborhood and ethnic leaders" that represented black and poor white voters, putting it in the control of "more responsible," wealthy, white citizens who could afford the poll tax and had a vested financial interest in the city.⁸¹ Minimizing increased black and worker political influence went hand-in-hand with eliminating corrupt party politics, their thinking being that blacks, for example, were naturally irresponsible and could therefore not be trusted to elect representatives to guide city politics and spending.⁸² Although they did not explicitly state any racial intent in passing their electoral reform, when at-large voting was initiated in 1895 in Galveston, it had the result of decreasing the recently elected presence of black, as well as poor working-class representatives on the council.⁸³

It is reasonable to assume that those individuals in Oakland who had advocated adopting the Galveston model government were aware of the racial and class-based motivations behind at-large electoral systems. For one, Oakland's at-large elections had the same impact on working-class representation as it had in Galveston. This electoral reform eliminated the socialist worker party threatening business control in the city, and, as Robert O. Self has noted, "Black Oaklanders were especially marginalized within this system."⁸⁴ By eliminating district elections in Oakland, it became more difficult for geographically segregated blacks to elect representatives, giving them less political power compared to the white city at large. This had been the case in Galveston as well.

⁷⁸ Davidson and Korbel, "At-Large Elections and Minority-Group Representation," 992.; Self, *American Babylon*, 65.

⁷⁹ Davidson and Korbel, 988.

⁸⁰ Davidson and Korbel, 987.

⁸¹ Davidson and Korbel, 987-8.

⁸² Davis McEntire, *Residence and Race; Final and Comprehensive Report to the Commission on Race and Housing*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 71-72.

⁸³ Davidson and Korbel, "At-Large Elections and Minority-Group Representation," 990.

⁸⁴ Self, *American Babylon*, 65.

Furthermore, increasing the role of name recognition with these at-large and non-partisan elections required getting endorsements taking out expensive ads in newspapers like the *Oakland Tribune*.⁸⁵ This form of electoral politics served to dilute the political power of those constituents the growth machine deemed undesirable, and limited their participation to ensure blacks and workers could not compete with conservative business leaders in the growth machine.⁸⁶

Fred Reed identified the impact of recent reform on black representation in 1923 while running for mayor in Oakland. In his first and only reference to race in his mayoral campaign he stated that although black people comprised 30 percent of Oakland's population, they were "taxed without representation" in city government.⁸⁷ This is most likely a direct result of Oakland's adoption of at-large elections a decade earlier. His solution? He would "ask 15 of the most representative Negroes of Oakland to name their choice for a place on the council, and I shall urge to the full limit of my ability that their selection shall mean election."⁸⁸ True to form in his campaign materials, Reed's plan to increase black representation took politics out of government. He would select the black people to then nominate one person to represent them on city council. All residents would not vote because, according to growth machine dogma, politics were corrupt. Instead by directing the selection process by appointment, he was professionalizing it. Furthermore, by putting himself in charge of picking qualified blacks nominating a representative, he had the power to shape their final selection, who would likely be a business-friendly representative. While he had recognized a real problem, his solution did not give more genuine, democratic, representation to blacks either. It also controlled the selection process in a way that would favor business interests, at the expense of black residents. He did not give a clear explanation as to how he would then help this person get elected either. Undoubtedly, they would need a newspaper endorsement, doubly ensuring the

⁸⁵ Self, *American Babylon*, 664.

⁸⁶ Self, 64.

⁸⁷ Fred Reed, "Statement from Candidate Fred Reed," 1923, Freed Reed Papers, Folder 9, Oakland Public Library History Room, Unpaginated 1.

⁸⁸ Reed, Unpaginated 1.

candidate would need a business background to get support from the *Oakland Tribune*. This representative for the black community would therefore more fully represent business interests, just like all the other members of the growth machine city government, instead of the needs of his constituents.

Following business's peaceful takeover in Oakland's with the council-manager government, the nonpartisan ballot, at-large elections, and the *Oakland Tribune's* political dominance, government was no longer independent of the business community.⁸⁹ Completing their total takeover in the late 1930s these reforms made it "nearly impossible for labor and blacks to elect candidates."⁹⁰ Narrowing non-business influence was the goal all along. Effectively, according to Hayes, with the *Oakland Tribune's* monopoly status, the high incumbency rate, business presence on the city council, at-large elections, and the non-partisan ballot, the "city council has been substantially separated from the social and political views of a majority of Oakland voters."⁹¹ Business leaders replaced the corrupt party machine with their own corrupt growth machine, defining public interest as their own business interests. Elite businessmen believed the residents did not have the same stake in the corporate-city, justifying their exclusion from decision making. These structural and electoral reforms were instituted in Oakland to block labor threats and black representation on City Council, interpreted as threats to the business coalition's control over city politics. The reforms did act as effective barriers, contributing to the political marginalization especially of blacks' interests in city politics. In control of elections and government, growth machine businessmen were free to pursue their interests in the fiscal welfare of the city and set about prioritizing development, attaching their prejudiced racial politics to land-use planning that would define blacks' social and physical marginalization in Oakland. In pursuit of efficiency and economic development, the racial politics

⁸⁹ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 189.

⁹⁰ Hayes, 189.

⁹¹ Hayes, 40.

and priorities set by the business growth machine would contribute to the creation of blight in the city, marked by inefficiency and stagnation.

Social Marginalization: Racism in Oakland

Racial stereotypes defined black social marginalization in Oakland, and shaped politics of the growth machine. Analyzing these social dynamics helps us see how racism made its way into politics and policies in Oakland, even under the guise of race-neutral economic zoning policies. Social marginalization based on prevailing racial stereotypes that played a role in justifying black voter disenfranchisement also had a strong impact on housing discrimination. A professor and researcher at Berkeley's School of Social Welfare as well as Research Director for the *Residence and Race; Final and Comprehensive Report to the Commission on Race and Housing*, Davis McEntire writes that segregation was constructed around the "visible and unchangeable fact of race," regardless of economic level⁹² McEntire, in a serious study of housing segregation published in 1960, went on to claim that black behavior was a factor in their physical marginalization, stating that even changing their "social behavior" would not decrease segregation.⁹³ McEntire claimed that slavery stunted blacks' social development, breeding "characteristics which encourage their segregation."⁹⁴ Therefore, as they migrated North and West, McEntire wrote that "their poverty, cultural backwardness, and tendency to congregate have probably been the main influences shaping their initial segregation."⁹⁵ These inferior traits may have originated as a product of their subjugation by white people, but it was still the responsibility of black people to correct them. According to McEntire, black segregation can be explained by their racial and social inferiority.

This professional analysis of housing segregation was also expressed frequently in the individual interviews conducted for Dr. Floyd Hunter's report on housing discrimination in Oakland

⁹² Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 19.

⁹³ Hunter, 20.

⁹⁴ *Declaration of Kenneth L. Hunter before the Senate Committee on Labor and Labor Relations, Oakland, California, October 1, 1960, and by Law, California Labor Law, 1961*, 1.

⁹⁵ McEntire, *Residence and Race; Final and Comprehensive Report to the Commission on Race and Housing*, 71.

⁹⁶ McEntire, 71.

⁹⁷ McEntire, 71.

⁹⁸ McEntire, 72.

published in 1964. Realtors explicitly expressed similar prejudices against black people, stating "Negroes are not going to attain status overnight because their morals and standards are still below the average white," while others claimed segregation was "Not so much a matter of race anymore in the average white," while others claimed segregation was "Not so much a matter of race anymore in Oakland housing – it's a matter of behavior."⁹⁶ Perception of inferior behavior was intrinsically associated with race as described by McEntire and justified their social exclusion from white spaces. This was prevalent in the hills, where one realtor defended segregation there by claiming, "In a quiet hill sector where there are many middleaged [sic] or older people, the loud voices (of Negroes) and some of the customs brought from the south are disturbing . . . Until they tone down, a desire for them as neighbors is not generally in demand."⁹⁷ Members of Oakland's social organizations expressed similar disapproval of black behavior and claims that behavior was inferior, stating they needed to change their "attitudes and elevate their moral standards."⁹⁸ These claims, all of which are blatantly prejudiced against black people, are based on the same assumptions of inferiority that McEntire identified. Their inferiority and un-American qualities, according to contemporary Davis McEntire, realtors, and others is what segregated blacks.

These assumptions about racial inferiority lead to physical marginalization of blacks in order to protect superior social status. Connecting status to location, they isolated blacks in segregated neighborhoods. Blacks were segregated not because they actually behaved in any particularly irresponsible or inferior way, but because of a white fear that, according to Dr. Hunter, neighborhood racial mixing would lead to a loss in social status.⁹⁹ In his study, three-fifths of white Oaklanders expressed some form of social prejudice against blacks, such as supporting ideas that they are "less well educated, less cultured, less emotionally stable, less healthy, less ambitious, less

⁹⁶ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 31.

⁹⁷ Hunter, 32.

⁹⁸ Hunter, 50, 54.

⁹⁹ Hunter, 2.

law abiding, or less moral.”¹⁰⁰ For some, the fear of sharing space emanated from the thought that “proximity and status equality heightens the possibility of intermarriage.”¹⁰¹ Segregation gave physical form to the social hierarchy, preventing racial mixing and social equality. Intermarriage violated these spatial and racial hierarchies and inferred an equality in status that could not be countenanced. Blacks and whites could only occupy the same space if they were clearly not equals. For example, the deed restrictions for Oakland’s Lakeshore Glen in 1922 stating “There are the usual restrictions as to negroes and Asiatic except in the capacity of domestic servants.”¹⁰² Blacks could only occupy the same space as whites if it was clear that they were socially inferior, working to serve their white employers. The damage brought by intermarriage and sharing the same space was parallel. They both threatened to upset this established racial order. Looking at social and racial hierarchies as a zero-sum game, any relative elevation in black status necessarily damaged whites’ relative status.

According to Both Dr. Hunter and Dr. Laurenti Luigi, a contributor to McEntire’s *Report to the Commission on Race and Housing*, a more significant fear used to justify discrimination in Oakland was that of economic loss.¹⁰³ According to Laurenti, this belief is key to examine “because it governs or at least rationalized many practices of real estate brokers, builders, and financial institutions – as well as the actions of homeowners.”¹⁰⁴ In Dr. Hunter’s study, realtors and social organizations identified discrimination as emanating from this fear in a six to one ratio compared to fear of social loss in a three to two ratio.¹⁰⁵ These economic fears found their roots in racial prejudice as it related to property maintenance. One Oakland realtor stated in Dr. Hunter’s report

¹⁰⁰ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 19.

¹⁰¹ Hunter, 20.

¹⁰² *Declaration of Restrictions Lakeshore Glen, South Lakeshore Glen, and Lakeshore Hills, Oakland, California: Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws of Lakeshore Homes Association* (Oakland, California: Walter H. Leimert Co, 1921), 5.

¹⁰³ Luigi Laurenti, *Property Values and Race: Studies in Seven Cities. Special Research Report to the Commission on Race and Housing* (Berkeley, 1960), ix.; Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 45, 54.

¹⁰⁴ Laurenti, 5.

¹⁰⁵ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 45, 54.

that "Negroes as a general rule do not keep up their premises; are slow paying; are frequently demanding and aggressive. As a result, the neighborhood is disrupted; property values decline; there is panic selling, and more Negroes move in."¹⁰⁶ These were explicitly racial defenses of housing segregation based on stereotyped assumptions about black behavior. White people believed that what they saw as inferior black behavior made property values go down as a result of their presumed irresponsibility and this would have a snowball effect, ruining a whole neighborhood.

These social evaluations of blacks as being irresponsible became the justification to exclude and segregate blacks because it increased property values. According to Robert O. Self, by expressing concern with an economic investment in property, these stereotypes took on the form of "racism rationalized as economic calculation."¹⁰⁷ These racial politics were articulated in deed restrictions, local zoning, and federal lending practices that reinforced segregation and promoted disinvestment in black communities. This conflation of increased property values with racial exclusion would become central to resident-enforcement of segregation after a United States Supreme Court decision made their state-enforcement unconstitutional with *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948.

These racial politics, based on stereotypes that blacks would decrease property values, also made their way into policies adopted by the growth machine business leaders interested in directing policies that would increase city property values to bring down overall tax rates. Shaping policies with these racist assumptions in mind, the growth machine would disinvest in black communities where property values would theoretically always be low, investing instead in white space with protectionist zoning that would elevate their property values and bolster the city's tax revenue. The federal government would follow this "good" practice as well, redlining black communities that were

¹⁰⁶ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 37.
¹⁰⁷ Self, *American Babylon*, 160.

risky investments and starving them of credit needed to make building improvements or move out of their segregated neighborhoods. Prioritizing white communities and property values would ultimately lead to the creation of blight, a direct result of private, local and federal racial prejudice and politics.

Physical Marginalization: Creating Segregation

Charles Keeler, the Managing Director of the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce wrote in the same opening letter of this chapter that city planning is the “fundamental need of all cities, assuming that a good business government underlies it.”¹⁰⁸ Not only did business administration go hand in hand with council-manager government and shrinking the electorate, it was also an important ingredient in planning. To successfully promote the growth machine’s interests, the process needed to be controlled by the citizens who understood business and development best: the business elites. This is a relationship alluded to in the opening vignette: “there are two central organizations in every city—the City government and the quasi-public body, the Chamber of Commerce.”¹⁰⁹ However, that meant that as with the rest of city government, neighborhood interests of lower to mid-income, minority, and working people were not represented. As a result, their racial politics shaped racial deed restrictions, zoning, and federal lending practices that physically marginalized blacks in West Oakland. Segregation and disinvestment were the product of black political and social marginalization in Oakland’s growth machine city that rejected black interests while promoting racist understandings of property value.

Big developers in Oakland like Fred Reed had many interests in common with other members of the pro-growth business elite interested in seeing property values increase and stay high.¹¹⁰ To accomplish this goal, community builders had established deed restrictions to

¹⁰⁸ Keeler, “Letter to Fred Reed,” 1.

¹⁰⁹ Keeler, “Letter to Fred Reed,” 1.

¹¹⁰ Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*, 118, 121.

“implement their planning and design vision” and maintain control of the property after selling it and to keep property values high.¹¹¹ These intentions were spelled out in deeds. For example, looking at the deed for lots purchased by fellow Oakland developer Henry Z. Jones from the Havenscourt Company, there were seven sections of restrictions, mainly concerning the type of structure that would be built on the land.¹¹² The final section required: “That no person of African

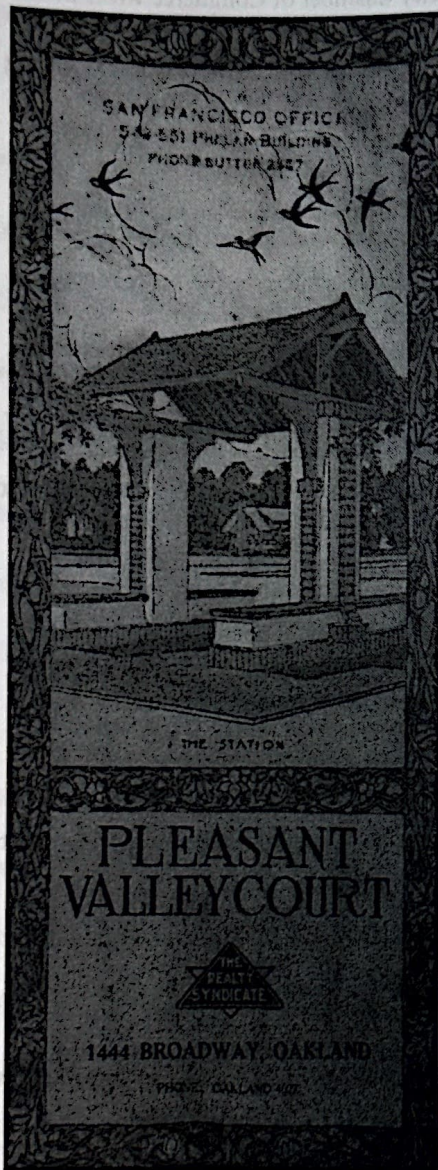


Figure 4. Racially restricted development Pleasant Valley brochure, cover and restrictions section. “Pleasant Valley Court Brochure” (The Realty Syndicate, n.d.), Freed Reed Papers, Oakland Public Library History Room, unpaginated 1, unpaginated 6.

Improvements

PLEASANT VALLEY COURT embodies every necessary improvement in street work, sidewalks, curbs, gutters, sewers, water, electricity and gas. No element has received more careful consideration.

Gas and water mains are laid inside the sidewalks, precluding the necessity of tearing up the streets to install service. No unsightly poles will be placed before the property, all wires being strung along the rear of the lots.

Sewers and drainage have been installed and afford complete protection.

The streets are broad, well paved, and follow the general contour of the tract.

Restrictions

Building restrictions, \$1500 to \$2500. See price list.

No business houses permitted except on Piedmont Avenue.

Buildings to set twenty (20) feet back from property line. No house to be erected within five (5) feet of the north line nor within twenty (20) feet of the south line of the lot.

We will not sell to Mongols, Africans or other undesirable people.

One-tenth down and the balance one per cent per month, with interest on deferred payments at six per cent per annum.

To Reach the Property

Take Piedmont Avenue car direct from Broadway, Oakland.

From San Francisco—Take Key Route ferry, and after crossing the bay board Piedmont, or Fortieth-Street, train. At Piedmont Avenue take car going north or walk north four blocks.

¹¹¹ Weiss, 3.

¹¹² “Havenscourt Deed of Indenture,” 1923, Henry Z. Jones Real Estate Collection, Carton 2, Oakland Public Library History Room, unpaginated 2.

or Mongolian descent shall purchase, own, hold, possess, lease or rent the above described parcel of land or any interest therein or the improvements thereon or any part thereof before the first day of January, A.D. 1925.”¹¹³ According to the deed, these restrictions were imposed “for the benefit of each and all lots of land delineated upon the aforesaid map, as a part of a general plan of development, improvement, building and occupation.”¹¹⁴ These deed restrictions enabled the Havenscourt Company to control what Henry Z. Jones could build on the property, and who could occupy it. While technically, these restrictions limited Jones’s property rights, they were “beneficial” restrictions because they would increase the property’s value. They ensured he would build a house that was large enough to get a good price on the market and that it would not be inhabited by minority people, like blacks, who would decrease the property value. Race was an economic consideration in real estate development. Beyond opposing their presence for social status reasons, developers were sure that black people were irresponsible and would be unable to maintain a property or its value.

With the help of larger developers like Fred Reed in Oakland, described as “community builders” by Marc A. Weiss, deed restrictions became a model for cities developing their zoning laws.¹¹⁵ Community builders, like other business leaders in the growth machine, needed infrastructure, city services, and land-use regulation “to maintain cost-effectiveness and transportation accessibility and to ensure a stable and high-quality long-term environment for their prospective property owners.”¹¹⁶ Furthermore, deed restrictions were limited as a tool to control property values because community builders could not predict every eventuality when writing them.¹¹⁷ Developers needed public regulations and planning to fill the gaps.¹¹⁸ Local zoning would

¹¹³ “Havenscourt Deed of Indenture,” unpaginated 2.

¹¹⁴ “Havenscourt Deed of Indenture,” unpaginated 2.

¹¹⁵ Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*, 4.

¹¹⁶ Weiss, 4.

¹¹⁷ Weiss, 4.

¹¹⁸ Weiss, 72.

perform these functions, becoming one of the most common planning tools, used in 1,360 cities by 1937.¹¹⁹ As stated by Weiss, deed restrictions had “legitimized the idea that private owners should surrender some of their individual property rights for the community good, including their own.”¹²⁰ Accordingly, legitimizing these restrictions “opened the door for the introduction and extension of public land-use controls.”¹²¹ Community builders made themselves the logical leaders in land-use planning that took off in the 1920s because it provided them with the services and infrastructure they needed to increase and stabilize property values, while encouraging cost-efficiency with the use of property tax revenue.¹²² These politics were also at the center of other large businessmen’s interests in Oakland’s growth machine. However, zoning plans, just like racially restrictive deeds, had biases about property value written into them.

Racial restrictions in zoning appeared just as zoning was being introduced as a planning tool. Public, state-enforced racial segregation ordinances and restrictions cropped-up as blacks entered white communities – either moving into white middle-class neighborhoods in Southern cities or into Western and Mid-Western cities during the Great Migration.¹²³ A leader in urban planning, Los Angeles passed the first zoning law in the United States in 1908, defending it successfully in court as a legitimate use of its police powers.¹²⁴ Two years later in 1910, Baltimore became a leader in applying this new tool towards segregation, passing the first racially restrictive zoning law in the United States which Atlanta, Oklahoma City, Richmond, and St. Louis copied.¹²⁵ Racial zoning laws, like racial deed restrictions, were defined by racial politics, and concerned themselves with mitigating the assumed deleterious effect increasing black populations had on white property values.¹²⁶ This

¹¹⁹ Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*, 5.

¹²⁰ Weiss, 69.

¹²¹ Weiss, 3.

¹²² Weiss, 34, 59, 127.

¹²³ Laurenti, *Property Values and Race: Studies in Seven Cities, Special Research Report to the Commission on Race and Housing*, 5, 6.

¹²⁴ Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*, 13, 79.

¹²⁵ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, 2017, 44-45.; Roger L. Rice, “Residential Segregation by Law, 1910-1917,” *The Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 2 (1968): 179-99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2204656>, 182.

¹²⁶ Rothstein, 41.

was revealed in the title and purpose of Baltimore's first racial zoning ordinance, Ordinance 610, called: "An ordinance for preserving property values and promoting the great interests and insuring the good government of Baltimore city."¹²⁷ Racial politics built on irrational associations between race, responsibility, and property maintenance were written into these public laws, protecting property values by controlling the racial composition of neighborhoods just like private racially restrictive deeds.

Although racial zoning was declared unconstitutional in 1917, urban planners found ways around the *Buchanan v. Warley* ruling. The Supreme Court invalidated racial zoning ordinances because it violated the 14th Amendment's prohibition on racially discriminatory state action. However, the racial biases underlying racial deed restrictions and zoning had not changed and innovative cities would create land-use policies to ensure black segregation in practice without mentioning race. Still concerned about the impact of black residence on white property values, for example, Ferguson, Missouri segregated itself economically in the 1910s, preventing multi-family housing construction in single-family neighborhoods, which "lower-income families of all races could not afford."¹²⁸ Although this form of zoning was race-neutral on its face, it had the impact of segregating the city in similar fashion to the race-neutral electoral reforms that decreased black political representation and participation.

While zoning of this type was rare before WWI, it was prioritized by members of Commerce Secretary Hoover's 1921 Advisory Committee on Zoning who were "outspoken segregationists whose speeches and writings," indicating race was a factor in their plans according to Richard Rothstein.¹²⁹ Furthermore, Rothstein states Ernst Freund, "the leading authority on administrative law in the 1920s" confirmed that zoning was in fact exploited as a way around *Buchanan* to exclude

¹²⁷ Baltimore (Md.), *The Ordinances of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore* (James Lucas and E.K. Deaver, 1911), 204.

¹²⁸ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 48.

¹²⁹ Rothstein, 51.

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blacks and not “for the creation of single-family districts, the stated justification for zoning.”¹³⁰ This strategy was promoted because it was a legal race-neutral workaround to *Buchanan v. Warley*. In fact, the United States Supreme Court upheld its constitutionality in a 1926 Cleveland case.¹³¹ Subsequently, these exclusionary zoning ordinances were adopted by “numerous white suburbs in towns across the county,” making it legally “impossible to disentangle motives” of racism and elitism in planning decisions.¹³² However, even if the courts would not recognize it, economic exclusion amounted to racial segregation.¹³³ For example, employment discrimination kept blacks in lower paying jobs that would make it impossible to buy homes in the single-family districts.¹³⁴ Urban planners could hide behind their race-neutral defense and continue to racially segregate blacks in practice as long as they did not mention “race” in their plans.

Zoning was also used as a tool to express the value community builders and the business growth machine gave to different areas in the city. According to community builders’ logic, with “strict segregation and predictable public control of all specific land uses, zoning would maximize aggregated land values, and stabilize values at each location, but would not maximize values everywhere.”¹³⁵ As with racially restrictive deeds, zoning was about establishing control – control over markets, resident populations, and property values. However, this came at the sacrifice of certain spaces in the city. The decision as to which areas would be prioritized to maximize aggregate city property values was naturally impacted by the growth machine’s racial politics. In their scheme to increase aggregate property values, they decided to maximize them in white, higher income neighborhoods with “protectionist zoning.” Protectionist zoning treated areas differently according to income levels, keeping high value areas high value and protecting mid-income areas with a range

¹³⁰ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 52.

¹³¹ Rothstein, 53.

¹³² Rothstein, 53.

¹³³ Rothstein, 57.; Self, *American Babylon*, 186.

¹³⁴ Rothstein, 57.

¹³⁵ Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*, 101.

of residential, commercial, and industrial buildings while preventing the creation of “industrial ‘nuisance encroachment.’”¹³⁶ Meanwhile, in planning zoning for low-income neighborhoods, “industrial uses was the primary objective, with absolutely no *protection* of the local working-class population.”¹³⁷ Much in the same way that the growth-machine pursued growth at the expense of the public good, community builders and planners also ignored the human implications of these policies on the low-income black communities they sacrificed for city-wide economic development.

While Oakland systematically marginalized the interests of its black residents in the flatlands, its zoning policy elevated the interests of their most important residents: higher-income whites.

Oakland’s 1935 zoning was divided into residential, commercial, and industrial categories.

Residential zoning was broken into four categories, “A” single-family, “B” two-family, and “C” and “D” multi-family, limited to 6 and 8 stories respectively.¹³⁸ Industrial zoning was divided into “H” light industrial and “T” heavy industrial.¹³⁹ Residential “A” zones were the most restricted and exclusive zones.¹⁴⁰ Comparing Dr. Hunter’s map of housing segregation in Oakland with 1935 zoning maps, there are three complete containment zones, where blacks were relegated to, and six complete exclusionary zones in the city, where black were kept out.¹⁴¹ While none of the containment zones had “A” zoning, they each were zoned for industrial use dispersed among, and in some cases surrounding, residential areas.¹⁴² On the other hand, half of the exclusionary zones had exclusively “A” zoning, an additional two had partial “A” zoning, and only one had industrial zoning south of MacArthur Boulevard, the line marking the base of the Oakland Hills.¹⁴³

¹³⁶ Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*, 12.

¹³⁷ Weiss, 12. Emphasis in the source.

¹³⁸ *City of Oakland Zoning Laws & Ordinances 474-475 C.M.S., Adopted February 5, 1935* (Oakland, California: City Planning Commission, 1935), 4-7.

¹³⁹ *Zoning Laws & Ordinances*, 9-11.

¹⁴⁰ *Zoning Laws & Ordinances*, 4.

¹⁴¹ Floyd Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 23.; *Zoning Laws & Ordinances*, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 48, 53; all 1935 zoning maps pages unpaginated.

¹⁴² *Zoning Laws & Ordinances*, 32, 34, 35.; all 1935 zoning maps pages unpaginated.

¹⁴³ *Zoning Laws & Ordinances*, unpaginated 29, 30, 36, 37, 48, 53.; all 1935 zoning maps pages unpaginated.

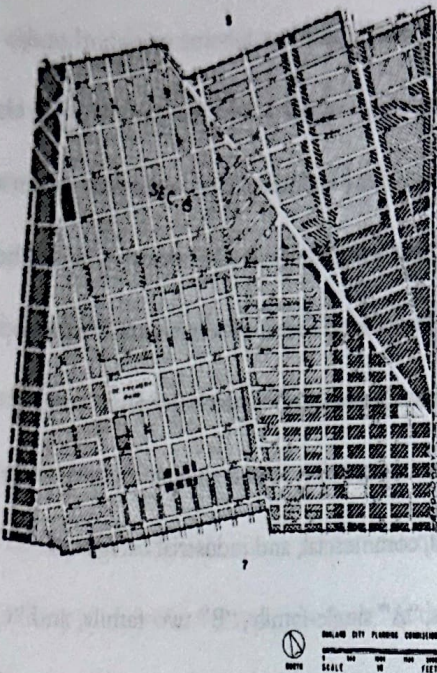


Figure 5. 1935 zoning map for Section 6, part of West Oakland including the Oak Center neighborhood. City of Oakland Zoning Laws & Ordinances 474-475 C.M.S, Adopted February 5, 1935 (Oakland, California: City Planning Commission, 1935), unpaginated 34.

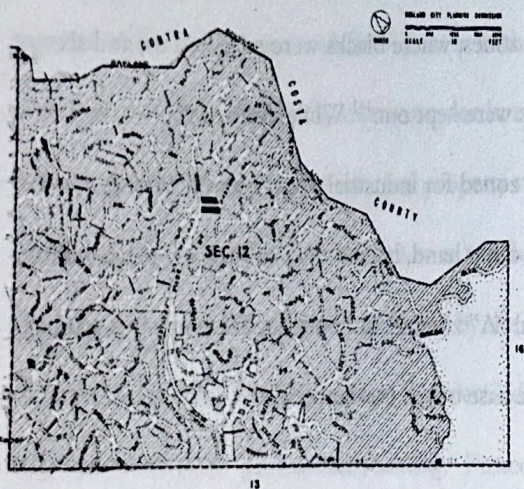


Figure 6. 1935 Zoning maps for Section 12, part of the Montclair neighborhood in the hills. City of Oakland Zoning Laws & Ordinances 474-475 C.M.S, Adopted February 5, 1935 (Oakland, California: City Planning Commission, 1935), unpaginated 40.

The racially exclusive areas had much better zoning that restricted industrial development and kept property values high by zoning it single-family, necessarily encouraging more expensive housing development. Meanwhile, blacks in racially contained West Oakland lived in much denser residential zoning among light and heavy industries. Activities allowed in light industrial areas included chemical, acid, disinfectant, chlorine, ammonia, cement, lime, gypsum, and alcohol manufacturing.¹⁴⁴ In heavy industrial areas, the following were allowed: manufacturing explosives and fertilizer; petroleum refining; garbage, offal or dead animal reduction or dumping; smelting.¹⁴⁵ While white spaces were zoned to be high property values areas free of industrial nuisances for exclusive white zones, the growth machine zoned serious health hazards for West Oakland that also would

¹⁴⁴ City of Oakland Zoning Laws & Ordinances, 9, 10.; all 1935 zoning maps pages unpaginated.

¹⁴⁵ Zoning Laws & Ordinances, 11.

have decreased property values there, representing disinvestment from black space.¹⁴⁶ These policy choices elevated white property values while depressing them in black areas by allowing acid manufacturing and garbage dumping. These decisions were influenced by racial politics and racial evaluations of space. The city actively took measures that would hurt black neighborhood values, made easy by the fact blacks were politically marginalized and not represented in local government. The decision also reflected white racial assumptions about property value, placing hazardous industries and denser, multi-family housing zoning in black neighborhoods where they thought property values would never be high, based on their racial biases. They sacrificed black housing conditions to allow white property values to appreciate, thinking it would help the city's economic development in the long-run by generating more tax revenue.

Federal Housing Policy

New Deal housing policies further enabled these discriminatory policies practiced by local governments like Oakland's and private residents. FDR's 1944 Second Bill of Rights included the "right to a decent home."¹⁴⁷ The federal government had been attempting to make this right a reality since the introduction of the New Deal a decade earlier by passing laws that stemmed foreclosures while simultaneously opening homeownership, revolutionizing the home mortgage industry to be more affordable with lower interest rates and long-term, self-amortizing loans.¹⁴⁸ Along with the right to a decent home, Americans came to view these New Deal programs as "a fundamental right."¹⁴⁹ However, these rights, were not available to all Americans. The right to homeownership was racially determined, as alluded to by President Hoover when he claimed the desire to own a home was one of racial longing: white racial longing.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, xii.

¹⁴⁷ Self, *American Babylon*, 62.

¹⁴⁸ Marc A Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 145.; Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 63, 64.

¹⁴⁹ Self, *American Babylon*, 62.

¹⁵⁰ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 75.

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With assistance in the form of federal government subsidies, white Oaklanders were able to purchase single-family homes in the hills with views of the San Francisco Bay. However, blacks in the flatlands lived a different experience, physically limited by private deed restrictions and economic zoning to West Oakland among heavy and light industry. Deemed risky investments by federal lenders based on local real estate practices biased by racial politics, blacks were denied access to federally secured credit made available to whites.¹⁵¹ This prevented them from getting necessary loans to move into expensive neighborhoods like the hills or make needed repairs to their homes in West Oakland.¹⁵² Like a business, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) rationalized these restrictions as necessary to insure they were funding the best mortgages.¹⁵³ These restrictions were tainted by racial bias from deed restrictions and local zoning practices. Because they perceived blacks as less responsible and therefore unlikely to maintain their properties, it was not smart for the government to investment in them. FHA in effect codified local racial politics at the national level, cutting off an important source of credit for blacks that was available to whites.

Looking at the 1942 Citizens Committee on Resident Development proposal for white, suburban development in the Oakland hills shows us how the growth machine's and federal governments interests came together to prioritize property values in white areas. The report noted: "A large percentage of our population desires and prefers hill properties for residential development. In the last decade the largest percentage of home-building and population gain took place in our hill area."¹⁵⁴ And why would they not want to live there? In an award-winning five-minute talk at a NAREB convention, Fred Reed expounded on the beauty of Oakland.¹⁵⁵ He described living in the Oakland Hills as living in "homes set in hillside gardens that look down over a city below, out across

¹⁵¹ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 142.; Thomas J Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 34.

¹⁵² Self, *American Babylon*, 142.

¹⁵³ Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*, 152.

¹⁵⁴ Citizens' Committee on Residential Development, "Report on Residential Development," 7.

¹⁵⁵ Fred Reed, "Oakland: City of Opportunity, City of World's Future, City of Destiny," 1923, Fred Reed Papers, Folder 5, Oakland Public Library History Room, unpaginated 1.

a blue bay, to where Mt. Tamalpais guards the Golden Gate.”¹⁵⁶ Physically rising above the city, their elevation and spacious-suburban style homes with spectacular scenic views of the Bay Area represented progress and achievement – the literal manifestation of moving up the social ladder.

As expressed in their 1942 hills development plan, the Citizens Committee on Resident Development wanted to develop the hills to promote Oakland’s economic growth and development. In their report, the committee claimed Oakland residents were making more money and moving out of the older parts of the city, but instead of staying in the city, they were migrating to the suburbs which they thought were comparatively more affordable due to their lower tax rates.¹⁵⁷ The committee warned that “The loss of this population will directly affect older homes, apartments, stores and income properties of all kinds, not to mention the tax revenue.”¹⁵⁸ The whole city of Oakland would be negatively impacted: the housing stock would deteriorate with nobody to pay for repairs, shopping would slow in local stores and decrease profits, the city would lose tax revenues, which would put a strain on city services. Oakland would be devastated. But, if it could keep residents with rising incomes in Oakland, these problems could be avoided, and the city would actually be improved.

The Citizens Committee on Resident Development recommended Oakland subsidize their proposed residential development in the hills to keep wealthy residents in the city. According to this plan, the city would provide a subsidy of \$500 per site, “after due-allowances for additional cost of construction necessitated by topography,” extend utilities to the hills, and eliminate restrictive building and subdividing codes “which impose artificial and unnecessary cost of building code requirements of suburban cities and satellite rural areas.”¹⁵⁹ For conservative business interests on the committee, loosening of city regulations was especially attractive, allowing them to direct

¹⁵⁶ Reed, unpaginated 1.

¹⁵⁷ Citizens’ Committee on Residential Development, “Report on Residential Development,” 7.

¹⁵⁸ Citizens’ Committee on Residential Development, 16.

¹⁵⁹ Citizens’ Committee on Residential Development, 16, 35.

housing development according to their profit-seeking interests. Furthermore, by the committee's estimates, the investment would produce a \$1,021,580 increase in taxable property value.¹⁶⁰ According to the plan's authors this would have helped the city economically with "Increased assessed valuation and increased tax revenue, provision of mass purchasing for our downtown merchants and the consequent strengthening of downtown property values."¹⁶¹ The committee attributed all these benefits to developing land and thereby increasing property valuations, which would allow taxes to be lowered and promote economic development.

This would fundamentally be a white development. In their 1942 Residential Report, the Chamber of Commerce Subcommittee stated that their proposed development would meet the FHA's subdividing requirements to qualify for federal mortgage insurance.¹⁶² The federal government "considered zoning restrictions to be an essential pre-requisite for insuring a home mortgage on any property," using federal mortgage insurance as a carrot to further encourage cities to adopt zoning ordinances.¹⁶³ In fact, this induced Oakland to adopt its own 1935 zoning code.¹⁶⁴ By requiring cities to adopt "restrictive" zoning laws in order to get important federal mortgage insurance for housing construction, the federal government reinforced and promoted urban planning policies that were racially restrictive in practice.¹⁶⁵ Although race was not explicitly mentioned in the 1942 hills development plan, adherence to FHA requirements signaled it would be racially restricted.

Developing the Oakland Hills represented peak opportunities for the federal government and elite business on the citizens committee and in local government. In fact, Douglas Manuel, FHA Promotion Manger was acknowledged by the citizens committee "for his assistance in furnishing

¹⁶⁰ Citizens' Committee on Residential Development, 34.; calculated from adding the increased value at the first proposed site, expected to increase in value from \$8,200 to \$601,200, to second set, expected to increase from \$17,820 to \$446,400.

¹⁶¹ Citizens' Committee on Residential Development, "Report on Residential Development," 7-8.

¹⁶² Citizens' Committee on Residential Development, 25, 35.

¹⁶³ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 151, 153.; Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*, 150.

¹⁶⁴ "New Zoning and Map Laws Are Passed" (Oakland Tribune, 1935), Zoning File, 1916-1935 Folder, Oakland Public Library History Room.

¹⁶⁵ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 25, 35.

factual data and his support of the endeavors of the Committee."¹⁶⁶ The FHA was supportive of the residential development proposal because it helped the federal government promote housing construction and homeownership, a goal since the 1920s.¹⁶⁷ It also fulfilled the growth machine's economic development platform by increasing city property values, thereby decreasing tax burdens while encouraging economic development with white, wealthy residents' continuing patronage to their businesses. The plan itself was a product of Oakland's growth machine that blurred the lines between government and business interests. The Citizen's Committee on Residential Development was an arm of the Chamber of Commerce and its members were appointed by Oakland's City Manager.¹⁶⁸ They were assisted in this scheme by community builders, also invested in the increase of property values, who gave them the tools with zoning to reflect their spatial values into government policy. With industry concentrated in the black flatlands, community builders and the growth machine could keep property values high everywhere else, protecting higher-income, white neighborhoods like the development on the hill, which would ostensibly save the city from fiscal ruin. This would allow the board of directors behind the city government to accomplish their goal of running a more-efficient, conservative corporate-city.

The 1942 residential development proposal predicated their hill development on the desire for social mobility, but it was only available to whites. Using the same levers of government, the growth machine, private residents, and the federal government segregated blacks to the flatlands in deteriorating housing intermixed with industrially zoned blocks. Disinvested and without necessary capital, things fell apart. The blight bred from black political and social marginalization expressed in their deteriorating physical surroundings. The powers that be, comprised of the growth machine and white property owners, to be discussed later, had aligned to promote their own interests as public

¹⁶⁶ Citizens' Committee on Residential Development, "Report on Residential Development," 8.

¹⁶⁷ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 75.

¹⁶⁸ Citizens' Committee on Residential Development, "Report on Residential Development," 8.

interests and prioritized increasing white property values and lowering taxes based on their racial politics. What started as private practices in deed restrictions morphed into local racial and economic zoning, finally taking shape in federal lending practices. Looking at Oakland, these private and public policies based on ugly racial politics, promoted segregation and disinvestment in black spaces while elevating the interests of white residents in the hills. These policies were based on the growth machine's interest in maintaining high property values in white spaces, not in the flatlands, in order to promote economic development through lower taxes. However, by imprinting racial hierarchies into land-use planning and housing policy, they created blight in West Oakland that hurt the whole city.

Chapter Two: Blight – Things Fall Apart

In a 1965 report on housing conditions in the West Oakland neighborhood of Acorn given to the Welfare Sub-Committee on Redevelopment, Oakland's housing inspector explains why one public welfare recipient's bedroom at 1060 18th St, Apt 5 in West Oakland was deemed uninhabitable.¹⁶⁹ It had a laundry list of problems: "Defective flue serving unapproved gas heated in living room"; "Electrical wiring at switch in bedroom is exposed to accidental contact due to lack of an outlet box and cover"; "Lack of required air space"; "Inadequate ceiling heights"; "Door leading to bedroom 58" in height."¹⁷⁰ The apartment was a fire hazard, a health hazard, and not fit for human habitation. It is difficult to imagine anyone living in these circumstances willingly with other alternatives available. But options were limited for black residents in Oakland. These residents were segregated in a blighted neighborhood that suffered from disinvestment.

Value was the most important priority for growth machine politicians. But not values like quality of life, the public good, or democracy.¹⁷¹ The value they favored, and the value written into policy and the city's maps was the financial value property could create for the city.¹⁷² In this fashion, Oakland's land-use planning under the conservative growth machine revolved around how to increase property values and raise tax revenues to support basic, necessary city services while decreasing overall tax rates.¹⁷³ The 1935 zoning law and 1942 hill development plan showed the city valued high income white neighborhoods, because they added value in tax revenue and consequently protected these areas from industrial or lower-income developments that would decrease them. The city's land-use planning also showed how economic racism kept blacks segregated by their incomes

¹⁶⁹ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, eds., *Report of Social Work and Community Relations Programs under Contract with Oakland Redevelopment Agency: Report no. 70*, Condensed edition, Council of Social Planning, Oakland Area. Report, b no. 70 (Oakland, Calif: Council of Social Planning–Oakland Area, 1965), 44.

¹⁷⁰ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, 44.

¹⁷¹ Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, vii.; Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," 169.

¹⁷² Logan and Molotch, vii.

¹⁷³ Logan and Molotch, 33.

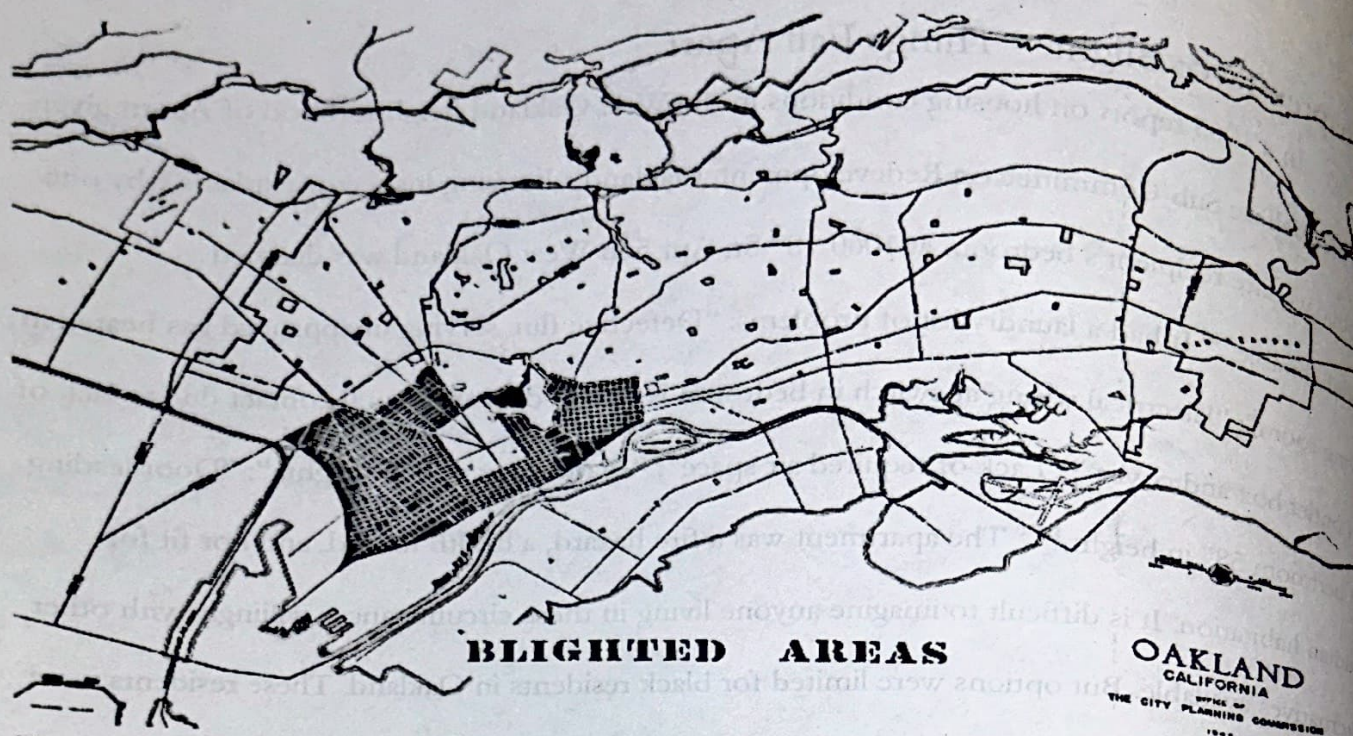


Figure 7. Blighted Areas in Oakland identified in the 1949 Blight Report. City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland: A Part of the Master Plan" (Oakland, Calif.: City Planning Commission, 1949), unpaginated 7, verso.

and race into West Oakland, zoned for industrial and residential use, decreasing its property values. The impacts were obvious. Uninhabitable, overcrowded, blighted housing existed in the flatlands and beautiful homes with a view built in the hills.

In the 1949 Housing Act, the federal government defined blight categorically, identifying it based on buildings, populations, land and public utilities, health, and value.¹⁷⁴ A blighted neighborhood could be characterized as having old, unsafe buildings that needed lots of repairs in a high density, overcrowded area lacking recreational facilities and with high juvenile and high crime rates.¹⁷⁵ These areas were also marked by unsanitary conditions, leading to high levels of disease and high infant mortality rates.¹⁷⁶ Blighted areas were plagued by "uneconomical extension of public services to outlying areas," "Disproportionate expenditures for police and fire protections and other

¹⁷⁴ Oakland City Planning Commission, ed., *Oakland General Plan* (Oakland: The Commission, 1959), 15, 16.

¹⁷⁵ City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland: A Part of the Master Plan" (Oakland, Calif.: City Planning Commission, 1949), 15.

¹⁷⁶ City Planning Commission, 16.

public services," as well as "uneconomical lot shapes and sizes."¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, blight could also be measured by an "Impairment of tax structure owing to depreciated property values," producing "Inadequate tax receipts in relation to service costs."¹⁷⁸ The federal government's analysis of value closely aligned with that of Oakland's growth machine leaders.¹⁷⁹ They put blight and deteriorating housing conditions in economic terms. In assessing the value of a blighted area, the federal government was limited to fiscal consideration, ignoring the value of an area as a home to residents.¹⁸⁰ Like the city, federal government defined value was by a property's taxable contributions to the city and whether this amount was an asset or drain on city services. The physical marginalization of blacks in West Oakland did not become a problem for local government to address with a policy solution until low property values created tax inefficiencies.

Furthermore, in discussions about property value and blight present in West Oakland, race would be a central issue. Homer Hoyt, quoted by Dr. Luigi Laurenti, claimed that "Certain racial groups, because of their lower economic status and their lower standards of living, pay less rent themselves and cause a greater spatial deterioration of property than groups higher in the social and economic scale."¹⁸¹ Because whites viewed blacks as socially inferior, it logically followed that their property values were naturally inferior: place reflected its inhabitants, and white people and the city judged black responsibility and other traits based on the exterior of their homes.¹⁸² However, these beliefs had no foundation in reality. If anything, these beliefs generated self-fulfilling prophecy in which hysterical whites panicked that black presence would bring down property values and lead the whole neighborhood to sell, glutting the market and bringing prices down.¹⁸³ All the while, whites believed property values decreased because of the presence of blacks as opposed to their own

¹⁷⁷ City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland," 15.

¹⁷⁸ City Planning Commission, 16.

¹⁷⁹ Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, vii.

¹⁸⁰ Logan and Molotch, vii.

¹⁸¹ Laurenti, *Property Values and Race: Studies in Seven Cities, Special Research Report to the Commission on Race and Housing*, 10.

¹⁸² Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 36.

¹⁸³ Laurenti, *Property Values and Race*, 26.; Sugrue, 191.

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irrationality.¹⁸⁴ The actions of lenders and appraisers decreased black property values as well, denying them access to loans and issuing racially biased appraiser reports on properties.¹⁸⁵ These "prediction-induced consequences" turned stereotype into reality, giving physical shape to social hierarchies and racial stereotypes.¹⁸⁶

Race did have a role in the creation of blight as these white people suspected, but for very different reasons. It was a product of institutionalized practices and attitudes towards black neighborhoods that were invisible to whites.¹⁸⁷ Specifically, blight was a product of segregation and the growth machine's prioritization of business development and white property owner interests, which encouraged disinvestment in West Oakland. Segregation and disinvestment had their origins in white racial assumptions about black people, conjured up in racist minds and then written into deed restrictions, zoning laws, and federal lending practices. However, instead of recognizing the roles of these institutions in creating blight and reassessing previous governmental and electoral reforms, blight served to confirm racial biases in an unending cycle style.

Segregation and Disinvestment

The city's core, including West Oakland, fit the federal government's definitions of blight according to a 1949 report issued by the Oakland City Planning Commission.¹⁸⁸ West Oakland and East of the Lake were the most densely populated census tracts and had the most overcrowded neighborhoods and lowest rents.¹⁸⁹ City, private resident, and federal interests as defined by their racial biases about blacks and property values contributed to these housing conditions in West Oakland.

¹⁸⁴ Laurenti, *Property Values and Race*, 25.; Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 196.

¹⁸⁵ Laurenti, 26.

¹⁸⁶ Laurenti, 26.

¹⁸⁷ Self, *American Babylon*, 139.

¹⁸⁸ City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland," 15-16.

¹⁸⁹ City Planning Commission, 18, 22, 24.

Racially restrictive deeds, such as those in the Fred Z. Jones, Lakeshore Glen, and Pleasant Valley deeds, were made unenforceable in state courts by the United States Supreme Court in 1948 in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, but even with this ruling and a 1963 state fair housing bill authored by Oakland-Berkeley Assemblyman Byron Rumford, racial discrimination was still a fact of life in Oakland. In 1964, Dr. Floyd Hunter found that a total of one-third of Oakland residents acting on racial prejudices to practice housing discrimination.¹⁹⁰ A product of state, then realtor and resident enforced deed restrictions, and economic zoning, Oakland's black populations in the city had been largely segregated to the West Oakland neighborhood, creating overcrowding as their population grew and more blacks migrated to the city, unable to move elsewhere in Alameda County where restrictions excluded them as well.¹⁹¹ Marginalized politically, socially, and physically, black interests in finding a good home outside of West Oakland were secondary to concerns white residents and the growth machine had about the decrease in property values they thought blacks would cause.

Reporting to the United States Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) in 1964, Assemblyman Nicholas C. Petris recounts examples of housing discrimination in Oakland in 1962. One apartment owner in East Oakland, who was also a city employee, wanted to keep his building white and rejected a nonwhite family; a rooming house rejected a minority person even though rooms were available; one female apartment building owner would not rent to nonwhites, in spite of having "four vacancies for several months."¹⁹² This discrimination extended to the home buying market as well. One black buyer tried purchasing a home full price in 1962, his offer initially accepted before being rejected because of the owner's opposition, selling it "some months later to a Chinese family for three thousand dollars less than the offer made by the Negro family."¹⁹³ Another black buyer in

¹⁹⁰ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 64.

¹⁹¹ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 212.; Self, *American Babylon*, 51, 256.

¹⁹² Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, *Report of Social Work and Community Relations Programs under Contract with Oakland Redevelopment Agency*, 81.

¹⁹³ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, 82.

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1962 had all eight of his offers, some for full asking price, rejected in the Lake District.¹⁹⁴ Petris found "resistance of white real estate brokers to assisting in the elimination of race as a qualifier for housing."¹⁹⁵ When asking "prominent real estate brokers" to find Montclair, Lakeshore, Skyline, or Oakland Hill homes for black, middle-income families, they could find none.¹⁹⁶ Even when blacks could not be excluded because of financial limitations, they were still denied access to white, higher income spaces, preventing their integration into the hills and excluding them from social progress and equality measured in living in a shared neighborhood. These patterns continued into 1964, despite the recent passage of California's fair housing law. An Oakland Redevelopment Agency phone survey found 21 percent of current 486 housing listings and 17 percent of 675 rental listings were racially restricted. In addition a total of 70 real estate brokers reported restricted listings in calls.¹⁹⁷ In fact, Dr. Floyd Hunter and Dr. Luigi Laurenti both found that realtors encouraged white property owners to either list or sell their properties as racially restricted in Oakland and San Francisco.¹⁹⁸ Blacks were stuck in deteriorating housing and they were limited in their options to move out as well, contributing to continued overcrowding as West Oakland's swelling population was squeezed into the same number of units.

The real estate industry had a direct interest in promoting the segregation practiced by local property owners in Oakland. By maintaining separate markets for black and white property owners, the real estate industry had better control over price stability and the housing market as a whole, a goal from the early days of deed restrictions and zoning.¹⁹⁹ Having separate housing markets for blacks and whites also allowed realtors to exploit the two groups through blockbusting, taking

¹⁹⁴ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, *Report of Social Work and Community Relations Programs under Contract with Oakland Redevelopment Agency*, 82.

¹⁹⁵ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, 82.

¹⁹⁶ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, 82.

¹⁹⁷ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, 83.

¹⁹⁸ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 31.; Laurenti, *Property Values and Race*, 7.

¹⁹⁹ Self, *American Babylon*, 265.; Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*, 84.

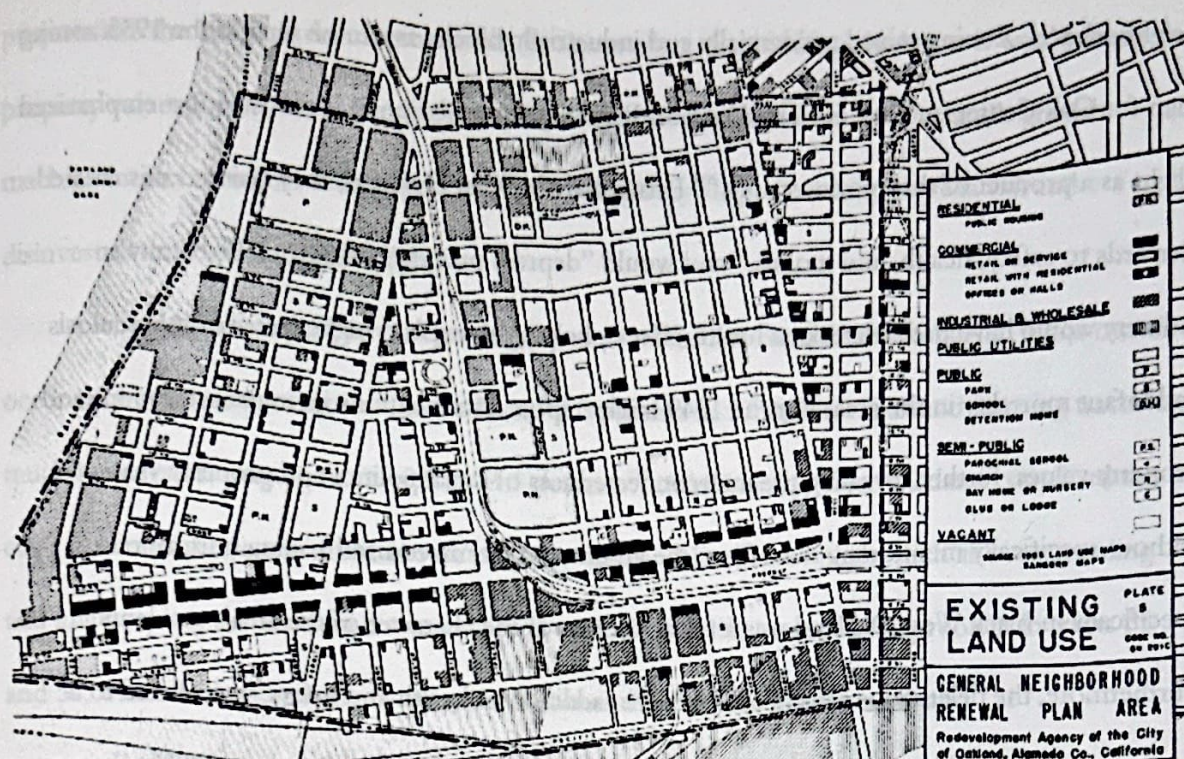


Figure 8. West Oakland zoning in 1959. City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland: A Part of the Master Plan" (Oakland, Calif.: City Planning Commission, 1959), unpaginated 40.

advantage of black desires to move out of overcrowded slums, and white people's fears that black neighbors would decrease their property values.²⁰⁰ Realtors would first convince whites that a "black residential takeover" was eminent. For example, in Detroit some paid black people to call white property owners in a neighborhood to make inquiries about homes for sale or push baby carriages down the street.²⁰¹ White residents panicked, sold their homes at "below-market prices," then realtors turned around and sold the homes to black families at "substantial markups."²⁰² Even if realtors did not subscribe to racist idea that black people decreased property values, they promoted and exploited the belief among property owners because it brought them handsome profits.²⁰³

In addition to segregation, West Oakland's blight conditions were a product of city zoning decisions that decreased property values and signified local government's disinvestment in the

²⁰⁰ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 195.

²⁰¹ Sugrue, 195.

²⁰² Sugrue, 196.

²⁰³ Self, *American Babylon*, 265.

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neighborhood. Zoning mixed residentially and industrially blocks as can be seen in the 1935 zoning map for Oak Center on page 50. The Oakland Planning Commission in its 1949 report emphasized blight as a product of this mixed zoning.²⁰⁴ Particularly in West Oakland, they claimed this created "hazards to safety, health, and morals," and would "depress property values."²⁰⁵ Proximity to industry would have had deleterious health effects, helping to explain higher rates of tuberculosis and infant mortality in the area. But the 1949 blight report also mentions its impact to morals and property values, further revealing the interconnectedness of racial politics and property values without specifically mentioning race. First, the argument that mixed-used zoning hurt morals specifically in black West Oakland was a racial critique of the character of the area's residents. Furthermore, the deleterious effects on morals, in addition to health and safety, was related to a decrease in West Oakland property values, following the logic of popular racial arguments that blacks lacked responsibility and therefore decreased property values due to their lack of property maintenance. Additionally, mixed-used zoning in West Oakland was a policy decision the city made in 1935, choosing to zone heavy and light industrial zoning in the middle of residential neighborhoods. Therefore, it was city policy that decreased property value in West Oakland. Blight was a natural outgrowth of this disinvestment in West Oakland, which sacrificed black space to increase the aggregate value of property elsewhere in the city in an effort to keep Oakland fiscally healthy.

Disinvestment on the part of the federal government had a role to play as well. By denying credit through redlining practices, black homeowners could not make necessary repairs or upgrades to invest in their old wooden homes.²⁰⁶ This contributed to the physical deterioration of West Oakland, preventing owners from investing in their own properties. Instead, federal dollars went to

²⁰⁴ City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland," 31, 34, 37.

²⁰⁵ City Planning Commission, 34.

²⁰⁶ Self, *American Babylon*, 142.

projects like the 1942 hill development, city business elites emphasizing the boost it would bring property values for the exclusively white homes and thus city tax revenues. Oakland's growth machine interests and the federal government's complicity shaped housing segregation and disinvestment, contributing to blight.

Absentee white property owners' disinvestment further contributed to blight. While owner occupancy averages per tract in Oakland was 47.5 percent in 1950, West Oakland housing tracts had much lower rates, ranging from 10.8 to 31.1 percent.²⁰⁷ Additionally, West Oakland contained the city's two census tracts with the lowest property values.²⁰⁸ Factors of blight such as overcrowding and low property values were not unique to West Oakland. Blight was also a problem in tracts 55 and 56, which had comparatively very low numbers of nonwhite residents, 40 and 121 respectively.²⁰⁹ What these tracts did have in common with West Oakland was lower than average owner occupancy rates. Tract 56 had an owner occupancy rate of 33.7 percent, a comparable rate to West Oakland tracts, as well as the fourth lowest property values in Oakland.²¹⁰ Tract 55 had an owner occupancy rate of 35 percent and had the third lowest property values in Oakland, closely trailing West Oakland's tract with the second lowest property values in the city.²¹¹

Based on this information, there appears to be a correlation between low property values and lower owner occupancy rates in Oakland. The 1949 Oakland study on blight explains that after moving out, absentee owner focus on "realizing the maximum return irrespective of the housing condition and their effect on the people forced to occupy those dwellings."²¹² The active disinvestment of landlords is mirrored by financial institutions, and without FHA financing for improvements, and depreciation of the property with subdividing, landlords "intensify the building's

²⁰⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Housing: 1950*, vol. V, Block Statistics, Part 133 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1952), 3.

²⁰⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 3.

²⁰⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 3.

²¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 3.

²¹¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 3.

²¹² City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland," 23.

use and profitability in the last few years."²¹³ Eventually landlords "disinvest totally, refusing to make repairs and paying only the necessary costs – and then only sporadically – for the building to yield rent."²¹⁴ It was not supposedly lazy blacks who created loss in property values that defined blight, it was their greedy, lazy white landlords. Cued by local zoning that put heavy and light industry in West Oakland, and by federal redlining practices, local property owners reified local and federal government disinvestment in their private businesses.²¹⁵ They did not value their properties in black spaces as anything other than a short-term income generator and would not invest in their properties or the neighborhood. And why would they if the city allowed a dump to establish across the street from their property and the federal government would not award loans in the area?

Thinking back to the West Oakland bedroom in Acorn deemed uninhabitable by the housing inspector, there were serious problems with housing conditions. The inspector's determination that the room was not fit for human life likely would have resulted in condemnation. Without any investments or improvements in the now empty unit, property values would decrease in the building, as well as the area, as it lost rental income. But this loss in income was not for lack of care on the tenant's part. All the problems the housing inspector listed such as exposed wires, low ceilings, insufficient air space, were building code violations. Lost property value in this building would have been as much a product of the owner's lack of responsibility as the city and federal government's action in the area. This example is symptomatic of local, federal, and private disinvestment in West Oakland, driven by racial assumptions about black property values.

While the growth machine in Oakland had prioritized the interests of white residents, city structural and electoral reforms instituted in the Progressive Era marginalized the interests of black residents, which, along with the racial politics of racist white residents and the federal government,

²¹³ Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 64.

²¹⁴ Logan and Molotch, 64.

²¹⁵ Self, *American Babylon*, 18.

led to their segregation and disinvestment in their neighborhoods. These institutionalized practices trapped black residents in poor housing conditions and created blight, identified in part by an area's property values relative to tax revenue spent on public services. That determination would give the growth machine the go-ahead from the federal government to fix blight with urban renewal in West Oakland and marginalize its residents even further. The growth machine would take the opportunity presented to them by the federal government to convert West Oakland to its most profitable use, which, based on racial perceptions of property value, would not include its black residents.

White Assessment

While the term blight was a purely economic term, measured by quantifiable metrics, its interpretation was almost always racial.²¹⁶ Blight as defined by the federal government, meant "property in which value no longer appreciated."²¹⁷ Blight was a direct product of segregation, that confined blacks to poor housing conditions, and of disinvestment by city and federal government as well as landlords, which further deteriorated housing. However, it was also a sign of "individual moral deficiency" that "served as a *cultural* signifier for a people – usually black people – who themselves had no value, or at least no values."²¹⁸ Space reflected race. According to this interpretation, blighted areas developed because of the quality of the people who lived in them. The structural integrity of the area's buildings was faulty, so the character of its residents must have been lacking as well, or vice versa. According to whites, blacks living in deteriorating homes were of just as little value as the buildings which they occupied. If they were like white Americans – smart, motivated, and capable of responsible property maintenance – whites figured that black housing would be in better condition. Instead it was falling apart, in their minds proving their initial racial assumptions about race and property value correct.

²¹⁶ Self, *American Babylon*, 150.

²¹⁷ N.D.B. Connolly, "Sunbelt Civil Rights: Urban Renewal and the Follies of Desegregation in Greater Miami," in *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space, and Region*, ed. Michelle M. Nickerson and Darren Dochuk, Politics and Culture in Modern America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 164–87, 181.

²¹⁸ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 9; Connolly, 181.

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Instead of looking inward and questioning the role of local and federal policy and the impact of their own decisions in creating blight, these conditions convinced whites that "blacks were feckless and irresponsible" and would "ruin any white neighborhoods they moved into."²¹⁹ They also convinced banks they were right to deny loans in black neighborhoods because they were not credit worthy.²²⁰ Whites did not have this deep reflection on the institutions breeding blight because, according to N.D.B. Connolly, the racism fostering segregation was "invisible to most White Americans, especially compared to the Old South white supremacy of cross burning, 'Whites Only' signage, or the Wallace campaign."²²¹ Unlike these invisible institutions that promoted segregation disinvestment, their product in the form of deteriorating housing and blighted, black neighborhoods was very visible.²²² Whites saw the housing conditions blacks lived in, but not the processes that created them because they did not fit the violent archetype of overt Southern racism. Instead, for example, Thomas Sugrue writes that blight coupled with black joblessness rates reinforced in white residents' minds the "inferior intelligence of blacks . . . stereotypes about black licentiousness, sexual promiscuity, laziness and dependence."²²³ According to white people, any blight in black areas occurred because of their supposed inferior character qualities, assessments that contributed to black residents' marginalization. These traits were outside of the mainstream for hardworking, virtuous, enterprising Americans. White residents thought that just as blacks could not adhere to acceptable standards or white social behavior, they could not their property up to proper standards either, justifying their marginalization. For example, Oakland's 1949 blight study claimed that mixed industrial and residential zoning decreased morals in black-West Oakland, but not in the East of the Lake area, singling out West Oakland as backward and inferior.²²⁴

²¹⁹ Self, *American Babylon*, 139.; Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 36.

²²⁰ Sugrue, 36.

²²¹ Connolly, "Sunbelt Civil Rights," 166.

²²² Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 9.

²²³ Sugrue, 8.

²²⁴ City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland," 34.

For white people, blaming the victims of their own racial politics was easy; much easier than examining the complex, invisible institutions that converted racial assumptions about property value into segregation and disinvestment. It also exonerated their bigotry. Their supposed naturally inferior traits made blacks bad neighbors – irresponsibility inevitably led to deferred property maintenance and the housing deterioration that created blight and tanked property values – as well as risky investments. It was not racial; it was just business. This was a widely held belief, and the most common defense of segregation, necessitating a full study to disprove it.²²⁵ As proven by Laurenti Luigi in his 1960 report on race and property value written for the Commission on Race and Housing, blacks did not have a lower propensity to maintain their property as white people assumed.²²⁶ Instead, the marginalization of blacks politically, socially, and physically created bad housing conditions. These circumstances in turn contributed to their continued marginalization by confirming stereotypes responsible for bad housing conditions in the first place. The racial biases behind these commonly held misconceptions about race and property values are important to examine because the people who ascribed to them, like homeowners and the city government officials, defined public interest. As a result, these assumptions made their way into city policy and private home sales in Oakland.

Despite what the white people in Oakland thought, in his 1960 study of property values, Laurenti found black people did not decrease property values there.²²⁷ In fact, studying San Francisco, Oakland, and Philadelphia, he found that while there was no “uniform pattern” the “entry of nonwhites into previously all-white neighborhoods was much more often associated with price improvement or stability than with price weakening.”²²⁸ For example in 17 areas that saw non-white entry in Oakland, 14 saw price increases “relatively higher than the control” while just three

²²⁵ Self, *American Babylon*, 160.

²²⁶ Laurenti, *Property Values and Race: Studies in Seven Cities, Special Research Report to the Commission on Race and Housing*, 56, 63.

²²⁷ Laurenti, 47.

²²⁸ Laurenti, 47.

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saw prices drop "relatively lower."²²⁹ Laurenti found that prices increased as whites opened the housing market to "pent-up *nonwhite* demand" to fill vacancies.²³⁰ In San Francisco, Oakland, and Philadelphia, again despite the common assumptions among white people, "nonwhites were maintaining their properties at least as well as white homeowners in comparable areas."²³¹ In fact, in a study of Kansas City, black property owners maintained their property better than comparable whites.²³² This was attributed to former white property owners disinvesting prior to black infiltration, which increased the need for repairs, the higher economic and education status of incoming blacks as opposed to existing white residents, and the fact that it was typical of first time homeowner behavior.²³³ Laurenti also suggests black property maintenance as a product of racial pride and feelings of being on trial.²³⁴ These findings flew in the face not only of Laurenti's contemporary McEntire's assumptions, but defied white America's assumptions about the relationship between property value and race. These findings indicated blacks were unequivocally not a lazy, irresponsible, unintelligent, culturally backward race. They did not depress property values by virtue of their existence in a neighborhood. Fundamentally, Laurenti's work shows the racial underpinnings in economic defenses of segregation were faulty. Blacks did not inherently cause property values to go down because they did not have uniquely inferior traits that would cause that to happen.

So, if race did not determine property maintenance practices and black people did not bring down property values in Oakland, how can we explain decreased property values in black communities? Laurenti found that the white idea that blacks do not maintain property was confirmed by their "observation of overcrowded slum areas, where nonwhites are predominantly

²²⁹ Laurenti, *Property Values and Race*, 175.

²³⁰ Laurenti, 126, 132, 137.

²³¹ Laurenti, 232, 56.

²³² Laurenti, 233.

²³³ Laurenti, 233, 234.

²³⁴ Laurenti, 235.

tenants and where landlords spend little, if anything, to maintain the appearance of property in which their only interest is the derivation of income."²³⁵ These practices mirrored the growth machine's approach to urban planning as well, valuing space based on the income it could generate in the form of taxes. Due to blighted conditions, West Oakland was of little value to the city, and actually a problem, because it generated little income in relation to the services given to the area. Furthermore, as shown previously, West Oakland had low rates of owner occupancy. It was these absentee landlords that had disinvested from their housing in the community following cues in local zoning and federal lending practices.²³⁶ So, ironically, it was white people's poor maintenance practices that created blight in Oakland. Whites were not universally responsible and motivated just in the same way blacks were not universally lacking in initiative.²³⁷ Fundamentally, race did not indicate social inferiority or superiority. As shown here, race did not determine property value either, at least until white people decided to disinvest from black communities and prevented black people from obtaining the credit to invest in their own properties.

Flipping the narrative on blight in West Oakland, we find that irrationality, bigotry, and ignorance expressed by white property owners and business leaders in the city growth machine and federal government created blight. Their racist stereotypes of black people shaped the physical marginalization of that community and built the slum conditions for which they then blamed their victims. White Oakland's inability to see the problem with the systems created by the reforms giving power to the city's growth machine inherently made any solutions to blight ineffective. Without addressing the root cause of blight, even if temporarily fixed with window dressing solutions, the underlying problems of segregation and disinvestment would persist, prohibiting any sort of long-term project solvency. Instead, racialized assessments of blight allowed the growth machine to

²³⁵ Laurenti, *Property Values and Race*, 236.

²³⁶ Self, *American Babylon*, 18.

²³⁷ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 74.

continue their same approach to city development: prioritize white space while disinvesting in black space. The growth machine thought this would encourage economic growth through increased aggregate property values that would allow the city to decrease taxes. Through their racial blinders, the growth machine could not see that their policy of disinvestment was actually destroying their city.

The growth machine's inability to recognize the real origins of blight is evident in the Oakland Planning Commission's final policy recommendation in the 1949 blight study. It proposed clearing blighted West Oakland, its best use being industrial instead of residential use.²³⁸ Where were these low-income and black residents supposed to move when more space was made for industry? Even though there was space, the answer was certainly not the hills.²³⁹ The study determined that would be too expensive.²⁴⁰ This of course was the underlying reason as to why economic zoning preserving racial exclusion was so successful. As property values increased in the hills, aided by local protectionist zoning and federal mortgage insurance for racially exclusive developments, the area became prohibitively expensive for residents seeking to move out of the flatlands.

Furthermore, the hills' exclusive residential zoning protected white, higher-income homeowners from the annoyances of industry, annoyances West Oakland residents had no choice but to bear, at the expense of their moral character according to the planning commission. Oakland prioritized white comfort and investments, which included maintaining segregation, because as stated in the 1942 Development Proposal, their capital was necessary to keep the city fiscally afloat. So instead the Planning Commission decided the "most economical and practical location for new medium- and low-income residents are in the present blighted neighborhoods."²⁴¹ Subsidizing the private construction of these units, the city estimated would be a "more efficient use of land," bring

²³⁸ City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland." 40.

²³⁹ City Planning Commission, 40.

²⁴⁰ City Planning Commission, 40.

²⁴¹ City Planning Commission, 40.

"higher assessed valuations, and lower total outlays for public services."²⁴² These were peak growth machine policies written by city government officials. Keeping blacks in the flatlands and out of the hills would increase aggregate property values in the city, enabling them to pass lower taxes, just as the growth machine wanted. However, by reinforcing segregation and not challenging the racial stereotypes that led to disinvestment in the first place, the 1949 policy recommendation was no solution for blight. The 1949 plan never went anywhere, but the general program for urban renewal they proposed and the philosophies behind it did gain traction again in the 1950s. With Oakland business elites leading the charge, the city would embark on their "greatest postwar spending project" to correct blight and slumping downtown property values: the 1959 General Neighborhood Renewal Plan.²⁴³

²⁴² City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland," 40.

²⁴³ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 120.

Chapter Three: The 1959 General Neighborhood Renewal Plan

Citizen participation is an indispensable element in any program that will ultimately involve all of the people of an area. Oakland was fortunate in having among its citizenry a number of individuals who not only possessed the vision to see the problems, but who were willing to give time, energy, and money to the task of solving it.

A group of these individuals met in May of 1954 and formed "the Citizens Committee for Urban Renewal". In the initial meeting Mr. Norris Nash, Vice-President of Kaiser Industries, was named General Chairman.

Since the Committee was formed it has been active in all matters pertaining to Urban Renewal in Oakland. This group has made numerous recommendations to the City Council for improving coordination among the various Departments involved in carrying out the program.

— Housing Division City of Oakland Building and Housing Department ²⁴⁴

For all the Housing Division of Oakland's Building and Housing Department's praise, the Citizens Committee for Urban Renewal did not have "the vision to see the problems." They did, however, have the money and access to have *their* interests heard by city government. But, without a real awareness of what caused blight, their plans for urban renewal in the 1959 General Neighborhood Renewal Plan (GNRP) made it worse. Blight, represented by the living conditions at 1060 18th St, Apt 5 in West Oakland described in Chapter Two, was a serious concern for the city. The health and fire hazards there as a result of exposed electrical wires and insufficient air space were a real danger to residents. As a result, West Oakland "inefficiently" drained city resources, by generating too little tax revenue in relation to the fire services, for example, required by residents. To adequately address blight in the flatlands with a program of urban renewal, the growth machine business leaders present in the Citizens Committee for Urban Renewal needed to dramatically change their racial politics. They needed to integrate the city and invest in black spaces in West Oakland the way they invested in white spaces in the hills. However, these institutions and their racial politics would prove insurmountable obstacles to any real solution.

²⁴⁴ Housing Division City of Oakland Building and Housing Department, "Final Report of the Clinton Park Urban Renewal Rehabilitation Project, No. Calif. R-2: An Historical Report on Neighborhood Rehabilitation in Oakland" (Oakland, California: Housing Division City of Oakland Building and Housing Department, 1962), 4.

The 1949 and 1954 Housing Acts made urban renewal a possible solution to blight by providing federal funding to local government that covered two-thirds of costs associated with purchasing land, and granted local jurisdictions eminent domain powers.²⁴⁵ Federal funding was in part a recognition of the role it had played in creating blight, in part by starving black residents of credit, and was meant to "serve as civil rights legislation," post *Shelley v. Kraemer* and *Brown v. Board of Education*.²⁴⁶ Specifically, as a black man himself and a major national housing official, Robert Weaver saw it as "spatial uplift" for blacks who would necessarily be leaving inner-city slums as a result of its redevelopment.²⁴⁷ With these federal dollars and powers, the Oakland Planning Commission declared all of West Oakland blighted in its 1949 study and recommended a program of urban renewal to solve it.²⁴⁸ Despite identifying the problem of blight, presenting a policy recommendation, and having federal funding available, urban renewal failed to get support in 1949 or in 1954.²⁴⁹ Urban renewal did not become possible until it had a strong business-elite backing.²⁵⁰ Under the council-manager government structure and electoral reforms of the growth machine city, business elite controlled city government, elected officials, and the fate of expensive programs through the power of their purse. Naturally, this gave their interests precedence in the program that would be implemented.

The Citizens Committee for Urban Renewal (OCCUR) had a largely elite membership. This was not unique to Oakland, urban renewal was championed elsewhere across the country by similar groups of business elites to protect "central city business and property investments."²⁵¹ In Oakland, downtown businesses were suffering and elites in the 1950s wanted to stop the "centrifugal loss of

²⁴⁵ Self, *American Babylon*, 139.; Davis McEntire, *Residence and Race: Final and Comprehensive Report to the Commission on Race and Housing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 333-334.

²⁴⁶ City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland," 10.; Connolly, "Sunbelt Civil Rights," 173, 179.

²⁴⁷ Connolly, "Sunbelt Civil Rights," 173, 179.

²⁴⁸ Robert O Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 139.; City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland: A Part of the Master Plan" (Oakland, Calif.: City Planning Commission, 1949), 59.

²⁴⁹ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 100, 101.

²⁵⁰ Hayes, 112.

²⁵¹ Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 168.

capital, property value, and middle-income consumers."²⁵² West Oakland, which neighbored Oakland's city center, should have provided downtown's consumers. Instead it was made up of poor residents living in slum conditions.²⁵³ Writing in 1933, Henry Wright, said "the idea that the slums should be rebuilt primarily with the vision of rehousing the present tenants is no longer valid in respect to any large-scale handling of the problem."²⁵⁴ Instead, Wright suggested planners should take advantage of the opportunity to replace these tenants with better ones. Specifically, his recommendation was to make "the present slum districts for the convenient and enjoyable occupancy of those whose business relations are largely in the central area."²⁵⁵ Wright wanted inner-city areas to be recreated for the higher-income people working nearby; not the present residents. Henry Wright, focusing on the financial worth of a person, decided higher-income residents could add more value to the city than poor ones.

Following this logic, the downtown business elite thought if they could attract the "right people," rather than addressing disinvestment in low-income West Oakland, they could boost declining sales and property values. Their solution, spearheaded by OCCUR was centered on their faith in industry and white consumers. The "right people" who would increase property values and tax revenues were industries and white, middle-income earners.²⁵⁶ The interests of black residents in West Oakland went largely unrepresented compared to growth machine powerhouses such as Kaiser and Knowland.²⁵⁷ Black residents were easy to ignore owing to lower rates of owner occupancy, which made it easier to seize land for redevelopment.²⁵⁸ Instead, business leaders such as these men, described by Ernestine Nettles as racists, directed policy that would impact black people's lives, almost ensuring by their racial politics that it would not be done fairly.

²⁵² Self, *American Babylon*, 139.

²⁵³ Self, 138.

²⁵⁴ Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 71.

²⁵⁵ Smith, 71.

²⁵⁶ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 108.; Self, *American Babylon*, 139, 140.

²⁵⁷ Self, *American Babylon*, 81.

²⁵⁸ City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland," 23.

The 1959 GNRP approach to solving blight was to raze black neighborhoods to make land available for industrial and higher-income housing that current residents could not afford. The human impact of black displacement was considered a necessary sacrifice for business leaders' plans to make room for the industries and middle-income white shoppers who would increase property value and tax revenues for the city.²⁵⁹ Robert O. Self writes that for this reason, redevelopment "embodied the calculable arithmetic of property values rather than the grammar of community."²⁶⁰ With business leaders' control over Oakland's corporate city government, policy put low taxes and the city's economic development ahead of the public good, and especially black residents' interests. Furthermore, this approach was aligned with the growth machine's racial priorities, based on the idea that low-income and black residents could not generate property value for the city and needed to be removed and replaced in West Oakland to limit the financial damage they caused to the city tax structure. Analyzing the people, philosophy, and specific policy details behind the 1959 GNRP gives us insight into why urban renewal further compounded not only downtown's problems, but also the physical marginalization of Oakland's black residents.

The People: OCCUR

To say J.R. and William Knowland played a large role in Oakland city politics would be an understatement. The Knowlands had a presence on all the citizens' committees reviewed for this project. No other names appeared with anything close to the same frequency as theirs. Knowland even sat on the New Oakland Committee in the 1960s with Ernestine Nettles, who was serving as a youth advisor.²⁶¹ Her theory for why he and fellow "mover and shaker" Kaiser were involved in the New Oakland Committee and so many others: "to make sure they were all on the same page."²⁶² Members of the business elite such as these men, came together on committee boards to better

²⁵⁹ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 139.

²⁶⁰ Housing Division City of Oakland Building and Housing Department, "Final Report of the Clinton Park Urban Renewal, 148.

²⁶¹ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles.

²⁶² Nettles.

coordinate their interests to ensure public policy aligned with it.²⁶³ City interests were defined through these committees with key players such as Knowland directing policy and public interest.

One such organization that William Knowland was involved with was OCCUR. In the Final Report of the Clinton Park Urban Renewal Rehabilitation Project, prepared by the Housing Division of Oakland's Building and Housing Department, the author notes Oakland's good fortune in having citizens participating in urban renewal planning.²⁶⁴ These citizens participating in OCCUR were not run-of-the-mill citizens you would find on the streets, the "neighborhoods citizens" who best represented typical residents' interests, these were wealthy mover and shaker citizens with capital invested in the city and an interest in keeping the value of those investments rising. In fact, OCCUR represented "most of the financial, and much of the industrial muscle of Oakland."²⁶⁵ It had been created by the mayor in 1954 and given "semi-governmental powers" that Hayes described as a rarity, given the scale of the project OCCUR controlled. The practice of granting citizen committee powers to these elite-business individuals was not abnormal of Oakland government however: similar powers were given to the chamber of commerce subcommittee directing residential development in the hills in 1942.

Looking at the list of the members of OCCUR, it reads like a company board of directors, bringing the business-centric orientation of city politics into greater relief. Specifically, among its members it included: Robert W. Turner of Kaiser Center, Chairman of OCCUR taking over for former Chairman Mr. Nash, Vice President of Kaiser Industries; Senator William Knowland, owner of the Oakland Tribune; Clark Mak of Pacific Gas and Electric; Loren Mowrey of the Oakland Real Estate Board; James Scott of the Bank of America; Mrs. Jean Simas of the Simas Brothers Oil Company; Earl Smith of the Apartment House Owners Association; Sheridan of the Uptown

²⁶³ Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 32.

²⁶⁴ Housing Division City of Oakland Building and Housing Department, "Final Report of the Clinton Park Urban Renewal," 4.

²⁶⁵ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 91.

Development Association; Warren Isaacs of the Downtown Property Owners Association; Stuart Davis of the First Savings and Loan Association.²⁶⁶ According to the corporate-city model of council-manager reforms, this was the ideal way a business-government should be run. Major stakeholders in the city, determined by the size of their investments in the city and tax contributions, shaping the policy decisions that impacted them most.

With its access to funding and people in positions of power, OCCUR was able to shape how blight was defined as a problem in a way that would suit their interests in stemming losses in downtown property values. Access further allowed OCCUR the opportunity to propose its own solution, embarking on a serious campaign to make urban renewal, which had already failed twice before, possible in Oakland. The committee conducted a thorough study of urban renewal and directed a "massive campaign to popularize redevelopment."²⁶⁷ OCCUR visited Los Angeles, St. Louis, KS, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Baltimore to learn about their urban renewal programs in 1956 along with officials from the "City Council, City Administration, Redevelopment Agency, Board of Education, the Citizen's Committee, and the Press."²⁶⁸ Through these trips, OCCUR had incredible access to government officials, giving them the opportunity to shape local officials' opinions about urban renewal. They were also treated less like a semi-governmental body, and more like a full-governmental body with a seat at the table beside the Oakland City Council and Redevelopment Agency while visiting other cities, blurring the line between government and business interests.

Back in Oakland, OCCUR also invited the American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods to meet with "City Officials and Committee Members" to give information and

²⁶⁶ Julius F. Thomas and Oakland (Calif.), eds., *Clinton Park: An Historical Report on Neighborhood Rehabilitation in Oakland, California* (Oakland, Calif.: Housing Div., Building & Housing Dept., City of Oakland, 1962), Appendix A.

²⁶⁷ Housing Division City of Oakland Building and Housing Department, "Final Report of the Clinton Park Urban Renewal," 6-8; Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 113.

²⁶⁸ Housing Division City of Oakland Building and Housing Department, "Final Report of the Clinton Park Urban Renewal," 6-7.

assistance on how to make urban redevelopment work in Oakland, as well as "Providing national publicity for the program" and "consultation with local leaders on problems."²⁶⁹ OCCUR promoted the need for urban renewal to solve blight in Oakland that was decreasing property values in downtown and creating tax inefficiencies, and then set up the city with all the tools and resources necessary to make that program possible. This was a direct product of their extraordinary access to local and national government officials, unavailable to the marginalized "neighborhood citizens" whose lives were intimately impact by the plan, but whose interests could not compete.

This central role OCCUR played in making urban renewal possible in Oakland through efforts such as their national tour was acknowledged by the Housing Division of the City of Oakland in their report of Clinton Park renewal, the city's pilot urban renewal project. The report identified OCCUR as "one of the dynamic forces behind Oakland's Urban Renewal program" and went so far as to say the Clinton Park project would have been unsuccessful without them.²⁷⁰ OCCUR was so invested in getting urban renewal adopted, resulting in this acknowledgment from the city, because of the financial stakes at play for them. Without urban renewal, they would continue to take losses in retail sales and property values, which had gone down 50 percent from 1925 to 1955.²⁷¹ Significantly, it was these interests represented in the 1959 General Neighborhood Renewal Plan (GNRP) as well. However, OCCUR fundamentally did not represent these communities. The Clinton Park report admitting it lacked such "neighborhood citizens."²⁷² However, this problem was not fixed by the planning process for the 1959 GNRP. For that plan, OCCUR is listed first among civic groups represented, in addition to a Redevelopment Liaison Committee with the Sunset District Council, the Council of Community Services, and the Urban

²⁶⁹ Housing Division City of Oakland Building and Housing Department, "Final Report of the Clinton Park Urban Renewal," 7.

²⁷⁰ Housing Division City of Oakland Building and Housing Department, 7.

²⁷¹ Self, *American Babylon*, 25.

²⁷² Housing Division City of Oakland Building and Housing Department, "Final Report of the Clinton Park Urban Renewal," 7.

Design Advisory Council.²⁷³ This is indicative of the growth machine, produced by the council-manager government and electoral reforms favored by business. They narrowed the pool of participants in government and promoted the business community's interests as public interests while ignoring neighborhood ones. As a result, it was OCCUR's elite members' interests shaped the city's redevelopment, favoring their vision of development and racial politics.

The Philosophy: Growth Machine Politics & Private Sector Saviors

The vision for economic development favored by the business leaders of OCCUR was built on their growth machine politics, putting their trust in industry and consumer spending. Business leaders represented on OCCUR and council-manager governments across the country had an unyielding faith in the ability of industry to save the local economy, which Elizabeth Shermer attributes to lessons they learned during the New Deal.²⁷⁴ The growth machine acting through bodies like OCCUR would continue to prioritize industry and white homeowner interests as *the* public interest, catering to them with urban renewal to solve the problem of "static" retail sales, vacant offices, and "scattered pockets of deterioration" in downtown Oakland.²⁷⁵

Interviewing a "selected group of influential business and financial leaders," Coro Foundation intern Donald Livingston studied the business industry's outlook on downtown Oakland, publishing his findings in 1961.²⁷⁶ According to these people interviewed during the Summer of 1961, around the same time as the roll-out of the GNRP, development of Oakland's Central District would be aided by several factors such as nearby urban renewal and a "better business climate with lower assessed valuations, lower taxes, and, consequently, lower rents."²⁷⁷ For adherents to growth machines politics, urban renewal was positive for business leaders located in the

²⁷³ Oakland City Planning Commission, *Oakland General Plan*, unpaginated 4.

²⁷⁴ Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, "Sunbelt Boosterism: Industrial Recruitment, Economic Development, and Growth Politics in the Developing Sunbelt," in *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space, and Region*, ed. Michelle M Nickerson and Darren Dochuk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 31–57, 33.

²⁷⁵ Donald Livingston, "The Logical Place Is Oakland: A Report on Business Leaders' Views of the Potential of Oakland's Central District" (Oakland, California: Coro Foundation, 1961), 2.

²⁷⁶ Livingston, 4.

²⁷⁷ Livingston, 10.

downtown area and concerned about its economic viability. Urban renewal was a hopeful opportunity because it would allow them to repurpose nearby land to what they deemed to be its best-use: industrial development.²⁷⁸ In turn, this would create favorable business conditions for growth machine economic development by also decreasing taxes through increased property values.

Industrial leaders would have described prioritizing industrial development as a major shift in local policy since the thought city had typically ignored their interests. This idea that industry was harmed by Oakland's residential population had been expressed years earlier. In 1954, a meeting of planners and industrial development representatives from giants such as the West Pacific Railroad was held in the Bay Area.²⁷⁹ The groups in attendance, government and big business, emphasized the close, growth machine-like relationship between government and business especially in planning. The two groups were also in sync when it came to the importance of industry, all present "agreed that industry is necessary for a reasonable tax structure in any community."²⁸⁰ Despite the universal recognition of their importance to Bay Area cities, industry complained that they were being victimized by the residential encroachment.²⁸¹ Planners would permit residential development in industrial areas and then these residents would complain about the industries next door.²⁸² Industry also felt it was given leftover land for industrial development.²⁸³ Oakland Planning Commissioner Houlihan agreed with the industrialists.²⁸⁴ The consensus from the planning conference was that more needed to be done to protect the giants of industry from residential annoyances. As the taxpayers funding city government, business interests took precedent as larger stakeholders, corporate entitlement in peak form.

²⁷⁸ Self, *American Babylon*, 140.

²⁷⁹ "Zoning Law Fails to Protect Factory Areas, Says Oakland Planning Chief" (Oakland Tribune, 1954), Zoning File, 1950-1965 Folder, Oakland Public Library History Room.

²⁸⁰ "Zoning Law Fails."

²⁸¹ "Zoning Law Fails."

²⁸² "Zoning Law Fails."

²⁸³ "Zoning Law Fails."

²⁸⁴ "Zoning Law Fails."

However, despite industry's belief they were victims, Oakland's growth machine had already shown its willingness to put industry's needs at the forefront of public interest. A decade earlier in 1944, Oakland rejected a planned development for 57 units of family housing, a development "strongly protested by representatives of heavy industries."²⁸⁵ The Oakland Planning Commission explained the decision by stating the subdivision was on "valuable industrial sites which would be destroyed in post-war time should emergency housing take over the land at present."²⁸⁶ Industry was not the victim of unfair city policy decisions as they claimed, they were the beneficiaries.

Business interests in city government continued to favor industrial interests with their plans to make West Oakland more accessible to industry with urban renewal, which would help increase the city's property values. They believed making the Central Business Area more attractive to higher income residents would help accomplish this goal as well. One of the business leaders interviewed by Donald Livingston verbalized the growth machine's interest in higher income earners when asked about creating businesses to cater to people working nearby: "These conveniences are not all good because many times you may draw a poorer work force interested in utilizing these convenience."²⁸⁷ West Oakland was the logical community served by the Central Business district.²⁸⁸ But business leaders did not want their business; they were seen as the wrong type of people. Instead they wanted white, higher income residents living nearby.²⁸⁹ These residents, like industries, would save downtown by bringing up property values and increasing spending in downtown businesses to boost retail sales. The business leaders wanted to attract this clientele thinking they would provide tax revenue for the city while allowing tax rates to decrease – another factor identified in making the business community more-friendly to development.²⁹⁰ Faith in industry, white upper income

²⁸⁵ "Planners Act on Waterfront Zone" (Oakland Tribune, May 24, 1944), Zoning File, 1936-1949 Folder, Oakland Public Library History Room.

²⁸⁶ "Planners Act on Waterfront Zone."

²⁸⁷ Livingston, "The Logical Place Is Oakland," 9.

²⁸⁸ Self, *American Babylon*, 139.

²⁸⁹ Self, 139.; Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 108.

²⁹⁰ Livingston, "The Logical Place Is Oakland," 10.

residents, and low taxes were quintessential components of growth machine interests in the city. However, these interests did not address the major cause of blight: segregation and disinvestment in West Oakland through policies just like these. However, with the people on OCCUR controlling the policy decisions, this philosophy made it into the 1959 GNRP. The growth machine's interest defined public policy, but to a much different effect than its business leaders had anticipated.

The Policy: 1959 General Neighborhood Renewal Plan

The 1959 GNRP was a culmination of growth machine politics from the way they had identified blight, to whom created the policy solution, and what interests went into that plan. The growth machine's racial politics played a central role in each stage of the process, including the creation of blight itself, and was shaped by their biases that, despite evidence to that contrary, blacks decreased property values. In the preface of the West Oakland GNRP, the author states "West Oakland has the potentiality for becoming again one of the best residential neighborhoods in the

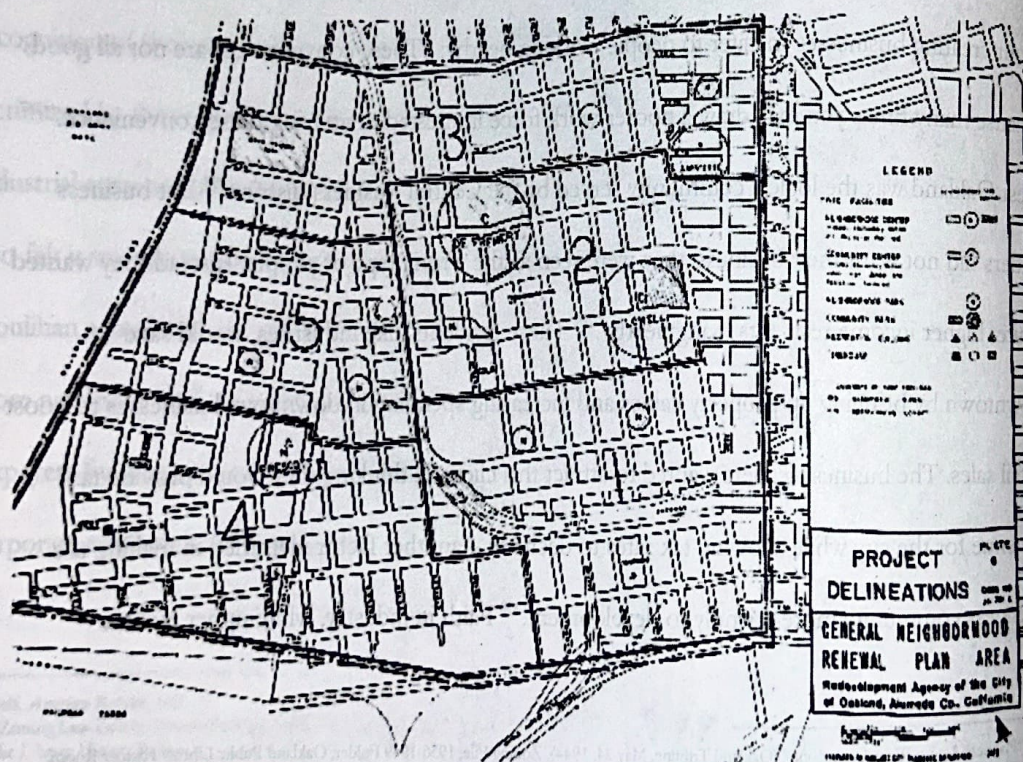


Figure 9. 1959 GNRP project areas in West Oakland, Acorn is area 1 and Oak Center is area 2. City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland: A Part of the Master Plan" (Oakland, Calif.: City Planning Commission, 1959), unpaginated 41.

City. And additionally, one of the most desirable light industrial locations.”²⁹¹ This vision would save the struggling downtown by increasing consumption and investment in West Oakland and the central-city business area. This vision also reflected the hope of the business-elite who stood to gain in terms of profits and lower taxes, which would spur growth machine oriented economic development in Oakland.²⁹² However, reading between the lines, this vision did not have West Oakland residents’ in mind. When the GNRP claimed West Oakland could become one of the “best residential neighborhood,” they meant it could become a white, middle-income residential neighborhood who would shop in OCCUR member’s nearby stores. This was the group prioritized by other housing plans such as the 1942 hills development, also spearheaded by Oakland’s growth machine. When the GNRP claimed West Oakland could become one of the “most desirable light industrial locations,” they meant they planned to increase acreage dedicated to industry. The GNRPS’s goal of increasing property values to cater to these two constituencies was predicated on pushing West Oakland residents out to elevate the area to its “best use,” higher income rentals and industry, increasing aggregate property values at the expense of black residents who business leaders believed were responsible for depressing property values with blight.²⁹³

In practice, the 1959 GNRP written by the Oakland City Planning Commission prioritized industrial development in West Oakland by eliminating mixed-use zoning and setting the terms for residential rehabilitation. The GNRP’s elimination of mixed-use industrial and residential zones made it possible for planners to significantly increase industrial acreage in West Oakland. A product of 1935 zoning that set aside space in “most of this area for heavy industrial uses,” the planners behind the GNRP acknowledged this mixed zoning was “environmentally bad for residential use.”²⁹⁴ These conditions were a product of the city’s disinvestment in black West Oakland, zoning it as a

²⁹¹ Oakland City Planning Commission, *Oakland General Plan*, 2.

²⁹² Self, *American Babylon*, 146, 149.

²⁹³ Self, 139, 146.

²⁹⁴ Oakland City Planning Commission, *Oakland General Plan*, 1, 14.

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dumping ground for industries that were environmentally harmful while protecting higher income white neighborhoods with exclusive residential zoning. Environmental degradation was a natural outgrowth of the growth machine's racial politics, Oakland was reaping what it had sowed. However, the city's response in light of an acknowledged housing shortage was to prioritize industrial rather than black residential interests, deciding to "clear all residential structures in the proposed industrial areas."²⁹⁵

The plan further prioritized industrial development by setting a high bar for residential rehabilitation, ensuring that many structures would be bulldozed, "redeveloped," and converted to industrial zoning. In order for a building to qualify for rehabilitation, the cost of such an undertaking had to be under the cost of replacement.²⁹⁶ Rehabilitation also needed to extend the building's life expectancy at least another 20 years.²⁹⁷ Finally, determinations would be made based on the potential rental income and improvements that would be generated in the neighborhood.²⁹⁸ Housing would need to at least meet basic code guidelines, balancing between "best possible neighborhood on the one hand and the housing market on the other."²⁹⁹ These requirements would have been difficult to meet in West Oakland because of ongoing major disinvestment that had prevented residents from getting credit for necessary repairs and upgrades to their old, wooden homes which the planning commission stated had a total life expectancy of just 35 years anyway.³⁰⁰ The GNRP stated that structures that could not be saved based on the "economic feasibility" would be cleared, straight from OCCUR's recommendations for the Clinton Park pilot urban renewal project.³⁰¹ Based on their survey of housing conditions and conversions of mixed residential, industrial zones to exclusively industrial use, the city estimated that industrial acreage would increase in West Oakland

²⁹⁵ Oakland City Planning Commission, *Oakland General Plan*, 1, 14.

²⁹⁶ Oakland City Planning Commission, 16-17

²⁹⁷ Oakland City Planning Commission, 16-17

²⁹⁸ Oakland City Planning Commission, 16-17

²⁹⁹ Oakland City Planning Commission, 17.

³⁰⁰ City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland," 9.

³⁰¹ Oakland City Planning Commission, *Oakland General Plan*, 14.; Thomas and Oakland (Calif.), eds., *Clinton Park*. 6.

by 121 acres while housing would decrease by 72 acres. Furthermore, the city left the option for increasing industrial acreage even more, stating it could increase beyond those already generous projected numbers.³⁰² Amidst a severe housing shortage, this represented a substantial decrease in available housing stock for an already overcrowded area.³⁰³ To ameliorate these problems, and decrease blight, housing had to be built or West Oakland residents would have to move out.

However, the city favored industrial development rather than residential on redeveloped land, and subsidized industrial acreage at a substantially higher rate than residential acreage. The city planned on acquiring five acres of industrial land at \$270,000 per acre for a total of \$1.35 million but planned on selling 104 acres for industrial development at a fraction of that price, \$45,000 per acre for \$4.6 million total, representing a subsidy of about \$23.4 million for corporations to move in.³⁰⁴ The city would acquire 192 acres of residential property at \$88,000 per acre for a total of \$16.9 million, selling 117 acres at \$43,560 per acres for \$5.1 million.³⁰⁵ The city planned on giving a subsidy of just \$5.2 million for residential property, a fifth of the size of industry's subsidy, showing the GNRP's clear preference for industrial development in West Oakland.³⁰⁶ The preface to the GNRP illuminates the city's logic behind promoting industrial growth with a \$23.4 million subsidy for corporations: "More land in the GNR Study Plan area will be devoted to industrial uses, thus increasing the City tax base."³⁰⁷ True to form, growth politicians writing the plans wanted to encourage industrial development and investment to increase the city's property value and resultant tax revenues so they could decrease overall tax rates thereby attracting economic development. They projected that through this corporate welfare scheme the city would see an increase of \$50 to \$80

³⁰² Oakland City Planning Commission, *Oakland General Plan*, 20.

³⁰³ Self, *American Babylon*, 68.

³⁰⁴ Oakland City Planning Commission, *Oakland General Plan*, 25.; Subsidy calculated by multiplying total acreage sold, 104, by the original purchase price per acre, \$270,000, and then from that value subtracting the product of 104 acres multiplied by the actual sales price of \$45,000 per acre.

³⁰⁵ Oakland City Planning Commission, 25.

³⁰⁶ Oakland City Planning Commission, 25.; Subsidy size calculated by multiplying total acreage sold, 117, by the original purchase price per acre \$88,000, and then from that value subtracting the product of 117 acres multiplied by the actual sales price of \$43,560 per acre.

³⁰⁷ Oakland City Planning Commission, 2.

million in private investment in the city.³⁰⁸ This calculation made the project's total \$26.4 million government price tag acceptable to fiscal conservatives like Knowland. Like the logic behind the 1942 hill development plan, public money was going to stimulate an even greater amount of private investment and development that would increase property values and drive growth through lower tax rates. However, as with other growth-oriented programs, they "lost the grammar of human community" while prioritizing industrial development.³⁰⁹

The 1954 Housing Act, which was provided key funding for Oakland's urban renewal, required at least temporary housing to be secured for displaced residents, but this was not a priority in the GNRP.³¹⁰ The GNRP estimated that of the 8,416 families living in West Oakland, 12 percent "can afford [to] purchase housing," 33 percent "can afford new rental units," 33 percent "can afford 'rehab' rental units," and 22 percent "need subsidized housing."³¹¹ However, the plan states that "adequate housing will be available only in the first three categories" meaning 22 percent of West Oakland's residents, representing 1,850 families, were expected based on current plans not to have housing at all.³¹² Even though they were embarking on a plan that would leave 1,850 of the lowest-income families without housing, the city still proposed the construction of an extra 240 single family homes and 2,723 new rental units beyond the calculated need for local residents in the highest-income brackets.³¹³ The proposed increase in more costly single family and new rental units beyond what was needed signaled the city did not have West Oakland's residents in mind while planning new housing developments. They did not want low-income residents to stay in West Oakland, specifically the 1,850 families without identifiable housing options. They wanted to attract more affluent residents from outside black West Oakland who could afford these single-family

³⁰⁸ Oakland City Planning Commission, *Oakland General Plan*, 22.

³⁰⁹ Self, *American Babylon*, 148.

³¹⁰ McEntire, *Residence and Race: Final and Comprehensive Report to the Commission on Race and Housing*, 334.

³¹¹ Oakland City Planning Commission, *Oakland General Plan*, 29.

³¹² Oakland City Planning Commission, 29.

³¹³ Oakland City Planning Commission, 33.; Calculated by subtracting 260 needed from 500 proposed new single-family home units and 2,777 needed new rental units from 5,500 proposed units.

homes or new rentals. This white population would better increase property values than the poorest black residents the city felt created blight.³¹⁴

The city prepared a range of possibilities for the 1,850 “residual problem.”³¹⁵ A “possibility” that new construction would decrease rental prices so “some of the 1850 could afford them” was explored.³¹⁶ But if the purpose of the project was to increase property values and the city was constructing higher-income housing at the same time, it seems unlikely that there would be a dip in rental prices. In fact, an increase was more likely, putting other West Oakland families at risk of losing housing as well. It was also “possible” County Welfare or Federal Section 221 could increase assistance for these low-income residents. But getting federal assistance required “substantial exceptions to traditional means of financing.”³¹⁷ Given the requirement of “substantial exceptions” for Section 221 housing, this option was unlikely. It was also “possible” according to the GNRP that these families would be put into existing public housing or that “550 new units of public housing could be built.”³¹⁸ The first option built no new units of housing, creating overcrowding elsewhere in the city and for that reason not solving blight. The second option made just 550 units available for 1,850 families, a deficit of 1,300 units, and was further problematic because Oakland’s real estate industry had traditionally, and effectively, opposed public housing construction.³¹⁹ While the GNRP authors could calculate the potential investment created by the GNRP, they could not put together a workable rehousing plan for West Oakland’s low-income residents beyond possibly increasing rental assistance at the county-level. Compared to the attention spent calculating private investment returns from industrial subsidies, rehousing low-income residents was not a priority in the GNRP. This was undoubtedly shaped by the growth machine’s interests.

³¹⁴ Self, *American Babylon*, 139.

³¹⁵ Oakland City Planning Commission, *Oakland General Plan*, 29.

³¹⁶ Oakland City Planning Commission, 29.

³¹⁷ Oakland City Planning Commission, 29.

³¹⁸ Oakland City Planning Commission, 30.

³¹⁹ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 82.

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The growth machine, in addition to making West Oakland available to industry, simultaneously promoted housing developments for more attractive to white, higher-income residents. In their discussions with the Oakland Civil Rights Coordinating Committee on February 27th, 1964, the Oakland Social Planning Council shared the Oakland Redevelopment Agency's plans to build "800 new dwelling units of which 720 will be apartments and 80 will be town houses."³²⁰ These units would be marketed to families within the \$5-7,000 income range.³²¹ Furthermore, the ORA expressed its commitment to making the development integrated.³²² While this on its face looked like a noble deed achieving the integrationist goals of urban renewal, it was more complicated. The proposed \$5-7,000 income range automatically excluded 90.5 percent of families in West Oakland according to the planning commission's own data in the 1959 GNRP.³²³ However, the 12 percent of families in the top income bracket in West Oakland that could have afforded these new apartments and townhouses were expected to be rehoused in new homes. This plan priced-out the 22 percent of West Oaklanders in the second-highest income bracket who had been expected to move to new rentals in West Oakland, according to the 1959 GNRP; however, the only housing development planned was now prohibitively expensive for them, and like the lowest-income residents in the flatlands, they would also have to find housing in a different area of the city.

While the units being built in West Oakland were billed as integrated, like housing in the single-family zoned hills, they were economically out of reach for local black residents. Rather, housing needed to be integrated to ensure white residents could move in. This recalls Henry Wright's quote: "the idea that the slums should be rebuilt primarily with the vision of rehousing the present tenants in no longer valid in respect to any large-scale handling of the problem."³²⁴ Why

³²⁰ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, *Report of Social Work and Community Relations Programs under Contract with Oakland Redevelopment Agency*, 77.

³²¹ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, 77.

³²² Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, 77.

³²³ Oakland City Planning Commission, *Oakland General Plan*, 31.

³²⁴ Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, 71.

rehouse West Oakland residents in their old neighborhoods when you could bring in ideal consumers? These ideal residents were white middle-income residents who could spend money downtown and bring up the property values in their higher-income rental units. As in the case of the hill development, these white middle-income residents would save the downtown economy and further promote the policies of the growth machine.

The GNRP tried to accomplish racial change in West Oakland by making it difficult for black residents to stay in West Oakland. GNRP policies also made it difficult for black residents to find acceptable housing in white areas.³²⁵ Robert Weaver intended for blacks to move out of segregated areas into better housing conditions, but for this integration to work, several things were required: the movement of white middle-income Oaklanders into West Oakland and of blacks into these newly available units elsewhere in the city.³²⁶ While the GNRP provided assistance in making housing available for the white property owners they wanted to attract, they did not adequately address how to integrate blacks into white sections of the city in any meaningful way.

Residents who were displaced by urban renewal and could not find housing had access to relocation services provided by the Oakland Social Planning Council, contracted for the purpose in 1962.³²⁷ Part of their role in providing relocation services was to smooth tensions between neighborhoods, incoming residents, and other groups through an "educational approach rather an action one."³²⁸ In an ORA Resolution adopted December 17th, 1958, it was resolved:

That since the redevelopment and rehabilitation of existing blighted areas and the conservation of other neighborhoods is substantially dependent upon the ability of all citizens to move freely, the Redevelopment Agency considers it necessary that all section of the city should be open to all citizens without distinction because of race, color, creed, or national origin.³²⁹

³²⁵ Oakland City Planning Commission, *Oakland General Plan*, 30.

³²⁶ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, *Report of Social Work and Community Relations Programs under Contract with Oakland Redevelopment Agency*, 60.

³²⁷ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, 1.

³²⁸ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, 3.

³²⁹ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, 70.

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However, the educational program was inadequate to accomplish these lofty goals, necessarily decreasing the effectiveness of the ORA's plans. Asking prejudiced white Oaklanders to open housing to black residents would not promote integration. Only enforcing California's 1963 Rumford Act, a landmark civil rights law passed by one of Oakland's own assemblymen, Byron Rumford, to outlaw private housing discrimination, would open housing to black residents.

In the same ORA phone surveys referenced by Assemblyman Petris in his 1964 USCRC interview, the Social Planning Council Consultant writing about urban renewal in Acorn observed in his "General Impressions" that although realtors knew the Rumford Act made private housing discrimination illegal, they claimed "owners might or would restrict," especially in expensive areas like Montclair, Skyline, Lake Merritt, and Adams Point, whereas less expensive areas would not.³³⁰ These residents in more expensive neighborhoods opposed integration because they were convinced by their racial politics that if black residents moved in, their white property values and social status would necessarily decrease. Furthermore, phone surveys revealed that nonwhite residents did not want "to move into changing neighborhoods because of the kind of reception which they might receive from their new neighbors."³³¹ These responses reveal that minority residents did not feel welcomed or wanted in neighborhoods undergoing racial change. This was likely a deliberate action on the part of discriminatory white residents who perceived increased nonwhite presence as a threat and tried to prevent it.

Despite this evidence of housing discrimination and reports that nonwhite residents feared reprisals if they moved into white neighborhoods, the Social Planning Council had a lackluster response. Although they were supposed to ease tensions between communities and help relocate West Oakland residents, the Social Planning Council's recommended approach to address

³³⁰ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, *Report of Social Work and Community Relations Programs under Contract with Oakland Redevelopment Agency*, 84.

³³¹ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, 88.

segregation was to do more to "bring together the willing owner and capable tenant or home buyer" and ask the County Welfare Department to add "intergroup and intercultural relations as part of its inservice training program."³³² These actions did not promote integration required to make urban renewal successful. Furthermore, they were highly deferential to racist white's interests and barely in keeping with fulfilling the Social Planning Council's stated duty to smooth tensions between neighborhoods. With the passage of California's 1963 Fair Housing Act, banning housing discrimination, Oakland's lack of a real response to reported incidents of housing discrimination also represented an abstention of their duty to uphold the law.

For these major reasons, promoting industrial and higher-income housing development while neglecting to provide housing for black residents, Hayes, Self, as well as Logan and Molotch agree that urban renewal in Oakland, like elsewhere across the country, was ultimately a failure. By 1969, Project Area One, Acorn, had attracted industries such as Ford, but no homes had been built.³³³ The real benefactors of the program were these industries who received large subsidies and the banks who helped fund the city's share of spending in the GNRP.³³⁴ For this reason, urban renewal represented a redistribution of resources from "poor and middling homeowners to private industries and corporations."³³⁵ Urban redevelopment also failed to attract the middle-income consumers that downtown business leaders thought would be their saviors.³³⁶ Expecting their spending to rescue downtown from stagnation, the growth machine represented in the GNRP did not count on white-property owners being disinterested in moving to West Oakland. White Oaklanders, such as those in the hills, had become accustomed to the privileges afforded them by racial exclusivity and single-family zoning; therefore, they were uninterested in living in the "heart of

³³² Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, *Report of Social Work and Community Relations Programs under Contract with Oakland Redevelopment Agency*, 84, 88.

³³³ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 121.; Self, *American Babylon*, 148.

³³⁴ Hayes, 122.

³³⁵ Self, *American Babylon*, 149.

³³⁶ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 120.

a ghettoized area.”³³⁷ They had rationalized the growth machine’s own racial politics, associating black neighborhoods with decreased property values.

Another aspect of the urban renewal’s failure was its inability to rehouse residents. The Oakland Social Planning Council acknowledged that “relocation intensified many existing problems,” and did not improve all family’s lives.³³⁸ The GNRP and Social Planning Council failed in their plans to build affordable units for West Oakland residents while simultaneously failing to encourage the integration that would make urban renewal work. By failing to address the stereotypes underlying disinvestment in West Oakland that had created blight and reinforced segregation in the first place, these city policy choices would keep whites from moving into the flatlands and blacks from moving into many white parts of the city. Oakland’s “greatest postwar spending project” hurt West Oakland’s black residents and also failed to help the downtown business community for which black interests were sacrificed.³³⁹

Unfortunately, these shortcomings in Oakland’s urban renewal program were far from unique. According to N.D.B. Connolly, one of “urban renewal’s most tragic consequences” was the creation of “hyper-segregated urban neighborhoods, downwardly mobile black suburbs” and the “modernization of white supremacy.”³⁴⁰ In Detroit, city planners similarly prioritized slum clearance to save their downtown with the addition of middle-income consumers that would enhance housing conditions and tax revenues for the city.³⁴¹ However, slum removal further overcrowded neighboring black areas because of the “utter failure” of their own relocation programs, increasing demand in those areas and enabling landlords to practice more rent-gouging.³⁴²

³³⁷ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 120.

³³⁸ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, *Report of Social Work and Community Relations Programs under Contract with Oakland Redevelopment Agency*, 57.

³³⁹ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 120.

³⁴⁰ Connolly, “Sunbelt Civil Rights,” 187.

³⁴¹ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 48-49.

³⁴² Sugrue, 49-51.

This pattern, concentrating minority populations into old, inner cities, disinvesting from those spaces, and then razing the deteriorated building for urban renewal, disproportionately impacted nonwhite families across the country.³⁴³ When the cleared land was redeveloped, it almost never rehoused previous residents. According to Logan and Molotch, of the land redeveloped with urban renewal money, "over 80 percent went for developing commercial, industrial, public infrastructure."³⁴⁴ Based on growth machine's philosophy of economic development, this should have boosted property values and allowed cities to cut taxes. This in fact had been the central philosophy for industrial development in the 1959 GNRP promoted by OCCUR. But a study of 130 cities found that in the longer term, urban renewal programs actually "increased city tax burdens."³⁴⁵ Not only did urban renewal disproportionately impact minorities by targeting slums for industrial development, later failing to rehouse them, the economic development plans for which these residents were sacrificed did not work. Oakland's economic development was actually hindered, not helped, by the growth machine's racial politics. They encouraged, instead of corrected, continued disinvestment in black communities by bulldozing entire neighborhoods and increasing industrial use in the area, ensuring the tax inefficiencies caused by blight would persist in Oakland.

³⁴³ McEntire, *Residence and Race; Final and Comprehensive Report to the Commission on Race and Housing*, 333.

³⁴⁴ Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 168.

³⁴⁵ Logan and Molotch, 169.

Chapter Four: White Privilege, White Backlash in the Oakland Hills

Sacramento-Calif.

Jan 9-1964

Dear Mr. Rumford:

Your performance on television was very amusing – a negro telling white people what they should do. You do not dare state the principle in your Fair Housing Act. If it is such a wonderful bill why not make public its good points. Your idea is taken from The Daily Worker in the 1928 resolutions of the Communist Party.

Can you deny this? . . .

Nothing has ever hurt California and the Democratic Party as you will see when our Legislators come up for election.

We are disgraced in the eyes of all 100% Americans.

– Women Property Owners.³⁴⁶

This is a blatantly racist letter. In their own words these women property owners showcase their extreme disrespect for the black public official receiving this letter, somebody who ordinarily should receive deference. Specifically, they insultingly assert their perceived racial superiority in their incredulity that a black man should even *try* to tell white people what to do. The year this letter was written was an intense period for racial politics in California and Oakland, due in part to the 1964 General Election. That year, California Democrats had the twin goals to elect President Johnson and defeat Proposition 14. Proposition 14 was spearheaded by the California Real Estate Association (CREA) to invalidate California Democrats' key civil rights legislative victory for the year referenced in the Women Property Owners' letter: outlawing housing discrimination.

The election year was a partial success for Democrats, while Johnson won 60 percent of the vote, Proposition 14 also passed with 65 percent of the vote.³⁴⁷ At first glance this seems like a contradiction.³⁴⁸ Johnson and the Democrats clearly were the party of civil rights, having passed the historical 1964 Civil Rights Act just earlier that year.³⁴⁹ Proposition 14 was very much in opposition

³⁴⁶ Sacramento Women's Club, "Letter to Byron Rumford," unpaginated 1-2.

³⁴⁷ Self, *American Babylon*, 168.

³⁴⁸ Self, 260.

³⁴⁹ Raymond E. Wolfinger and Fred I. Greenstein, "The Repeal of Fair Housing in California: An Analysis of Referendum Voting," *The American Political Science Review* 62, no. 3 (September 1968): 753–69, 760.

to this agenda, making it a constitutionally protected right in California that "Neither the State nor any subdivision or agency thereof shall deny, limit or abridge, directly or indirectly, the right of any persons, who is willing or desires to sell, lease, or rent any part or all of his real property, to decline to sell, lease or rent such property to such person or persons as he, in his absolute discretion, chooses."³⁵⁰ In a period of significant victories against racially discriminatory practices, this law gave legal sanction to that very thing by leaving it to owners' discretion whether or not to sell or rent based on any qualifications they chose. Property owners such as the white women writing to Assemblyman Rumford clearly would have considered race a qualification. The law did not mention race, which allowed it to pass legal muster. However, like economic zoning, in practice the law could be applied racially.

In fact, Proposition 14 was intended to be applied racially. Rather tellingly, the petition said the law would not apply to hotel accommodations.³⁵¹ Because Proposition 14 would allow racial discrimination in housing, its authors had to exempt hotels so their state constitutional amendment would not be held invalid for conflicting with the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Despite taking intentional steps to avoid conflicting with federal law, which was written to address racial discrimination, neither the text of Proposition 14 nor the campaign for it mentioned race, instead touting its defense of homeowner rights. In 1964, Californians voted to elect President Johnson after passing the Civil Rights Act, showing their support for policies of racial equality while simultaneously rejecting them.

Californians did not vote this way because they were ignorant about Proposition 14's meaning. To the contrary, evidence collected from polling data at the time suggests at least 87 percent of the electorate understood the amendment.³⁵² This was in all likelihood a product of intense campaigning, with clear cues from the California Democratic Party and conservative groups

³⁵⁰ "Proposition 14 Petition," n.d., William Byron Rumford Papers, Carton 6, Folder 21, Bancroft Library, unpaginated 2.

³⁵¹ "Proposition 14 Petition," unpaginated 2.

³⁵² Wolfinger and Fred I. Greenstein, "The Repeal of Fair Housing in California," 756.

as to how they should vote, making it an election with high levels of information available to voters.³⁵³ Political science theory defines correct voting as voting that occurs when people have access to "full information," which should allow voters to make an educated and "correct" vote based on their personal interests.³⁵⁴ With clear cues from their respective parties and a near-total understanding among the electorate of the amendment's purpose, voters should have the necessary information to vote accordingly to their interests. Californians knew what they were doing when they voted for Democratic Presidential Candidate Johnson and the conservative Proposition 14 amendment. In fact, they judged that voting across parties would actually better serve their interests. Which begs the question, why?

A crucial factor in understanding why Californians passed Proposition 14 is looking at who supported it. In fact, these results are shockingly telling and have important implications for the success of urban renewal. The state Democratic Party led the fight against Proposition 14 in a highly publicized election. They used rhetoric comparing Proposition 14 to racism in the South and focused on moralizing arguments.³⁵⁵ For example, in an issue of the Californians Against Proposition Newsletter, Proposition 14 opponents wrote: "At a time when even Jackson, Mississippi, is bowing to the inevitable change that will eventually give the Negro American his rights of full citizenship, the voters of California are being asked to reverse the direction of this change."³⁵⁶ If Californians passed this law, the state would be even more backwards than Mississippi and that would be a disgrace. After all, even *Mississippi*, for all its infamous treatment of black people, was giving black people their civil rights. Democrats and opponents to Proposition 14 were

³⁵³ Wolfinger and Fred I. Greenstein, 761.

³⁵⁴ Richard R. Lau and David P. Redlawsk, "Voting Correctly," *The American Political Science Review* 91, no. 3 (1997): 585–98, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2952076>, 586.

³⁵⁵ Daniel Martinez HoSang, "Racial Liberalism and the Rise of the Sunbelt West: The Defeat of Fair Housing on the 1964 California Ballot," in *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space, and Region*, ed. Michelle M. Nickerson and Darren Dochuk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 188–217, 202.

³⁵⁶ Californians Against Proposition 14, "News from Californians Against Proposition 14 Newsletter No. 3," July 16, 1964, Byron Rumford Papers, Carton 1, Folder 12, Bancroft Library.

shaming Californians into supporting black civil rights.³⁵⁷ Conservatives responded with similar appeals to civil rights. For example Daniel W. Klein, the Executive Vice President of the San Francisco Real Estate Board, said in a KCBS address, "there is no difference between property rights and civil rights; they are both human rights, and all rights come from God."³⁵⁸ Klein would have believed that maintaining segregation and the right to discriminate necessary to keep his property values high and real estate markets stable. Although he was claiming property rights were civil rights and human rights, by supporting racial discrimination inherent to Proposition 14 he made it clear he did not want to defend these God given rights for everyone, just white property owners.

Listening to these arguments from both sides, white Democrats and Republicans were more likely than not to support Proposition 14. Only 27 percent of white Democrats polled in late October expressed opposition to the amendment, still higher than 13 percent of white Republicans opposed to Prop 14.³⁵⁹ The racial dimension becomes clearer by examining a demographic analysis of Proposition 14 voting. A total of 22 percent of white voters polled expressed opposition to the amendment compared to 85 percent of black voters. Blacks and whites opposed the measure by almost opposite margins. This extreme gulf in opposition to Prop 14 shows race was a better indicator of voter support than party identification, what is typically understood as the best predictor for voting behavior, foreshadowing the party realignment the Women Property Owners threatened in their letter to Assemblyman Byron Rumford along the lines of racial rights.³⁶⁰ The Democratic Party in California was no longer aligned with what these formerly Democratic voters considered to be in their interest. The deciding factor for white voters who supported a state right to practice

³⁵⁷ HoSang, "Racial Liberalism and the Rise of the Sunbelt West: The Defeat of Fair Housing on the 1964 California Ballot," 202.

³⁵⁸ Daniel W. Klein, "KCBS Rebuttal to California's Anti-Civil Rights Proposal," 1964, Byron Rumford Papers, Carton 1, Folder 12, Bancroft Library, 2.

³⁵⁹ Thomas W Casstevens, University of California at Berkeley, and Institute of Governmental Studies, *Politics, Housing, and Race Relations: California's Rumford Act and Proposition 14* (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, 1967), 75.; Author Casstevens notes on page 71 that California Poll release #463 results from late October 1964 are a reliable model to interpret voting patterns on election day, closely matching the voting results for Proposition 14 on election day.

³⁶⁰ Michael S Lewis-Beck, *The American Voter Revisited* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 126.

housing discrimination? The perceived difference between civil rights in the public sphere and civil rights crossing the threshold into their homes.³⁶¹ With integration the lynchpin of ongoing urban renewal projects, how white people delineated what was an acceptable civil right constructed a formidable institutional barrier to fair housing, further helping us understand the failure of Oakland's plans to address blight in West Oakland. Like the growth machine behind urban renewal policy, racist white Oaklanders thought housing segregation was in their best interest economically. And with the backing of powerful institutions such as the California Real Estate Association (CREA) behind them, black residents' interests did not matter.³⁶²

New Deal Rights, Racial Rights, & Property Values

Byron Rumford, the recipient of the Women Property Owners' letter at the beginning of this chapter, was a Bay Area Democratic Assemblyman deeply engaged in the fight for racial equality in California. Rumford was very well acquainted with the problem of housing discrimination – especially as a black man representing Oakland and Berkeley.³⁶³ Activists such as Rumford had been unable to pass fair housing and other civil rights initiatives at the local level. For example, a Berkeley initiative for fair housing failed to pass in 1963.³⁶⁴ Governmental and electoral reforms that brought the growth machine to power were successful at marginalizing black interests in racial equality measures long after they were initially adopted in 1913. Instead, efforts to pass civil rights measures were more successful at the state level, which is where Byron Rumford served as the sponsor and driving force behind the passage of California's Fair Housing Act, finally passed in 1963 after other failed previous attempts.³⁶⁵

³⁶¹ Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 225.; Self, *American Babylon*, 260.

³⁶² HoSang, "Racial Liberalism and the Rise of the Sunbelt West: The Defeat of Fair Housing on the 1964 California Ballot." 193.

³⁶³ Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed*, 179.

³⁶⁴ Brilliant, 189.

³⁶⁵ Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed*, 179.

While several other states had already adopted their own versions of the law, the 1963 Fair Housing Act was certainly revolutionary for California.³⁶⁶ It extended the state's Hawkins Act ban on discrimination in publicly funded housing to 60-70 percent of the private housing market.³⁶⁷ In the passage of the bill, Assemblyman Rumford and Governor Brown referenced FDR's Second Bill of Rights in their support for fair housing rights, making the New Deal right of homeownership accessible to more people. Rumford described the ability to purchase a home as a "basic American right."³⁶⁸ While these rights were initially only extended to whites, the newly embraced Democratic Party platform of civil rights and inclusion pushed them to open that right to blacks as well.

The Democratic party's support for integration was tied up in their desire for urban renewal to succeed, Brown stating that with segregation, "tensions are aggravated, our American principles of equality are ignored, urban renewal projects are thwarted, de facto segregation in the school encouraged."³⁶⁹ To be successful, urban renewal required integration to increase the availability of homes for displaced black families to prevent slums from simply moving elsewhere in the city. As Brown later stated, with housing discrimination still legal, white homeowners would not only hamper urban renewal as a program, but also urban renewal as a program to save cities.³⁷⁰ This had to do with the impact of blight on the city that Oakland's 1949 blight study and OCCUR noted. Blight hurt cities because of the drain it put on services without a commensurate contribution to the city tax coffers on account of lower property values in the area. According to Democrats, California's 1963 Fair Housing Act, also known as the Rumford Act, would help accomplish this goal of saving cities such as Oakland by extending homeowner rights to all Californians, allowing blacks to move out of blighted areas instead of remaining segregated in different ones. Outlawing

³⁶⁶ HoSang, "Racial Liberalism and the Rise of the Sunbelt West: The Defeat of Fair Housing on the 1964 California Ballot," 191.

³⁶⁷ "Housing Bill Passes" (Berkeley Gazette, June 22, 1963), William Byron Rumford Papers, Carton 1, Folder 1, Bancroft Library; Casstevens, University of California, and Institute of Governmental Studies, *Politics, Housing, and Race Relations*, 11.

³⁶⁸ "Given 'Do Pass'" (Sacramento Observer, March 28, 1963), William Byron Rumford Papers, Carton 1, Folder 1, Bancroft Library.

³⁶⁹ "Bill Would Ban Bias" (Oakland Tribune, February 14, 1963), William Byron Rumford Papers, Carton 1, Folder 8, Bancroft Library, 1.

³⁷⁰ "Bill Would Ban Bias," 1.

private housing discrimination, the bill should have been popular among the same coalition that supported these efforts before, but, because it required racial integration, it did not.

Conservatives and left-leaning Democrats had supported urban renewal and homeowner rights for different reasons. The ability to use federal funding and freedom to redevelop blighted areas as they saw fit had attracted industry interest to urban renewal. However, as shown in the analysis of Oakland's 1959 GNRP, they expressed no interest in addressing urban renewal's other goal of integration, even if it made their program more effective. Many of Oakland's white residents did not support integration either, documented in the Oakland Social Planning Council's Report on their work for the city's redevelopment agency. They rejected the civil rights priorities of the California Democratic Party in order to defend their "exclusive" homeowner rights.³⁷¹ Growth machine politicians and white homeowners had supported these programs because they found them to be agreement with their own interests, decreasing the city's overall service expenditures and tax rates by increasing property values in black spaces with industry and higher-income white residents. However, based on their racial politics, they would not support "forced" integration in the Rumford Act because of the impact they perceived it would have on their property values. For this reason, they would break with their previous coalition. The growth machine, represented by the real estate industry, was happy to defend this position.³⁷²

They did exactly that, initiating and running the successful Proposition 14 movement to create a right to practice housing discrimination in 1964.³⁷³ A response to the Rumford Act, it went beyond a simple repeal of California's fair housing law, and was supported by Democrats in addition to Republican voters.³⁷⁴ In effect, President FDR's New Deal Bill of Rights was replaced by CREA's Property Owner's Bill of Rights as the rallying cry for this new coalition of Democrats and

³⁷¹ HoSang, "Racial Liberalism and the Rise of the Sunbelt West: The Defeat of Fair Housing on the 1964 California Ballot." 197.

³⁷² HoSang, 193.

³⁷³ HoSang, 193.

³⁷⁴ Casstevens, University of California, and Institute of Governmental Studies, *Politics, Housing, and Race Relations*, 75.; HoSang, 194.

Republicans united by their racial politics.³⁷⁵ Claiming "the rights and freedoms of the individual American property owner are being eroded," the prologue to CREA's Bill of Rights stated this loss would "destroy the free enterprising individual American."³⁷⁶ Instead of embracing the Democratic Party's extension of property rights to previously excluded blacks, CREA's Bill of Rights interpreted this action as a threat to the integrity of those same rights for white property owners. With its inclusion in a "Bill of Rights," access to homeownership had been raised above the partisan fray, becoming a universal, nonpartisan right. CREA had taken rights that fundamentally originated from a liberal presidential administration and defended them along the lines of conservative, white, homeowner politics. Furthermore, by claiming that giving blacks property rights hurt those of "the free enterprising individual American," the campaign made it clear they did not count blacks among the highly respected class of driven Americans who required protection. Instead, they stereotyped blacks like Dr. McEntire as un-American for their perceived lack of initiative and independence.

The rights in the CREA Bill of Rights included rights to privacy, choosing friends, and using property as the owner so decides.³⁷⁷ These rights were a response to what they perceived as "forced" government intervention in their lives, legislating private transactions, telling them who to interact with and what to do with their property. With the context of the Cold War, whites like the Sacramento Women Property Owners who perceived the Rumford Act as unfairly costing them social and economic losses, also attacked it as a communist intervention, and for that reason un-American and deplorable.³⁷⁸ White property owners abhorred the idea of being forced to live with a group of people whom they thought would decrease their property values and social status.

The CREA Bill of Rights also defended this right to discriminate in color-blind terms. In his study on Oakland housing discrimination, Dr. Floyd Hunter shows us how these practices were

³⁷⁵ HoSang, "Racial Liberalism and the Rise of the Sunbelt West: The Defeat of Fair Housing on the 1964 California Ballot," 211.

³⁷⁶ "CREA Bill of Rights," n.d., William Byron Rumford Papers, Carton 1, Folder 12, Bancroft Library.

³⁷⁷ "CREA Bill of Rights."

³⁷⁸ HoSang, "Racial Liberalism and the Rise of the Sunbelt West: The Defeat of Fair Housing on the 1964 California Ballot," 196, 197.

actually very color-conscious. Sixth on CREA's list of property rights was the "the right to maintain what, in his opinion, are congenial surrounding for tenants."³⁷⁹ In practice, this argument was used to justify opposition to blacks renters in Oakland on the grounds that all the other tenants would move out.³⁸⁰ Eighth on the list, "the right to determine the acceptability and desirability of any prospective buyer or tenant of his property."³⁸¹ This blatantly reopened the market to the all too common prejudices against black people observed in both the Women Property Owner's letter in the beginning of this chapter, Dr. Hunter's study of discrimination in Oakland, and in Dr. McEntire's own words. Hunter found that a full third of Oakland residents would act on this right to discriminate, not an insignificant number.³⁸² These Oaklanders, willing to act on their prejudices against blacks, would not deem even financially eligible blacks desirable tenants or buyers. In practice this right sanctioned housing discrimination.

Significantly, CREA's Bill of Rights also included as the ninth right, "The right of every American to choose who, in his opinion, are congenial tenants in any property he owns – to maintain the stability and security of his income."³⁸³ This was the popularized connection made almost four decades prior in private racial restriction in Oakland's Pleasant Valley and Lakeshore Glen developments, as well Oakland's zoning laws and regulations that prioritized the value of white residential development in the hills over the black ones surrounded by industry in the flatlands. Race was linked to property value, with exclusive white properties holding the highest value by virtue of their exclusion and protected by economically exclusive zoning that shut black residents out.³⁸⁴ By stating owners had the right to determine tenants and purchase based on income security, they

³⁷⁹ "CREA Bill of Rights."

³⁸⁰ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, *Report of Social Work and Community Relations Programs under Contract with Oakland Redevelopment Agency*, 84.

³⁸¹ "CREA Bill of Rights."

³⁸² Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 64.

³⁸³ "CREA Bill of Rights."

³⁸⁴ Self, *American Babylon*, 105

meant in no uncertain terms the right to exclude blacks whom they believed based on racist assumptions would bring those property values down.

CREA's Bill of Rights brought the divergent housing interests of blacks and whites into sharp clarity. While whites "claimed the mantle of the authentic New Deal state" and expected it to protect their economic security as homeowners, made possible by racial exclusion.³⁸⁵ At the same time, blacks expected the New Deal state to address "Jim Crow and open housing and labor markets."³⁸⁶ It was this contradiction that came into full relief with Proposition 14 in California. It was impossible to satisfy both claims to the New Deal state due to the unwillingness of institutionally-backed whites to give up their special privileges afforded to them by federal and local housing and land-use policies. As Thomas Sugrue writes, the New Deal language "raised the expectations of American workers in the 1930s and 1940s" with the government to provide "for their security as workers, retirees, and homeowners."³⁸⁷ And while government assistance had provided the support that made white homeownership possible, whites appointed themselves the rightful body to decide which programs were necessary and which to oppose and block as "taxpayer subsidized handout for the feckless."³⁸⁸ The deciding factor making a program necessary became racially based: which program helped themselves as the eminently responsible and deserving white homeowners and which helped "culturally backward," inferior blacks?

For these reasons, white homeowners found the language in CREA's Bill of Rights appealing. According to Professor Daniel HoSang, the "Proposition 14 campaign increasingly bound both liberals and conservatives to a political discourse centered on white racial identity."³⁸⁹ The language CREA used was "enormously popular to white voters: it legitimated a historic 'right to

³⁸⁵ Self, 95.

³⁸⁶ Self, 95.

³⁸⁷ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 62.

³⁸⁸ Sugrue, 63.

³⁸⁹ HoSang, "Racial Liberalism and the Rise of the Sunbelt West: The Defeat of Fair Housing on the 1964 California Ballot," 211.

discriminate' as beyond the regulation of the state while disavowing any complicity in or responsibility for prevailing inequalities, an unapologetic racial innocence."³⁹⁰ By focusing on the "language of private rights and free markets" housing choices became "racially innocent, involving only issues of property values and property rights," stripping decisions from their true impact and "their actual consequence interpretation of social inequality and white privilege."³⁹¹ Internalizing the association between increasing property values and racial restrictions, homeowners rationalized giving-up certain property rights for the benefits that exclusion would bring: lower property taxes made possible by segregation.³⁹² White homeowners used economic arguments devoid of explicit racial reference to maintain racial segregation, just like the local government response to the *Buchanan v. Warley* decision. Nowhere in CREA's Property Owners Bill of Rights, or the language of Proposition 14's petition, is race referenced, but it is dripping with coded language in an election fundamentally concerned with race.

The 1964 General Election and the Oakland Hills

As stated by Robert O. Self, Oakland's "public interest was defined entirely in terms of white homeowners."³⁹³ However, not just any white homeowners could assert control over the political process. Oakland was especially responsive to higher-income white residents.³⁹⁴ As argued in the 1942 residential development plan for the hills, this class of homeowners deserved special attention because they would save the city with their tax revenue and high property values. That attention from the growth machine allowed these white homeowners to direct economic and racial exclusion to maintain their spatial privileges that they had internalized as a right. For example, they protested against and successfully killed a petition to rezone Montclair for multi-family units, perceiving it as a

³⁹⁰ HoSang, 198.

³⁹¹ Self, *American Babylon*, 117.

³⁹² Self, 105.

³⁹³ Self, 279.

³⁹⁴ Citizens' Committee on Residential Development, "Report on Residential Development," 16.

threat to these rights.³⁹⁵ Around the East Bay, white homeowners rejected multi-family housing while "approving redevelopment plans that threatened older affordable neighborhoods."³⁹⁶ Their opposition was an "assertion of the class power of homeowners and a reaction to the perceived erosion of that power."³⁹⁷ It did not matter that they were limiting affordable housing options or supporting the removal of other property owners from their homes.

Hill residents used their influence over the public interest in 1963 and 1964 to make their zoning even more exclusive during the roll-out of urban renewal and the Proposition 14 campaign. While homes in the West Oakland flatlands were razed and rezoned for industrial use, the Oakland growth machine bent over backwards to protect white property owners in the hills. Following a recommendation from the Hill Improvement Club, the Oakland City Council upgraded single-family "A" zoning there to "A-1," increasing required square footage of lot sizes and frontages to twelve thousand square feet and 90 feet respectively, up from five thousand square foot lots and 45-foot frontages.³⁹⁸ The hills, already mostly zoned "A" residential, already the most restricted of residential areas, would become even more exclusive. "A-1" zoning was not used anywhere else in the Oakland.³⁹⁹ Furthermore, the Planning Commission eliminated "several tracts that were so closely identified by developed 'A' zone areas, that a rezoning would be unfair to the owners."⁴⁰⁰ The city worked to increase the value of property in the hills at the recommendation of hill residents themselves, modifying zoning requirements after two rounds of review from the Oakland Planning Commission to make it the most expensive area in the city over the protests of developers.⁴⁰¹ The city was also careful to prevent their actions from decreasing existing property values in the hills

³⁹⁵ "Zoning Petition Withdrawn" (Oakland Tribune, January 25, 1941), Zoning File, 1936-1949 Folder, Oakland Public Library History Room; Self, *American Babylon*, 278.

³⁹⁶ Self, 278.

³⁹⁷ Self, 280.

³⁹⁸ "Hill Zoning Plan Still Up in Air" (Oakland Tribune, 1963), Zoning File, 1950-1965 Folder, Oakland Public Library History Room; "City Marks Hill for Top Zoning" (Oakland Tribune, 1964), Zoning File, 1950-1965 Folder, Oakland Public Library History Room.

³⁹⁹ "City Marks Hill for Top Zoning."

⁴⁰⁰ "City Marks Hill for Top Zoning."

⁴⁰¹ "Hill Zoning Plan Still Up in Air"; "City Marks Hill for Top Zoning."

with their zoning changes. Contrast this with the treatment of West Oakland residents and a clear pattern emerges of whose interests and property values mattered, and it is not the marginalized flatlands.

In addition to protecting their interests with exclusionary local zoning laws, white hills residents supported the Proposition 14 movement to protect their racial and internalized white homeowner privileges. Examining 1935 zoning maps, areas of containment and exclusion identified in the 1964 Hunter report on housing discrimination, and geographical voting patterns for Proposition 14 identified by Robert O. Self with the Cartography Lab at University of Wisconsin, an even more complex relationship emerges beyond a simple racial understanding of Proposition 14 voting. The exclusive hill areas in Oakland gave the strongest support to the amendment, voting over 70 percent in support of Proposition 14.⁴⁰² Almost the entire area was zoned area "A" for "A" single-family residential development.⁴⁰³ These voters supported the right to discriminate, by protecting their racial and zoning exclusiveness. Additionally, three of the five complete 1935 zoning tracts in this zone were identified by Hunter as being racially exclusionary.⁴⁰⁴ The flatlands voted against Proposition 14 by the largest margin, over 75 percent.⁴⁰⁵ This area also contained four complete 1935 zoning tracts, all of them in areas of racial containment with mixed residential and industrial zoning.⁴⁰⁶

Looking at the California Poll results, there is a correlation between income level that further explains the connections between economic and racial exclusion and voting for Proposition 14. Eliminating the lowest and highest white income brackets due to small sample sizes, the California Poll, identified a correlation between income level for white people and their intention to support or

⁴⁰² Self, *American Babylon*, 169.

⁴⁰³ *Zoning Laws & Ordinances*, 29, 30, 36, 37, 48, 53; all 1935 zoning maps pages unpaginated.

⁴⁰⁴ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 23.

⁴⁰⁵ Self, *American Babylon*, 169.

⁴⁰⁶ *Zoning Laws & Ordinances*, 32, 34, 35; all 1935 zoning maps pages unpaginated; Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 23.

oppose Proposition 14.⁴⁰⁷ Low- to middle-income whites giving 56 percent, and middle-income 58 percent, and middle- to upper-income 68 percent support.⁴⁰⁸ These voters had rationalized the connection between economic and racial segregation with their high property values – their economic interests. In order to maintain their higher economic and social status and protect their investments social status, residents in the hills needed to carefully guard their neighborhoods to prevent black and lower-income infiltration from the flatlands. Hunter's report identified that a third of Oakland residents would act on their racial biases; however, Prop 14 voting patterns showed 70 percent of the Oakland hills were willing to add an amendment to the state constitution to defend their right to act on racial biases.⁴⁰⁹

The polling data shows that for white people, such as those in the hills, political party affiliation was not the strongest determinant to predict voting behavior for Proposition 14. It did not matter what their party told them to do. The well-published information that passing Proposition 14 would eliminate urban renewal funding did not matter either.⁴¹⁰ What did matter was what they found to be in their best interest: preventing integration to keep property values high. Although Governor Brown and Oakland's growth machine billed urban renewal as saving city property values, it required integration to work as planned by the federal government. Just as the growth machine proved unwilling to see this part of the program through with lackluster social planning council action, so too were white hill residents unwilling to make what they saw as a major economic sacrifice: letting blacks into their neighborhoods.⁴¹¹ Their inability to address their racial evaluations of space and their interests in maintaining their own privileges through racial exclusion would ensure the underlying causes of blight would remain unaddressed in Oakland. In fact, this

⁴⁰⁷ Casstevens, University of California, and Institute of Governmental Studies, *Politics, Housing, and Race Relations*, 77.

⁴⁰⁸ Casstevens, University of California, and Institute of Governmental Studies, 77.

⁴⁰⁹ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 64.; Self, *American Babylon*, 169.

⁴¹⁰ Casstevens, University of California, and Institute of Governmental Studies, *Politics, Housing, and Race Relations*, 63.; "Civil Rights Law's Impact on Unions Set Forth in Digest," *California ALF-CIO News Letter*, July 24, 1964, Byron Rumford Papers, Carton 1 Folder 12, Bancroft Library.

⁴¹¹ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 267.; Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed*, 222.

fear that blacks might decrease their property value helped break up the former New Deal coalition; some California Democrats switched to the Republican Party over their opposition to state intervention forcing integration. This ultimately helped open the door politically for Ronald Reagan, a supporter of Proposition 14, who became governor in 1966.⁴¹²

The federal government's threat to take away urban renewal funding was not an idle one. After California passed Proposition 14, the federal government removed all of the state's urban renewal funding, including for West Oakland redevelopment, to discourage other states from passing similar amendments.⁴¹³ As stated by a letter to Representative Phillip Burton from P.M. Brownstein, FHA Commissioner, the amendment was in opposition to recent executive orders promoting fair housing as well as urban renewal "nondiscrimination requirements."⁴¹⁴ White Californians voted for Johnson but rejected his administration's stance in support of fair housing, knowing that a vote for Proposition 14 meant also giving up urban renewal funding. The federal government thought withholding the money for urban renewal could force the defeat of Proposition 14, expecting it to act as a deterrent in California. But it did not. White homeowners decided that preserving their interests by maintaining segregation was more important than addressing blight. After all, it was this same affinity for segregation and disinvestment in black space that had helped create blight in the first place.

Urban renewal could not successfully address blight in Oakland because white residents in neighborhoods such as the hills opposed integration, as shown by the success of Proposition 14 there. In the absence of new housing units for displaced residents or money for rehabilitation, integration of black residents into the rest of Oakland's stock was a must to stop overcrowding and housing deterioration in the flatlands. But, white hill residents who had internalized growth machine

⁴¹² Brilliant, 225; HoSang, "Racial Liberalism and the Rise of the Sunbelt West," 199.

⁴¹³ Casstevens, University of California, and Institute of Governmental Studies, *Politics, Housing, and Race Relations*. 81.

⁴¹⁴ P.M. Brownstein, "Letter to Phillip Burton," May 8, 1964, William Byron Rumford Papers, Carton 1, Folder 12, Bancroft Library.

ideologies saw their property value and low taxes as intrinsically connected to and reliant upon racial exclusion. Integration was in direct opposition to their interests because it hurt their property investments in addition to their racial and homeowner rights. Therefore, the hills fought against it, and with institutional support in Oakland, and in California, they were able to set policy to maintain the benefits of exclusive zoning with Proposition 13, afforded to them at the expense of the GNRP and West Oakland's residents looking for new housing. The white rejection of integration, fundamental to the 1964 Democratic platform in California and federal urban renewal funding, signaled the breakup of the New Deal coalition in the state, uniting white Democrats and Republicans by their racial politics to protect their white homeowner interests.

Chapter Five: The Flatland's Residents

I remember them fighting to try to save the Victorians that hadn't been torn down, that was the biggest thing for me, I remember them really fighting to keep those single-family homes from being demolished. – Ernestine Nettles⁴¹⁵

The city saw West Oakland as deteriorating buildings, tax inefficiencies, as well as problematic crime and health statistics: a policy problem. It was urban planning to the city; however, it was personal to West Oakland's residents. It was personal because urban renewal fundamentally threatened the stability of their communities and determined whether or not they would be able to keep their *homes*. That's why, as Ernestine Nettles said, the people in Oak Center were fighting so hard. Professor Davis McEntire states in his report to the Commission on Race and Housing that "Of all the housing activities of government, none has potentially a greater impact upon the housing conditions of minority groups and racial residence patterns than urban renewal."⁴¹⁶ The reason was simple. It was a product of their segregation in deteriorating areas, forcing urban renewal efforts to "squarely confront the issue of where and under what conditions the minority groups are to live."⁴¹⁷ Despite the impact of urban renewal on minorities, observed by McEntire and made obvious by examining maps of blight and areas of containment in Oakland, minorities were not consulted in the plans for urban renewal in their neighborhoods. Those plans were created by OCCUR and executed by the city with federal money. So far, silence has been the most telling story coming from government reports and newspaper clippings. There is absence of commentary from residents in West Oakland. Lacking in these documents written by the business power structure are real perspectives from these residents. What did they think about West Oakland?

⁴¹⁵ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles.

⁴¹⁶ McEntire, *Residence and Race; Final and Comprehensive Report to the Commission on Race and Housing*, 333.

⁴¹⁷ McEntire, 333.



Figure 10. Tula Frontjós' home at 1036 Adeline Street, Oak Center. John R. Barton and Macklin F. Martin, *Oak Center Appraisal*, 3 (Oakland, California: n.p., 1967), parcel 350-26, unpaginated 1.

The 1949 blight study painted a bleak picture of West Oakland as a neighborhood that was fundamentally broken. It had high rates of crime, juvenile delinquency, tuberculosis, infant mortality, overcrowding, inadequate bath facilities, and fires.⁴¹⁸ It was in need of serious intervention, not least of all because of the serious drain it put on the tax base.⁴¹⁹ The study minimized the West Oakland neighborhood that people called home into statistics that confirmed racial biases.

White residents, who had aligned their interests in personal property value with the growth machine city government, internalized these racist beliefs as well. They described black neighbors as a loud, unruly population who would inevitably cause white property values to deteriorate just as they created deterioration in their own neighborhoods.⁴²⁰ These assumptions reduced blacks to the

⁴¹⁸ City Planning Commission, "Urban Redevelopment in Oakland," 30 verso.

⁴¹⁹ City Planning Commission, 16.

⁴²⁰ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 31, 32, 50, 54.

most basic of stereotypes, making it easy to defend their racial politics couched in seemingly, color-blind innocent economic decisions.

Depictions of the residents of West Oakland and the landscape of their neighborhood is transformed by narratives such as Ernestine's with day-to-day stories, memories, and dreams. West Oakland was a neighborhood that people called home and cannot be summed up by its definition as a blighted area. Quantifiable metrics defined it as blighted, but it was also a rich community. Learning West Oakland's story from the residents' perspectives like Ernestine's deepens our understanding of Oakland as a city and tells us what became of the attempt to redevelop the flatlands in the early 1960s.

Residential Life in West Oakland

Ernestine was born in West Oakland when it was still a diverse neighborhood, moving to her Oak Center home on Union Street in 1955 where she still lives today.⁴²¹ Her house is a block away from Cole Elementary School where she played baseball as a kid after finishing homework and chores, and across the street from the California Cereal factory, formerly occupied by Nabisco.⁴²² Ernestine remembers when trains went down Union St. and Poplar street.⁴²³ They brought materials into different factories like Nabisco, American Steel, Carnation Ice Cream, and another steel manufacturer.⁴²⁴ The tracks are not used for trains anymore, now filled in by pavement, but when they operated, trains would have run by Cole Elementary School and into the Nabisco factory right behind the school. Ernestine reminded me that at this time, "of course there was nothing being done about clean air."⁴²⁵

Despite the problems with the air causing asthma for kids in West Oakland, Oak Center according to Ernestine was home to "some of the oldest citizens of Oakland," living to be over a

⁴²¹ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles.

⁴²² Nettles.

⁴²³ Nettles.

⁴²⁴ Nettles.

⁴²⁵ Nettles.

hundred.⁴²⁶ Ernestine explains that back then all of West Oakland's residents were eating organic, even in public housing, because they ate out of the backyard gardens they maintained.⁴²⁷ This was a practice they had brought with them: "When black people migrated here from the South, they all had gardens, because aside from the fact that it's healthy, they were doing it for economic reasons, so they didn't have to go to the store for anything."⁴²⁸ In fact, Ernestine says she could not remember her mom ever buying produce from a store.⁴²⁹ At their house, her parents planted onions, garlic, celery, greens, cabbage, mustard greens, beans, string beans, snap beans, and tomatoes.⁴³⁰ With the help of her aunt and great aunt, the produce was canned and stored in their basement dark room.⁴³¹ Her family could eat fruits and vegetables through the winter until spring came and her dad replanted.⁴³² Contrary to the grim image painted by the 1949 blight study and racist white Oaklanders, West Oakland was not a barren wasteland. It was a fertile neighborhood, where residents actually grew fruit in their backyards. While factories and industries certainly had a negative impact on residents' lives, the community had vitality, and residents made the neighborhood's landscape serve their interests through urban agriculture.

Black Homeownership

Although whites like McEntire could not recognize it due to their racial biases, homeownership carried similar importance for blacks. Just as whites wanted to prevent blacks from moving into the hill area because of the perceived negative economic and social impact it would have for them, according to Robert O. Self, "black families measured social progress in terms of economic and spatial mobility."⁴³³ In fact, Thomas Sugrue writes that in Detroit, black homeowners tried to prevent lower-income residents from moving into their new, higher-income neighborhoods

⁴²⁶ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles.

⁴²⁷ Nettles.

⁴²⁸ Nettles.

⁴²⁹ Nettles.

⁴³⁰ Nettles.

⁴³¹ Nettles.

⁴³² Nettles.

⁴³³ Self, *American Babylon*, 50.

for very similar reasons to white homeowners, thinking it would decrease their social status and property values.⁴³⁴ Dr. Floyd Hunter found this in Oakland as well; some black homeowners opposed to the “wrong kind” of blacks moving into their neighborhoods.⁴³⁵ Homeownership, the largest investment families would make at this time, had extra significance in California where the “detached, single-family home had been elevated in popular culture as the preeminent symbol of both independence and assimilation.”⁴³⁶ Blacks were not immune to these cultural symbols. Like whites, they sought out the status of homeownership and also took steps to protect the sanctity and privileges that came with it, even at the expense of other blacks.

Beyond its broad-based American and Californian cultural significance, homeownership carried a deeper, racial meaning too. FDR’s Second Bill of Rights, which white hill residents had reinterpreted to exclude blacks, had “appealed to the seldom-met aspirations for landownership and independence held by blacks since emancipation.”⁴³⁷ As homeownership became a fundamental right, it also was a marker of citizenship.⁴³⁸ Significantly, this right would allow blacks to become fully accepted members of white society, social equals deserving of respect. Homeownership would also allow them to become independent.⁴³⁹ According to Ernestine Nettles, “it came from migrating from the South and understanding he who owns the land controls the land.”⁴⁴⁰ If they owned their homes and property, they could not be evicted at the whim of a landlord, they had stability and at the same time freedom.⁴⁴¹ They could pick what color they wanted to paint their home. They could subdivide their home to earn a rental income. They owned a stake in the country with their home, and had the power to control their own futures.

⁴³⁴ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 41.

⁴³⁵ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 32.

⁴³⁶ Self, *American Babylon*, 99.

⁴³⁷ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 62.

⁴³⁸ Sugrue, 62.

⁴³⁹ Sugrue, 34.

⁴⁴⁰ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles.

⁴⁴¹ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 315.

Starting in 1949, the city declared West Oakland blighted, but Ernestine did not see it that way. In our interview, she said “Even when I was a little kid I didn’t think our neighborhood was blighted.”⁴⁴² West Oakland was a neighborhood with factories causing air pollution, but it was also community where kids did their homework and played games on the playground, where parents grew vegetables in backyards, and residents could live long lives.

For all the deterioration in some of its illegally subdivided rental units, West Oakland, and Oak Center also had beautiful homes that had special significance for the black owners took pride in them. This fact is recorded in appraisal reports of Oak Center homes conducted for the city in 1967. For example, in the home pictured on this page, at 1307 Chestnut Street, the appraisers noted among their notes on the building an “excellent pride of ownership.”⁴⁴³ The bottom floor was occupied by owners Earl and Alice Wright and they rented three units upstairs. Overall, the



Figure 11. Earl & Alice Wright's home at 1307 Chestnut Street, Oak Center. John R. Barton and Macklin F. Martin, *Oak Center Appraisal*, 3 (Oakland, California: n.p., 1967), parcel 359-11, unpaginated 1

⁴⁴² Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles. Emphasis added in interview.

⁴⁴³ John R. Barton and Macklin F. Martin, *Oak Center Appraisal*, 3 (Oakland, California: n.p., 1967), parcel 359-11, unpaginated 2.

appraisers judged the building to be in good condition, deciding its best use would be "continue to serve as income property until such time as it becomes economically feasible for more intensive use as plottage."⁴⁴⁴ While the appraiser report measured the pride owners felt in the home, their judgement of its best use was limited to fiscal considerations, separated from the meaning of the home to its occupants. Once the structure could be used more intensively, or efficiently, it would be torn down. The Wright family's home is not there anymore; it was in fact torn down along with other beautiful Victorians Ernestine mentioned to make room for Lowell Park.

Organizing Oak Center

McEntire wrote that to make rehabilitation work, effort was required on the part of black residents.⁴⁴⁵ However, he stated this "Citizen initiative and leadership for neighborhood betterment presupposes a level of cultural development and economic competence not yet achieved by most Negroes, Mexican-Americans, or Puerto Ricans."⁴⁴⁶ According to McEntire, blacks and other minorities "lacked the attitudes, knowledge, and social habits needed to take the initiative or carry responsibility for a community program."⁴⁴⁷ This was a problem for middle class blacks too, who after being excluded from society have "lagged in acquiring the skills of effective participation."⁴⁴⁸ McEntire claims the rehabilitation programs part of urban renewal could not work because of the same deficiencies, such as lack of initiative, that isolated blacks in deteriorating areas in the first place. Based on his assessment, Oak Center residents should not have been willing or capable of meeting the city's requirements to rehabilitate and save their homes. Like many other whites, McEntire thought blacks were unmotivated, uninformed, irresponsible, and backward, so saving a deteriorating building would not have been of any interest to them. But he was dead wrong.

⁴⁴⁴ Barton and Martin, parcel 359-11, unpaginated 2.

⁴⁴⁵ McEntire, *Residence and Race: Final and Comprehensive Report to the Commission on Race and Housing*, 345.

⁴⁴⁶ McEntire, 345.

⁴⁴⁷ McEntire, 345.

⁴⁴⁸ McEntire, 345.

On July 1st, 1963 the first official meeting of the Oak Center Neighborhood Association was held in West Oakland.⁴⁴⁹ On its way towards becoming Oakland's "first stable neighborhood group organized around the problems of redevelopment," the group had several false starts.⁴⁵⁰ First efforts to form an Oak Center neighborhood group started with the October 19th, 1962 meeting of the "Project 2 Committee," named for their GNRP project area.⁴⁵¹ This organization was the brainchild of Mrs. Gregory, a member of the Sunset Council Board, and Rose Sherman, an Oakland Social Planning Council consultant.⁴⁵² The committee would serve to calm down residents, anxious about the fate of Oak Center after the widespread demolition in the Acorn neighborhood.⁴⁵³

Acorn was the first of five project areas in West Oakland slated for redevelopment under the 1959 GNRP.⁴⁵⁴ Of seven subdivisions within Acorn, the city had identified two with 70 percent substandard housing, and five with 60 percent standard housing.⁴⁵⁵ Regardless, except for a few buildings, all of Acorn was demolished, including 333 standard structures.⁴⁵⁶ However, these were not just "structures" that were destroyed, they were black residents' homes. Furthermore, speaking before the 1967 USCRC, Lillian Love revealed that these residents' lives had been irrevocably changed without being "made aware or informed as to what was really going to happen."⁴⁵⁷ In fact, when it was announced in a public hearing following the city's survey that there were just five structures "worth saving" in the neighborhood, "the protests that arose at that time – and it was too late – indicated that the survey itself had not touched the people who occupied the area."⁴⁵⁸ Marginalized in Oakland, their interests did not factor into policy decisions.

⁴⁴⁹ Rose Edith Hightower Sherman, *Oak Center Neighborhood*; "to Provide an Opportunity for Residents to Participate in the Shaping of Their Community": A Diary on How This Was Done in Oak Center, Council of Social Planning, Alameda Co., Calif. Oakland Area. Report, no. 53 (Oakland, Calif. [The Council, 1964], 22.

⁴⁵⁰ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 123.

⁴⁵¹ Sherman, *Oak Center Neighborhood*; "to Provide an Opportunity for Residents to Participate in the Shaping of Their Community," 4, 6.

⁴⁵² Sherman, 4, 6.

⁴⁵³ Oakland City Planning Commission, ed., *Oakland General Plan*, 23.; Sherman, *Oak Center Neighborhood*; "to Provide an Opportunity for Residents to Participate in the Shaping of Their Community," 4.

⁴⁵⁴ Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 116.; Oakland City Planning Commission, 23.

⁴⁵⁵ Hayes, 116.

⁴⁵⁶ Hayes, 116.

⁴⁵⁷ *A Time to Listen ... a Time to Act; Voices from the Ghettos of the Nation's Cities*. (Washington, 1967), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015002601964>, 7.

⁴⁵⁸ *A Time to Listen ... a Time to Act; Voices from the Ghettos of the Nation's Cities*, 8.

For residents living in neighboring Oak Center, the next target of the GNRP, the handling of Acorn had created "a great deal of resentment."⁴⁵⁹ Rose Sherman and other planning council consultants thought minority groups opposed their plans because of a "lack of information and misunderstandings of how the Agency was operating, what specific services were offered and what role minority groups could play in making their concerns known."⁴⁶⁰ According to Rose Sherman, "Project Acorn has greatly influenced the attitudes of these residents – not that it was done, but how it was done."⁴⁶¹ Forget the lack of consultation, involvement, unnecessary destruction of homes around which lives were built, according to Sherman they just needed more information and then

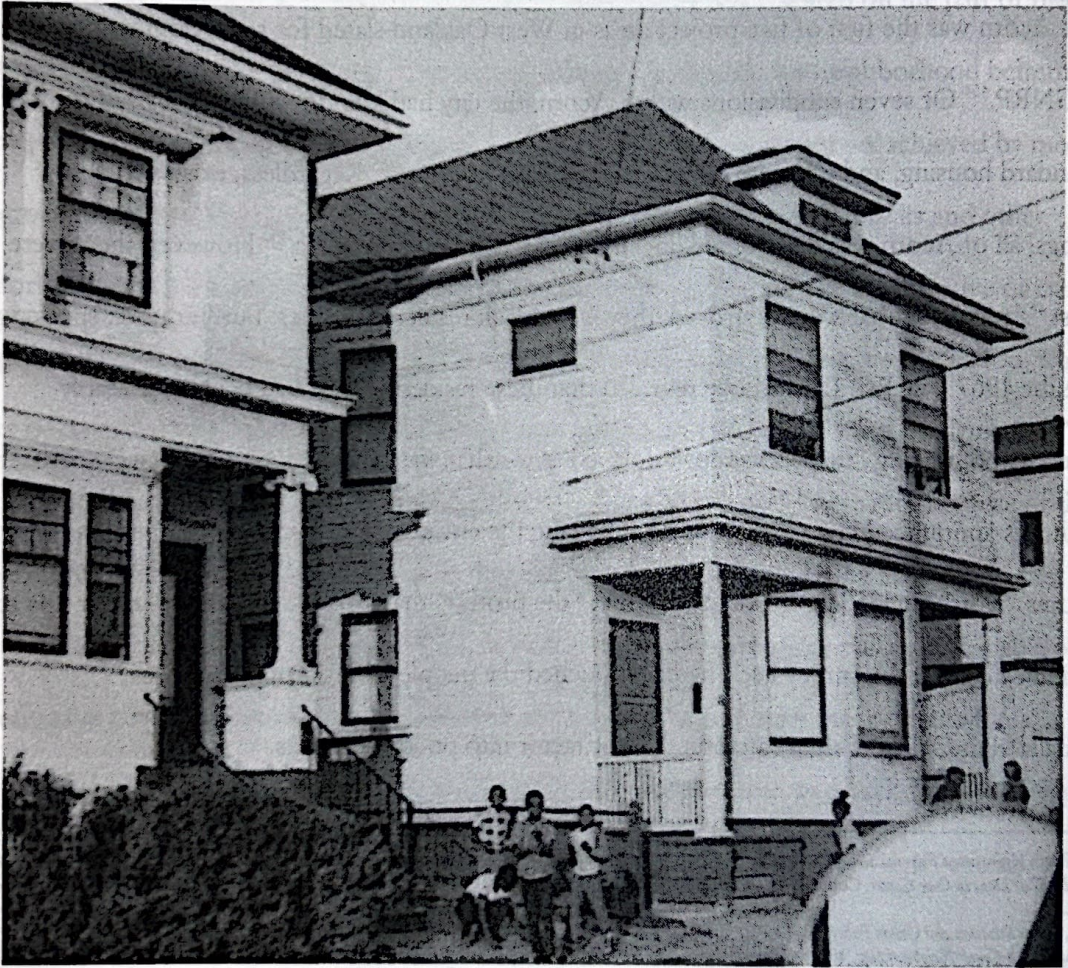


Figure 12 Lillian L. Jackson's home at 814-12 18th Street, Oak Center. John R. Barton and Macklin F. Martin, *Oak Center Appraisal*, 3 (Oakland, California: n.p., 1967), parcel 236-7, unpaginated 1.

⁴⁵⁹ *A Time to Listen ... a Time to Act; Voices from the Ghettos of the Nation's Cities*, 7-8.

⁴⁶⁰ Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, *Report of Social Work and Community Relations Programs under Contract with Oakland Redevelopment Agency*, 15.

⁴⁶¹ Sherman, *Oak Center Neighborhood*; "to Provide an Opportunity for Residents to Participate in the Shaping of Their Community," 14.

they would have been fine. For Rose Sherman, the Oak Center committee was a group "who will have as their main concern, supplying information that will ease some of this anxiety."⁴⁶² This was a limited view of what a neighborhood group could do in terms of participation in the policy and decision-making process. It was after-the-fact involvement for the purpose of sharing information about a plan created by white business leaders in OCCUR, not an effort to welcome input from the community. In April 1963 the "Project 2 Committee" was dissolved following the death of one member and relocation of two others.⁴⁶³

Several months later, Lillian Love chaired a meeting on June 19th, 1963 to explore forming a new committee.⁴⁶⁴ Their stated mission was "To work together to try to keep this neighborhood intact and to get as many properties rehabilitate as possible."⁴⁶⁵ This attitude was noted by Sherman at an early block meeting, one female property owner stating, "We will make this the best neighborhood possible."⁴⁶⁶ These residents saw the formation of the Oak Center Neighborhood Association (OCNA) as more than neighborhood group disseminating information from the city. The OCNA gave them an opportunity to control the destiny of their neighborhood and claim self-determination in a city that left them on the margins, physically, socially, and politically. Getting information from the Oakland Redevelopment Agency through Rose Sherman was part of that empowerment, enabling them to make informed decisions about how to avoid becoming another Acom and to save their homes.

The OCNA's first meeting was spent in part preparing questions that would be answered by an Oakland Redevelopment Agency representative at their July 19th meeting.⁴⁶⁷ These questions expressed an interest and energy for making necessary repairs: "I would be willing to do whatever

⁴⁶² Council of Social Planning and Council of Social Planning, *Report of Social Work and Community Relations Programs under Contract with Oakland Redevelopment Agency*, 4.

⁴⁶³ Sherman, *Oak Center Neighborhood*; "to Provide an Opportunity for Residents to Participate in the Shaping of Their Community," 11, 13.

⁴⁶⁴ Sherman, 20.

⁴⁶⁵ Sherman, 20.

⁴⁶⁶ Sherman, 14.

⁴⁶⁷ Sherman, 22, 27.

remodeling that is needed. Is it possible that I could start as soon as possible?"⁴⁶⁸ They had questions about specific properties: "Union St – 1508 – what to happen here?"⁴⁶⁹ They also expressed frustration: How can the Council come in and condemn property and take it?"⁴⁷⁰ These were homeowners with a financial and emotional investment in their homes and community. Ultimately, their central question was "how can I stay in my home?" Ernestine Nettles was still a child at the time, but she remembers figures like Lillian Love, Virginia Harvey, Wilford Harvey, and one of her godfathers Herbert Geis as central in organizing the OCNA.⁴⁷¹ She said, "they were fighting to preserve these homes and this land because it was owned by black people."⁴⁷² Black homeowners organized themselves to have their voices heard in very similar fashion to white homeowners petitioning city council. Importantly, however, the OCNA represented an effort by black homeowners to assert their interests in a city that marginalized them, and to defend their houses and all that they represented: social status, independence, and home.

Ernestine's family was ultimately able to rehabilitate their home by bringing it up to code.⁴⁷³ They were lucky though, through her godfather they had a connection to the city redevelopment board which gave them access to "a lot of insider information."⁴⁷⁴ Despite their access to this resource, Ernestine's family was still taken advantage of during the rehabilitation process.⁴⁷⁵ Even though her parents used a contractor from a list provided by the city, their contractor did a lot of substandard work, even removing crown molding from their Victorian home and putting it in other homes.⁴⁷⁶ According to Ernestine, "they were raping the houses in this community."⁴⁷⁷ Redevelopment became an opportunity to raid West Oakland of what they deemed to be of most

⁴⁶⁸ Sherman, *Oak Center Neighborhood*; "to Provide an Opportunity for Residents to Participate in the Shaping of Their Community," 23.

⁴⁶⁹ Sherman, 25.

⁴⁷⁰ Sherman, 24.

⁴⁷¹ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles.

⁴⁷² Nettles.

⁴⁷³ Nettles.

⁴⁷⁴ Nettles.

⁴⁷⁵ Nettles.

⁴⁷⁶ Nettles.

⁴⁷⁷ Nettles.

value, such as space for industry and crown molding, leaving residents behind with empty rooms and lots where beautiful decorations and homes once were. Homeownership was supposed to give these black residents control over their property and land, to protect them from arbitrary white landowner decisions; however, the growth machine and white proved that the government's use of eminent domain made even the stability of homeownership uncertain for black residents in West Oakland.

Other people in the neighborhood who could not bring their homes to code in time had them condemned and seized, forcing residents to move out who would have otherwise stayed.⁴⁷⁸ According to Ernestine Nettles, these residents and others "moved to East Oakland, and a lot of them ended up in public housing. And you had people who went to Richmond too. Richmond, Berkeley."⁴⁷⁹ Ms. Nettles described East Oakland as previously an almost entirely white area, an area of racial dispersion where pioneer black residents had begun to establish a community starting in 1950.⁴⁸⁰ A sad irony, the public housing that many displaced residents eventually moved into sat on the sites of black homes: "they tore down homes that people owned to build Acorn. Beautiful homes."⁴⁸¹ Ernestine also talked about Redevelopment of downtown Oakland, which was meant to increase property values, but actually resulted in the departure of many businesses.⁴⁸² According to her, "it wasn't like these people wanted to move, it was 'redevelopment' moving them out with a plan, I feel, obviously didn't work."⁴⁸³ Redevelopment was a failure for many reasons, destroying standard structures to then replace them with public housing was cross-purpose with what the city was supposed to do in redeveloping blight. Furthermore, it hurt downtown businesses, also a

⁴⁷⁸ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles.

⁴⁷⁹ Nettles.

⁴⁸⁰ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 23.; Nettles; Self, *American Babylon*, 105.

⁴⁸¹ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles..

⁴⁸² Nettles.

⁴⁸³ Nettles.

contradiction of a plan that had a goal to increase downtown property values.⁴⁸⁴ But one of the biggest failures was the lack of consultation of community members in West Oakland.

While property owners had a privileged status in the city, it was specifically white, not black, homeowner's interests that continued to direct Oakland city policy into the 1960s. Fundamental differences existed between white and black homeowners in Oakland beyond the deeply racial significance of homeownership for blacks. Between these two groups, there was a major difference in lack of access to local government based on the color of their skin. This was not a coincidence, marginalization of black interests went hand in hand with the structural and electoral reforms instituted in the 1910s that favored the interests of white business leaders. Understand the development of Oakland's city government, prioritization of industrial and white homeowner interests in the hills as the "public interest," and one sees how black residents' interests were irrelevant to a power structure focused on increasing property values. As Ernestine's story shows us, this had a real impact on residents' ability to keep their homes and backyard gardens, their neighborhoods and playgrounds, and community networks in Oak Center.

⁴⁸⁴ Self, *American Babylon*, 139.

Conclusion: The Story Continues

City and federal institutions have an impact on neighborhood specific realities for the individuals who make up Oakland. These institutions have shown their staying power and still direct Oakland's development in a similar pattern today, advantaging corporations while disadvantaging minority populations for the sake of their vision of economic development. In fact, despite claims that the United States is now a post-racial society after Obama's presidency, Ernestine Nettles says, discrimination has not gone away.⁴⁸⁵ Uniquely situated as a lifelong resident and former city employee, she observes that "it has gotten very sophisticated."⁴⁸⁶ Racial politics still impact city policies pursuing economic development through private investors. They also continue to impact personal evaluations of black space, and federal practices as well. These facts have grave implications for gentrification in Oakland and elsewhere across the country, the newest phase of the "Negro Removal" that occurred during the 1959 GNRP.⁴⁸⁷

Although Oakland's city government operates with a different structure today, it still is a corporate government. The Oakland City Council uses district instead of at-large elections to fill all of its seat but one, and uses a "strong mayor" system, giving the directly elected mayor the power to appoint the city manager, now styled as the city administrator.⁴⁸⁸ Despite these modifications that should make the city more democratic, the city's basic corporate structure established in the 1910s still remains. In fact, on its current government website, Oakland explicitly describes its government in business terms: "The Mayor serves as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), overseeing the Executive Branch of government. The City Administrator is the City's Chief Operating Officer (COO), responsible for the day-to-day operations of City agencies and departments."⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁵ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles.

⁴⁸⁶ Nettles.

⁴⁸⁷ Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 71.

⁴⁸⁸ "City Administrator | City Administration | City of Oakland | California," accessed March 12, 2018, <http://www2.oaklandnet.com/government/o/CityAdministration/index.htm>.

⁴⁸⁹ "Contact Us | City of Oakland | California," accessed March 12, 2018, <http://www2.oaklandnet.com/government/o/CityAdministration/a/ContactUs/index.htm>.

Fundamentally, Oakland is a city government run as a business, striving for efficiency and championing businesses as the major driver of economic development in the city.

Ernestine Nettles confirms that corporations still control Oakland, for example, getting accommodations from minority and females mayors who "say one thing in public and do another."⁴⁹⁰ Explaining the favoritism shown corporations today, she gives the example of Oakland's small and local business program. To qualify for Oakland's program, a business has to meet a 30 percent threshold of the national small business administration standard.⁴⁹¹ However, the national threshold has been increasing over time as a result of lobbying efforts, "so that more businesses will qualify as a small business across the nation."⁴⁹² At the same time, Oakland has not changed its standards for the small business program.⁴⁹³ As a result, Ernestine says "the playing field is not balanced anymore. A company can be a billion-dollar company and they'll get certified as a local business enterprise in the city of Oakland if they have an office here and they got staff here."⁴⁹⁴ Ernestine matter-of-factly states this is corporate welfare.⁴⁹⁵ Corporate welfare very similar to the generous subsidies in the 1959 GNRP awarded to industries who wanted to purchase land in West Oakland where the homes of black families once stood. Programs such as these are promoted by local government because they incentivize businesses to locate offices in Oakland, so the city can earn tax revenues, a continuing preoccupation for officials.

However, as was the case with the 1959 GNRP, in pursuing economic development along these growth machine terms, public interests are made secondary. In fact, Oakland's local and small business corporate welfare today comes at the expense of the truly local, small businesses operated by minorities and women.⁴⁹⁶ According to Ernestine Nettles, large companies taking advantage of

⁴⁹⁰ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles.

⁴⁹¹ Nettles.

⁴⁹² Nettles.

⁴⁹³ Nettles.

⁴⁹⁴ Nettles.

⁴⁹⁵ Nettles.

⁴⁹⁶ Nettles.

the small and local business program are winning contracts with the city and "are making 13 to 14 million dollars a year" while the smaller "one and two thousand dollar a year companies . . . can't compete against a company making 13, 14 million much less a billion dollars because the cost of doing business is totally different."⁴⁹⁷ Furthermore, local officials are unaware of the history laid out in the preceding chapters which has contributed to ongoing racial inequality in their city. Ernestine saying her departmental head in Oakland city government "doesn't know the history of the city and she's never bothered to learn it."⁴⁹⁸ Once again, the city of Oakland has entered a period of advantaging corporations and disadvantaging minorities, enabled by city officials' ignorance of the institutions that have historically erected barriers to equal opportunities for its black residents. Because the city is hiring officials from out of town who do not know or want to know Oakland's history, Ernestine says:

There are things that could be done in terms of jobs, development that could be done for people and opportunities for small women and minority companies in the city of Oakland that just are not done because there's a consciousness that needs to be there and the consciousness is just not there. And it doesn't matter if you are black, white, or indifferent, the consciousness is not there.⁴⁹⁹

The racial politics that shaped Oakland's development are still relevant today because the administrators who could feasibly challenge the old institutional barriers that have historically marginalized blacks in the city, do not know or care about changing them. They do not see the invisible barriers in the city, much in the same way that white residents could not see the role the same institutions played in creating blight back in the 1960s. By not recognizing segregation and disinvestment in black communities, these officials will not be able to address it either. Therefore, the biases and institutions that shaped segregation's physical boundaries continue to stay in place, continuing to direct policy in Oakland today.

⁴⁹⁷ Nettles, Interview with Ernestine Nettles.

⁴⁹⁸ Nettles.

⁴⁹⁹ Nettles.

These historical institutions still impact personal decisions about how to treat different spaces in Oakland. Individuals living in the city, or just passing through, still have a racialized understanding of the value of West Oakland. The area was zoned for heavy and light industrial usage in 1935 and while neighborhoods like Oak Center are now largely zoned residential, people still treat West Oakland as if its zoning has not changed. One of the things Oakland was formerly zoned for in 1935 as part of its heavy industrial classification was garbage, offal or dead animal reduction or dumping.⁵⁰⁰ For the last 30 years dumping has been a problem unique to West Oakland according to Ms. Brigitte Cook, Council District 3 Liaison. In fact, the city has an Illegal Dumping Reward Program to address it, which Ms. Cook discussed at an Oak Center Neighborhood Association meeting February 5th, 2018. Residents had been keeping extensive personal records of illegal dumping in West Oakland, but the city needed its own record and were encouraging community members at the meetings to report illegal dumpings to the hotline operating from Monday to Friday 8 am to 4:30 pm, via email, app, or online. The dumping zoning was a legal classification for the social value of the place in 1935. You could dump trash in West Oakland, but not the hills, because the city considered the property and the people there to be of less value. While legal classifications of how to use space have changed, the deeper understanding of the value of that space remains the same. Outsiders to the community still see West Oakland as a place to dump garbage.

While the city continues to disadvantage minority groups in the city with its corporate welfare schemes and people still interpret West Oakland as being of less value, the OCNA is continuing its work to represent the interest of its residents. It still has members such as Ernestine Nettles who attend monthly meetings and are engaged in the community, defending their own interests where other government bodies will not. For example, in a February 5th, 2018 meeting,

⁵⁰⁰ *Zoning Laws & Ordinances*, 11.

residents vociferously demanded that the Alameda County Environmental Health Department require that an abandoned full-service Shell gas station in Oak Center be brought up to environmental standards for residential use, as zoned by the city. The site was abandoned in the 1970s after a subterranean gas leak was discovered and the environmental health department was conducting its last tests to clear the site as conforming to state environmental standards for commercial use. However, residents were still concerned about subterranean pollution that had spread underneath their homes and the ground level pollutants at the site that were not being cleaned. Additionally, they wanted the site to be brought up to residential health standards because as a commercial space it would remain abandoned, not anticipating any businesses would move in. The meeting brought together a representative of the gas station owner, a representative from the regional environmental health department, and community members. The OCNA continues to play the role it held in the 1960s, facilitating conversations between government officials and community members and disseminating information to community members about local initiatives. In the city's corporate structure that privileges business interests, organizations such as these are of the utmost importance to ensure that at least West Oakland's most basic needs are met for a healthy and safe environment.

The OCNA organization itself was formed in the 1960s to fight the threat of urban renewal and displacement in Oak Center. Now its residents are facing displacement caused not so much by local government policy, but by gentrification led by individual white residents in West Oakland and across the county, pushing out long-time, black residents. Ironically, this is what the GNRP envisioned for West Oakland back in 1959, seeing white consumers as the key, along with further industrial development, to increasing property values in the city. While it was not possible before to alter the demographic makeup of West Oakland because of stronger racial biases held by white people opposed to integration, white residents are now seeking out homes in the flatlands,

recognizing the cultural richness in the community that residents like Ernestine Nettles have called home for decades.⁵⁰¹

The federal government is bankrolling this transition with the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) of 1977. To make up for past discriminatory practices, the CRA mandated that banks provide loans to low-income geographic areas.⁵⁰² However, by not recognizing that at the core of discriminatory redlining practices were racialized risk assessments of *individuals* occupying the space, not the geographic location itself, this requirement has a large loophole now being exploited by banks. To be effective, the CRA depended on black people remaining isolated in black areas and white people avoiding them. It seemed a reasonable expectation, after all, since that had been the observed pattern of behavior, especially with urban renewal. Black people were hyper-segregated into other black slums and the white people that urban planners envisioned would replace them never moved in, as was the case with West Oakland. Although trying to address the effects of discriminatory lending practices, the law was unprepared for white residents to actually become less racist, not imagining that “historically black neighborhoods would be sought out by young homebuyers.”⁵⁰³ Now with white people moving into black neighborhoods, banks are giving their required CRA loans for black areas, which offer affordable loans with just three percent down, to whites.⁵⁰⁴

In Philadelphia, this has allowed newcomer whites to easily purchase homes and additional rental properties with little money down as banks compete to attract their business.⁵⁰⁵ This practice, although in opposition to the purpose of the CRA, is legal because the requirement of the act is to reinvest with affordable home loans in black neighborhoods, not invest in the black individuals

⁵⁰¹ *Episode 5: Mobilization*, City Rising, 2017. <https://www.kcet.org/shows/city-rising/episodes/e5-mobilization>.

⁵⁰² “Gentrification Became Low-Income Lending Law’s Unintended Consequence,” *Reveal*, February 16, 2018, <https://www.revealnews.org/article/gentrification-became-low-income-lending-laws-unintended-consequence/>.

⁵⁰³ “Gentrification.”

⁵⁰⁴ “Gentrification.”

⁵⁰⁵ “For People of Color, Banks Are Shutting the Door to Homeownership,” *Reveal*, February 15, 2018, <https://www.revealnews.org/article/for-people-of-color-banks-are-shutting-the-door-to-homeownership/>.

themselves. In fact, "nearly all financial institutions nationwide have passed their Community Reinvestment Act inspections since 2009, even though racial disparities in lending remain as pronounced as ever."⁵⁰⁶ While the CRA has addressed disparities in areas funded, it does not address disparities in the people funded, and the people are what matter most in determining lending practices based on risk assessments.

The racial bias in awarding loans has gotten, as Ernestine would put it, more sophisticated at discriminating. Credit scores are the new form of racialized risk assessments determining who gets a loan.⁵⁰⁷ Like the old risk assessments baked into local lending and then federal loan insurance practices, credit scores "have a discriminatory impact on borrowers of color."⁵⁰⁸ Ironically, the banks continue to perpetuate the same practices for which the 1977 CRA was passed to correct. However, banks now claim that when loan applicants are rejected, it is because of their ineligibility based on economic factors that make them risky as investments. This is a sorry attempt at rationalizing racism as economically necessary to sustain their businesses. At its most basic level it is based on fallacious assessments of who is a risky investment rooted in racial stereotypes and quantified in credit score calculations. This is not a new argument; it worked its way into racially restrictive covenants as early as 1921 in Oakland. Racial discrimination was, and is acceptable, for these businesses because they tell themselves it protects property values and investments, shielding them from any culpability in maintaining segregation by giving themselves the easy defense of "colorblind economic factors."

However, analyzing and controlling mortgage records for those same "economic factors" exposes their lie and shows the much deeper and disturbing racial truth behind lending practices used today. The Center for Investigative Reporting examined 31 million mortgage records from 2015 to 2016, finding that even controlling for "economic factors" including "applicants' income,

⁵⁰⁶ "Gentrification."

⁵⁰⁷ "Shutting the Door."

⁵⁰⁸ "Shutting the Door."

the size of the loan they sought and the neighborhood where they wanted to buy," African Americans, Latinos, Asians and Native Americans "were denied conventional home purchase loans at significantly higher rates than whites" in a whopping total of 61 metro areas in the United States.⁵⁰⁹ These areas included Philadelphia, Detroit, Atlanta, Washington, Vallejo, a town in the Bay Area, Little Rock, and Sumter.⁵¹⁰ Specifically in their case study city, Philadelphia, "lenders made 10 times as many conventional home purchase loans to whites as African Americans, even though the two groups represent about the same share of the area's population."⁵¹¹ The underlying factor in these lending practices is consistently race, not economic factors like income. The magnitude of the problem across the country and depth of disparities indicate that for all the legal protections that have been instituted since the 1960s, fair housing is still not a practiced right in the United States. In fact, according to The Center for Investigative Reporting, the homeownership gap between blacks and whites, "which had been shrinking since the 1970s, has exploded since the housing bust. It is now wider than it was during the Jim Crow era."⁵¹² Discriminatory lending practices have gotten worse, not better. Speaking to the gravity of the problem, these racialized practices have created a disparity in black and white homeownership that is worse than one of the most infamous chapters in United States racial history.

These findings indicate that there is something deeply wrong with the 1977 CRA, and federal oversight more generally, if banks can still be certified for the program while these very real and identifiable discriminatory practices exist. Despite a real need to update the CRA and address worsening housing discrimination, the Trump administration is "weakening the standards banks must meet to pass a Community Reinvestment Act exam."⁵¹³ Additionally, his administration has

⁵⁰⁹ "Gentrification."

⁵¹⁰ "Shutting the Door."

⁵¹¹ "Gentrification."

⁵¹² "Shutting the Door."

⁵¹³ "Shutting the Door."

not pursued a single racial discrimination case against lenders.⁵¹⁴ The federal government's approach gives tacit approval to these discriminatory practices. The administration and these policies are a product of the 2016 election, in which polling revealed that half of Americans believe "we've done too much to remedy racial inequality."⁵¹⁵ The country is not post-racial. The United States is rolling back protections for black people in a way that is literally bringing the country back to the Jim Crow Era. This has impacts on racial economic inequalities as well because homes continue to be a central investment a family will make.⁵¹⁶ These discriminatory practices deny black families the opportunity to build equity, explaining the huge gulf in their median net worth, \$9,000 compared to \$132,000 for white families from U.S. Census data.⁵¹⁷ The gap in homeownership between whites and blacks impacts more than housing stability. It impacts financial stability, and without equity in homes, it impacts housing and financial stability for future generations to come. As a result, this is an ugly problem that will only continue to fester in United States, forcing different opportunities and destinies onto people based on where they can live because of their race.⁵¹⁸

In addition to limiting financial and economic opportunities through the denial of homeownership, lending discrimination supported by the federal government also leaves a deeply personal impact on the individuals it touches. In their study of lending discrimination in Philadelphia, the Center for Investigative Reporting spoke to residents like Rachelle Faroul and Adrienne Stokes. Rachelle Faroul at the time of the article's publication was a 33-year old college graduate working full-time at the University of Pennsylvania and had been denied home loans at two different institutions.⁵¹⁹ She described the mortgage process as "humiliating," saying "I was made to feel like nothing that I was contributing was of value, like I didn't matter."⁵²⁰ To lending

⁵¹⁴ "Shutting the Door."

⁵¹⁵ Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 201.

⁵¹⁶ "Shutting the Door."

⁵¹⁷ "Shutting the Door."

⁵¹⁸ Self, *American Babylon*, 58.

⁵¹⁹ "Shutting the Door."

⁵²⁰ "Shutting the Door."

institutions, the people that mattered were applicants that they deemed a good investment, but for Rachelle Faroul, they striped away all her accomplishments and judged her value as an investment based on her skin color. As she said, this process took an emotional toll on her. It is difficult not to internalize somebody's negative assessments of your worth. This speaks to the dehumanizing effect of racism and housing discrimination, a process which reinforces racial boundaries and social status by elevating white applicants as more worthy than black ones. These were the same hierarchies at play that historically marginalized black residents in West Oakland through the denial of loans and inclusion in white neighborhoods. White people used these practices as a social reminder to blacks that they did not view them as being equals.

Black residents in Philadelphia like Adrienne Stokes also worry about losing their homes.⁵²¹ Unlike white assumptions that black people hurt property values, Ms. Stokes's fear is based in reality and is remarkably similar to the threat that urban renewal posed to black communities. In fact, as a result of gentrification, the home of a long-time black family neighboring Ms. Stokes was "demolished and is now a hole in the ground."⁵²² Stokes was worried because she had been rejected for loans to improve her home.⁵²³ Without those improvements, according to Arlene Wayne-Thomas, a Philadelphia realtor, "the building inspector shows up, and you have to sell, and here comes the gentrification."⁵²⁴ These were the same patterns of disinvestment in black space that helped to foster blight as defined by the government in West Oakland in 1949. Black communities were credit starved, could not bring their homes up to code, and then hundreds lost them as a direct result of the 1959 GNRP that determined them to be sub-standard. This is why Ms. Stokes was worried.

⁵²¹ "Gentrification."

⁵²² "Gentrification."

⁵²³ "Gentrification."

⁵²⁴ "Gentrification."

The denial of loans to black residents within 1977 CRA reinvestment zones brings the fundamental nature of race in lending practices into greater clarity. Banks have become comfortable investing in gentrification, lending in black neighborhoods, as long as they are awarding loans to a white applicant. Where Stokes' neighbors once lived, a white developer was planning on building luxury apartments.⁵²⁵ The 1977 CRA loans that should make property maintenance and upgrades possible are instead going to white developers who sell to other higher-income residents. This gentrification will increase property values in a black neighborhood, but just as was the case with urban renewal, black residents will not see these benefits.⁵²⁶ In fact, gentrification and discriminatory lending practices are removing them from their neighborhoods. They are more likely to end up like Ms. Stokes' neighbors, living in their home for decades, making their lives, community, memories, and dreams there, and having nothing to show for it except a hole in the ground.

Significantly, Arlene Wayne-Thomas of Philadelphia is quoted in the Center for Investigative Reporting article as saying "We're talking about the same issues in 2017 that we were talking about in the 1940s." She is not wrong. Government support for private discriminatory housing practices and disinvestment in black space has been a fixture since the 1940s and can even be traced back further. It is imperative to understand that race still plays a fundamental role in housing policy, even when it is disguised as a color-blind "economic factor," such as efforts to maximize property values, decreasing tax inefficiencies, or making loan application decisions based on credit scores. Without raising our consciousness as Ernestine Nettles would say, we cannot address the racial politics baked into our city and federal institutions that create housing barriers in Oakland, Philadelphia, and across the country.

⁵²⁵ "Gentrification."

⁵²⁶ "Gentrification."

These historical barriers are obvious for those who are willing to look at the physical map of Oakland today. Comparing Dr. Hunter's map of racial exclusion and containment in 1960 to current patterns of gentrification, identified by the Urban Displacement Project, a striking similarity jumps out. Areas identified as racially exclusive by Dr. Hunter remain the higher-income housing areas today in Oakland, a privilege first secured with residential "A" zoning in 1935 and then reinforced in 1964 with "A-1" zoning.⁵²⁷ Furthermore, upon visual inspection, 24 of the 28 total census tracts in present-day Oakland that fall within the boundaries of the area identified as being racially exclusive in 1964 are either at-risk of excluding low-income families or experiencing ongoing and advanced exclusion today. Strategies of economic zoning to exclude black residents from white neighborhoods still remain effective and visible. Low-income residents from West Oakland are being kept out of the hills while they lose their homes and neighborhoods to gentrification. Because local business leaders, city officials, and white residents cannot or will not see the long history of these institutionalized barriers to housing, just like urban planners in the 1950s and 1960s, they misinterpret the outcomes of housing discrimination, such as deteriorating housing, and leave segregation in place.

As a result, as gentrification unfolds in Oakland, we are seeing the history of urban renewal repeating itself. Now that white people are moving into black spaces, West Oakland has become worthy of investment again, but as in Philadelphia, this does not necessarily mean gains for all of its black residents. The same racial biases that assigned less value and worth to black spaces in 1964 are still present today, manifesting themselves in the small and local business programs that advantage corporations that still dominate city politics, dumping practices, national discriminatory lending trends, and patterns of gentrification in Oakland. Even though white residents are no longer fleeing

⁵²⁷ "Urban Displacement San Francisco Map | Urban Displacement Project," accessed March 11, 2018, <http://www.urbandisplacement.org/map/sf>; Hunter, *Housing Discrimination in Oakland, California*, 23.

the flatlands for the hills, instead flocking to West Oakland, black residents are still being physically marginalized. As Ernestine Nettles watches from her home on Union Street, the story of housing discrimination continues today in West Oakland, with a similar cast of characters, and in much the same way.

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