

UC Berkeley

Charlene Conrad Liebaw Library Prize for Undergraduate Research

Title

Housewives Save the City from the "Cement Octopus"! Women's Activism in the San Francisco Freeway Revolts, 1955-1967

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/36s587v3>

Author

Germain, Justin

Publication Date

2017-04-01

Undergraduate

Housewives Save the City from the “Cement Octopus”!
Women’s Activism in the San Francisco Freeway Revolts, 1955 - 1967

by
Justin Matthew Germain

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelor of Arts Requirements in History, the
University of California, Berkeley

December 2nd, 2016
101 Advisor: Peter Sahlins
Academic Advisor: David Henkin

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	3
List of Figures	4
Introduction.....	5
Part 1: Men, Women, and Space.....	12
<i>Postwar Plans for Prosperity</i>	12
<i>Masculinity and the Downtown</i>	16
<i>“The Little Housewives:” Women and the Neighborhood</i>	20
Part 2: Women in Grassroots Activism	24
<i>The Highway Starts at Home</i>	24
<i>Protecting the “Heart of the Neighborhood”: Environmental Threats</i>	30
Part 3: Protests for the People.....	35
<i>Behind the Scenes and On the Ground</i>	35
<i>Community over Concrete</i>	41
Bibliography	49

Acknowledgments

I would like to give thanks to the following people for all of their support throughout my research and writing process:

My professors Peter Sahlins and David Henkin have ensured that my writing is as polished, professional, and enlivening as it could possibly be, and I could not be more grateful for that.

Thank you to Evelyn Rose, who provided me with a wealth of information about the Gum Tree Girls. I hope that I can preserve their actions just as they preserved the integrity of Glen Park.

Without all of the people that I interviewed for this project, I would never have been able to experience the passion, excitement, and legacy that the Freeway Revolts created. Thank you for taking time out of your day to speak with me.

And thank you to Ash. You made my time working on this project immeasurably more amazing and I am so grateful that you have never stopped encouraging me. Thank you.

List of Figures

Figure 1: Fischer, Eric. "San Francisco Department of City Planning, Comprehensive Trafficways Plan, October 1948." *San Francisco Bay Area freeway and bridge plans*, 2008. Accessed September 27, 2016 at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/walkingsf/3897327276/in/album-72157622139053795/>.

Figure 2: Webster, Michael and Jason Henderson. "Proposed freeways and the freeway revolt in San Francisco, 1959 – 1966." In *Street Fight: The Politics of Mobility in San Francisco*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013, 40.

Figure 3: "Picketers protesting against the Southern Freeway marching at City Hall." April 18, 1961, San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection, San Francisco Public Library. Accessed November 30, 2016 at <http://sflib1.sfpl.org:82/record=b1038789>.

Figure 4: Smith, Emma Bland. "Protecting Glen Park." In *San Francisco's Glen Park and Diamond Heights*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2007, 85.

Figure 5: "Anti-Freeway Rally In Panhandle." *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 4, 1964, 1.

Figure 6: Wong, Howard. "Freeway Revolt Statue." *No Dig: Save North Beach Village*. Accessed November 30, 2016 at <http://nonorthbeachdig.org/SFCivicHistory.html>.

Figure 7: Scavo, Jordan. "Planned and Constructed Freeways." *California History* 91, no.2 (Summer 2014): 18-19.

Introduction

That octopus grows like a science-fiction blight, / The Bay and the Ferry Building are out of sight, / The trees that stood for a thousand years, / We watch them falling through our tears, / Oh stand by me and protect that tree / From the freeway misery.

Malvina Reynolds, "The Cement Octopus," 1964.¹

The gas-powered growl of the soil sample drill interrupted the natural silence known to San Francisco's Glen Park Canyon. A tightly-packed wall of blue gum eucalyptus fronds shielded the park's seventy acres of trails, ridges, and playgrounds from the city's notorious wind and fog. In the summer of 1965, hundreds of children in the Silver Tree Day Camp clambered up the canyon's rocky outcroppings as their mothers watched from the canyon floor. Zoanne Nordstrom, a longtime resident of the surrounding Glen Park community, had taken her eighteen-month old son out on their regular walk through the park when she spotted a man drilling deep holes near the trails. After asking the hard hat-clad construction worker why he was disrupting the park, she was shocked to hear that he was taking soil samples for a freeway viaduct through the playground.² To Nordstrom, it was absurd to think that this was a good place for a freeway. Glen Park Canyon had been a designated conservation area since 1922, and many young families had moved to Glen Park because of the natural landscape. When the construction worker told her that a freeway was coming, she responded emphatically, anticipating over two years of future activism: "The hell it is!"³

¹ Malvina Reynolds, "The Cement Octopus," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 17, 1964, 1A.

² Zoanne Nordstrom, *Zoanne Nordstrom to Assignment Four: KRON-TV, September 22, 1966*, Letter, From *Zoanne Nordstrom Personal Papers* (hereafter ZNPP) provided to the author by Zoanne Nordstrom; Rich Jordan, "Glen Park's Trees May Give Way to Progress," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 29, 1965, 8.

³ Nordstrom, *Zoanne Nordstrom to Assignment Four: KRON-TV, ZNPP*; Zoanne Nordstrom, *Zoanne Nordstrom to Mr. Guilles, October 1, 1965*, Letter, ZNPP; Gail Bensinger, "Led by the Gum Tree Girls 40 Years Ago, Glen Park Won War Against Freeway," *Glen Park News*, Winter 2007/2008, 5.

By the time Nordstrom ended up creating the Save Glen Park Committee with fellow mothers Joan Seiwald and Geri Arkush in October 1965, San Francisco homeowners had been fighting freeway construction proposals throughout the city for ten straight years. With nearly three quarters of a million people packed into just over forty-six square miles of land, San Francisco residents fought to protect the city's finite space against state-sanctioned transportation projects.⁴ At stake were the houses, trees, and community cultures that many middle-class residents believed were part of their city's unique identity. The unrelenting push to stop the freeways that threatened their homes came to be known as "freeway revolts," as coined by San Franciscan newspapers during successful anti-freeway protests in the late 1950s.⁵ The San Francisco Freeway Revolts of 1955 – 1967 were the first, most expensive, and longest of their kind. Only in the mid-1960s did similar movements erupt in cities like Los Angeles and Baltimore, and it was not until the 1970s that freeway revolts became a nationwide phenomenon.⁶ The revolutionary character of these twelve years of activism is debatable, but urban residents clearly protested to define and protect space in their own terms. Preserving places like homes, parks, and playgrounds meant preserving the social relationships that they had cultivated and treasured for decades.

To be sure, not every San Francisco resident experienced urban space in the same way. An eight-lane freeway held widely different meanings to an upper-class family in Twin Peaks

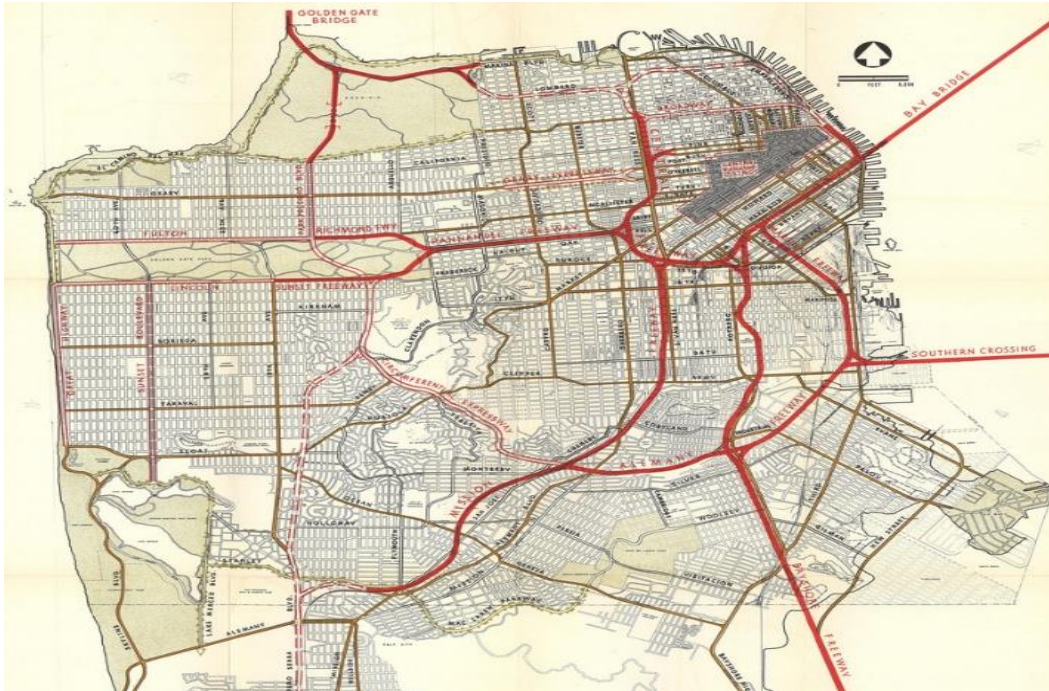
⁴ "Save Glen Park Committee Report," *Save Glen Park Committee*, November 9, 1965, Report, ZNPP; "Bay Area Census," MTC-ABAG Library, Accessed October 17, 2016 at <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/historical/copop18602000.htm>.

⁵ Raymond A. Mohl, "Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities," *Journal of Urban History* 30, no.5: 2004, 678; Charles Thieriot, "Where to Build SF Freeways?" *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 24, 1956, 64.

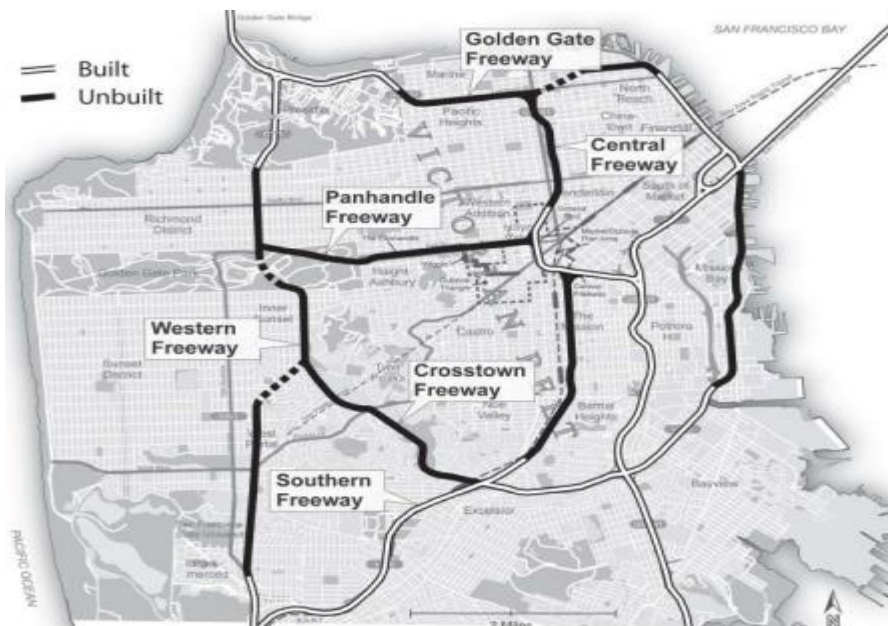
⁶ Raymond A. Mohl, "The Interstates and the Cities: Highways, Housing, and the Freeway Revolt," Poverty and Race Research Action Council: University of Alabama at Birmingham, 2002, 70.

than it did to a small merchant in the Mission District. Yet the vehemence and immediacy of Nordstrom's anti-freeway response seemed to be widely shared by women throughout many of the city's residential neighborhoods. Often those who campaigned the hardest to save their streets were middle-class women new to social activism. Yet with men dominating business and government in the postwar period, how did women influence the 1955 - 1967 San Francisco Freeway Revolts? How did their gender structure their motivations and experiences? In campaigning against urban freeways' detrimental social effects, middle-class women both strengthened neighborhood-based activism and asserted political ownership over public space. Through their prominent leadership roles, women defined the anti-freeway movement's rhetoric by mobilizing cultural associations about domesticity and community. Not only does this activism illuminate how neighborhoods influenced state-sanctioned urban development during the postwar era, it also exemplifies how postwar, middle-class women developed a sense of political agency.

This paper will address the San Francisco Freeway Revolts in three parts. Part 1 will explore how men and women interacted within postwar San Francisco space during an era of rampant transportation development. Part 2 narrows the focus to women and examines the rhetoric that they used to strengthen anti-freeway activism. The final section describes the steps that women took to fight freeway development and analyzes how they changed the relationship between women, space, and community in San Francisco.



[Figure 1: Eric Fischer, “San Francisco Department of City Planning, Comprehensive Trafficways Plan, October 1948,” *San Francisco Bay Area freeway and bridge plans*, 2008, Accessed September 27, 2016 at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/walkingsf/3897327276/in/album-72157622139053795/>. In this 1948 municipal transportation plan, all red lines show freeways planned to be built by 1970. Not shown on the map are the Crosstown and Central Freeways, which were added to the plan in 1951.]



[Figure 2: Michael Webster and Jason Henderson, “Proposed freeways and the freeway revolt in San Francisco, 1959 – 1966,” in *Street Fight: The Politics of Mobility in San Francisco* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 40. The Freeway Revolts were incredibly successful in preventing freeway construction in middle-class neighborhoods West of Bernal Heights. A lack of political organization led to the (partial) construction of the Bayshore, Southern, and Embarcadero Freeways in neighborhoods near industrial centers.]

Scholars have long portrayed the San Francisco Freeway Revolts as a struggle between heroic city politicians and heinous officials from state and federal offices. In her 2009 article, “Captain Blake versus the Highwaymen: Or, How San Francisco Won the Freeway Revolt,” historian Katherine Johnson claimed that San Francisco Supervisor William Blake led the fight to protect the city from state executives, who were determined to secure federal highway funds at any cost. Johnson frames the Freeway Revolts as a face-off between local and state government with bureaucrats as the enemy. While she addresses the hostility that many San Franciscans held towards state highway officials, her narrow focus on local politicians effaced the effects of widespread grassroots activism.⁷

San Francisco historian William Issel also focused his attention on the Board of Supervisors in his 1999 article “‘Land Values, Human Values, and the Preservation of the City's Treasured Appearance’: Environmentalism, Politics, and the San Francisco Freeway Revolt.” While engineers and business leaders saw freeways through economic frameworks, grassroots activists and local politicians fought for the “human values” of open space and community preservation. Moreover, Issel argues, the goal of maintaining a unique San Franciscan character (defined by urban greenery and unobstructed vistas) united a disparate opposition against disruptive freeway construction. Issel’s focus, however, still substantially neglects activists. Instead, his narrative revolves mostly around prominent mayors, supervisors, and business leaders.⁸

⁷ Katherine M. Johnson, “Captain Blake versus the Highwaymen: Or, How San Francisco Won the Freeway Revolt,” *Journal of Planning History* 8, no.1 (2009): 56-83.

⁸ William Issel, “‘Land Values, Human Values, and the Preservation of the City's Treasured Appearance’: Environmentalism, Politics, and the San Francisco Freeway Revolt,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 68, no. 4 (1999): 611-646.

In his 1969 article “The San Francisco Freeway Revolt,” William H. Lathrop, a Stanford civil engineering graduate student, shifted the discourse away from local politics toward two prominent themes: infrastructure dilemmas and citizen associations. Lathrop emphasizes the influence of middle-class neighborhood associations that began in the wake of early freeway construction in the mid-1950s. He also uses transportation studies to argue how the city’s geography was crucial in determining the extent and form of citizen opposition. Written only a few years after the Freeway Revolts ended, but from an engineer’s perspective, Lathrop’s distinct and timely viewpoint supports a thesis about the influential role of grassroots advocacy.⁹

Forty-five years later, urban historian Jason Henderson expanded Lathrop’s focus on transportation and infrastructure in *Street Fight: The Politics of Mobility in San Francisco* (2013). He contextualizes his argument through characteristics of urban life, such as traffic, transit, and downtown business. According to Henderson, small merchants and white, middle-class, conservative homeowners led campaigns against freeway construction in their own neighborhoods while forgoing activism in surrounding areas. To Henderson, the fact that activists seemed to fight only for nearby neighborhoods ensured that the Freeway Revolts were just reforms rather than revolutions in urban San Francisco mobility.¹⁰

The Freeway Revolts captured the attention of the city’s middle-class, frequently taking up front page headlines throughout the mid-1960s. By analyzing journalistic responses to Panhandle Freeway construction, Judith Lynch transcribed this fervor as it happened in her 1967 University of California, Berkeley Master's thesis “The San Francisco Panhandle Freeway

⁹ This perspective on grassroots organizations is rare within the literature, however the article’s relatively short length hinders its thoroughness. William Lathrop, “The San Francisco Freeway Revolt,” *Journal of Transportation Engineering* (March 1969): 1-16.

¹⁰ Jason Henderson, *Street Fight: The Politics of Mobility in San Francisco* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013).

Debate: One Year of Coverage by the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner*.” As the only scholar to thoroughly analyze journalism’s role in the Freeway Revolts, Lynch argues that local newspapers took sides in debates about freeway construction. The *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *San Francisco Examiner* often deliberately misrepresented environmental effects or rally attendance numbers to encourage citizen action. Her large source list and its focus on controversial hearings, statements, and rallies emphasizes the public’s lasting involvement in the movement. While Lynch’s focus on 1964 captures the vehemence of Panhandle protesters, this narrow focus revealed little about newspapers’ responses to other freeway fights.¹¹

Rather than arguing that conflict between local and state government defined the Freeway Revolts, Joseph A. Rodriguez in *City Against Suburb: The Culture Wars in an American Metropolis* (1999) conceives of the struggle as one between urban and suburban culture. San Francisco homeowners believed that freeways injected suburban ideology into urban space by valuing shorter commutes over community integrity. Citing city planning ideology, Rodriguez shows that while environmental and economic concerns were influential, preserving the character and status of urban homes formed the crux of freeway opposition. Rodriguez differs from many scholars by providing insight into how homeowners politicized their communities within a rapidly changing region. Although he skims over individual activist experiences, he distinguishes his analysis by incorporating culture and community into conversations about freeway resistance.¹²

Unlike most scholars writing about freeway opposition, historian Eric Avila incorporates gender in *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (2014). Although

¹¹ Judith A. Lynch, “The San Francisco Panhandle Freeway Debate: One Year of Coverage by the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner*,” (M.A. Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1967).

¹² Joseph A. Rodriguez, *City Against Suburb: The Culture Wars in an American Metropolis* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1999).

his book does not address anti-freeway activism in San Francisco, it argues that women in Los Angeles, Baltimore, and New York City fought against postwar freeways through maternal politics and artistic creation. Avila contends that women used their status as mothers to fight freeways by lambasting men's explicit control over urban areas. Since his discussion on women's roles in freeway opposition is limited to a single chapter, greater research is needed for a more thorough discussion.¹³

In light of these works on the San Francisco Freeway Revolts, my research aims to fulfill two objectives. First, since most scholars have treated activists as a homogenous group, I will instead focus on women's roles and experiences as activists to explore possible differences within the campaign and illuminate this missing dimension in our understanding of the movement. Second, I aim to revise the common belief that local, white, male politicians were the main instigators of freeway activism. While this paper focuses on the entire span of the Freeway Revolts, two fights in particular - those against the Panhandle Freeway (1964) and O'Shaughnessy Boulevard (1965-1967) - will be the focal points due to their locations and distinct styles of activism.¹⁴

Part 1: Men, Women, and Space

Postwar Plans for Prosperity

In an attempt to build prosperity after World War II, local and state legislatures encouraged massive urban freeway construction in San Francisco. Prior to the war, California

¹³ Eric Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

¹⁴ The fight against the Western Freeway also especially captured the city's attention due to the freeway's expansive length and proposed destruction of Golden Gate Park land. The Panhandle and O'Shaughnessy campaigns illuminated how both large, city-wide protests and smaller, more isolated demonstrations used similar rhetoric and organizational tactics.

freeways connected rural trade routes, yet after the 1947 Collier-Burns Act, state highways integrated into urban and suburban networks.¹⁵ As the city with the highest concentration of registered vehicles in the world at the time, this was a particular boon for San Francisco. The city's urban planners believed that stemming extreme congestion could be the key to continued economic growth.¹⁶ In July 1951, the City Planning Commission, only five years old at the time, approved eight major freeways in the city's Master Plan. This included the Western Freeway connecting Civic Center with the Golden Gate Bridge (cutting through Golden Gate Park), and the Crosstown Freeway linking Glen Park's O'Shaughnessy Boulevard, Alemany Boulevard, and the soon-to-be finished Bayshore Freeway in the Southeast.¹⁷ Since the earliest proposed expressways ran through downtrodden industrial areas and the other freeways were not projected to be finished for twenty years, most San Franciscans treated the plans with indifference.¹⁸ To politicians and planners, however, freeways could not sustain prosperity and curb traffic congestion on their own. Californian legislators established the Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission the same year that they issued the Master Plan to further solidify a growing regional economy. Planning and urban renewal officials argued that creating a rapid transit system was necessary if the freeway network was to be effective.¹⁹ To San Franciscan leaders, transportation development would spearhead the Bay Area's rise as the west coast's postwar, industrial hub.

¹⁵ At the time, this highway reform was limited to California, setting the state up for urban freeway construction (and subsequent tension) earlier than other states. Johnson, "Captain Blake versus the Highwaymen," 60.

¹⁶ "Freeway Studies: Panhandle Parkway and Crosstown Tunnel Corridors: A Digest of Studies," *Department of Public Works and California Division of Highways*, May 1964, Report, From Box FW:VF #84, San Francisco Public Library (hereafter SFPL); Henderson, *Street Fight*, 41.

¹⁷ The Bayshore Freeway would be the city's only fully completed highway after the Freeway Revolts. "Four Freeways Added to 1945 Master Plan," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 18, 1951, 16.

¹⁸ Calvin Welch, Interview by author, Audio recording, San Francisco, CA, July 12, 2016; "Four Freeways," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 16; Lathrop, "San Francisco Freeway Revolt," 12.

¹⁹ David W. Jones, Jr., *California's Freeway Era in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: Institute of Transportation Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1989), 273; R.F. Ziegenfelder, Hall, and Macdonald, "The San Francisco Bay Area Mass Rapid Transit Study," *San Francisco City Planning*

Opening with an extravagant public ceremony on June 1, 1951, the Bayshore Freeway, the first in the city, ran 1.3 miles along former railroad lines on the Eastern edge of the peninsula from Augusta to 25th Street.²⁰ Construction of the Embarcadero, the city's second freeway which traversed a mile along the waterfront (and in front of the legendary Ferry Building), did not go as smoothly. Two years after a minimally publicized hearing about the freeway in 1953, homeowners living near the pier attacked the road's gross obstruction of their view. This included the historic San Francisco Ferry Building, which, while often maligned for its outdated appearance, proved a better sight than a double-deck, eight-lane thoroughfare.²¹ San Franciscans' commitment to preserving open views of the Bay was just one of the ways in which the city's urban identity and landscape exacerbated freeway tension.²² Business elites and state engineers recognized how precious the view of the Bay was to San Franciscans. To ease homeowners' worries, they argued that highways would enhance, rather than obstruct, the celebrated view. Sympathetic journalists even labeled engineers as innovative artists whose structures would preserve the city's world-renowned beauty. While the peninsula was known for its impressive vistas, it was also known for its increasingly limited space. With 7,500 people migrating to the Bay Area each month in 1955 and a dense, hilly landscape, freeways could only disturb homeowners, businesses, and parks.²³

Division, February 10, 1955, Report, 10; "Report to the Honorable George Christopher and Board of Supervisors Regarding the Proposed Freeway and Trafficways Plan for the City and County of San Francisco," *San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association*, April 1961, 1, From Box FW:VF #81, SFPL.

²⁰ "Bayshore Freeway: First Unit Within City of San Francisco Opened to Public Use," *California Highways and Public Works*, May/June 1951, 1.

²¹ Richard M. Zettel, *Urban Transportation in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley), 4; "Waterfront Freeway to Open," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 31, 1959, 2.

²² Lathrop, "San Francisco Freeway Revolt," 14.

²³ George T. Cameron, "Not Only Beautiful, It's a New Art Form," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 27, 1954, 18; Walter S. Douglas, "Mass Transportation for the Bay Area," January 28, 1955, Report, 3, Gardner Library, University of California, Berkeley; Thieriot, "Where to Build SF Freeways?" 64.

As residents faced the imminent construction of the Embarcadero, they realized that other freeways held different, but just as destructive, problems. Many took issue with the Panhandle Freeway's design, which cut through eight blocks of park space between Oak and Fell streets and severed the northeastern corner of Golden Gate Park.²⁴ While freeways constructed in San Francisco during the early 1950s avoided these problems by running over industrial strips, highway plans of the late 1950s and early 1960s directly traversed neighborhoods and parks. These plans called for housing demolition on an unprecedented scale. City Hall's 1960 plans for the Russian Hill Tunnel, Central Freeway, and Western Freeway demanded the destruction of nearly 2,500 houses and over 170 businesses. Even after this plan was scrapped, subsequent plans were no less forgiving. The 1964 Panhandle Freeway would have destroyed \$2.5 million (over \$61 million in today's standards) worth of property for 6,000 residents.²⁵ The scale and location of this proposed devastation prompted a much more hostile response than the Bayshore Freeway did. By the end of the Freeway Revolts, 70,000 San Francisco residents had signed petitions against freeway construction. While occasional protests had transpired since 1955, citizens began to first organize en masse in 1958, and their subsequent pressure led the Board of Supervisors to cancel six freeways (totaling fifteen miles in length) on January 26, 1959.²⁶ The city's relief was short-lived, however, as politicians insisted on constructing a revised Panhandle Parkway and widening O'Shaughnessy Boulevard over the next decade. Just as citizens across

²⁴ Dean St. Dennis, "Freeway Plans Would Ruin Park Greenery," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 24, 1964, 17.

²⁵ "Parcels of Land and Improvements Located on Rights-of-Way of Proposed Freeway Routes Recommended in "Trafficways in San Francisco - A Reappraisal, November 1960," *City and County of San Francisco*, March 23, 1961, From Box FW:VF #81, SFPL; Mel Wax, "Board Unit Rejects Panhandle Route: New Revolt Erupts on Freeway," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 15, 1964, 1.

²⁶ The six freeways rejected by the Board of Supervisors included the Western, Junipero Serra, Crosstown, Park-Presidio, Central, and Golden Gate Freeways. Chris Carlsson, "Shaping the City From Below," *Boom* Vol 4, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 94; "Board Kills Plans for 6 Freeways," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 27, 1959, 1-2.

the city had joined together in the late 1950s to stop the “concrete monsters tearing through San Francisco,” they were moved to do so again throughout the 1960s.²⁷

Masculinity and the Downtown

Throughout these campaigns, concerned citizens targeted their anger at the downtown interests controlling freeway growth. While local industry had always possessed political influence, the need for private businesses to cooperate with the city during the Great Depression drastically amplified their political voice in San Francisco. Cooperation continued in the postwar era as the city’s administrative bodies became more insulated from what Issel referred to as “electoral politics and interest-group lobbying.”²⁸ This sense of separation from the public carried over into the early freeway planning process. Yet this was not the only way in which the business, political, and engineering groups in charge of freeway plans were separated from the populations that they served. These fields were all linked by the fact that their membership was nearly completely male. Debates over freeway construction in San Francisco revealed how men in postwar urban areas had nearly complete authority over public space. Both in and out of government, men held disproportionate power over city housing and infrastructure projects. The city’s longtime corporate interests, which fervently campaigned for freeways, were no exception. Thomas Gray, the bombastic lobbyist and manager of the Down Town Association, memorably claimed that his business coalition was San Francisco’s “sugar daddy.”²⁹ This moniker perfectly embodied how males dominated postwar Bay Area business. In 1960, men made up 80% of all

²⁷ Mel Wax, “Go-Ahead on Hunters Pt. and Transit Area Asked,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 30, 1963, 2.

²⁸ William Issel, “Liberalism and Urban Policy in San Francisco from the 1930s to the 1960s,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 22, No. 4 (November 1991): 436, 445.

²⁹ Rachel Gordon, “Thomas Gray – SF Leader,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 31, 2006, Accessed October 9, 2016 at <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Thomas-Gray-S-F-leader-2515000.php>; Elmont White, “Park Freeway Proposals Raise Angry Protests,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 7, 1964, 1.

managers, officials, and proprietors in California.³⁰ Freeway tension further illuminated this male-industrial connection, as both the San Francisco Business and Property Owners Association and the Chamber of Commerce advocated for freeway construction while the San Francisco Women's Chamber of Commerce rallied against it. These women were often middle-class or elite business owners who would have benefited from the regional economic boom of urban freeway construction. Mass regionalization, however, took a back seat to their objections that an expressway would "desecrate" park land.³¹ These divisions revealed how women in postwar business environments based their opinions about freeways on more than just economic rationale. While men defined business interests in San Francisco, women in industry were more willing to sacrifice economic benefits to preserve city integrity.

Men, however, controlled more than just the city's economic dealings - they also dominated local politics. Between 1950 and 1969, only two women served on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors: Clarissa McMahon (1953-1966) and Dorothy von Beroldingen (1966-1970).³² Women's voices were not adequately represented on the major body responsible for approving freeway plans, nor were they in other political arenas. In May 1959, Mayor George Christopher established the Mayor's Committee to Study Freeways to gather citizen input in an organized fashion. Just like the Board of Supervisors, fifteen out of the sixteen committee members that Christopher appointed were male professionals.³³ Thus, not only did men make

³⁰ Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek, *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 6.0* [Machine-readable database], Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015.

³¹ "Crosstown Tunnel – New Bid for Study," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 8, 1962, 14; "Crosstown Tunnel Finally Makes It: S.F. Wins Freeway Revolt," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 13, 1963, 1.

³² "Former Supervisors," *City and County of San Francisco: Board of Supervisors*, Accessed October 13, 2016 at <http://sfbos.org/past-supervisors>.

³³ "Mayor's Committee to Study Freeways Final Report," *San Francisco Mayor's Committee to Study Freeways*, April 22, 1960, 10, From Box FW:VF #83, SFPL.

decisions about whether to widen the Southern Freeway to eight lanes or substitute the Panhandle Freeway for an underground tunnel, they looked to other men for outside support. Whenever women attempted to intrude on these men's domains, they were often met with derision. "All of the department heads were men," noted longtime Glen Park homeowner and Save Glen Park Committee co-founder Joan Seiwald, claiming that whenever she campaigned at City Hall against the widening of O'Shaughnessy Boulevard, "the men would head for the men's room."³⁴ The politics-business alliance in postwar San Francisco was tightknit and used political issues like freeway debates to maintain its power. Masculinity was simply an integral part of how the city functioned in the 1950s and 1960s.

Politics and industry were not the only male-dominated field at the time; men were also in charge of designing these freeway plans as state highway engineers. This nearly all-male profession, known for its staunch reliance on economic and geographic data, determined which neighborhoods would bear the burden of the "hydra of roads."³⁵ Men's dominance in the civil engineering field was extraordinarily unequal, with men making up 99.2% of Californian civil engineers in 1960 (the highest out of any recorded occupation). Not until 1969 were women even allowed into Tau Beta Pi, the oldest collegiate engineering honor society in the United States.³⁶ This strictly gendered division of labor was far from random. Historically, the engineering field legitimized itself through professionalism, a failure to consider social and cultural effects of their work, and an excessive disposition towards hiring white, middle-class men. Glen Park mother

³⁴ Don Williams, "How Mrs. Baxter and The Gum Tree Girls Foiled the Freeway," *Glen Park News*, Summer 2000, 1.

³⁵ Zoanne Nordstrom came up with the term "hydra of roads" by noting how the twists and curves of Los Angeles freeways looked like a "snake." Bensinger, "Led by the Gum Tree Girls," 5.

³⁶ Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series*, 2015; Ruth Oldenziel, *Making Technology Masculine: Men, Women, and Modern Machines in America, 1870-1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), 169.

and activist Nordstrom called out this limited worldview in 1965, boldly claiming that highway engineers failed to judge or understand how their actions affected San Francisco neighborhoods.³⁷ Activists constantly criticized the Division of Highway's "slide rule boys," who in turn retaliated by labeling freeway opponents as childish and irrational. When Nordstrom, Seiwald, and Arkush created the Save Glen Park Committee in 1965, Chief Engineer Clifford Geertz disparaged them as the "Gum Tree Girls" desperately trying to save the "bucolic backwater" of Glen Park Canyon.³⁸ This mindset lay at the heart of where freeways in San Francisco were constructed. To state engineers like Geertz, data and logic determined the qualities of space; individuals and communities were never part of the equation.

In addition to being the primary decision-makers surrounding freeway construction, men also received most of their benefits. When freeway supporters claimed that construction would create a substantial number of jobs, these positions would nearly always go to men. California's design and construction industries were nearly completely male, including 90% of architects, 96% of structural metal workers, and 97% of cranemen.³⁹ More than just providing jobs for men, freeways solidified this gendered division of labor within the physical urban environment as well. Historically, the automobile has entrenched gendered behaviors and space, most notably in the modern city's central business district and exterior residential fringes.⁴⁰ In the twentieth century, urban men drove longer distances for work-related purposes, while women stayed closer

³⁷ Oldenziel, *Making Technology Masculine*, 13, 16; Zoanne Nordstrom, *Zoanne Nordstrom to Roger Boas, November 20, 1965*, Letter, ZNPP.

³⁸ Williams, "Mrs. Baxter and the Gum Tree Girls," 1.

³⁹ Wax, "Board Unit Rejects Panhandle Route," 1; Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series*, 2015.

⁴⁰ Martin Wachs, "Men, Women, and Urban Travel: The Persistence of Separate Spheres," *Presentation at Thirtieth Annual Meeting of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, Buffalo, NY* (October 27, 1988): 10.

to home and drove primarily for family-related trips.⁴¹ By modifying the physical environment to ensure continued reliance on automobile travel, freeways entrenched gendered spheres in urban areas. “Like it or not,” City Planning Director James McCarthy informed a Glen Park community freeway meeting, “the automobile is here to stay.”⁴² Massive urban freeway construction in San Francisco would fortify city space as gendered space, ensuring that the city’s male domination would persist for decades to come. In line with postwar gender roles, men used the hearings, committees, and studies that defined San Francisco’s freeway debates to assert dominance over public space, just as they had for decades.

“The Little Housewives:” Women and the Neighborhood

Although freeway planning frequently originated within the city’s financial sector, it was the homes and parks surrounding San Francisco’s northeastern downtown quadrant that would bear most of the freeway burden. Threats of freeway construction revealed urban neighborhoods’ distinguishing characteristics. With the exception of the eastern Haight-Ashbury, neighborhoods with the largest levels of anti-freeway activism primarily consisted of white, middle-class families. Districts where freeways were planned but not built (e.g. Glen Park, Diamond Heights, and Sunset) had some of the lowest percentages of African-Americans in the peninsula (1.6%, 2.0%, and 0.2% respectively). On the other hand, districts near active or finished freeway projects, such as Oceanview-Ingleside and Bayview-Hunters Point, had disproportionately larger numbers of African-American residents (38.2% and 46.8% respectively). Furthermore, a majority of individuals in the former set of districts owned their houses, while most in the latter rented.⁴³ Communities that organized against freeway construction were, by most measures,

⁴¹ Wachs, “Men, Women, and Urban Travel,” 2.

⁴² Williams, “Mrs. Baxter and the Gum Tree Girls,” 1.

⁴³ Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series*, 2015.

economically sound, which afforded residents more time to devote to non-work activities like activism.⁴⁴ Neighborhood homogeneity made anti-freeway activism a distinctly middle-class (and at times, as shown by the Women’s Chamber of Commerce, an upper-class) action. These communities aimed to preserve their own neighborhoods rather than challenge the social structures preventing downtrodden areas from organizing politically. Yet treating communities in such a binary manner would disregard the stark public-private gender divide that persisted throughout most urban areas in the 1950s and 1960s. Whereas men monopolized public space in San Francisco, many considered private space to be under women’s jurisdiction. The relatively short distance between neighborhoods and the downtown established a residential atmosphere that did not identify with the urbanity of the downtown nor with the suburban lifestyle of many South Bay towns. Women living in these districts, therefore, had distinct perspectives towards the home. Additionally, since a majority of women living in these communities were not in the labor force (female unemployment was 56.2% in Glen Park), women spent a disproportionately larger amount of time participating in and creating a middle-class residential culture.⁴⁵ The space and social relationships within their immediate community were responsible for defining much of their day-to-day lives.

Women in urban San Francisco were ardently attached to their home and neighborhood. The home represents a unique space in the life of any individual, especially when private space is limited in a city like San Francisco. In 1981, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and cultural sociologist Eugene Rochberg-Halton articulated the home’s unique importance, arguing “that men and women make order in their selves...by first creating and then interacting with the material world.” The home’s physical space is “most involved in making up...identity” because it

⁴⁴ Welch, Interview by author, July 12, 2016.

⁴⁵ Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series*, 2015.

establishes “permanence in the intimate life of a person.”⁴⁶ In the mid-twentieth century, many women seemed to hold a stronger “emotional attachment to the home” than men did because they viewed the home as a place to develop interpersonal relationships.⁴⁷ For many women, freeways likely threatened these intimate social attachments in a way that they did not for men. The emotional associations tied to the home logically extended to the neighborhood. A home can only be safe and foster positive relationships if its environment allows it to. As a unit, the neighborhood’s role of protecting and enlivening private space can help to establish legitimacy in making political claims. In 1964, the American Institute of Architects stated that politically influential neighborhoods like Richmond and the Haight-Ashbury possessed the right to defend their inhabitants against freeway disruption. Spurred on by their gendered association with private space, women helped to “reestablish the neighborhood,” in the words of Mission District historian Erik Howell, as a “comprehensive planning unit.”⁴⁸ Many women did so through neighborhood improvement associations, which shifted from being male-dominated organizations to ones that were primarily female during the 1960s.⁴⁹ The Citizens Committee to Save Golden Gate Park (a coalition of twenty six different neighborhood associations) was filled with prominent female leaders, including the Russian Hill Improvement Association’s Dorothy Orrick and E.L. Kelsey, the woman behind the 1947 campaign to save the city’s legendary cable

⁴⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 16, 17.

⁴⁷ Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, 129, 132.

⁴⁸ Northern CA Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, “Panhandle Parkway,” *Northern CA Chapter of the American Institute of Architects to San Francisco Board of Supervisors, October 12, 1964*, Letter, From Box FW:VF #84, SFPL; Erik O. Howell, “In the Public Interest: Space, Ethnicity, and Authority in San Francisco’s Mission District, 1906-1973,” (University of California, Berkeley, Dissertation: 2009), 148.

⁴⁹ Beverly Duncan and Otis D. Duncan, *Sex Typing and Social Roles: A Research Report* (New York: Academic Press, Inc. 1978), 171.

cars.⁵⁰ The neighborhood acted as both motive and tool for anti-freeway activism, and women's control over this space made it accessible for them to advocate on its behalf. Since much of the urban residential community centered on the family, women were expected to oversee this environment through their identities as housewives and mothers.⁵¹

Acting through these gender roles provided both obstacles and advantages to urban, middle-class female activists. As in the rest of the postwar United States, San Franciscans espoused staunch beliefs on how men and women should behave. At a national level, heteronormative, patriarchal domestic order provided stability amidst fears of crazed Communists and dastardly Soviet spies.⁵² This order even prevailed among relatively liberal families. Ben Bierman, the son of Panhandle Freeway Revolt leader and future San Francisco Supervisor Sue Bierman, commented on these gender dynamics, remarking how his household was definitely “a male-dominated environment” with his father, philosopher Arthur Bierman, being “clear about...male roles.”⁵³ To many, this context made the idea of a housewife activist seem abnormal and frivolous. The *San Francisco Chronicle* ran a sardonic story in 1961 on local housewives campaigning at a City Hall hearing about the amount of water in canned hams. This pejorative association carried over into the Freeway Revolts. Marc Zimmerman, son of Twin Peaks anti-freeway activist Gina Pennestri, mentioned that developers would often snidely refer to his mother and other neighborhood women as “little housewives.”⁵⁴ Yet amidst these

⁵⁰ “Big Protest on Park Freeway,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 28, 1964, 1.

⁵¹ Sam Bass Warner Jr., “Learning From the Past: Services to Families,” in *The Car and The City: The Automobile, the Built Environment, and Daily Urban Life*, ed. Margaret Crawford and Martin Wachs (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 10.

⁵² Joanne Meyerowitz, “Introduction,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 3.

⁵³ Ben Bierman, Interview by author, Audio recording, Berkeley, CA, July 11, 2016.

⁵⁴ David Halberstam, “Housewives Want Their Ham Straight,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 18, 1961, 1; Marc Zimmerman, Interview by author, Audio recording, San Francisco, CA, June 17, 2016.

dismissive remarks, women's participation in local affairs had the potential to improve home life. Mothers involved in community organizations usually had more happy and stable families than those who were less politically active. Additionally, families developed stronger emotional connections to one another when they participated in political initiatives.⁵⁵ While women had social and political roadblocks to effectively defending their communities, their labels as housewives or mothers did not completely compromise their actions. The middle-class culture (based on principles of strong, matrifocal families and stable living environments) that produced many anti-freeway activists would go on to influence the tactics that women used to fight freeways.⁵⁶ Women harnessed these identities during the Freeway Revolts to focus on the issues most accessible to them as protectors of private space.

Part 2: Women in Grassroots Activism

The Highway Starts at Home

“I know there were guys that did it,” Haight Ashbury Neighborhood Council (HANC) organizer Calvin Welch remembered, yet “I would say at the conceptual level, at the organizational level, at the creative level....I think it was heavily women.” Welch had worked at HANC since 1970, six years after Sue Bierman, “the great heroine of the freeway fight,” had founded the association to combat the Panhandle Freeway.⁵⁷ He was not the only one to view women as the driving force behind the San Francisco Freeway Revolts. Marc Zimmerman recalled how it was the women in his Twin Peaks neighborhood that fought to stop the

⁵⁵ Participation in the community included involvement in, among others, neighborhood associations, PTA meetings, political clubs, and church groups. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, 155, 154.

⁵⁶ For more on women using their identities as mothers in anti-freeway activism throughout the country, see Avila, *Folklore of the Freeway*, 57-60.

⁵⁷ Welch, Interview by author, July 12, 2016.

Panhandle, “the men had nothing to do with this at all.”⁵⁸ While perhaps a slight exaggeration, there was no denying that women formed the grassroots foundation of anti-freeway activism. A 1961 petition written by the female-chaired Forest Hill Garden Club garnered 612 signatures in an effort to block the Western Freeway. Approximately 95% of those who signed the petition were female.⁵⁹ For the most part, these women were not career activists, they were often middle-class, stay-at-home mothers drawn to activism by threats to their home. The sheer number of politicized women helped to create a new activist bloc and define the rhetoric that the movement would rally behind. While women spearheaded this rhetoric, it was usually not directed towards the betterment of women specifically (unlike the San Francisco women’s liberation groups that would begin in 1968).⁶⁰ Rather, women used perceptions of gendered differences to campaign for political reform. Along these lines, female activists in San Francisco focused on two major themes when fighting urban freeway plans: family and the environment.

The former fit well into postwar, middle-class culture; areas affected by freeway plans were densely packed with families and children. In the Sunset District, 73.1% of married couples had a child under eighteen years old, as did 91.1% of families in Diamond Heights.⁶¹ Activists fought freeways because they believed that a safe, open, clean, and family-friendly neighborhood was more valuable than a quicker commute for suburban residents. In 1959, Glen Park resident J.C. Baxter, also known as the “Joan of Arc” of the Crosstown Freeway fight, passionately argued to the California State Legislature that hundreds of “families will be displaced” in

⁵⁸ Zimmerman, Interview by author, June 17, 2016.

⁵⁹ Watt Long, *Watt Long to Director of City Planning James McCarthy, April 13, 1961*, Letter, From Box FW:VF #81, SFPL.

⁶⁰ Joanna Dyl, “Women’s Liberation Origins and Development of the Movement,” *FoundSF*, Accessed November 27, 2016 at http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Women%27s_Liberation_Origins_and_Development_of_the_Movement.

⁶¹ Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series*, 2015.

exchange for “three minutes’ driving time.”⁶² Since this was such a common principle, activists were able to campaign on the philosophy that protesting freeways would keep families from leaving San Francisco. In a 1966 letter to Lady Bird Johnson, Gum Tree Girl Nordstrom noted that San Francisco’s most pressing problem was the migration of middle-class families out of the city and into the suburbs. The destruction of private space via freeway, she argued, would only serve to exacerbate the trend.⁶³ Activists like Nordstrom used the family as a rhetorical tool to inject personal meaning into urban residential space that seemed to be increasingly impersonal and at-risk. This rhetoric also normalized family wellbeing as a standard of judgment for freeway opponents. As the fight to stop the widening of O’Shaughnessy Boulevard began in 1965, Supervisor John A. Ertola stated that he was “hopeful that we can preserve our open spaces for the families with children in San Francisco.”⁶⁴ Freeway activism transformed families into a political, rather than just an interpersonal, social unit. The family served as both reference and rhetoric for freeway activists, many of whom campaigned as families themselves.

It was no surprise to see husbands and wives fighting against freeways together. This was part of a larger, national Cold War era trend: it was more common to see couples participating in neighborhood improvement organizations and community clubs than individuals.⁶⁵ This held true for Sue and Arthur Bierman, who cofounded HANC after living in the Haight-Ashbury district for over a decade. Not only did they work together much of the time, but many other

⁶² Baxter also mentioned that (in Glen Park) the Crosstown Freeway would destroy “fourteen business establishments....120 buildings, [and] our library.” William Issel, Interview by author, Audio recording, Berkeley, CA, June 6, 2016; Williams, “Mrs. Baxter and the Gum Tree Girls,” 1, 10.

⁶³ Lady Bird Johnson also spearheaded the successful campaign for the Highway Beautification Act of 1965. “How the Highway Beautification Act Became a Law,” *U.S. Department of Transportation: Federal Highway Administration*, Accessed November 22, 2016 at <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/beauty.cfm>; Zoanne Theriault, *Zoanne Theriault to Lady Bird Johnson, September 19, 1966*, Letter, ZNPP.

⁶⁴ John A. Ertola, *John A. Ertola to Zoanne Nordstrom, December 10, 1965*, Letter, ZNPP.

⁶⁵ Duncan and Duncan, *Sex Typing and Social Roles*, 178-179.

husbands and wives in the district also joined the movement as couples.⁶⁶ The husbands that did advocate with their wives were greatly supportive of their activism. Joan Seiwald, whose husband Robert was president of the Glen Park Property Owners Association, admitted that when the Gum Tree Girls first began organizing, “the only real encouragement we received was from our husbands.”⁶⁷ Moreover, Arthur Bierman encouraged Sue (who was a stay-at-home mother at the time) to get involved in activism in the first place.⁶⁸ This marital element embedded strong interpersonal connections into anti-freeway organizing. While couples did not make up the entirety of the movement, when they did participate together they solidified the centrality of the family’s role in freeway opposition. Yet families were not just made up of husbands and wives; when children got involved, they had incredibly powerful effects.

More than men, women campaigned against freeways by stressing the disastrous effects that they would have on children. Male homeowners used kids as the reasoning behind their objections to freeway construction, but usually in very specific circumstances. Russel Shearer, Secretary of the San Francisco Boys’ Club on Page Street, claimed that any freeway constructed in the area would hinder his organization’s daytime support of over 2,500 boys. It was more common to see women argue that freeways would be detrimental to their children’s daily lives. Arguing that the Panhandle Freeway would intrude on child-friendly space (including Golden Gate Park and Tank Hill), Gina Pennestri’s primary motivation was to preserve a safe, open, and accessible area for her son to play in.⁶⁹ Mothers prioritized their children’s wellbeing most prominently when freeways planned to destroy parks and open space. Some did this by arguing

⁶⁶ Ben Bierman, Interview by author, July 11, 2016.

⁶⁷ P.J. Deutsch, *P.J. Deutsch to Robert Seiwald, February 6, 1967*, Letter, JSPP; Bensinger, “Led by the Gum Tree Girls,” 5.

⁶⁸ Arthur Bierman, Interview by author, Audio recording, San Francisco, CA, June 28, 2016.

⁶⁹ Russel Shearer, *Russel Shearer to San Francisco City Planning Commission, March 29, 1961*, Letter, From Box FW:VF #81, SFPL; Zimmerman, Interview by author, June 17, 2016.

that renovation would be unsafe to kids in these spaces while others claimed that parks provided some of the only opportunities for children to experience nature within a rapidly urbanizing city.⁷⁰ Nordstrom best emphasized this connection when, in a 1965 letter to San Francisco Supervisor Roger Boas, she accurately stated that “the majority of the Commissioners are men, who, if they did have children spent most of their daytime hours away from home and are, therefore, unable to evaluate the importance of parks to mothers with small children.”⁷¹ Urban mothers interacted more frequently with their children in spaces that freeway construction would harm or eliminate. Mothers believed that their interests could not be well-represented by a political body incapable of understanding the importance of family-friendly spaces. Nordstrom



[Figure 3: “Picketers protesting against the Southern Freeway marching at City Hall.” April 18, 1961, San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection, San Francisco Public Library. Accessed November 30, 2016 at <http://sflib1.sfpl.org:82/record=b1038789>. Women often led marches in front of City Hall and brought their children with them, as shown by the four children above holding signs of their own.

⁷⁰ Joe Beeman, *Supervisor Joe Beeman to Joan Seiwald, March 21, 1967*, Letter, Joan Seiwald Personal Papers (hereafter referred to as JSPP); Zoanne Theriault, “Save Glen Park Committee Report,” *Save Glen Park Committee*, November 9, 1965, Report, ZNPP.

⁷¹ Nordstrom, *Zoanne Nordstrom to Roger Boas*, November 20, 1965.

mobilized the gendered expectation that women had jurisdiction over the home to legitimate her actions. Not only does her rhetoric act to oppose freeways, it also vies for female political representation, anticipating similar claims by those involved in the women's rights movement only a few years later.

With a sense of legitimacy, mothers used their children as political tools to advocate for social change. In May 1964, the Citizens Committee to Save Golden Gate Park planned a citywide rally in the park's polo grounds to persuade ambivalent supervisors to vote against the Panhandle Freeway. Robert Parker, member of both the coalition and HANC, informed *San Francisco Chronicle* reporters that "parents are urged to bring their children and turn out to show what Golden Gate Park means to us all."⁷² By selecting the rally's theme as "An Afternoon in the Park," the committee associated anti-freeway sentiment with traditional family values.⁷³ Having a group of children at the rally visualized the family's control over that specific kind of space. Pennestri, Bierman, and other neighborhood mothers fighting against the Panhandle would frequently bring their kids with them to Planning Commission hearings, meetings with Mayor George Christopher, and protests in front of City Hall (see Figure 3).⁷⁴ By presenting their children to individuals with political power, these mothers humanized freeway's destructive tendencies. Since supervisors and engineers usually only examined blueprints, maps, and economic reports before voting, this was a powerful and disruptive tactic. The Gum Tree Girls, who had eleven kids between them, humanized the debate by threatening to tie their kids to trees in Glen Park Canyon if supervisors approved the street widening.⁷⁵ Family, therefore, proved a valuable rhetorical tool to amplify women's voices during the Freeway Revolts. Not only did it

⁷² "Special MUNI Fleet for Big Park Rally," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 2, 1964, 1.

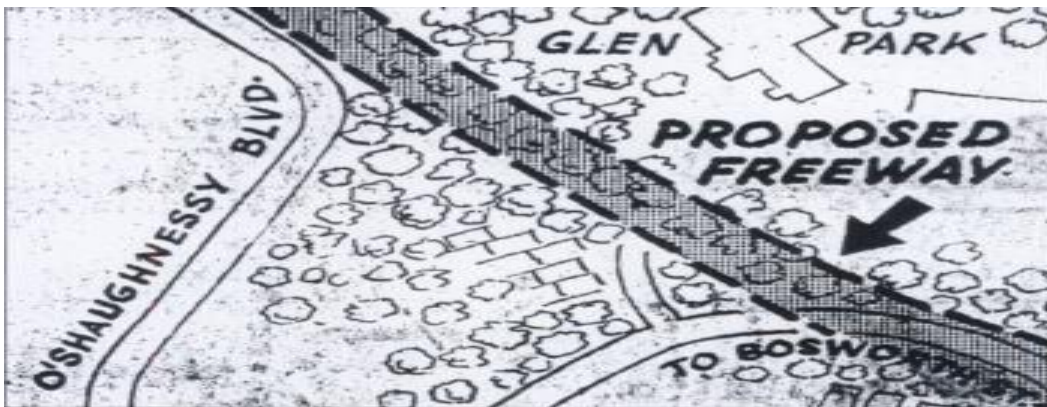
⁷³ "New Songs to Help Save the Park," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 16, 1964, 1.

⁷⁴ Zimmerman, Interview by author, June 17, 2016.

⁷⁵ Bensinger, "Led by the Gum Tree Girls," 5.

personalize and generalize the threats that freeways posed to these neighborhoods, it also defined middle-class women's involvement in anti-freeway activism. Women used their families (and their role within the family) to assert greater political ownership over private space.

Protecting the "Heart of the Neighborhood": Environmental Threats



[Figure 4: Emma Bland Smith, "Protecting Glen Park," in *San Francisco's Glen Park and Diamond Heights* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 85. This simplified map shows how the straightening and widening of O'Shaughnessy Boulevard would run through the tree line surrounding Glen Park.]

Private space, however, consisted of more than just the home. Women also claimed a distinct and influential connection with open space in urban areas. Engineers' calls to remove pristine greenery and park space sparked new attitudes towards the urban environment. As shown in Figure 4, state engineers designed the new O'Shaughnessy Boulevard to cut a 75-foot wide path through the wall of blue gum eucalyptus trees that protected the Glen Park playground from wind.⁷⁶ Yet the proposed destruction of Golden Gate Park and the Panhandle was the spark that invigorated city residents' environmental admiration. Locals in the Haight-Ashbury reveled in old tales suggesting that John McLaren, the lead horticulturist of Golden Gate Park in the early twentieth century, compiled all of the different species of eucalyptus in the park and

⁷⁶ Jordan, "Glen Park's Trees May Give Way to Progress," 8; E. Cahill Maloney, "Glen Park Trees: Roadway Plans Threaten Park," *San Francisco Progress*, November 3, 1965, 1.

planted one of each throughout the Panhandle.⁷⁷ The Panhandle Parkway (as it was often referred to by the pro-freeway editorial board of the *San Francisco Examiner* to evoke a connection to nature) would put this unique feature at risk by cutting both the park and the Haight-Ashbury in half.⁷⁸ It would also divide the Conservatory of Flowers from the rest of Golden Gate Park and require 161 trees to be removed with 679 other trees displaced. Faced with such destruction, many residents lost faith in state engineers who claimed that Golden Gate Park would be just as beautiful without all of the threatened greenery. When conservationist and Interior Department official Harold Gilliam asked 1964 anti-freeway rally attendees whether San Francisco should trust engineers to invigorate the park, “a massed shout of ‘No!’ [came] from the listening thousands seated in the Polo Grounds.”⁷⁹ While anti-freeway activists’ rhetoric aligned more closely with prewar concerns for conservation and recreation, their enthusiasm for park preservation seemed to foreshadow the powerful environmental movements that would capture the Bay Area’s attention only a decade later.

While thousands of these environmental neophytes campaigned to save trees from the “concrete monsters” threatening to tear them down, women actively espoused a stronger connection to natural space than men did.⁸⁰ San Francisco’s density formed many of the public’s concerns for open space. Like in other dense population centers, most San Franciscans focused

⁷⁷ The Panhandle’s ecological diversity is reflected by the fact that it had over 1100 species of trees and bushes. David Jenkins, “The union movement, the California Labor School, and San Francisco politics, 1926-1988,” interview by Lisa Rubens, 1987-1988, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 255; Welch, Interview by author, July 12, 2016.

⁷⁸ For more on the history of urban parkways in the twentieth century (and parkway pioneer Robert Moses), see “Robert Moses,” The New York Preservation Archive Project, Accessed November 29, 2016 at <http://www.nypap.org/preservation-history/robert-moses/>. Lynch, “The San Francisco Panhandle Freeway Debate,” 11; “Crosstown Tunnel – New Bid for Study,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14;

⁷⁹ “The Cost in Park Trees,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 14, 1964, 1; Donovan Bess, “Thousands Shout ‘No’ to Freeway,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 18, 1964, 1.

⁸⁰ “Crosstown Tunnel Finally Makes It,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1.

their environmental advocacy on their immediate urban surroundings rather than on broader concerns about conservation or energy. These postwar American attitudes toward the environment, however, were historically gendered. The concept of nature has been deeply feminized, and has often been perceived as inferior to male-dominated civilization. As social economist Mary Mellor argued, this association assigned women “a socially constructed mediating role between hu(man)ity and non-human nature.”⁸¹ This role had two prominent but paradoxical effects for women who fought against freeway construction. First, it legitimized women’s involvement in the budding environmental movement by complying with socially defined gender roles. Second, it encouraged women to combat environmental and gendered oppression through a seemingly ecofeminist perspective. As Mellor described, “ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women.”⁸² Although many female anti-freeway activists did not openly define their actions in terms of gender equality, they still utilized aspects of their gender (such as their identity as mothers) to advance their cause.⁸³ Women’s activism in the Freeway Revolts revolved around issues that were perceived to be associated with women in postwar society. Mobilizing gender stereotypes about nature became an effective activist tool, just as they had for women’s relationship with the family.

Through this gendered, environmental framework, women attempted to assert ownership over open space like they did for residential space. Like today, many people in the postwar era

⁸¹ Mellor’s emphasis. Samuel P. Hays, *Explorations in Environmental History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 18-19; Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 42; Mary Mellor, *Feminism and Ecology* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 13.

⁸² Mellor also noted that a broader definition of ecofeminism would include women’s activism about the environment that did not necessarily include feminist or ecofeminist rhetoric. Mellor, *Feminism and Ecology*, 1, 4.

⁸³ Avila, *Folklore of the Freeway*, 57.

firmly associated parks with images of the home and family. Arthur Bierman lauded the Panhandle as “the last breath before going into an office and coming back the other side.”⁸⁴ Parks acted as the boundary between residential neighborhoods and the industrial epicenter of the city that they surrounded. More often than not, activist women attempted to incorporate park space into community culture. Nordstrom, for instance, claimed that Glen Park Canyon deserved protection since it was “the heart of the neighborhood.”⁸⁵ Sue Bierman had focused on ecological preservation throughout her activist days and would do so as well during her later years as a planning commissioner. In her first step into social advocacy, she successfully rallied against proposed high-rise development in Sutro Forest after teaming up with her neighbor and future mayor of San Francisco Dianne Feinstein.⁸⁶ This was incredibly common of middle and upper-class women at the time. Housewives and stay-at-home mothers from the Haight-Ashbury often rallied specifically against tree removal.⁸⁷ In homogenous, middle-class neighborhoods removed from poverty and racism, harmful development of the environment became one of the first major threats to their livelihood in the twentieth century. Middle-class women used environmental rhetoric to gain influence over open space in a community-wide assertion of political and social control.

In turn, women harnessed this space to amplify their arguments for its preservation. The use of open space motivated women to become activists, advanced their message, and provided an effective arena for advocacy. Rallies in the Golden Gate Park Polo Grounds or protests in front of City Hall reflected activists’ focus on using open space for demonstrations. Sue

⁸⁴ Arthur Bierman, Interview by author, June 28, 2016.

⁸⁵ Nordstrom, *Zoanne Nordstrom to Mr. Guilles, October 1, 1965*, ZNPP.

⁸⁶ Sue Bierman, Interview by Wayne Schotten, July 11, 2006, Accessed June 22, 2016 at <http://www.wildstrawberryfilms.com/Bierman%20Memorial.html>; Ben Bierman, Interview by author, July 11, 2016.

⁸⁷ White, “Park Freeway Proposals Raise Angry Protests,” 1.

Bierman’s “funeral for trees” in the Panhandle, however, exploited these spaces’ persuasive qualities.⁸⁸ On April 4, 1964, Bierman, alongside her husband, three fellow activists, and City Planning Commissioner Albert Meakin, wrapped orange, crepe paper ribbons around “206 big trees” on the north and south ends of the Panhandle (see Figure 5). Beckoning local parkgoers and reporters to witness the event, the group stated that every tree with a ribbon would be removed under Plan F, the state’s current design for the Panhandle Freeway. With reporters in tow, they launched a petition campaign against any and all freeway construction threatening Panhandle park space.⁸⁹ By wrapping ribbons around each of these trees, Bierman asserted physical and political ownership over public space in her community. With state engineers and a hyper-masculine politician-business coalition threatening said space, women like Bierman struck back against such wanton manifestations of political control. Open space provided opportunities for women to assert agency within an urban culture that treated housewives and mothers as



[Figure 5: “Anti-Freeway Rally In Panhandle,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 4, 1964, 1. Sue Bierman led a HANC group in wrapping ribbons around every single tree in the Panhandle that would be removed because of the Panhandle Freeway. Bierman used the visibility and sanctity of Panhandle trees to spark mass petition drives in the community.]

⁸⁸ Arthur Bierman, Interview by author, June 28, 2016.

⁸⁹ “Anti-Freeway Rally in Panhandle,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 4, 1964, 1; Arthur Bierman, Interview by author, June 28, 2016.

inconsequential. While protesting environmental degradation represented a middle-class push to preserve its status and livelihood, women's distinctive rhetoric allowed them to play bigger political roles within their community.

Part 3: Protests for the People

Behind the Scenes and On the Ground

“We have to concur with....the Chamber of Commerce,” a 1954 piece in the *San Francisco Chronicle* haughtily announced, that “the weeping and wailing are most certainly premature, since nobody has yet been hurt or even threatened” by freeway construction.⁹⁰ Pro-freeway individuals (like this reporter) commonly possessed few strong, personal connections to residential neighborhoods. Activists pinpointed this sense of disinterest and used their grassroots strategies to build strong interpersonal connections with both public and private space. Yet their opponents often framed this style of activism as excessively emotional, a hallmark of pejorative attacks towards women. Charles Thieriot, editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, stated that in addition to being “hurtful and foolish,” anti-freeway protests were “nine parts emotion and one part reason.”⁹¹ Zoanne Nordstrom claimed that as the Gum Tree Girls began their campaign, only a few other Glen Park residents “didn’t treat us like idiots.”⁹² Pro-freeway advocates claimed that freeway opponents were unknowledgeable and irrational in order to decrease their legitimacy. Thus women were forced to overcome both these compromising perspectives and postwar gender stereotypes of women letting their emotions overwhelm their decisions.

Women attempted to strengthen their advocacy against these critiques by gaining political legitimacy. First, women attempted to become experts on urban planning and

⁹⁰ “Why All The Wailing About Park Freeway?” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 22, 1954, 18.

⁹¹ Thieriot, “Where to Build SF Freeways?” 64.

⁹² Williams, “Mrs. Baxter and the Gum Tree Girls,” 1.

infrastructure development to cast off gendered stereotypes. With only a high school diploma, Gina Pennestri and her female Clayton Street neighbors set out to memorize zoning codes and Planning Commission procedures to show the Board of Supervisors that they could not be dismissed as “ladies” or “little housewives.”⁹³ Calvin Welch noticed the same trend with Sue Bierman and the “blazingly bright” HANC organizer June Dunn, noting that they “read incessantly” and while “many of them did not have much actual, practical experience in land use issues per se...they were very knowledgeable about general land-use policies.”⁹⁴ Before female voices could be heard, they were forced to dispel the notion that women could not understand the complexities of freeway design. Secondly, women used their status as voters to reinforce their sense of legitimacy. In both 1960 and 1964, five out of the eleven members on the Board of Supervisors were up for re-election. At the time, supervisors were elected by the entire city population, allowing residents to influence each candidate’s decision-making even if they were outside their district. In San Francisco’s pluralistic political system steeped in New Deal-style liberalism, constituents often judged their supervisors by whether they were on downtown’s side or the neighborhoods’.⁹⁵ With thousands of voters behind them and a strong knowledge of political procedures, women started taking advantage of incumbents’ desires to keep their jobs. “In the beginning they weren’t taken seriously,” Zimmerman stated, claiming that with time and

⁹³ Zimmerman, Interview by author, June 17, 2016.

⁹⁴ Welch, Interview by author, July 12, 2016.

⁹⁵ The city implemented district elections in San Francisco in 1977, only to have voters repeal them in 1980 after the assassinations of Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk tarnished the voting format. Voters approved Proposition H in 1996, reinstating district elections for 2000. “Former Supervisors,” *City and County of San Francisco*, <http://sfbos.org/past-supervisors>; “District Elections in San Francisco,” *San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association*, Accessed November 23, 2016 at <http://www.spur.org/publications/urbanist-article/2000-02-01/district-elections-san-francisco>; Issel, “Liberalism and Urban Policy in San Francisco,” 448; Ben Bierman, Interview by author, July 11, 2016.

diligence they convinced the supervisors that they “have people that are going to vote.”⁹⁶

Pervasive activism encouraged political leaders to recognize middle-class women as a strong political force within the city. Gaining political legitimacy went hand in hand with the chipping away of American gender roles for female activists.

Even after women successfully justified their political power, men used different frameworks of activism to persuade people against freeways. On an organizational level, while men appeared to be the public face of the movement, women oversaw conceptual and on-the-ground initiatives within anti-freeway coalitions. Usually this took place in the female-heavy neighborhood improvement associations, which every major San Francisco district had by the 1950s.⁹⁷ This stands in direct contrast to civic, homeowner, and merchant groups. Rather than aiming to improve community wellbeing, these organizations dedicated themselves to political and economic advancement. As opposed to their influence in neighborhood improvement associations, rarely any women held leadership positions in homeowner or merchant associations. Men chaired nine out of ten civic groups attempting to increase the Haight-Ashbury’s electoral power in May 1964, with a woman only leading the Polytechnic High Parent-Teachers Association.⁹⁸ Mayor Christopher’s short-lived 1959-1960 Committee to Study Freeways exemplified this dichotomy even further. Out of the sixteen members on the body, all government documents referred to its only female member by her husband’s name: “Mrs. Arthur Williams” of the Forest Hill Garden Club.⁹⁹ The masculinity present within San Francisco

⁹⁶ Herbert Goodwin, *California’s Growing Freeway System* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1969), 443; Zimmerman, Interview by author, June 17, 2016.

⁹⁷ Rodriguez, *City Against Suburb*, 25.

⁹⁸ “Political Action – The Key to Neighborhood Success,” *Haight-Ashbury Independent*, May 14, 1964, 1, From Box FW:VF #84, SFPL.

⁹⁹ Deutsch, P.J. *Deutsch to Robert Seiwald*, February 6, 1967; “Mayor’s Committee to Study Freeways Final Report,” *San Francisco Mayor’s Committee to Study Freeways*, 10.

business and politics carried over into neighborhood discourse through these longstanding and influential organizations.

Many scholars of the San Francisco Freeway Revolts have ignored the fact that men appeared to be leaders of the movement simply because they dominated positions dealing with public relations. For example, the Public Relations Subcommittee of the Mayor's Committee consisted of five men while Mrs. Arthur Williams acted as a junior member of the behind-the-scenes Statistical Committee.¹⁰⁰ This gendered division of labor, with men in the public spotlight and women in organizational and creative positions, spread throughout various San Francisco freeway fights. While three women led the Save Glen Park Committee and had Mrs. Joseph Snyder as their Secretary, local judge Harry W. Low acted as their spokesperson throughout the Glen Park struggle.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Sue Bierman was rarely seen in the public eye; at her 1964 "funeral for trees" demonstration and press conference, only Albert Meakin, HANC members Robert Barker and Gary Garabedian, and Ray Guenther from the Edgewood Avenue Improvement Association spoke to the assembly of journalists and concerned citizens. While other organizations like the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association also possessed this gendered distinction, the Freeway Revolts were distinct in the number of influential positions that women held.¹⁰² By overseeing neighborhood improvement associations like the Forest Hill Garden Club and the Potrero Boosters and Merchants Association while organizing thousand-person rallies throughout the city, women spearheaded anti-freeway action on a grand scale (just on a more behind-the-scenes level than men). Welch praised Sue

¹⁰⁰ "Mayor's Committee to Study Freeways Final Report," *San Francisco Mayor's Committee to Study Freeways*, 10.

¹⁰¹ "O'Shaughnessy Rerouting Protested," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8.

¹⁰² "Anti-Freeway Rally in Panhandle," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1; Dorothy W. Erskine, "Environmental Quality and Planning: Continuity of Volunteer Leadership," interview by John R. Jacobs, 1976, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 150.

Bierman's emblematic style of behind-the-scenes organizing, arguing that "absolutely, without Sue Bierman there would not have been the vote" to halt the Panhandle Freeway in May 1964.¹⁰³

Women's distinctive rhetoric of organizing improved the spread and success of their anti-freeway message. Letter-writing campaigns (organized by HANC and the Gum Tree Girls in their respective freeway fights), city hearing presentations, and district petitions comprised most activist strategies within traditionally middle and upper-class communities. Letters poured into the city's top three newspapers (the *Chronicle*, *Examiner*, and *San Francisco Progress*), and the Gum Tree Girls inundated the Board of Supervisors with messages about freeways' disastrous effects.¹⁰⁴ Women often grounded their perspectives on transportation development within a compelling, emotional context. Pediatric cardiologist Dr. Ann Purdy, who worked at Children's Hospital east of Potrero Hill, argued that the Panhandle Parkway would dispossess neighbors already displaced by other freeway construction, "rob" local kids of the chance to play safely in the Panhandle, and "depress a fine middle-class residential area."¹⁰⁵ During letter-writing campaigns or City Hall hearings, men, on the other hand, tended to focus on the housing or economic costs of freeway development. Real estate developer Chris McKeon, arguably one of the most influential leaders in the fight against the Western Freeway in the late 1950s, passionately exclaimed that "sales and improvements of property are at a standstill.... [freeway

¹⁰³ Long, *Watt Long to Director of City Planning James McCarthy*, April 13, 1961; Emma Fleming, *Emma Fleming to the Honorable George Christopher*, April 19, 1961, Letter, From Box FW:VF #81, SFPL; Welch, Interview by author, July 12, 2016.

¹⁰⁴ Bensinger, "Led by the Gum Tree Girls," 5; Nordstrom, *Zoanne Nordstrom to Roger Boas*, November 20, 1965.

¹⁰⁵ Eugene Dong, M.D., Norman E. Shumway, M.D., and Richard R. Lower, M.D., "A Heart Transplantation Narrative: The Earliest Years," *Stanford University*, November 3, 1995, Accessed October 20, 2016 at <http://web.stanford.edu/~genedong/httx/harttx.htm>; Ann Purdy, M.D., "The Case Against a Freeway in Golden Gate Park," Report, July 29, 1964, From Box FW:VF #84, SFPL.

threats have] depreciated properties tremendously.”¹⁰⁶ This focus on property stemmed from men’s relationship to their neighborhood. Men’s view of residential space was rooted in home ownership and business (as shown by their community involvement), while women took a broader perspective that focused on improving holistic community well-being. Even when men argued about social issues like environmental degradation or children’s wellbeing, women consistently put social discourse front and center.

To strengthen and solidify the interpersonal dimension of their activism, women aimed to develop strong connections with political leaders and the media. Nordstrom wrote letters to a company constructing new high-rise apartments in Diamond Heights, to Justin Herman of the city’s Redevelopment Agency, and to the construction workers involved in both projects to weave this seemingly pro-development groups into local community discourse.¹⁰⁷ In the spring of 1964, Dunn utilized relationships she had with reporters at the local KPIX TV station while Bierman worked with a KGO producer who lived in the Haight-Ashbury to publicize freeway destruction. Welch noted that Bierman and Dunn possessed “a level of media savvy” not found in other contemporary San Francisco social movements.¹⁰⁸ In terms of the Panhandle, however, the relationships that activists had already cultivated in the upper Haight-Ashbury helped to strengthen and encourage their advocacy. A swath of prominent individuals lived north of 17th Street, all within a few blocks of each other. In addition to Dunn and the Biermans, the neighborhood was home to soon-to-be famous civil rights lawyer Beverly Axelrod, future congresswoman Dianne Feinstein, and Jack Morrison, the Panhandle Freeway swing vote on the

¹⁰⁶ Chris McKeon, *Chris McKeon to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, June 1, 1956*, Letter, From Box FW:VF #57, SFPL.

¹⁰⁷ Zoanne Nordstrom, *Zoanne Nordstrom to Justin Herman, September 22, 1965*, Letter, ZNPP; Nordstrom, *Zoanne Nordstrom to Mr. Guilles*, October 1, 1965.

¹⁰⁸ Dunn would eventually become Bierman’s administrative assistant during Bierman’s time as a San Francisco Supervisor. Welch, Interview by author, July 12, 2016.

Board of Supervisors.¹⁰⁹ Knowing the value of their relationship to Morrison, the Biermans would often take the Supervisor into Golden Gate Park and the Presidio to show the homes and trees that the parkway would eliminate. By the end of his spring walks with Sue and his twilight drive with Arthur (accompanied by his wife and fellow anti-freeway activist Jane), Morrison decided to cast his vote against the Parkway.¹¹⁰ Women cultivated interpersonal relationships that heavily benefited their activism, but they did so within predominantly middle-class neighborhoods with powerful individuals beside them. This spatial, class, and interpersonal setting provided women the opportunity to further their advocacy by harnessing and expanding a social network of involved activists. The movement's middle-class nature used its stability and influence to further its presence as a newly mobilized group. Yet without pursuing and strengthening relationships within the community, the power of anti-freeway coalitions would have been substantially diminished.

Community over Concrete

The anti-freeway movement's political power grew from its effective network of interpersonal relationships between activists and the movement's grassroots structure. Highway engineers' incessant attempts to divide activist groups showed the movement's ability to draw strength through personal connections. In 1964, engineers informed activists that they would not run the Panhandle Freeway near the lower-class Western Addition district if community members supported an adjacent freeway on the peninsula's north end. Engineers made the same offer to opponents of the Central Freeway and, in both cases, anti-freeway groups did not budge. Welch, who teaches about the Freeway Revolts at San Francisco State University, proclaimed

¹⁰⁹ Ben Bierman, Interview by author, July 11, 2016.

¹¹⁰ Arthur Bierman, Interview by author, June 28, 2016.

that “coalitions only work when there’s mutual trust.”¹¹¹ Coalitions like the Citizens Committee to Save Golden Gate Park fought directly against what urban freeways embodied: separation and division within residential communities. Freeways transport an individual above and away from community space while dividing the homes and parks beneath it. These physically-divided neighborhoods often experienced decreased safety, cohesiveness, and livelihood, all of which a series of San Francisco freeways likely would have caused had they been built.¹¹² The Embarcadero, the city’s second freeway, represented this sense of impersonal division; city planner Lynn Harriss criticized its “ruthless display of utter disregard for anything but the utilitarian, the materialistic, the straight-line-between-two-points type of thinking.”¹¹³ Anti-freeway organizing was truly a community-based movement. With housing associations and average homeowners working in concert, the campaign’s organizational structure encouraged the interpersonal relationships that were antithetical to freeways’ divisive tendencies.

More than men, women strengthened community networks of interpersonal relationships within anti-freeway coalitions. They did so in three arenas: the home, the cocktail party, and the movement. Within their personal, residential space, postwar women focused almost completely on preserving intimate interactions with family and friends. Overall, women possessed stronger connections to the objects and spaces that preserved social relationships.¹¹⁴ The bonds that women formed through freeway activism in their homes and neighborhoods solidified the social capital that these networks brought to residential San Francisco.¹¹⁵ Not only did women

¹¹¹ Welch, Interview by author, July 12, 2016.

¹¹² Sarah S. Jain, “Violent Submission: Gendered Automobility,” *Cultural Critique* no.61, (Autumn 2005): 189; Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1961), 120, 353.

¹¹³ Louis W. Kemp, “Aesthetes and Engineers: The Occupational Ideology of Highway Design,” *Technology and Culture* 27, no.4 (Oct.1986): 777-778.

¹¹⁴ Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, 142.

¹¹⁵ Jacobs, *Life and Death*, 138.

strengthen networks of newly minted middle-class activists, they did so within their politically-centered social life. Throughout the Panhandle Freeway Revolt, Pennestri and Bierman would constantly throw cocktail parties for the anti-freeway activists in the neighborhood. Ben Bierman, now an Associate Professor at the City University of New York, remembered that “they partied [but] it was all about the politics....That’s what they all did....they partied hard.”¹¹⁶ Marc Zimmerman recalled his mother constantly attending these booze-filled gatherings with other neighborhood organizers. Calvin Welch even claimed that partying with other anti-freeway women was integral to their distinct postwar, middle-class political style.¹¹⁷ This form of activism represented a larger shift in policy-making in postwar San Francisco. Urban historian Issel argued that whenever major societal processes change, “new social networks develop that struggle over the economic and political resources necessary for urban policy-making...” and that “social change occurs in such context.”¹¹⁸ In the framework of transportation development, women strengthened the power of neighborhoods to influence urban policy. The politicization of middle-class women and the creation of strong activist coalitions not only redefined San Francisco’s politics of urban space, it provided new arenas for individuals to assert political ownership. Through their steadfast dedication to social rhetoric and relationship preservation, women empowered their neighborhoods and amplified the political voice of San Francisco’s (female) middle class.

The social dimension that women brought to the Freeway Revolts increased the movement’s political power and success. While economic arguments made a difference, actions

¹¹⁶ Ben Bierman, Interview by author, July 11, 2016.

¹¹⁷ Welch, who was younger than many of the anti-freeway activists of the Panhandle Freeway Revolt, noted that June Dunn criticized his younger generation for favoring marijuana over alcohol. Zimmerman, Interview by author, June 17, 2016; Welch, Interview by author, July 12, 2016.

¹¹⁸ Issel, “Liberalism and Urban Policy in San Francisco,” 431.

and strategies steeped in the social effects of urban development became the standard in 1960s San Francisco. After years of citizen campaigns for housing protection, environmental preservation, economic prosperity, and neighborhood integrity, those with political influence began to adopt women's rhetoric when they decided to oppose San Francisco freeways. When the Board of Supervisors' Streets Committee unanimously condemned the Panhandle Parkway on May 15, 1964, four days before its official 6-5 rejection, the *San Francisco Chronicle* summed up the forces at work: "Destruction of trees, the prospective loss of homes, and the impassioned arguments of dozens of spokesmen from San Francisco's neighborhoods carried the day against the statistics of the State Division of Highways, the Chamber of Commerce, [and] the Down Town Association."¹¹⁹ In the Glen Park fight, Supervisor Peter Tamaras, who had been on the board since 1961, informed Nordstrom in October 1965 that he was now "opposed to destroying, removing or interfering with any portion of areas now being used for park purposes."¹²⁰ Jack Morrison rebuked the widening of O'Shaughnessy Boulevard within a month of the Gum Tree Girls' campaign (a stark contrast from his hesitation to oppose the Panhandle), and argued that the economic benefits of transportation development should not automatically be prioritized over community wellbeing.¹²¹ On November 8, 1965, the rumbles of bulldozers in Glen Park came to a screeching halt. The Board of Supervisors ordered the Department of Public Works to stop construction in Glen Park Canyon.¹²² While the official, widened route would only be moved out of the park in 1967 (due to further efforts by the Gum Tree Girls), months of

¹¹⁹ Note that the author mentions "spokesmen," reaffirming the perception that men were the public face of the Freeway Revolts. Wax, "Board Unit Rejects Panhandle Route," 1.

¹²⁰ "Former Supervisors," *City and County of San Francisco*, <http://sfbos.org/past-supervisors>; Peter Tamaras, *Peter Tamaras to Zoanne Nordstrom, October 30, 1965*, Letter, ZNPP.

¹²¹ "Supervisor Morrison Opposes Destruction of Glen Park," *Committee to Re-elect Supervisor Jack Morrison, October 27, 1965*, Report, ZNPP.

¹²² "Canyon Bulldozer Halted," *San Francisco Progress*, November 10-11, 1965, 1.

machinated disruption in the park had finally ceased. Women's focus on establishing a community-minded network of middle-class homeowners dramatically improved anti-freeway political power. Their substantial influence normalized women's participation in social activism and weakened men's control over public space in San Francisco. That space - free of freeways that would have decimated neighborhoods and destroyed urban life - was a product of women who just wanted to keep their community livable.

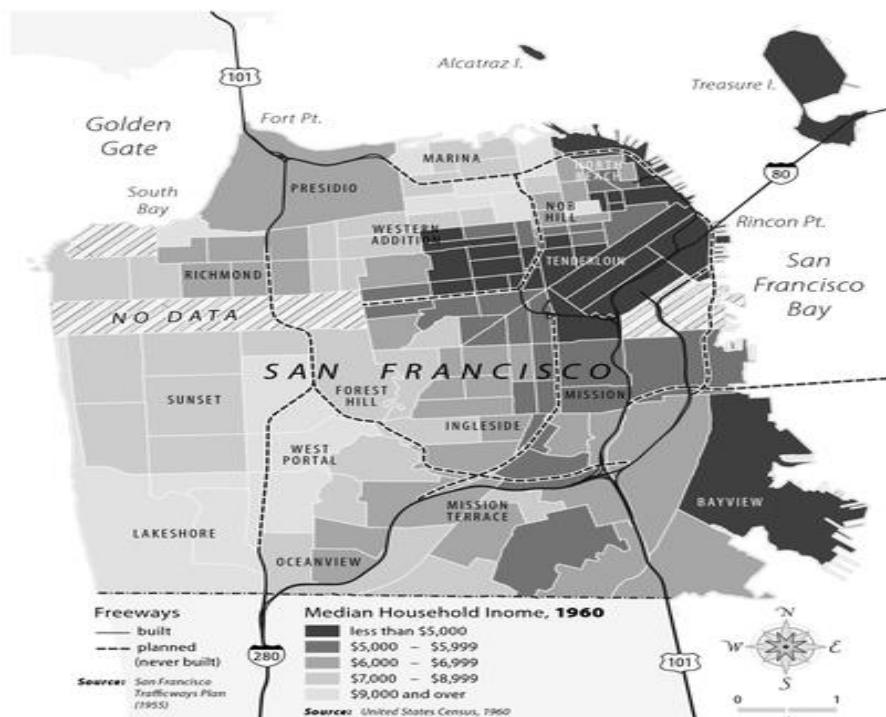
Conclusion



[Figure 6: Howard Wong, "Freeway Revolt Statue," *No Dig: Save North Beach Village*, Accessed November 30, 2016 at <http://nonorthbeachdig.org/SFCivicHistory.html>. The text underneath the statue reads "This map shows the vast network of freeways proposed for San Francisco in 1956. By standing up to say 'No,' by speaking out in public, by circulating petitions, ordinary citizens turned back this assault on the fabric of our dear City. We will always be grateful to them."]

Nestled in the front yard of an old Victorian home facing the trees of Lafayette Park are three metal figures standing atop an aged wooden pillar. In the front, an unnamed man opens his arms as if he was greeting an audience while two women stand behind him with petitions and

flyers in their hands (see Figure 6).¹²³ The home-made statue, entitled *The Freeway Revolt*, perfectly embodies how women influenced the twelve years of anti-freeway protests in San Francisco. Men appeared to dominate the movement in the public eye, yet women worked behind the scenes and on-the-ground to establish widespread community support against urban freeway construction. Just as in the statue, women were the backbone of anti-freeway organizing. Their leadership and focus on community ensured that the neighborhood was both a driving force behind anti-freeway activism and a tool to further the movement’s success. While this style of advocacy was incredibly successful in repelling city freeways, little was done to actually solve the city’s traffic problems. By 2000, per-capita auto ownership in the Bay Area had doubled



[Figure 7: Jordan Scavo, “Planned and Constructed Freeways,” *California History* 91, no.2 (Summer 2014): 18-19. Dark lines indicate constructed freeways, while dashed lines indicate planned freeways that were never built. The darker the region, the lower the median household income. Approved freeways ended up being constructed in low-income areas with higher minority populations.]

¹²³ “SF Neighborhood Battles,” *No Dig: Save North Beach Village*, Accessed December 1, 2016 at <http://nonorthbeachdig.org/SFCivicHistory.html>.

since 1950, putting an even greater strain on the city's already restricted infrastructure.¹²⁴ The Embarcadero, Bayshore, and Southern Freeways were not enough to stem congestion, and ended up harming lower-class communities throughout the city (see Figure 7). The limited ability for these communities to politically organize against freeway construction solidified their institutional lack of privilege and economic resources. In turn, both the process and effects of the San Francisco Freeway Revolts solidified the influence of the urban middle-class. This sense of political identity expanded across the country through smaller freeway revolts in Baltimore, Los Angeles, and Miami in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹²⁵ By the end of the freeway revolts, neighborhoods and the middle class were stronger politically than they had been for decades, and they never would have been so without women's unrelenting focus and commitment.

Although they did not overhaul postwar gender roles in the same revolutionary spirit that the Freeway Revolts moniker implied, women developed political identity and agency through their anti-freeway activism. By mobilizing their cultural associations to nature, the home, and the community, women legitimized their control over public space. Women like Bierman, Pennestri, and Nordstrom rarely, if ever, claimed that their advocacy aimed to empower women. Yet by gaining organizational leadership, politicizing freeways' effects on personal lives, and drawing upon perceptions of sexual difference for political reform, they anticipated the rhetoric of women's liberation activists less than half a decade later. Women's effective leadership showed that it was anything but foolish to view housewives as prominent social activists. Their actions brought new perspectives about the social effects of development that seem natural to contemporary urban planners. Today, public urban space is less defined by the constraints of

¹²⁴ Richard A. Walker and William Cronon, *The Country in the City: The Greening of the San Francisco Bay Area* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 213.

¹²⁵ Avila, *Folklore of the Freeway*, 53.

masculine politics and industry and one step closer to being a setting where interpersonal relationships can truly flourish. By changing the way that urban space identified and developed, San Francisco women ensured that each community remained just that: a community.

*The men on the highways need those jobs, we know, / Let's put them to work planting new trees
to grow, / Building new parks where kids can play, / Pushing that cement monster away, /
Oh, stand by me and protect that tree / From the freeway misery.*

Malvina Reynolds, "The Cement Octopus," 1964.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Reynolds, "The Cement Octopus," 1A.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

ZOANNE NORDSTROM PERSONAL COLLECTION

“Canyon Bulldozer Halted.” *San Francisco Progress*, November 10-11, 1965, 1.

Ertola, John A. *John A. Ertola to Zoanne Nordstrom, December 10, 1965*. Letter, ZNPP.

Jordan, Rich. “Glen Park’s Trees May Give Way to Progress.” *San Francisco Examiner*, September 29, 1965, 8.

Maloney, E. Cahill. “Glen Park Trees: Roadway Plans Threaten Park.” *San Francisco Progress*, November 3, 1965, 1.

Nordstrom, Zoanne. *Zoanne Nordstrom to Assignment Four: KRON-TV, September 22, 1966*. Letter. ZNPP.

Nordstrom, Zoanne. *Zoanne Nordstrom to Justin Herman, September 22, 1965*. Letter, ZNPP.

Nordstrom, Zoanne. *Zoanne Nordstrom to Mr. Guilles, October 1, 1965*. Letter, ZNPP.

Nordstrom, Zoanne. *Zoanne Nordstrom to Roger Boas, November 20, 1965*. Letter, ZNPP.

“O’Shaughnessy Rerouting Protested: A Glen Park Canyon Controversy.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 8, 1965, 8.

“Save Glen Park Committee Report.” *Save Glen Park Committee*, November 9, 1965. Report, ZNPP.

“Supervisor Morrison Opposes Destruction of Glen Park.” *Committee to Re-elect Supervisor Jack Morrison*, October 27, 1965. Report, ZNPP.

Tamaras, Peter. *Peter Tamaras to Zoanne Nordstrom, October 30, 1965*. Letter, ZNPP.

Therriault, Zoanne. “Save Glen Park Committee Report.” *Save Glen Park Committee*, November 9, 1965. Report, ZNPP.

Therriault, Zoanne. *Zoanne Therriault to Lady Bird Johnson, September 19, 1966*. Letter, ZNPP.

JOAN SEIWALD PERSONAL COLLECTION

Beeman, Joe, *Supervisor Joe Beeman to Joan Seiwald, March 21, 1967*. Letter, JSPP.

Bensinger, Gail. “Led by the Gum Tree Girls 40 Years Ago, Glen Park Won War Against Freeway.” *Glen Park News*, Winter 2007/2008, 5. JSPP.

Deutsch, P.J. *P.J. Deutsch to Robert Seiwald, February 6, 1967*. Letter, JSPP.

NEWSPAPERS

“Anti-Freeway Rally in Panhandle.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 4, 1964, 1.

“Bayshore Freeway: First Unit Within City of San Francisco Opened to Public Use.” *California Highways and Public Works*, May/June 1951, 1.

Bess, Donovan. “Thousands Shout “No” to Freeway.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 18, 1964, 1.

“Big Protest on Park Freeway.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 28, 1964, 1.

“Board Kills Plans for 6 Freeways.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 27, 1959, 1-2.

Cameron, George T. “Not Only Beautiful, It’s a New Art Form.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 27, 1954, 18.

“Crosstown Tunnel Finally Makes It: S.F. Wins Freeway Revolt.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 13, 1963, 1.

“Crosstown Tunnel – New Bid for Study.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 8, 1962, 14.

“Four Freeways Added to 1945 Master Plan.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 18, 1951, 16.

Halberstam, David. “Housewives Want Their Ham Straight.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 18, 1961, 1.

Jordan, Rich. “Glen Park’s Trees May Give Way to Progress.” *San Francisco Examiner*, September 29, 1965, 8.

“New Songs to Help Save the Park.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 16, 1964, 1.

Reynolds, Malvina. “The Cement Octopus.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 17, 1964, 1A.

Seiwald, Joan. “The Park in Glen Park.” *Glen Park News* (Spring 1997), Accessed May 29, 2016 at <https://archive.org/stream/glenparknewsspriunse#page/n0/mode/2up>.

“Special MUNI Fleet for Big Park Rally.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 2, 1964, 1.

St. Dennis, Dean St. “Freeway Plans Would Ruin Park Greenery.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 24, 1964, 17.

Stevens, Will. "Engineers Building Freeways to Capture S.F.'s Scenic Beauty." *San Francisco Examiner*, August 9, 1954, 1.

"The Cost in Park Trees." *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 14, 1964, 1.

Thieriot, Charles. "Where to Build SF Freeways?" *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 24, 1956, 64.

"Waterfront Freeway to Open." *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 31, 1959, 2.

Wax, Mel. "Board Unit Rejects Panhandle Route: New Revolt Erupts on Freeway." *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 15, 1964, 1.

Wax, Mel. "Go-Ahead on Hunters Pt. and Transit Area Asked." *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 30, 1963, 2.

Williams, Don. "How Mrs. Baxter and The Gum Tree Girls Foiled the Freeway." *Glen Park News* (Summer 2000). 1, 10.

White, Elmont. "Park Freeway Proposals Raise Angry Protests." *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 7, 1964, 1.

"Why All The Wailing About Park Freeway?" *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 22, 1954, 18.

FREEWAY REVOLTS COLLECTION: SAN FRANCISCO HISTORY CENTER, SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY

Fleming, Emma. *Emma Fleming to the Honorable George Christopher, April 19, 1961*. Letter, From Box FW:VF #81, SFPL.

"Freeway Studies: Panhandle Parkway and Crosstown Tunnel Corridors: A Digest of Studies." *Department of Public Works and California Division of Highways*, May 1964. Report, From Box FW:VF #84, SFPL.

Long, Watt. *Watt Long to Director of City Planning James McCarthy, April 13, 1961*. Letter, From Box FW:VF #81, SFPL.

"Mayor's Committee to Study Freeways Final Report." *San Francisco Mayor's Committee to Study Freeways*, April 22, 1960, 10. From Box FW:VF #83, SFPL.

McKeon, Chris, *Chris McKeon to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, June 1, 1956*. Letter, From Box FW:VF #57, SFPL.

Northern CA Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, "Panhandle Parkway." *Northern CA Chapter of the American Institute of Architects to San Francisco Board of Supervisors, October 12, 1964*. Letter, From Box FW:VF #84, SFPL.

“Parcels of Land and Improvements Located on Rights-of-Way of Proposed Freeway Routes Recommended in “Trafficways in San Francisco - A Reappraisal, November 1960.” *City and County of San Francisco*, March 23, 1961. From Box FW:VF #81, SFPL.

“Political Action – The Key to Neighborhood Success.” *Haight-Ashbury Independent*, May 14, 1964, 1. From Box FW:VF #84, SFPL.

Purdy, Ann, M.D., “The Case Against a Freeway in Golden Gate Park.” July 29, 1964. Report, From Box FW:VF #84, SFPL.

“Report to the Honorable George Christopher and Board of Supervisors Regarding the Proposed Freeway and Trafficways Plan for the City and County of San Francisco.” *San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association*, April 1961, 1. From Box FW:VF #81, SFPL.

Shearer, Russel, *Russel Shearer to San Francisco City Planning Commission, March 29, 1961*. Letter, From Box FW:VF #81, SFPL.

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS

Bierman, Arthur. Interview by author, Audio recording, San Francisco, CA, June 28, 2016.

Bierman, Ben. Interview by author, Audio recording, Berkeley, CA, July 11, 2016.

Issel, William. Interview by author, Audio recording, Berkeley, CA, June 6, 2016.

Welch, Calvin. Interview by author, Audio recording, San Francisco, CA, July 12, 2016.

Zimmerman, Marc. Interview by author, Audio recording, San Francisco, CA, June 17, 2016.

OTHER PUBLISHED MATERIAL

“Bay Area Census.” MTC-ABAG Library. Accessed October 17, 2016 at <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/historical/copop18602000.htm>.

Bierman, Sue. Interview by Wayne Schotten, July 11, 2006. Accessed June 22, 2016 at <http://www.wildstrawberryfilms.com/Bierman%20Memorial.html>.

Dong, Eugene, M.D., E. Shumway, Norman, M.D., and Richard R. Lower, M.D., “A Heart Transplantation Narrative: The Earliest Years.” *Stanford University*, November 3, 1995. Accessed October 20, 2016 at <http://web.stanford.edu/~genedong/httx/harttx.htm>.

Douglas, Walter S. “Mass Transportation for the Bay Area.” San Francisco, January 28, 1955. Gardner Library, University of California, Berkeley.

- Dyl, Joanna. "Women's Liberation Origins and Development of the Movement." *FoundSF*, Accessed November 27, 2016 at http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Women%27s_Liberation_Origins_and_Development_of_the_Movement.
- Erskine, Dorothy W. "Environmental Quality and Planning: Continuity of Volunteer Leadership." Interview by John R. Jacobs, 1976. Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
- "Former Supervisors." *City and County of San Francisco: Board of Supervisors*. Accessed October 13, 2016 at <http://sfbos.org/past-supervisors>.
- Gordon, Rachel. "Thomas Gray – SF Leader." *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 31, 2006. Accessed October 16, 2016 at <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Thomas-Gray-S-F-leader-2515000.php>.
- "How the Highway Beautification Act Became a Law." *U.S. Department of Transportation: Federal Highway Administration*. Accessed November 22, 2016 at <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/beauty.cfm>.
- Jenkins, David. "The union movement, the California Labor School, and San Francisco politics, 1926-1988." Interview by Lisa Rubens, 1987-1988, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
- Ruggles, Steven, Genadek, Katie, Goeken, Ronald, Grover, Josiah, and Matthew Sobek. *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 6.0* [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015.
- Ziegenfelder, R.F., Hall, and Macdonald. "The San Francisco Bay Area Mass Rapid Transit Study." *San Francisco City Planning Division*, February 10, 1955. Report, 10.

Secondary Literature

- Avila, Eric. *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
- Barton, Stephen E. "The Neighborhood Movement in San Francisco." *Berkeley Planning Journal* 2, no.1 (1985): 85-105.
- Carlsson, Chris. "Shaping the City From Below." *Boom* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 94-102.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Duncan, Beverly and Otis D. Duncan, *Sex Typing and Social Roles: A Research Report*. New York: Academic Press, Inc. 1978.

- Goodwin, Herbert. *California's Growing Freeway System*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1969.
- Hays, Samuel P. *Explorations in Environmental History*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998.
- Henderson, Jason. *Street Fight: The Politics of Mobility in San Francisco*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013.
- Howell, Erik O. "In the Public Interest: Space, Ethnicity, and Authority in San Francisco's Mission District, 1906-1973." University of California, Berkeley, Dissertation: 2009.
- Issel, William. "'Land Values, Human Values, and the Preservation of the City's Treasured Appearance': Environmentalism, Politics, and the San Francisco Freeway Revolt." *The Pacific Historical Review* 68, no. 4 (Nov. 1999): 611-646.
- Issel, William. "Liberalism and Urban Policy in San Francisco from the 1930s to the 1960s." *Western Historical Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (Nov. 1991): 431-450.
- Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York: Random House, Inc. 1961.
- Jain, Sarah S. "Violent Submission: Gendered Automobility." *Cultural Critique* no.61 (Autumn 2005): 186-214.
- Johnson, Katherine M. "Captain Blake versus the Highwaymen: Or, How San Francisco Won the Freeway Revolt." *Journal of Planning History* 8, no.1 (2009): 56-83.
- Jones, Jr., David W. *California's Freeway Era in Historical Perspective*. Berkeley, CA: Institute of Transportation Studies, 1989.
- Kemp, Louis W. "Aesthetes and Engineers: The Occupational Ideology of Highway Design." *Technology and Culture* 27, no.4 (Oct.1986): 759-797.
- Lathrop, William. "The San Francisco Freeway Revolt." *Journal of Transportation Engineering* (March 1969): 1-16.
- Lynch, Judith A. "The San Francisco Panhandle Freeway Debate: One Year of Coverage by the Chronicle and the Examiner." University of California, Berkeley, M.A. Thesis: 1967.
- Mellor, Mary, *Feminism and Ecology*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Merchant, Carolyn. *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

- Meyerowitz, Joanne, "Introduction." In *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz, 1-4. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.
- Mohl, Raymond A. "Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities." *Journal of Urban History* 30, no.5 (2004): 674-706.
- Mohl, Raymond A. "The Interstates and the Cities: Highways, Housing, and the Freeway Revolt." Poverty and Race Research Action Council: University of Alabama at Birmingham, 2002.
- Oldenziel, Ruth. *Making Technology Masculine: Men, Women, and Modern Machines in America, 1870-1945*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000.
- Rodriguez, Joseph A. *City Against Suburb: The Culture Wars in an American Metropolis*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1999.
- Smith, Emma Bland. *San Francisco's Glen Park and Diamond Heights*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2007.
- Wachs, Martin. "Men, Women, and Urban Travel: The Persistence of Separate Spheres." *Presentation at Thirtieth Annual Meeting of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, Buffalo, NY* (October 27, 1988): 1-20.
- Walker, Richard A. and William Cronon. *The Country in the City: The Greening of the San Francisco Bay Area*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007.
- Warner Jr., Sam Bass, "Learning From the Past: Services to Families," in *The Car and The City: The Automobile, the Built Environment, and Daily Urban Life*. ed. Crawford, Margaret and Martin Wachs. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.
- Zettel, Richard M. *Urban Transportation in the San Francisco Bay Area*. Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, 1963.