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Publication Date

2020

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From Redlining to Greenlining: The Political Ecology of Race, Class, and
Access to Green Space in Oakland, California from 1937-2020

By

Chryl Natasha Elaine Corbin

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Environmental Science, Policy, and Management

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Rachel Morello-Frosch, Chair

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Professor Carolyn Finney

Fall 2020

Abstract

From Redlining to Greenlining: The Political Ecology of Race, Class, and
Access to Green Space in Oakland, California from 1937-2020

By
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Doctor of Philosophy in Environmental Science, Policy and Management

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Since the 1960s, Oakland, California, has been represented as a predominantly African American, low-income, and high crime urbanity. In the 2000s, the municipality started to become recognized as a top green city, and by the 2010s the city began to emerge as a gentrification hot spot. This dissertation elucidates how the relationships between race, class, housing, and access to green spaces have changed from redlining—prior to the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, 1965, and 1968—to 2020, after Oakland adopted an environmental agenda and began to establish itself as a green city starting in the 1990s. I question how Oakland’s urban environmental “sustainable development” agenda has impacted residents’ access to green spaces, and to what extent and how are these policies and practices creating, exacerbating, and/or mitigating urban environmental (in)justice issues. I examine *both sides* of environmental (in)justice, uneven distribution of environmental harms and the uneven development of environmental goods in which low-income residents and communities of color are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards while also being prevented from benefiting from environmental amenities. I interrogate Oakland as a 21st century sustainable green city while also examining the historical urban policies and practices embedded in legal residential segregation and the current green gentrification processes which influence and contribute to the environmental (in)justices being (re)produced today.

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In Loving Memory of Hazel Fay Corbin
My Mother, My Mentor, and My Best Friend

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by acknowledging my mother, mentor, and best friend, Hazel Fay Corbin, for whom this dissertation is dedicated. She instilled in me the philosophy of *leaving things better than you found them* and she always possessed a calm strength that I continually seek to attain. I am truly sad she will never get to read this dissertation, yet I am comforted knowing she was proud of me. I would like to thank my family especially my big sister, Sharon, who has supported me throughout my academic journey and its twists and turns. A big thank you to my big brother, Ronald (my twin separated by 11 years), for being the best pod-sibling I could ever ask for during the Covid-19 pandemic, anti-police brutally uprisings, heatwaves, poor air quality due to wildfires, and my dissertation writing process. Thank you for taking care of your little sister during these scary times. To my niece and nephew, Athena and Brandon, thank you for checking in on your auntie and being excited about my nerdish ways and laughing at my really bad jokes. Our Zoom meetings definitely lifted my spirits.

I have been deeply humbled by the talent and expertise of my Oakland parks and recreation community members, colleagues, and friends who have served and continue to serve on the City of Oakland Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission, the Mosswood Recreation Advisory Council, and the De Fremery Recreation Advisory Council as well as the City of Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development staff and the Oakland Parks Recreation Foundation board members and staff. You have been a fountain of encouragement, community love, and honesty. I will always be eternally grateful to you, thank you for allowing me to work alongside you. Thank you for all that you do for our city, our communities, and our environment.

I must recognize my mentors Deborah Freedman Lustig and David Minkus, and the 2018 Institute for the Study of Societal Issues Fellows; Gabby, Louise, Angela, Fantasia, Dinorah, and Joseph. Thank you for creating a wonderful and productive academic space to wrestle with ideas, obtain professional advice, and cultivate a community of scholars. I am not sure if I could have made it to this stage without your guidance, feedback, proof-reading skills (thank you Deborah!), and camaraderie.

I want to close by acknowledging my dissertation committee, Rachel Morello-Frosch, Nancy Peluso, Jovan Lewis, Malo Hutson, and Carolyn Finney for contributing your time and energy and guiding me over the years. I could not have asked for a better group of mentors who inspire me in so many different ways. I consider myself very lucky. It was a spectacular honor.

PREFACE

My life-long relationship with urban nature is what made me an environmentalist and urban political ecologist. I stand at many intersectionalities. I am a Black woman who is the child of immigrants, and I grew up in a low-income single parent household. I was born in Washington D.C. and was raised in what is now called a D.C. suburb, Silver Spring, Maryland. I lived in the apartment complexes that housed predominantly Black residents, on the periphery of a White affluent neighborhood and a predominantly Jewish community that bordered Rock Creek Park, one of the largest urban parks in the United States. Rock Creek Park was my big backyard full of nature. During the summers I would pick honeysuckles, catch fireflies, skip rocks, and compete to see how far up I could climb the trees. My mother would take my friends and I on nature walks which included finding the best pinecones, the prettiest leaves, and the most interesting rocks. Other times we would go to the National Zoo or head to the Washington Mall and check out the museums, always stopping at the Museum of Natural History and picnicking on the lawn. I attended summer day camp at my local recreation center where my father volunteered as the youth tennis coach, my elementary school crossing guard, Mrs. Marx, led senior exercise classes, and my classmates spent the day doing arts and crafts, taking fieldtrips, helping our special needs campmates, and playing games. All these places were free and green and offered what I now realize is a unique diverse, transformative experience, which allowed me to learn the beauty in difference and diversity.

Urban green spaces formed me, cultivated me, and connected me to nature and to community in ways that I continue to recognize. These spaces and the surrounding community expanded my understanding of society, the world, and gave me an intense appreciation of public green spaces. I would not be the person or the scholar I am today without access to these well-funded urban natures, public facilities, and community networks that allowed children, like myself, to feel unencumbered by the politics and practices of exclusion.

I often say that I was raised in the DMV (D.C., Maryland, and Virginia) but I became an adult in Oakland. I am an Oaklander. Like many before me, I migrated to the East Bay, drawn to its radical politics, beautiful weather, and diverse population. I first moved to Oakland in 2004, excited to see the stomping grounds of the Black Panther Party and all the historic locations captured in black and white photos. I was happy to move away from San Francisco and its exploding rents during the dot-com era. As an Academy of Art University film student majoring in cinematography and editing, safe affordable housing was hard to find, and many of my classmates lived in empty industrial buildings, fourteen of them together sleeping on pallets and futons on the floor. I realized there was a better way and took a leap of faith and completely changed my life trajectory by moving to Oakland and going to Berkeley City College where I fell in love with African American and African Diaspora studies and globalization studies.

My first apartment in Oakland was located on 3rd and Foothill Boulevard just blocks from Lake Merritt. Elders and other neighbors warned me about the Lake, “you know they found a body in there” and “don’t walk the lake at night.” This was my first impression of Lake Merritt. These cautionary tales came from the mostly Black and Asian community in which I lived and grew to become a member. The Lake was so beautiful, I had no clue of its history. At that time, Lake Merritt was not as nice as it is today. When the weather warmed you could smell it before you could see it. I have funny memories of the gut-wrenching sounds bus riders would make as we neared the Lake on the number 1 or 1R bus, which ran from East Oakland to Berkeley. When

traveling from East Oakland, Asian, Black, and Latinx commuters got off downtown, often transferring to other buses or trains at the 12th Street BART Station; from downtown to Berkeley the racial composition changed to majority White, and like clockwork it reversed the other way. Bus patrons would cover their noses and mouths with hands or their sleeves as we approached the odiferous Lake Merritt. Riders grimaced and comments about the pungent smell ensued, eyes watered, with many reacting with laughs and chuckles. These bus rides were telling, these were the spaces in which politics and views of Oakland were exchanged openly. Murmurs and full-on conversations would take place on these rides and starting around 2011, when Oakland began its restoration project for Lake Merritt, many bus ride orators turned to the topic of the impending reality of gentrification coming to Oakland. This is how I entered into this research, not necessarily studying a phenomenon from the outside but trying to understand the shifting and changing world around me, as it was also happening to me, and the communities in which I belong, love, and on behalf I continue to labor.

In 2015, I applied and was appointed to the City of Oakland Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC). PRAC is comprised of eleven commissioners who report and make recommendations to the City Council on park rules, policies, and practices, and “in accordance with Oakland Municipal Code 12.64.080, approval from Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission is required to collect revenue in City of Oakland parks and park facilities.”¹ This means during my tenure with PRAC, I have actively voted for, abstained, or voted against events and plans that occur in the City of Oakland municipal park systems when sponsors were seeking approval of plans or to accept fees and/or donations, a topic that became increasingly salient over my term of service and that forms one of the central topics of Chapter 4 of this dissertation. I have seen first-hand that Oakland municipal parks, particularly high-use parks, generate revenue for the municipal government, yet they are unable to close the funding gaps and carry the burden of its ever diminishing and inadequate budget. Due in part to these budget constraints, children in Oakland today do not have the same opportunities and experiences that I did growing up in the D.C. area.

As a PRAC commissioner my duties also included community work as the park liaison for Mosswood Park and De Fremery Park, two of Oakland’s oldest parks, located in neighborhoods that were predominantly African American and are undergoing shifts in its population at the intersection of race and class. Since 2016, I have worked with two PRAC commissioners as part of a task force to update and create new rules and regulations for Oakland’s public parks; since 2018 we have been waiting on the Oakland City Council to approve the new ordinances, it is now 2020. In 2017 I was voted in as Vice Chair and in 2019 I assumed the position of Chair, as I write this dissertation, I have completed my tenure and I am no longer serving on the PRAC. I have participated in city-wide public meetings, conducted meetings with staff, and spoken with residents as well as conducted multiple site visits during my time with the PRAC. I have worked alongside the Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation since 2019 and have contributed to the Oakland 2030 Equitable Climate Action Plan, conducted a city-wide park experiences and perceptions survey, and worked on the successful Measure Q Campaign which passed the 2020 Oakland Parks and Recreation, Preservation, Litter Reduction, and Homeless Support Act.

My charge as a PRAC Commissioner is to serve all of Oakland’s communities, and in doing so, I reorient the discourse around citizenship to one focused on resident status. I am making

¹ Mandolin Kadera-Redmond, “2017 Annual Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission Report” (report presented at the Oakland City Council meeting, Oakland, CA, February 2018).

an explicit acknowledgement of who Oakland residents are and what a resident means in our highly charged political time in which lines between citizenship and immigrant status have formed a fraught and unnecessary binary at the municipal level in order to usurp power over place and space. This binary of legality and rights to resources, including the resource of public lands, nature, and parks, can impact how some residents are criminalized and victimized for existing outside of *their place*. In upholding Oakland's claims as a sanctuary city,² I use the term resident and Oakland resident, and Oakland community members interchangeably to acknowledge all who reside within the municipality of the City of Oakland regardless of their immigrant status, national affiliation, race, and whether not they are housed or unsheltered. I also believe it is important to make visible the racial diversity in Oakland and their complicated histories. It is for that reason I have decided to fully identify Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian (BILA) populations and communities while minimizing the use of "people of color." While BILA this is not a perfect fix and does not fully identify the many cultures that are included under these racial designations it is useful in explicitly acknowledging, identifying, and upholding these particular populations who have had a long antagonistic history within the United States as it connects to land, property, and resource ownership and access. This community engagement and the civic work I have done has set the stage for the research that I present in this dissertation.

Since the 2010s, media footage of public park space tensions between park users have gone viral. The *Kill a hipster save your hood* (2013) online music video by Paper Castles comically likens hipsters to zombies taking over Oakland and other historically Black and Brown neighborhoods across the US.³ In 2014, the Dropbox Dudes incident in San Francisco, California, in which identified Dropbox employees (White male adults) ruptured the communal use of a soccer field which has hosted pick-up games for a generation and by threatening children of color with their permits and rights to the space.⁴ The tragic shooting deaths of Alex Nieto⁵ in San Francisco, CA on March 21st and Tamir Rice⁶ in Cleveland, Ohio, on November 22 in 2014 in public parks by police were also pivotal moments. To me, they signaled a sharp change in understandings of who public spaces belong to and who has rights to the city. Both were people of color: Nieto, a Latinx man, 28, and Rice, a 12-year-old African American child, were identified as threats by their neighbors and police were called. Both died in their neighborhood parks. In 2018 the infamous BBQ Becky incident happened, in which a White woman, Jennifer Schilte, confronted and then called the police about two black men, Kenzie Smith and Onsayo Abram, who were barbecuing at Lake Merritt; she reported that she was being threatened. There have been numerous other incidents and casualties in which Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian (BILA) residents are not only being dispossessed of their homes but the ones who stay are having their lives threatened when recreating in public parks. My positive experiences in public parks and green spaces growing up seems to be unique and are not the norm for non-White urban children; in this dissertation I chart the changes in Oakland, especially due to gentrification, that limit park access and engagement by BILA communities of today.

² Liz Robbins, "Sanctuary City' Mayors Vow to Defy Trump's Immigration Order," *The New York Times*, January 25, 2017.

³ "Kill a Hipster," YouTube.

⁴ "Mission Playground is Not For Sale," YouTube.

⁵ Rebecca Solnit, "Death by gentrification the killing that shamed San Francisco." *The Guardian*. March 21, 2016

⁶ Shaila Dewan and Richard A. Oppel Jr., "In Tamir Rice Case, Many Errors by Cleveland Police, The a Fatal One." *New York Times*, January 22, 2015.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awPVY1DcupE>

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Oakland, California, in concert with municipalities around the world, was inspired by the 1992 Earth Summit's Agenda 21 Sustainable Development Plan,⁷ which brought cities to the forefront and recognized urban areas as essential to creating a healthy environment and world. The conference acknowledged that globally, the urbanization process is intensifying, and cities are rapidly growing to accommodate the influx of new populations migrating from suburban and rural areas.⁸ City governments began aligning with the United Nations for the explicit purpose of creating an environmental agenda to combat the effects of climate change. Cities in the United States started exercising municipal autonomy, bypassing federal environmental regulations deemed insufficient, and collectively mobilizing nationally and globally around environmental concerns. What has since emerged is the concept of the sustainable green city: an urban area designed to advance sustainability goals, address climate change, improve quality of life, and minimize negative environmental impacts.⁹ A crucial part of creating the green city is the production of green spaces (e.g. parks, gardens, and urban agriculture).¹⁰ Green spaces absorb CO₂ and air pollutants, reduce flooding from storm water run-off, mitigate the urban heat island effect, and can serve as areas for recreation, food production, and wildlife habitat formation.¹¹ The promise of the green city is particularly vital for low-income neighborhoods and communities of color who tend to be the most environmentally compromised,¹² and are less likely to live next to or have access to healthy green spaces.¹³

In the last two decades, US cities have been allocating millions of dollars to major green space projects; Chicago's Millennium Park and the New York High Line are notable examples of cities converting the traditional concrete built environment to world-renowned parks. Cities like Atlanta, Dallas, and St. Louis are following suit by creating epic master plans in which parks are front and center. Not since the days of Muir, Olmsted, and the City Beautiful movement (1890s-1900s) has park creation and beautification been so extensive within the United States.¹⁴ While parks have been traditionally understood as important for human health, sustainable development rooted in environmental and economic ethics is ushering in new land use practices as well as creating new relationships between urban residents and nature.

This dissertation brings together scholarship from environmental studies, urban political ecology, race theory, and visual culture to elucidate Oakland's transition from redlining—a legal form of residential segregation—to its current greening process in which the municipality is (re)establishing itself as a sustainable green city. In this work I examine Oakland's urban “sustainable development” agenda and strategies and their impacts on residents' access to public

⁷ “Agenda 21,” United Nations Conference on Environment & Development. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 3, 1992.

⁸ United Nations, “Water and Cities Facts and Figures” *UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication* (2010).

⁹ San Francisco Department of the Environment, “Urban Environmental Accords.”

¹⁰ Steffen Lehmann, “Green Urbanism: Formulating a Series of Holistic Principles,” *S.A.P.I.E.N.S.*, 3.2 (2010): 1-10.

¹¹ Salzman, James et al. “The Most important Current Research Questions in Urban Ecosystem Services,” *Duke Environmental Law & Policy Forum* (2014): 1-22.

¹² Robert D. Bullard and Glenn S. Johnson. “Environmental Justice: Grassroots Activism and Its Impact on Public Policy Decision Making,” *Journal of Social Issues* 56 (2000):555-578.

¹³ Jennifer Wolch et al. “Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: The challenge of making cities ‘just green enough,’” *Landscape and Urban Planning* 125 (2014): 234-244.

¹⁴ Kermit Carlyle Parsons and David Schuyler, eds. *From Garden City to Green City: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

parks and green spaces at the intersection of race and class. Moreover, I question Oakland's historical legacy and the relationships between race, class, housing, and access to green space prior to the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s to 2020. Lastly, I ask to what extent and how is the greening of Oakland creating, exacerbating, and/or mitigating urban environmental (in)justice issues? I examine *both sides* of environmental (in)justice, the uneven distribution and development of environmental harms and goods in which low-income residents and communities of color are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards while also being prevented from benefiting from environmental amenities. I interrogate Oakland as a 21st century sustainable green city while also examining historical urban policies and practices embedded in legal segregation and redlining, and the current gentrification process which influences and contributes to the environmental (in)justices being (re)produced today.

In this introduction, I describe my research methods and then present the theoretical framework for the dissertation, discussing how race, the neoliberal state, and gentrification are conceptualized and brought to bear on the case study of Oakland, California. Finally, I give a brief synopsis of the three linked, but independent, papers that comprise this dissertation.

METHODS

This dissertation incorporates a mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data situated within the framework of urban political ecology. As defined by Erik Swyngedouw and Nick Heynen, urban political ecology “provide[s] an integrated and relational approach that helps untangle the interconnected economic, political, social and ecological processes that together go to form highly uneven urban landscapes.”¹⁵ The socio-ecological process of green space use and creation as it relates to race, class, and housing in Oakland, California, is the primary focus of this dissertation. As an extended case study, this research illuminates how historical processes of urbanization and current urban environmental policies and practices are impacting the lived experiences of Oakland's most vulnerable residents right now, and what that could mean for future populations living in green cities. This dissertation draws on five foundational data sources: 1) City of Oakland municipal reports and documents from 1937 to 2020; 2) participant observations and field notes from 2016-2020 from public meetings which include Oakland Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC) meetings, Mosswood Recreational Advisory Council (Mosswood RAC) meetings, City of Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development public park meetings, and City of Oakland city-wide meetings; 3) participant observations, interviews, and field notes and photos from site visits at Mosswood Park; 4) meeting notes and documents from PRAC and the Mosswood RAC; and 5) empirical and archival data from the Homeowners' Loan Corporation, the United State Census, the Bay Area Census, and the California Environmental Protection Agency. These data sources were organized, analyzed, coded to look for themes separately as well as analyzed across data sources to reveal trends and patterns over time.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Race

According to Michael Omi and Howard Winant race can be deployed in many ways, including as “a concept, a representation or signification of identity that refers to different types of human bodies” made recognizable through visually “perceived corporeal and phenotype markers

¹⁵ Erik Swyngedouw and Nikolas C. Heynen, “Urban Political Ecology, Justice and the Politics of Scale,” *Antipode* 35, no. 5 (2003): 914.

of difference.”¹⁶ The “meanings and social practices that are ascribed to these” different bodies do not originate from them, thus are not biological, but are socially constructed and (re)produced.¹⁷ Race has been used as “a fundamental organizing principle of social stratification.”¹⁸ Within the US, race has not only “influenced the definition of rights and privileges, and the distribution of resources,” but also “the ideologies and practices of subordination and oppression.”¹⁹

Claire Jean Kim’s concepts of *racial ordering*, *racial triangulation*, and *colorblind talk* reveals some of the social practices that organize and stratify race. Racial ordering “emphasizes that groups get racialized both relatively to one another and differently from one another,” it is through a “shared cognitive map [that] classif[ies] different groups with concrete distributional consequences [and with] certain privileges and/or exclusions”²⁰ that have been buttressed by race-based laws. Racial ordering is constructed within a racial hierarchy which situates Whites at the top, Blacks at the bottom, and places Asians and Latinx in-between. Kim’s addition of a horizontal axis, to the vertical racial ordering, further stratifies race by an outsider or insider designation based on the perception of US citizenship. The vertical and horizontal axes provide a framework for racial triangulation in which Asians and Latinx are situated above Blacks and under Whites while also being positioned as outsiders, foreigners, and as non-Americans. Also, from this triangulation Asians are conceptualized and stereotyped as *model minorities* and perceived closer to Whites, while Latinx are placed below Asians and closer to Blacks representing *problematic immigrants*. It is within this understand that racial power is exposed and made visible “not as something that an individual or group exercises directly and intentionally over another individual or group but rather as a systemic property, permeating, circulating throughout, and continuously constituting society.”²¹ Lastly, the concept of colorblind talk acknowledges there are discourses that are deployed precisely to “hide the American racial order from view, protecting it from challenge[...] by obscuring [it],”²² and allowing it to continue and function unnoticed.

According to George Lipsitz, “the lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension.”²³ Race has been a key determinant for property ownership, for instance the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, repealed in 1943, prohibited Chinese immigrants from obtaining citizenship, a public education, engaging in specific labor industries, and prevented them from purchasing land, this is in contrast to the resources and services provided to European immigrants.²⁴ Prior to the 1968 Fair Housing Act race-based residential legal segregation and zoning policies dictated where particular races could live, the neighborhood in which particular races could buy a home, and the ability to own land and property.²⁵ Today race is still “influenc[ing] the likely hood of exposure to environmental and health risks”²⁶ and “often keep[s] low-income people of color outside of areas with amenities.”²⁷ Race is integral to the

¹⁶ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *The Racial Formation in the United States (Third Edition)* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 111.

¹⁷ Omi and Winant, *The Racial Formation*, 111.

¹⁸ Omi and Winant, *The Racial Formation*, 111.

¹⁹ Omi and Winant, *The Racial Formation*, 107.

²⁰ Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 17.

²¹ Kim, *Bitter Fruit*, 9.

²² Kim, *Bitter Fruit*, 17.

²³ George Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape,” *Landscape Journal* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 12.

²⁴ Erika Lee, “The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (2002): 36–62.

²⁵ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017).

²⁶ Robert D. Bullard, *Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and Communities of Color* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996).

²⁷ John a. Powell, “Structural Racism and Spatial Jim Crow,” in *The Black Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century: Race, Power, and Politics of Place*, ed. by Robert D. Bullard, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 56.

understanding of how land and property as resources were unevenly distributed by governments allowing for one group to benefit to the exclusion of others.

Gentrification Processes

The term *gentrification* was originally coined by Ruth Glass in 1964 to convey the neighborhood change taking place in London while operationalizing the term gentry, originally derived from Britain's feudal past. Wealthier individuals, the working-class industrial laborers, were moving into modest dwellings near their places of employment and improving both the property and the surrounding areas through their own labor and capital. The individual actions carried out by this new population and class drove up property values leading to the displacement of lower income, long-term residents of London.

Gentrification in connection to environmental agendas and policies as well as green space creation, restoration, and beautification projects emerged within political ecology literature in the late 2000s. Sarah Dooling's concept of *ecological gentrification* was one of the first to explain a process in which "implementation of an environmental planning agenda related to public green space [...] leads to the displacement or exclusion of the most economically vulnerable human population—homeless people—while espousing an environmental ethic."²⁸ I believe Dooling's vulnerable human population can and should be expanded to include the precarious classes, those who are low-income/the working-class poor, social welfare recipients, those living on fixed incomes, retirement pensions, and those who are renters. Noah Quastel's notion of *eco-gentrification* expands on Dooling's work and focuses on how real estate and businesses use green space as a way to drive up property costs as well as attract new residents and patrons. He argues that "eco-gentrification emerged between 2006 and 2008 as an urban concern directed to be consistent with increasingly competitive neoliberal real estate markets."²⁹ Melissa Checker contextualizes *environmental gentrification* as a neoliberal practice in which environmental justice language is coopted, used for green washing, and produces displacement. According to Checker, "while it appears as politically-neutral, consensus-based planning that is both ecologically and socially sensitive, in practice, environmental gentrification subordinates equity to profit-minded development."³⁰ Lastly, Gould and Lewis' concept *green gentrification* connect gentrification to a "greening event," a green space creation, restoration, and/or beautification project, that attracts more affluent populations.³¹ Moreover, they provide a framework to identify this process based on whether the population "whitens," "richens," and whether rents are raised after greening events. Gould and Lewis completely flip the script on the traditional understanding of gentrification and aligns with Neil Smith. According to Smith, the gentrification process "now occurs at various scales and at various sites,"³² ranging from the micro through a "discrete process" of individual actions as put forth by Glass to operating as a city planning tool and a "global urban strategy."³³ Ultimately the gentrification processes produce the same result, the wealthy displacing the economically vulnerable. There are also those who believe that gentrification can be a process in

²⁸ Sarah Dooling, "Ecological Gentrification: A Research Agenda Exploring Justice in the City," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33, no. 3 (2002): 621-63.

²⁹ Noah Quastel, "Political Ecologies of Gentrification," *Urban Geography* 30, no. 7 (2009): 697.

³⁰ Melissa Checker, "Wiped Out by the "Greenwave": Environmental Gentrification and the Paradoxical Politics of Urban Sustainability," *City & Society* 23 (2011) 210-229.

³¹ Kenneth A. Gould and Tammy L. Lewis, "The Environmental Injustice of Green Gentrification: The Case of Brooklyn's Prospect Park," in *The World in Brooklyn: Gentrification, Immigration, and Ethnic Politics in a Global City*, ed. by DeSena, Judith N. and Timothy Shortell (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 113-146.

³² Loretta Lees, "Super-gentrification: The Case of Brooklyn Heights, New York," *Urban Studies* 40, No. 12 (2003): 2487-2509.

³³ Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy," *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 427-50.

which low-income residents can benefit from the resources and amenities that enter with it,³⁴ but this can be true only if these populations are able to stay put.

The greening of the urban landscape could provide an opportunity to supply crucial health benefits and access to nature to the environmentally compromised and precarious populations. Nevertheless, through the gentrification processes addressed above, green space creation also works to displace these very populations, possibly sending them to other environmentally challenged areas. This paradoxical effect is often portrayed by municipal governments and academic scholars as an unavoidable outcome of creating a green sustainable city and attaining a more environmentally friendly cityscape.³⁵ In this dissertation, I examine greening and gentrification process in Oakland and show that not only are low-income residents and communities of color being prevented from benefiting from new park beautification, creation, and restoration projects, they are also impacted by the diminishing quality and access to parks not undergoing these changes and in turn are not benefiting from new or longstanding environmental amenities.

The Neo-Liberal State & The Green City

David Harvey argues that “the fundamental mission of the neoliberal state is to create a ‘good business climate’ and therefore to optimize conditions for capital accumulation no matter what the consequences for employment or social well-being [...]”³⁶ Moreover, “the neoliberal state is particularly assiduous in seeking the privatization of assets as a means to open up fresh fields for capital accumulation. Sectors formally run or regulated by the state [...] are turned over to the private sphere or deregulated [...] it trumpets the virtues of competition while actually opening the market to centralized capital and monopoly power.”³⁷ Within the neoliberal state as described by David Harvey, I argue that what is taking place in Oakland and other cities can be conceived as a *Neo-Liberal Green City*. I show in Chapter 4, that public green spaces are becoming privatized both explicitly and implicitly through policies and practices that determine green space use and access through fees and/or capital exchanges. Access is determined through non-governmental owners or through partial ownerships between corporations and local governments that create a slippery slope in which public parks and green spaces are not fully public but are semi-private.

Access & the Production of Space

Jesse C. Ribot and Nancy Peluso move beyond the traditional understanding of property rights and define access “as the ability to benefit from things—including material objects, persons, institutions, and symbols.”³⁸ By focusing on “ability, rather than rights as in property theory, this formulation brings attention to a wider range of social relationships that can constrain or enable people to benefit from resources without focusing on property relations alone.”³⁹ Much of the literature and studies conducted in regards to access to nature in cities tend to focus on residential proximity to parks and green space as the determinant factor. Drawing on Ribot and Peluso, I argue that proximity should not be the sole focus. Park users’ ability to benefit, as put forth by Ribot and Peluso, is salient for Oakland park users and recognizes the cultural practices and park

³⁴ Lance Freeman, *There Goes the 'Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

³⁵ Jennifer R. Wolch, et al, “Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: The challenge of making cities ‘just green enough,’” *Landscape and Urban Planning* 125 (2014): 234-244.

³⁶ David. Harvey, *Spaces of Neoliberalization: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 19.

³⁷ David Harvey, *Spaces of Neoliberalization*, 19.

³⁸ Jesse C. Ribot and Nancy Peluso, “A Theory of Access,” *Rural Sociology* 68, no. 2 (2003): 153.

³⁹ Ribot and Peluso, “A Theory of Access,” 154.

engagements in which these residents seek to participate. In Chapter 4, I examine the ability to benefit from access in one Oakland park. The flow of the White middle-class to the city has brought different understandings and ideologies of how to use green spaces, and in turn how communities chose to engage green space is as important as proximity to green spaces.

Henri Lefebvre states that *spatial practice* is expressed in the “lived material world.”⁴⁰ “Everyday practices and experiences are continually mediated between the two forms of social space, working within the bounds of the conceived abstract spaces, of planners and architects while simultaneously being shaped and shaping individual’s perceptions and uses of spaces.”⁴¹ Representations of space operate in an abstract form based on portrayals of spaces that influence how they are perceived—for example through maps. Representations of space are not directly lived but are conceived and constructed through discourse. “It is encountered through the understandings and abstractions contained in plans, codes, and designs that shape how we conceptualized ordered space. This form of social space is the dominant form and is central to the production of abstract space.”⁴² My dissertation works to connect lived residential experiences in Oakland, especially access to and engagement with green space, to understand how the future green city of Oakland is being depicted by city planners, developers, and its municipal government.

Visual Culture & Representational Space

Representational space is imagined and embodied in “complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not.”⁴³ “The works of artists, photographers, filmmakers, and poets may be representational spaces that, through their uses of symbolism, construct counter-discourses and thus open up the possibility to think differently about space.”⁴⁴ In Chapter 3, I analyze the West Oakland Specific Plan and focus on the visual representations in the plan, particularly the representational spaces, the images, and renderings and discuss the erasure of Black bodies.

The theories addressed above work together to unearth the social relations that extend to capital flows and accumulation processes, understandings of nature and its uses in cities, access to and productions of space as well as the social connections and conflicts within them, and visual depictions of these urban landscapes and its inhabitants. Just as important, these social, political, and economic relationships have perceived and real consequences that play out materiality, spatially, and in the everyday lives of Oakland’s residents.

DISSERTATION CHAPTERS

Chapter 2, *In Red, Black, and Green: The Political Ecological Eras of Oakland, California 1937-2020*, examines the relationships between race, class, housing, and access to green space in Oakland, CA, between 1937-2020. I organize these relationships into three distinct political ecological eras: Red (1937-1968), Black (1977-1999), and Green (2005-2020) to capture how seminal laws, policies, and/or practices influence and reconfigure the relationships between capital, space, and people. By taking a historical view, this chapter provides an opportunity to recognize the political, economic, and social (re)configurations in space and place as they connect to land-use, landscapes, and the populations that reside within them. Through analyzing Oakland’s urban political ecology at the intersection of race within these eras, I elucidate how the uneven development of Oakland, takes place while (re)producing environmental (in)justices that both

⁴⁰ Eugene McCann, “Race, Protest, and Public Space: Contextualizing Lefebvre in the U.S. City,” *Antipode* 31, no. 2 (1999): 163-184.

⁴¹ McCann, “Race, Protest, and Public Space,” 172-173.

⁴² McCann, “Race, Protest, and Public Space,” 172.

⁴³ Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 33.

⁴⁴ McCann, “Race, Protest, and Public Space,” 172.

expose Black and Brown communities to environmental harms and prevent them from benefiting from environmental goods.

Chapter 3, *Rendering Gentrification and Erasing Race: Sustainable Development & The (Re)Visioning of Oakland, California as a Green City*, analyzes the representation of Oakland's population in the West Oakland Specific Plan, released in June 2014. The Plan, which was touted as the "guiding framework for realizing the vision of a healthy, vibrant West Oakland," was widely featured in local newspapers, online zines, blogs, and Facebook pages, with comment sections serving as a platform to both celebrate and contest the new plan and the spaces it depicted. Based on a content analysis of the West Oakland Specific Plan (WOSP), I examine how Oakland is envisioning its future as a green city. This chapter employs and operationalizes Claire Jean Kim's *colorblind talk* and Lewis and Gould's *green gentrification* concepts by applying them to visual culture. The prominence of the visual dimensions of these frameworks provides a unique opportunity to deconstruct images while illuminating the racialized and environmental discourses conveyed in master and specific plans created by city planners, developers, and the City of Oakland. This chapter argues that the WOSP positions Oakland as a top sustainable/green city while depicting erasures of its African American population and in so doing rebrands Oakland as a green and White city.

Chapter 4, *Enclosure-Occupations: Contested Productions of Green Space & the Paradoxes within Oakland, California's Green City* focuses on Mosswood Park, a small but highly used park that is crucial to the local community. Tensions between park use, the commodification of park space, and lack of public park funding have been made visible on the landscape of Mosswood Park. This paper looks at two types of enclosure-occupations: one from *above*, government sanctioned events which allow for the temporary enclosure of park space for private events, and the other from *below*, informal extralegal encampments of unsheltered residents. While those who participate in these enclosure-occupations have vastly different economic, political, and social power, both enclosure-occupations simultaneously create openings for some while constricting public park access for others.

Chapter 5, *Towards Restorative Environmental Justice*, my concluding chapter, offers policy and practice recommendations to reconcile the historically produced environmental injustices which continues to impact predominantly low-income and/or Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian residents more severely than Whites, while also preventing new forms impacting all residents. *Restorative Environmental Justice* is the intended outcome from what I introduce, define, and layout as the Environmental Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (J.E.D.I.) approach which brings together and connects theory and praxis to civic and community engagement. I developed the Environmental JEDI approach and have implemented it within in my work as a City of Oakland Parks and Recreation Advisory Commissioner. I also draw on environmental justice scholarship as I explore the challenges and opportunities around restorative environmental justice within the City of Oakland Parks and Recreation system with the ultimate goal of preventing and mitigating green gentrification as Oakland becomes a green sustainable city.

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Chapter 2.
**IN RED, BLACK, AND GREEN: THE POLITICAL ECOLOGICAL ERAS OF
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA FROM 1937-2020**

Abstract

This paper examines the historical and current relationships between race, class, housing, and access to green space between 1937-2020 in Oakland, California. I track how a bundle of federal, state, and local policies and practices influenced the political, economic, and social patterns, particularly as they impacted Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian residents in the flatlands. Following a long historical arc, this work identifies and is organized into three distinct political ecological eras: Red (1937-1968) – a legally segregated city, Black (1977-1999)–an African American/Black plurality municipality, and Green (2005-2020)–a green city with an environmental agenda. The political ecological eras make visible how new laws, policies, and/or practices impact and (re)configure the spatiality of race and the materiality of space as they connect to land uses, landscapes, and the populations that reside within them. Moreover, this study reveals the changing yet constant patterns in which environmental injustices occur and contribute to the uneven distribution of environmental harms and environmental goods, particularly access of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian residents to healthy green spaces and public parks.

Introduction

The suburbanization process in the United States, spurred on by the New Deal and accelerated after World War II, incentivized White populations to move into single-family homes and out of cities through housing investments. This population shift was integral in creating what are called inner cities, neighborhoods comprised of predominantly people of color, primarily African American populations but also includes Asian and Latinx communities, and is characterized by poverty, blight, and derelict housing. These neighborhoods have been euphemistically called *the hood* or *the projects* at best and *the ghetto* at worst.⁴⁵ While Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian (BILA) residents were contained within mostly rural and urban landscapes, the suburbs became emblematic of the White middle-class with single family housing, white picket fences, green lawns, backyards, and treelined streets. The suburbanization process and the urban project produced unevenly developed and differently valued landscapes which set the stage for the environmental injustices that have been (re)produced and continue today in Oakland, California.

The decrease of White residents in Oakland coincided with the enactment of Civil Rights Acts of 1964, 1965, and 1968 signed into law by Lyndon B. Johnson. These Acts ended legal segregation in public places and occupational discrimination based on race, prohibited racial discrimination in voting, and made race-based housing discrimination illegal. Unfortunately, removing race-based discriminatory laws did not right the historical wrongs and new economic shifts in the form of deindustrialization further hindered African Americans from achieving the American dream. By the mid to late 1970s, Oakland was reconfigured as an African American plurality facing the collapse of the west coast domestic manufacturing industry,⁴⁶ property taxation shifts particularly California's 1978 Proposition 13⁴⁷ which froze property taxes, and gradually precipitated the decline of state funding to county and municipal governments. This made the City of Oakland and its public institutions and infrastructure economically precarious well into the 2000s.

The City of Oakland, in efforts to become a global city⁴⁸, began constructing its environmental agenda by adopting municipal resolutions modeled from the 1992 Earth Summit⁴⁹ and the 1997 Kyoto Protocol⁵⁰, starting Oakland's alliance with the United Nations and other global cities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fight climate change. These resolutions also moved Oakland towards developing a local climate protection action plan and a sustainable development strategy focused on economic development.

Between 2005 and 2010 Oakland was severely hit by the subprime mortgage foreclosure crisis which displaced thousands of homeowners and disproportionately impacted African Americans and Latinx residents. By 2000, new and predominantly White residents began moving to Oakland in two waves; first hipsters, artists, and those who were priced out of San Francisco's rising rents due to the first tech boom⁵¹, the dot-com era, in the early 2000s and by the mid 2010s the second tech boom added to those migrating to Oakland.⁵² These new residents had significantly higher wages and began relocating into historically low-income and predominantly BILA

⁴⁵ Kenneth B. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 7.

⁴⁶ Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁴⁷ Jeffrey I. Chapman, "Proposition 13: Some Unintended Consequences," (Public Policy Institute of California, 10th Annual Envision California Conference September 24-26, 1998).

⁴⁸ Saskia Sassen, "The Global City: Introducing a Concept," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 11. 2 (2005): 29.

⁴⁹ "Agenda 21" *United Nations Conference on Environment Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*, 3 to 14 June 1992.

⁵⁰ "Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change," United Nations, 1998.

⁵¹ Evelyn Nieves, "Mission District Fights Case of Dot-Com Fever," *New York Times* November 5, 2000.

⁵² Broke-Ass Stuart, "Why are all my friends moving to Oakland," *Medium* March 3, 2013

neighborhoods in the flatlands of Oakland. Gentrification pressures have continued to raise rents and price out many long-term residents, illegal eviction practices have displaced and forcefully removed them, and the racial and economic demographics of the city rapidly changed.⁵³ These new residents have also become the main beneficiaries of this municipality's greenlining process in which green spaces have and are being created, beautified, and restored in the flatlands of Oakland, situated in the formerly redlined areas, and where the majority non-White residents still live as the city implements its environmental agenda.

This paper focuses on the relationships between race, class, housing, and access to green space in the racially segregated neighborhoods, in the flatlands of Oakland, from 1937 until 2020. I argue that race-based housing policies and practices not only impacted class, they also influenced the uneven distribution of green space and environmental goods at the neighborhood level. Although policies and practices have changed and shifted between 1937-2020, there are recurring capitalist forms of accumulation in which low-income residents and BILA communities are habitually excluded from and/or dispossessed of property ownership, quality housing, and healthy green amenities while also having their housing, neighborhoods, and lives compromised by environmental harms and repeatedly sacrificed for the benefit of the state and in (re)creation of a White Oakland.

For the discussion that follows, I have divided housing and residential spatial politics into three eras with specific political ecological characteristics; Red (1937-1968), Black (1977-1999), and Green (2005-2020). Red (1937-1968) focuses on legal race-based residential segregation starting in 1937 I contrast Oakland's red and green neighborhoods as identified by the Home Owners' Loan Corporation area description documents. This era ends with the Civil Rights Act of 1968, the Fair Housing Act, which ended legal race-based housing discrimination. Black (1977-1999) situates Oakland as a *Chocolate City* with an African American plurality, in which positions of power are held by African American leadership, starting in 1977, with the first Black mayor, and ending in 1999 when a White mayor, Jerry Brown, took office for the first time in a generation. Lastly, the Green era (2005-2020) focuses on Oakland's process of greening through its creation and implementation of an environmental agenda which produced new land-use policies that influenced the spatiality of race and materiality of space as they connect to housing and access to green space. The gaps between political ecological eras make visible transitions in which laws, policies, and/or practices are created, adopted, and/or implemented which (re)configure capital, people, and place. The gaps between these political ecological eras acknowledge that historical turns and policy changes are not neat; at times they are messy as political and ecological legacies continue to reverberate and impact future spatial, material, economic, and societal formations. The three political eras, Red, Black, and Green, illuminate the relationships among and the ideologies connected to land uses, landscapes, and the populations that reside on them.

This paper uses a mixed-methods approach, described in detail below, that includes primary and secondary qualitative and quantitative data sources from federal and municipal documents, maps, census records, and archival materials. I analyze these sources to show Oakland's uneven development of housing at the intersection of race and class. By grounding this research within a historical, theoretical, and environmental context, this work examines how the relationships between race, class, and housing have influenced access to green space in this city. In so doing, this study connects political ecology to race studies and reveals the changing yet constant patterns in which environmental injustices occur and contribute to the uneven distribution

⁵³ "Evict This! A History of Housing in West Oakland and Tools to Resist Displacement," East Bay Solidarity Network, December 3, 2013.

of environmental harms and environmental goods, particularly regarding access of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian (BILA) residents to healthy green spaces and public parks. Before turning to the three eras, I present my theoretical and historical framework, giving a brief overview of Marxist concepts of accumulation and the intersections of race and property.

Theoretical and Historical Framework

Marx identified primitive accumulation as a process that “precedes capitalist accumulation; an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure.”⁵⁴ Primitive accumulation is understood as the seizure of land and resources without monetary exchange, and it is what brought the capitalist mode of production into being. Accumulation by dispossession, a more useful concept for this paper, positions the ongoing process of capitalist accumulation beyond the primitive in which a “set of assets,” is released “at a very low (and in some instances zero) cost” and individuals with “overaccumulated capital can seize hold of such assets and immediately turn them into profitable use.”⁵⁵ Accumulation by dispossession also “correlates with the visitation of periodic bouts of predatory devaluation of assets in one part of the world or another.”⁵⁶ Within the US context, these “periodic bouts of predatory devaluation”⁵⁷ also occur at the local municipal scale, visible when we look at the relationships between neighborhoods, the devaluation processes associated with the practice of eminent domain, and its active use during the suburbanization and the urbanization processes within the US.

The uneven distribution of resources by the state specifically land and property, produced a pattern of accumulation that created differently valued neighborhoods and landscapes in which capital has been pushed and pulled across space and into neighborhoods, through a process of valorization and devaluation decided by governments and rooted in race-based policies and practices.⁵⁸ Across the US, capital flows were directed into the suburbs through investments in the form of federally backed low-interest mortgages from the Federal Housing Administration and other funding programs like the G.I. Bill,⁵⁹ allowing predominately White citizens to gain homeownership and producing a majority White middle-class. Concurrently, this process pulled capital flows out of and away from urban areas through exclusion and disinvestment practices that prevented those designated as not-White from benefiting from this state-produced accumulation and distribution process.⁶⁰ What accumulation by dispossession does not explicitly address is how race influences the ways in which these assets are garnered, valued or devalued, and the process in which these assets are redistributed to the benefit of majority White populations.

The politics of race influences spatialized and marginalized unevenly valued landscapes through the uneven distribution of resources.^{61,62,63} Foundational to the history of the United States

⁵⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 873.

⁵⁵ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (New York: Oxford Press, 2003), 137-182.

⁵⁶ Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 181-182.

⁵⁷ Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 181-182.

⁵⁸ Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 175-205.

⁵⁹ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequity in Twentieth-Century America*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company 2005), 113-141.

⁶⁰ Robert O. Self, *American Babylon*, 135-176.

⁶¹ George Lipsitz. “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race.” *Landscape Journal* (2007): 12.

⁶² Omi and Winant, *Racial Formations*, 107.

⁶³ Jeff Romm, “The Coincidental Order of Environmental Injustice.” in *Justice and Natural Resources: Concepts, Strategies, and Applications*, eds. Kathryn Mutz, Gary Bryner, and Douglas Kenney (Washington: Island Press, 2002), 117-37.

is the seizure of Indigenous lands⁶⁴ and Black bodies⁶⁵ in the process of making empire through state violence: with the end result being the commodifying of both land and persons. These assets, seized through primitive accumulation and by dispossession, were made into property and redistributed by state institutions, to be seized by some and were bestowed onto others, mainly to White men.⁶⁶ These beneficiaries did not necessarily have the overaccumulated capital to immediately turn them into profitable use, and most likely this transformation would have been impossible without the other state and institutional interventions in the form of laws and policies that buttressed this population during and after the redistribution of these resources. From this history of race-based laws and policies, land-less White men were able to move into the owner class.⁶⁷ This process continues today. For example, the Homestead Act of 1862 allowed White homesteaders from the US and new European immigrants the ability and access to acquire property, the lands of Native Americans and Indigenous Nations, for free or record low prices and at a level that has never been matched since.⁶⁸ The Homestead Act was a state based primitive accumulation process in which colonized lands were seized and redistributed as property allowing for wealth to grow in the hands of mostly White men.⁶⁹

Race has “influenced the definition of rights and privileges, and the distribution of resources;”⁷⁰ including land and property ownership as well as access to housing. Moreover, race has been used as “a fundamental organizing principle of social stratification”⁷¹ and has influenced “the ideologies and practices of subordination and oppression.”⁷² Race is integral to the understanding of how land and property, as resources, were unevenly distributed and differentially valued by governments and institutions allowing for one group to benefit to the exclusion of others.⁷³ The uneven distribution of resources created and accelerated what Thomas Shapiro calls the *racial wealth gap* between Whites and African Americans. Shapiro distinguishes between income and wealth. Income “includes earnings from work, interest and dividends, pensions, and transfer payments,”⁷⁴ and wealth is “the total value of things families own minus the debts.”⁷⁵ In line with a Marxist critique, he argues that “the economic foundation of a capitalist society is ‘private property,’” the acquisition and possession of land.⁷⁶ The possession of land and property is critical to the way the middle and upper classes in the US accumulate: homeownership accounting for “44 percent of total measured net worth.”⁷⁷ Even when African Americans achieve middle-class status, they are far more precarious than their White counterparts because most African Americans lack access to transformative assets, capital and other resources that are passed from one generation to another or one family member to another in a type of pool of collective

⁶⁴ Mark Spence, “Dispossessing the Wilderness: Yosemite Indians and the National Park Ideal, 1864-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 1 (1996): 38.

⁶⁵ Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 6.

⁶⁶ Angie Beeman et al., “Whiteness as Property: Predatory Lending and the Reproduction of Racialized Inequality,” *Critical Sociology* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 27–45.

⁶⁷ Beeman, “Whiteness as Property,” 27–45.

⁶⁸ Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 32-50.

⁶⁹ Richard Edwards, et al, *Homesteading the Plains: Toward a New History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

⁷⁰ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *The Racial Formation in the United States (Third Edition)*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 107.

⁷¹ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 111.

⁷² Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 107.

⁷³ Sean F. Reardon et al, “Neighborhood Income Composition by Household Race and Income, 1990-2009,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (2015): 78-97.

⁷⁴ Thomas Shapiro, *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 32-33.

⁷⁵ Shapiro, *The Hidden Cost of Being African American*, 32-33.

⁷⁶ Shapiro, *The Hidden Cost of Being African American*, 33.

⁷⁷ Shapiro, *The Hidden Cost of Being African American*, 107.

family wealth. Transformative assets are less available to African Americans due to historical race-based exclusionary laws, policies, and practices like redlining and racially exclusive housing covenants which prevented African Americans from benefiting from low-cost federally secured mortgages and prohibited them from achieving homeownership within desirable neighborhoods. These same race-based practices made non-Whites more vulnerable to property devaluation and property confiscations through eminent domain prior to the 1968 Fair Housing Act. Post-1968 predatory mortgage lending and property devaluation strategies continue impact African American access to wealth.⁷⁸

The Three Political Ecological Eras in Oakland

This paper is organized into three sections reflecting the political ecological areas I call: Red (1937-1968), Black (1977-1999), and Green (2005-2020). Each political ecological era has separate but interlinking bundles of policies and practices which influence the relationship between race, class, housing, and access to green space. The gaps between eras make visible the transition from one era to another in which new laws, policies, and/or practices are created, adopted, and implemented, shifting and reconfiguring capital, people, and place. In discussing the Red era (1937-1968), I analyze Oakland's legal racial residential segregation history. I use the Home Owners' Loan Corporation's (HOLC) NS Form-8 Area Description documents and the 1937 Thomas Brother's Alameda County Map, to show how red and green residential tracts were attributed values, based in part on how the populations who lived within those tracts were perceived. The Black political ecological era (1977-1999), is the post 1968 Civil Rights Fair Housing era in which Oakland's population transitions from a White majority to an African American plurality. In this section, I use census records, municipal documents, and data I collected from Google earth to document the locations of public parks in formerly redlined neighborhoods and investigate the quality of these parks from 1977-1999. Lastly, in the Green era (2005-2020) discusses the reshaping of municipal land use policy through the adoption of a green/sustainable agenda starting in the 1990s by joining the United Nations Cities for Climate Protection Campaign and creating a city-wide strategy to reduce its green-house-gas emissions. Using census records and municipal documents, master and specific plans, new relationships at the intersection of race, class, housing and green space are revealed. These three political ecological eras signal changes in economic and housing policies and practices that influence the (re)organization of people and place within the urban environment and illuminates who is benefiting from and who is being deprived of quality green spaces and a healthy environment. As I will show, there is an enduring contrast between the Oakland hills, where wealthier, whiter populations live with more green space, and the Oakland flatlands or flats, where lower-income, predominantly African American, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian residents live, with less and lower-quality green space.

The Red Political Ecological Era, 1937-1968

The Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) created security grades that evaluated housing tracts and assessed the investment risks for mortgages for banks and investors. Using the HOLC security area description documents⁷⁹ a map was created by the Thomas Brother's in 1937 (*Figure 1*) for Oakland's neighborhoods. These security grade documents and maps were produced by the Federal Home Loan Bank Board in collaboration with local governments for over 200 US cities under Roosevelt's New Deal, after the passage of the Homeowners Refinancing Act of

⁷⁸ Shapiro, *The Hidden Cost of Being African American*, 87-103.

⁷⁹ Robert K. Nelson et al., "Mapping Inequality," in *American Panorama*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed January 26, 2020.

1933.⁸⁰ The HOLC's purpose was to act as a relief agency to rescue homeowners from default by issuing replacement mortgages^{81, 82} thereby quelling the foreclosure crisis and bank failures created in the wake of the 1929 stock market crash, which led to the Great Depression era that lasted into the late 1930s.⁸³

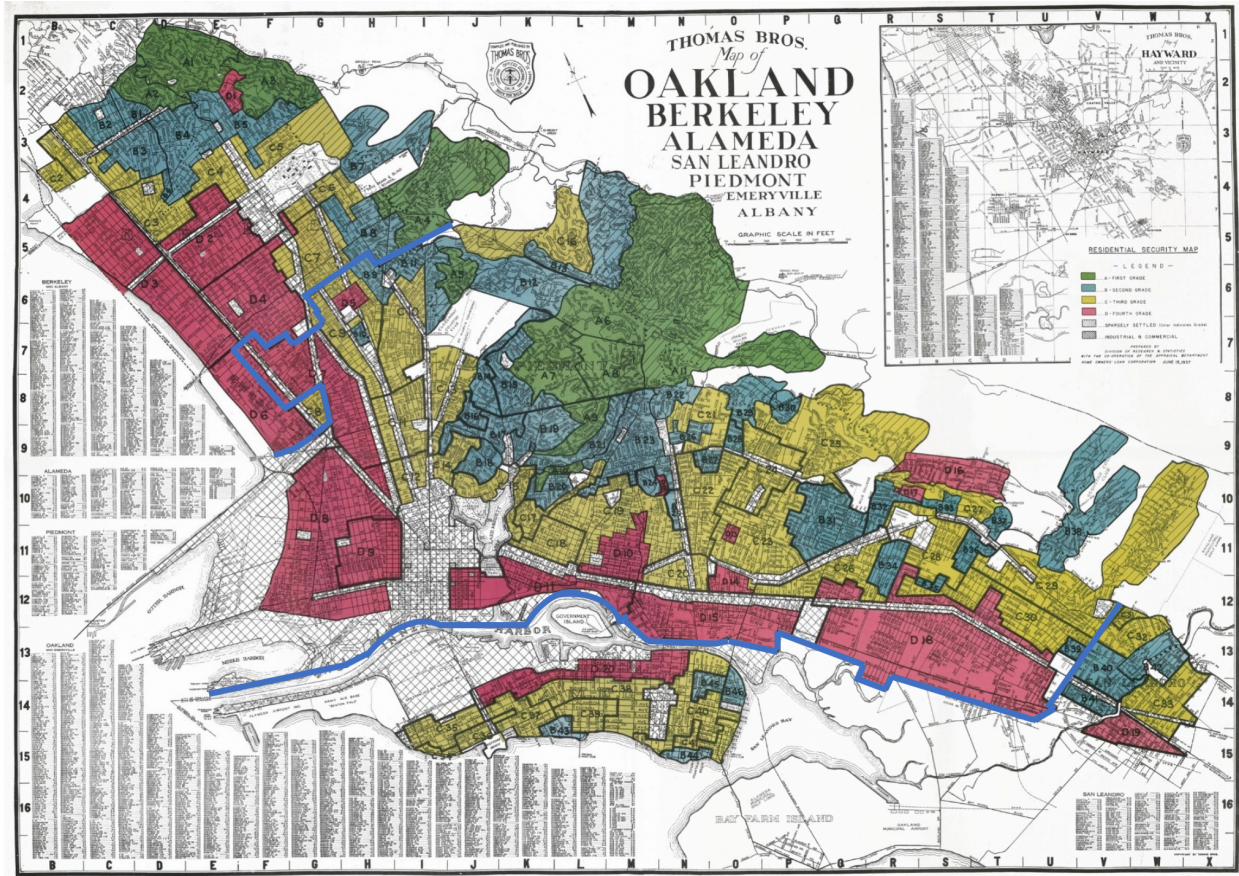


Figure 1: The Thomas Bros. the Home Owners' Loan Corporation Map of Alameda County June 15, 1937. The municipality of Oakland, CA is demarcated within the blue border.

The HOLC assigned housing tracts a loan security grade from “A” to “D” that corresponded with a color-coded system from green to red. It documented the perceived “desirability” of the neighborhood and the investment risk: green (A first grade) areas were considered best, blue (B second grade) were desirable, yellow (C third grade) were declining, and red (D fourth grade) were hazardous for investments, hence the origin of the term *redlining*. These loan security grades are further stratified using an additional “HIGH” or “LOW” designation if the housing value is considered better or worse than the average housing stock grade.

Multiple factors influenced the HOLC's standardized risk grade including: condition of the housing stock, the type of housing stock, and racial demographics identifying the “infiltration of”

⁸⁰ Peter M. Carrozzo, “A New Deal for the American Mortgage: The Home Owners’ Loan Corporation, the National Housing Act and the Birth of the National Mortgage Market,” *University of Miami Business Law Review* 17 (2009 2008): 8.

⁸¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 190-218.

⁸² Amy E. Hillier, “Redlining and the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation,” *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 4 (2003): 394–420.

⁸³ Carrozzo, “Home Owners’ Loan Corporation,” 4.

people of color, particularly African American and Asian residents and “foreign-born,” immigrants and a dedicated section for documentation is explicitly located on the NS FORM-8 area description documents. Oakland’s area description documents, NS FORM-8s, were created by City of Oakland Building Inspector’s Office and document the race/ethnicity of inhabitants, occupations of the residents, building types, predicted desirability over the next 10-15 years, and clarifying remarks which summarize the history and the current understanding of the neighborhood and its amenities and dis-amenities. Thus, these descriptions attributed value to these housing tracts both current and speculative. The HOLC evaluated the quality of the housing tract and indicated the desirability of neighborhoods while providing a system in which governments and private financiers could assess the safety of property investments for future construction projects and mortgage loans.

Oakland’s HOLC map is comprised of 69 housing tracts and is a visual representation of the 69 areas description documents. The Thomas Brother’s map (*Figure 1*) performs multiple duties: it makes visible the neighborhood tracts, land values, and the geography and topography. The map also shows the municipality’s bifurcation into differently valued landscapes with the hills predominantly demarcated in green and blue, the locations of desirable neighborhoods, and the flats in yellow and red, the neighborhoods declining in value and the least desirable neighborhoods. This map also indicates which neighborhoods and residents are worthy of investment and which are not. Although investors did not always lend in accordance with the HOLC security map risk grades, lending patterns reinforced racial segregation.⁸⁴ Moreover, the legacy of the HOLC’s risk grades evaluation system are associated with current neighborhood racial residential patterns, poverty, income inequality, tree canopy coverage, higher ambient temperatures, and diminished home value appreciation.⁸⁵ The HOLC data makes legible the policies and practices that created and formed the first political ecological era, *Red*, and establishes how the relationships between race, class, housing, and access to green space were formed at the beginning of the United States suburbanization process and during legal racial residential segregation in Oakland, CA.

Table 1: HOLC Identified Green Neighborhoods in Oakland, California.

Tract	Security Grade	Neighborhood
A-5	High Green	Claremont Pine
A-6	Green	Montclair
A-9	High Green	Lakeshore Highlands
A-10	Low Green	Excelsior District
A-11	Green	Oakmore District

All five green, first grade, neighborhoods tracts (A-5 to A-11) are located in the Oakland hills (*Table 1, Figure 1*). Within the area description documents, these neighborhood environments are touted as “good,”⁸⁶ “inspiring,”⁸⁷ and/or “unsurpassed.”⁸⁸ Out of the five tracts, two are designated as high green tracts, A-5, Claremont Pines, and A-9, Lakeshore Highlands, with

⁸⁴ Hillier, “Redlining and the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation,” 394–420.

⁸⁵ S. Namin, et al., “The Legacy of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation and the Political Ecology of Urban Trees and Air Pollution in the United States.” *Social Science & Medicine* 246 (February 1, 2020), 246.

⁸⁶ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. A-9.

⁸⁷ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. A-5.

⁸⁸ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. A-10 and Description NS Form-8, No. A-11.

Claremont “considered one of the best residential areas in East Bay.”⁸⁹ The two assigned the security grade green are the Montclair neighborhood, A-6, is recorded as a “beautiful sylvan setting, among pine and eucalyptus trees; fine view[s]...” and the Oakmore District, A-11. Green amenities extended to the 500-acre Joaquin Miller Park, acquired by the City of Oakland in 1917,⁹⁰ and Redwood Regional a 1,077-acre park. In 1934 the Regional Park District was created, “aided by a Federal appropriation of \$500,000 for the establishment of three CCC [California Conservation Corps] camps, whose workers [...] helped materially in bringing the property to its present status as one of the finest recreation centers in America.”⁹¹ Only one tract in Oakland is indicated as low green, the Excelsior District, A-10, a contributing reason for the lowered security grade is that it is “hemmed in by multiple unit zoning,”⁹² for apartments. All the Oakland hills neighborhoods are positioned far from industrial sites that are located in the flats and alongside waterways, indicated on the Thomas Brother’s Map (*Figure 1*), with the black and white hash pattern. Their designation as the only five green neighborhoods situates these residential tracts as a scarce and coveted commodity in property ownership and in green amenities.

The housing within the green tracts were “highly restricted”⁹³ by race and specifically “restricted to [White] racial occupants.”⁹⁴ By imposing race-based restrictive covenants, “obligations that purchasers of property must assume,”⁹⁵ the green tracts in the Oakland hills protected “against occupan[cy] by Negroes [Blacks] and Orientals [Asians].”⁹⁶ Not only were there racial restrictions but also class restrictions in that none of the residents in the green tract areas are relief families, those under social welfare, who are often acknowledged as either as “undesirables” or as an “infiltration threat by the lower classes” within the area description documents. These green housing tracts all benefited from Federal Housing Administration investments providing an opportunity for home ownership and wealth creation through the availability of low-cost “long term loans,” which were “cheaper than fair, ordinary rent”⁹⁷ according to the HOLC documents. Only White US born residents could reap the benefits of home ownership through government loans and in neighborhood investments and thus gained access to the surrounding green amenities.

A few security D fourth grade, red, areas were located in the hills; D-12, D-13, and D-17 and are designated as high landslide risk areas and are effectively considered uninhabitable. According to the Area Description document for tract D-12, “in 1936 one residence slid all the way down to the creek bottom. Since that time practically all houses on lots affected by the slide conditions have been removed.”⁹⁸ In tract D-13, “slides have occurred only along the western side of Ransom Street and parts of Santa Rita Street... along Harrington Street the homes are small and cheap... regardless of slide conditions, loans in this area should be made with great caution and upon very restricted terms, if at all.”⁹⁹ The D-17 tract form cautions that “loans should be carefully supervised in this area. Moreover, no new loan should be made without a very careful engineering inspection of the land and terrain.”¹⁰⁰ D-16 is the only fourth grade tract in the Oakland hills that

⁸⁹ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. A-5.

⁹⁰ City of Oakland, “History of Oakland Parks and Recreation.”

⁹¹ G.A. Cummings and E.S. Pladwell, *Oakland...A History* (Oakland: The Grant D. Miller Mortuaries, Inc, 1942), 108.

⁹² Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. A-5.

⁹³ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. A-6.

⁹⁴ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. A-10.

⁹⁵ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 78.

⁹⁶ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. A-5.

⁹⁷ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. A-6.

⁹⁸ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-12.

⁹⁹ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-13.

¹⁰⁰ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-17.

was not indicated as a slide area. Although recognized for its “excellent climate,” and as “well located” and zoned for single residential,” D-16’s tract is recorded as a “fairly new district” with a “poor reputation.”¹⁰¹ This particular tract was rocked by a scandal involving “several city officials” who mismanaged bonds which led to “heavy property assessments and the subsequent loss of many lots and homes” due to foreclosures during the depression.¹⁰² Under clarifying marks for tract D-16, it is also said that, “the section east of this reservoir is sparsely settled and gives promise of developing into a higher grade area,”¹⁰³ and acknowledging the potential for this area in the future.

The redlined (Grade D) neighborhoods, visibly represented in red on the Thomas Brother’s Map, (*Figure 1*) are all located in the flatlands of Oakland except the four tracts addressed above (D-12, D-13, D-16, and D-17). These red tracts are identified as hazardous for investments and are documented as the least desirable housing stock consisting of mostly multi-family units or apartments, old housing, and housing of low quality. Moreover, redlined neighborhoods were located close to manufacturing plants and factories and in areas zoned for industry, the main driver of Oakland’s economy at the time. Another major economy was the west coast military industrial complex which played a pivotal role Oakland’s population growth between 1939 to 1945 (*Figure 2*).¹⁰⁴ Although the HOLC preceded the influx of both White and Black WWII laborers from the South to Oakland, it worked to capture and contain African American populations within the redlined flatlands of the municipality unlike their White counterparts.

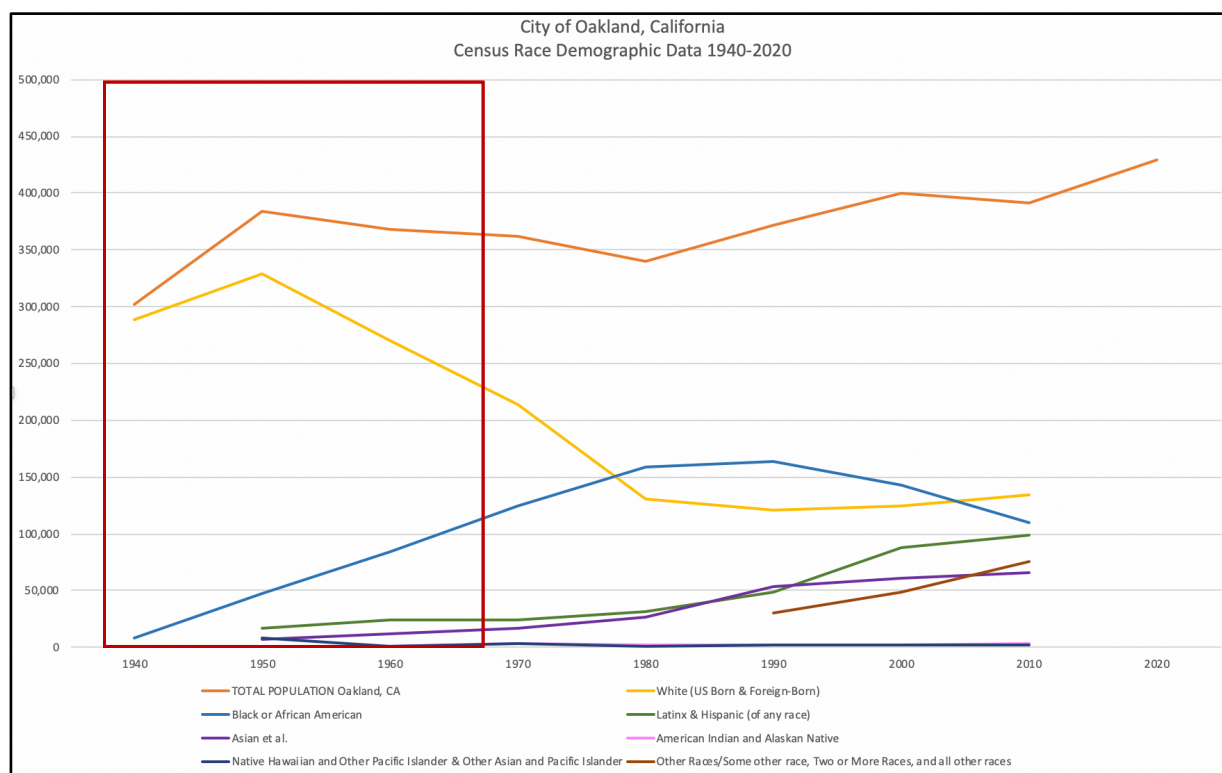


Figure 2: US Census Demographic Data for Oakland, CA 1940-2010 and projected population for 2020. The red rectangle identifies the Red Political Ecological Era, 1937-1968.

¹⁰¹ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-16, 2.

¹⁰² Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-16, 2.

¹⁰³ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-16, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Beth Bagwell, *Oakland: The Story of a City Second Edition*, (Oakland: Oakland Heritage Alliance, 2012), 232-242.

Table 2: *HOLC Red Neighborhoods in Oakland, California.*

Tract	Security Grade	Neighborhood
D-5	Red	North Oakland Berkeley Border
D-7	Red	West Oakland
D-8	Red	West Oakland
D-9	Red	West Oakland
D-10	Red	East Oakland/San Antonio
D-11	Red	Downtown/Chinatown
D-14	Red	East Oakland/ Fruitvale
D-15	Red	East Oakland/ Antonio-Fruitvale
D-18	Red	East Oakland/ Deep East Oakland

The hills and flats value designation was entrenched by legal race-based housing practices of restrictive covenants that organized and formed the housing market, identifying the housing type, the quality of the housing stock, the surrounding environmental amenities, and dictating where residents lived based on race, class, and citizenship. Table 2 shows that 9 tracts were designated as D-fourth grade, red, in the Oakland flats (D-5 to D-11, D-14, D-15, and D-18). D-6 is in the neighboring municipality of Emeryville. Four of the tracts (D-7, D-8, D-15, and D-18) are described as within “walking distance to local industry [...] for laborers,” which is recorded under the “favorable influences” section of the area description documents.¹⁰⁵ The red D tracts reveal the intersection of economic advantages through wage work and environmental disadvantages among housing options for African American and Asian residents. As early as 1937, tract D-7 in West Oakland is described as having “odors from factories,” as well as consisting of “cheap older homes.”¹⁰⁶ While the NS FORM-8 for tract D-8 also documents “odor from bay flats; smoke and grime from railroad shops and local industry,” noting that “City taxes [were] too high in proportion to income and value” of the homes, “old type houses and cottages, [with] tenement tendencies,” the residents are said to be a “heterogeneous mixture of all races.”¹⁰⁷ Tract D-9, also in West Oakland, is described similarly: the neighborhood is “run down in appearance” with “high city taxes in proportion to value of property” and an “infiltration of Negroes [Blacks], Orientals [Asians], etc.”¹⁰⁸ In the East Oakland/San Antonio-Fruitvale Area tract D-15, the form records “odors from industries” along with “old two-story homes and old one-story cottages (latter predominating),” a “predominance of foreign inhabitants” with an “infiltration of Negroes [Blacks] and Orientals [Asian];” many relief families are also acknowledged.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, this tract “lies below east Fourteenth Street (below the tracks) and is poorly regarded” and a “semi-slum area.”¹¹⁰ Lastly, tract D-11 is in the Chinatown/Downtown area, with a “predominance of Orientals [Asians];” it is recorded as having “no restrictions” in regards to racial residential

¹⁰⁵ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-15.

¹⁰⁶ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-7.

¹⁰⁷ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-8.

¹⁰⁸ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-9.

¹⁰⁹ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-19.

¹¹⁰ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-19.

stipulations and is designated as light industrial, “zoned for multiple dwellings.”¹¹¹ The red neighborhoods are labeled as such due to their proximity to the industrial sector and the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge which opened to traffic “in November, 1936, [and] marked the dawn of a new era in transportation between the two cities.”¹¹² The NS FORM-8 area description document describe tract D-15 by stating:

The Owens Illinois Glass Company is now completing one of the largest and most modern glass factories in America near the estuary (Tidal Canal) between High Street and Fruitvale Avenue. When completed, it will employ from fifteen hundred to two thousand workmen. This will create a demand for housing in the district and will incidentally cause an increase of population. Rentals are out of proportion to sale values in this area. Splendidly situated for a "slum clearance" project.¹¹³

The policies and practices that designated redlined neighborhoods as hazardous for investment and contained people of color within these neighborhoods is foundational to understanding Oakland’s particular brand of structural racism that divided the hills and the flats by race and class. Moreover, these policies and practices disproportionately exposed the communities in flats to environmental harms. Low-income, Black, and Asian populations were contained in the least desirable environments with the most derelict housing stock and then exposed to industrial contaminants which most likely caused diminished health outcomes and/or premature death.¹¹⁴ As the second migration of African Americans moved from the South to the West in search of jobs in the WWII industry and later as African American soldiers returned with G.I. Bills, they were forced into redlined neighborhoods and excluded from green housing tracts and effectively prevented from benefiting from federal loans and funds provided by the G.I. Bill and FHA low-interest home mortgages.¹¹⁵ They were denied quality housing and a healthy environment. Legal segregation supported the policies of HOLC, FHA, and the creation of race-based restrictive covenant practices, creating further housing and environmental disparities between communities of color and White residents. Moreover, these laws, policies, and practices structured the racial spatiality in Oakland in which a majority White population reside in the hills with ample and healthy green spaces and amenities while residents of color in the flats suffered the harms of environmental pollution and lack of access to the same healthy green environments. None of the red tracts in the flats of Oakland document any environmental amenities; their proximity to downtown, industry, and the Bay Bridge are the only “favorable” attributes documented for these redlined neighborhoods.

The post-World War II suburbanization process was accompanied by a bundle of goods and amenities that created new land-uses and consumer practices and ultimately produced a new and distinct middle-class culture outside of urban metropolitan areas within the US. The single-family house and the automobile became staples and status symbols of White middle-class life within the suburbs.¹¹⁶ Nationally and within Oakland, suburbanization produced new landscapes with vastly different political, social, and economical expectations than the urban: the suburban included an “intensified commercialization of nature for leisure, and an insular suburban consumer

¹¹¹ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-11.

¹¹² Cummings and Pladwell, *Oakland...A History*, 110.

¹¹³ Oakland, CA Area Description NS Form-8, No. D-15.

¹¹⁴ Alameda County Data Sharing Initiative, “Persistent Poverty in Alameda County,” January 9, 2020.

¹¹⁵ Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White*, 113-141.

¹¹⁶ Paul Robbins, *Lawn People: How Grass, Weeds, and Chemicals Make Us Who We Are*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 26.

culture.”¹¹⁷ The FHA provided Whites a path to homeownership and granted millions of White Americans their very own private recreational green space, the yard.¹¹⁸

The front yard is bundled up in expressions of patriotism, social status, and social conformity, the American backyard is often a secluded, fenced in, private space for the owner-class to engage with their very own nature how they saw fit.¹¹⁹ The backyard is a privatized green space for personalized enjoyment, afforded by homeownership. It created new outdoor-living practices and a backyard culture. The backyard was coined as the outdoor living room in Better Homes and Gardens and an integral part of the “the good life” for Californians in the 1950s.¹²⁰ The post-WWII military industrial complex and its supporting manufacturers had an overaccumulation of post-war surplus materials “like aluminum and concrete [which] pivoted production for the consumer market following the war, with new products catering to suburban lifestyle. Everything from aluminum grill spatulas and tongs, patio furniture, and colorful and tough outdoor fabrics readily available to the average consumer. [The iconic shape of the Weber charcoal grill is based on the design of marine buoys.]”¹²¹ As new homeowners enjoyed backyards within the suburbs, urban areas and particularly redlined neighborhood parks were neglected by the municipal government.

African Americans living in redlined urban neighborhoods experienced dire conditions. Housing was often dilapidated, according to the 1950s census: “15,000 units were substandard, over 3500 hundred unfit for repair, some houses were unlisted by the city and were illegally constructed [...] houses have inadequate and decrepit plumbing dangerous to health [...] some have no inside sanitary facilities.”¹²² Restricted from having access to the same environmental amenities, the redlined neighborhoods in the flats of Oakland became both container for and contaminator of African Americans, Asians, and other low-income residents, often people of color. Despite the poverty in some of these redlined neighborhoods, some residents were able to thrive, becoming homeowners and operate businesses in service to their communities.¹²³

In addition, African Americans were often denied access to the “great outdoors,” particularly when national parks and regional park systems were legally segregated, prior to 1964 Civil Rights Act.^{124, 125} Facing barriers to parks outside the city and often unable to have their own private backyards, African Americans residents and communities mostly relied on urban public parks as their primary source for recreation and access to green space. By 1942, Oakland had approximately 48 public parks and playgrounds.¹²⁶ De Fremery Park and Recreation Center in West Oakland was the only African American serving public park. De Fremery park was formerly the estate of Jacobus (James) de Fremery and Virginie De Fremery, the daughter of a formerly enslaved Black woman.¹²⁷ The estate was purchased by the City of Oakland in 1907 and made into a public park and the first municipal playground in 1910.¹²⁸ In 1944 a social hall was constructed

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Carney, “Suburbanizing Nature and Naturalizing Suburbanites: Outdoor-Living Culture and Landscapes of Growth,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 38 (Winter 2007): 479.

¹¹⁸ Robbins, *Lawn People*, 30.

¹¹⁹ Carney, “Suburbanizing Nature and Naturalizing Suburbanites,” 477-500.

¹²⁰ Carney, “Suburbanizing Nature and Naturalizing Suburbanites,” 477-500.

¹²¹ Amelia Fogarty, “The American Backyard as We Know It Developed after World War II,” *Smithsonian Insider*, May 22, 2018.

¹²² City of Oakland, “Our City Oakland - 1950’s Urban Renewal & Tour of an American City,” YouTube. Vintage City of Oakland Footage, May 16, 2016.

¹²³ Self, *American Babylon*, 46-60.

¹²⁴ Carolyn Merchant, “Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History,” *Environmental History* 8 (2003): 385.

¹²⁵ Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces*, 32-50.

¹²⁶ Cummings and Pladwell, *Oakland...A History*, 113.

¹²⁷ YHLA Architects, “Exterior Rehabilitation Property Assessment Report May 1, 2014.” Exterior Rehabilitation Property Assessment Report May 1, 2014 presented at the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, Oakland, CA, May 12, 2014.

¹²⁸ City of Oakland, “History of Oakland Parks and Recreation.”

at De Fremery when the United Service Organization (USO) expanded the recreation center,¹²⁹ and it became the sole recreational space for Black USO officers to congregate.¹³⁰ Since WWII, De Fremery has been a beloved park for recreation by the surrounding African American community.

New federal and regional transportation projects in service to suburbanites targeted Oakland's redlined neighborhoods for demolition; these included the construction of the highway system in the 1950s and the creation of the Bay Area Rapid Transit system a decade later.¹³¹ The freeway construction contributed to new public parks 20 years later, albeit parks in areas with dangerous air quality, as will be discussed in the next section. HOLC devalued the flats and undervalued their residents and created the conditions in which the freeway system could be constructed and bifurcate redlined neighborhoods, the cheapest land with a powerless constituency.¹³² In so doing, White suburbanites were bestowed new transportation infrastructure through the devaluation and dispossession of people of color from their homes, properties, and businesses.

Starting in the 1940s, the Federal Freeway Administration began drawing plans for constructing the interstate system.¹³³ Five freeways in Oakland, I-880, I-980, I-580, I-80 and the Cypress Viaduct, were constructed. Vast areas in West Oakland, Downtown Chinatown, and East Oakland neighborhoods were demolished by the freeway construction. Homes and businesses were devalued further by the state using the power of eminent domain; they were razed to make way for the freeways. The residents who remained after the freeway construction were exposed to new environmental harms from air pollution by freeway emissions. These residents were walled off by the freeway's massive structures that divided their neighborhoods, obstructed their mobility, and made it more difficult to access their environmental amenities, including parks.¹³⁴

Despite the 1968 Fair Housing Act ending the practices of redlining and legal race-based housing discrimination, the formerly redlined neighborhoods, like West Oakland, were left entangled in a maze of freeways and/or existing next to them. The Cypress freeway, alone, uprooted 600 families and dozens of business.¹³⁵ The total number of homes, properties, and business that were demolished and the dispossession incurred by redlined communities of color by acts of legal, race-based, predatory practices to massive transportation construction is impossible to calculate. The bundle of laws, policies, and practices imposed by federal government, state, and municipality excluded residents of color from obtaining FHA loans, contained these residents in environmentally compromised redlined neighborhoods, devalued their communities, their neighborhoods, and dispossessed them of their property, homes, and businesses to construct a transportation system. White suburban residents were the beneficiaries of freeways and shorter commutes. Redlining's race-based housing policies and practices from the Red political ecological era of 1937-1968 continues to impact the health and well-being people of color and particularly African American residents in West Oakland who reside today in these formerly redlined neighborhoods.¹³⁶

¹²⁹ Dorothy W Pitts, *A Special Place for Special People: The Defremery Story* (New York: Better Communications, 1993).

¹³⁰ Pitts, *A Special Place for Special People*.

¹³¹ Robert O Self. *American Babylon*, 135-176.

¹³² Robert O Self. *American Babylon*, 135-176.

¹³³ Robert O Self. *American Babylon*, 135-176.

¹³⁴ Joseph A. Rodriguez, "Rapid Transit and Community Power: West Oakland Residents Confront BART." *Antipode* December 12, 2002.

¹³⁵ "Project Planning, Development, Right of Way; Public Involvement; Mitigation and Enhancement Activities," California Department of Transportation, 2001.

¹³⁶ Anthony L. Nardone et al, "Associations between Historical Residential Redlining and Current Age-Adjusted Rates of Emergency Department Visits Due to Asthma across Eight Cities in California: An Ecological Study," *The Lancet Planetary Health* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): e24-31.

The Black Political Ecological Era, 1977-1999

The political ecological era identified as Black (1977-1999) encompasses Oakland's post-Civil Rights reconfiguration as a *Chocolate City*¹³⁷, an African American plurality with neighboring White suburban municipalities. The term chocolate city originated from the 1975 Parliament album and song also entitled "Chocolate City" which refers to the geographic, demographic, and migratory shifts produced by the post-WWII suburbanization that had formed a new racialized and classed spatiality, a "chocolate city with vanilla suburbs."¹³⁸ A chocolate city also refers to municipalities in which positions of power, specifically the office of the mayor, are held by African-American/Black leadership.¹³⁹ Between 1968 and 1980, urban metropolitan governments began voting in their first black mayors including Oakland. Lionel Wilson served three terms in office from 1977-1991, followed by Elihu Harris, the second Black mayor, who served until 1999 after which Jerry Brown became Oakland's first White mayor in more than two decades. During the Black era, 1977-1999, African American communities in Oakland were still reeling from the loss of their homes by freeway construction; many still lived in the abhorrent housing conditions that remained. The lack of industrial jobs due to suburban relocations, exclusion from gainful employment, and poverty compounded by police brutality and racism created the economic, political, and social conditions which begat the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) with Oakland becoming the epicenter of the Black Power Movement in the 1970s.^{140,141} The BPP emerged out of the economic neglect and disinvestment experienced by many cities impacted by white flight. Despite African American leadership in elected office and community organizations, and despite the increasing African American majority in Oakland, the Black era sustained the racialized patterns of the Red era through new processes, as I discuss further below.

According to the 1960 US Census, Oakland's population was 86% White and 12% Black, with the remaining residents classified as other (a combination of Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian, and populations) (*Figure 3*). By the 1970s, Oakland's White population fell to 58% with the Black population increasing to 35%, with an overall population loss of approximately 6000 residents.¹⁴² Between 1970 and 1980, there was an overall population loss of ~22,224, and an African American gain of ~34,641 residents,¹⁴³ and a White population loss of ~82,385, the last sharp decline from white flight. Between 1980 and 1990, the African American population steadily increased, establishing a plurality of 47% in 1990 marking the largest African American population calculated by the US Census in Oakland's history.

¹³⁷ Marcus Anthony Hunter and Zandria Robinson, *Chocolate Cities: The Black Map of American Life*. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), ix-xiii.

¹³⁸ Parliament, *Chocolate City*, Vinyl. Casablanca, 1975.

¹³⁹ Parliament. *Chocolate City*, Vinyl. Casablanca, 1975.

¹⁴⁰ Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

¹⁴¹ Emory Douglas, *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas* (New York: Random House Incorporated, 2007).

¹⁴² US Census Bureau, "Census.Gov," Census.gov, n.d.

¹⁴³ US Census Bureau, "Census.Gov," Census.gov, n.d.

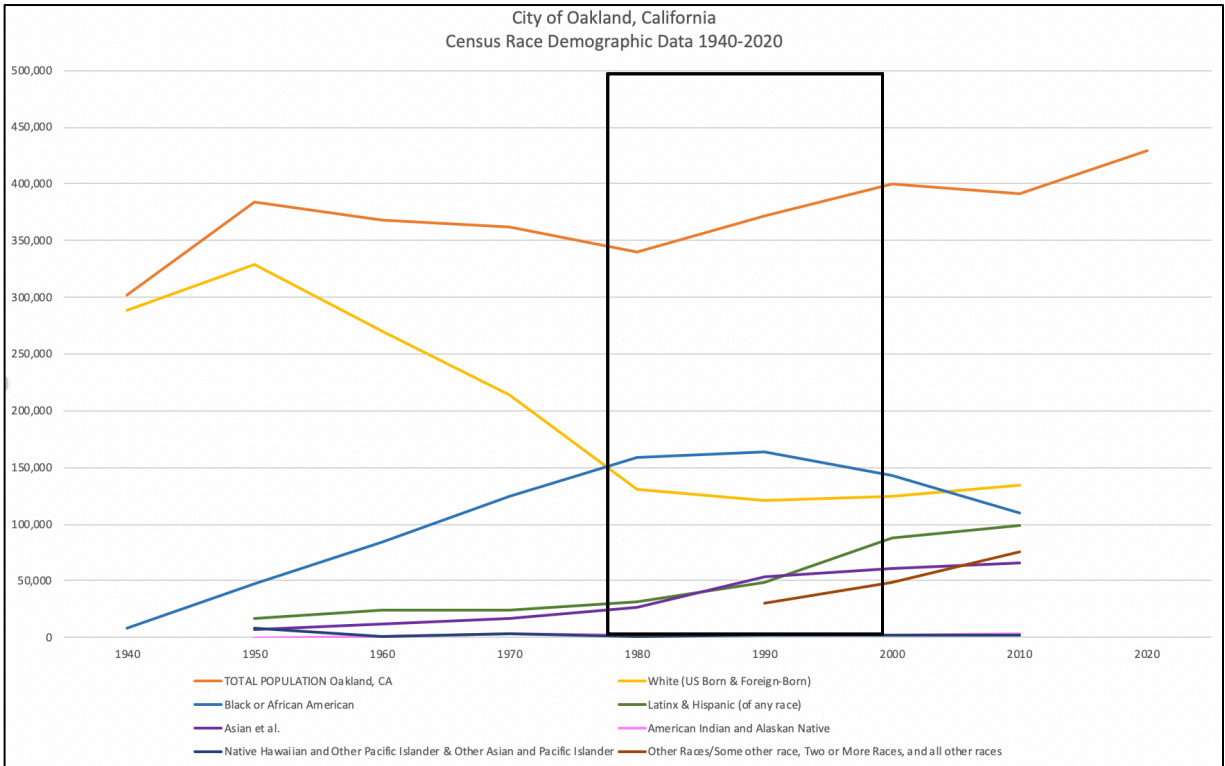


Figure 3: US Census Demographic Data for Oakland, CA 1940-2010 and projected population for 2020. The black rectangle demarcates the Black Political Ecological Era, 1977-1999.

The 1970s saw the deindustrialization process in which the US “economy underwent a transition from the world’s leading industrial producer to a so-called post-industrial society.”¹⁴⁴ Oakland, like many US industrial cities, saw a decline in manufacturing with many of these jobs relocating to the suburbs and being outsourced to locations overseas.¹⁴⁵ The surrounding East Bay municipal suburbs “garnered most of Alameda’s County’s growth” as property costs were far less expensive which incentivized plant relocations.¹⁴⁶ The collapse of the manufacturing industry, property taxation shifts, and a state government in financial crisis began to further underfund the municipality into the 1980s.¹⁴⁷

In 1978, Californians voted in Proposition 13, the “People’s Initiative to Limit Property Taxation,” “reducing property tax rates on homes, business, and farms by 57%.”¹⁴⁸ Prop 13 placed a cap on property taxes; with real estate property taxes not to exceed 2% per year of the full cash value of the property as long as the property was not sold.¹⁴⁹ Concurrently, the shift away from federal and state funding of local governments required cities “to fund more local services and to find innovative ways of supporting their vulnerable communities.”¹⁵⁰ Although the long-term impacts of Prop13 were not fully anticipated, the result was the eventual and severe defunding of

¹⁴⁴ Jack Cody, “California’s Budget Crisis: A Historical Overview,” February 28, 2011.

¹⁴⁵ Self, *American Babylon*, 171.

¹⁴⁶ Self, *American Babylon*, 171.

¹⁴⁷ Jack Cody, “California’s Budget Crisis: A Historical Overview,” February 28, 2011.

¹⁴⁸ What is Proposition 13? California Tax Data, n.d.

¹⁴⁹ What is Proposition 13? California Tax Data, n.d.

¹⁵⁰ Mark Davidson, and Kevin Ward, “Picking up the Pieces: Austerity Urbanism, California and Fiscal Crisis,” *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 2, no. 7 (December 26, 2013): 86.

public goods including schools, libraries, and parks.¹⁵¹ This proposition benefited homeowners and hurt state, county, and municipal governments, setting the stage for a slippery slope into the privatization of public goods through the restructuring of taxes.

Oakland also “saw a second wave of new parks, most associated with the freeway construction” in the 1970s.”¹⁵² The remaining undeveloped lands from freeway construction were acquired and used as sites for park creation. While “the number of city parks increased dramatically during this period, [the] total park acreage increased only slightly.”¹⁵³ Both new and historical parks within these neighborhoods were now situated near freeways, exposing these communities to a new set of environmental harms from traffic-related air pollution, not only where they lived but also where they played.

The Health Effects Institute Panel on the Health Effects of Traffic-Related Air Pollution conducted a survey that found traffic-related air pollution has an “exposure zone within a range of up to 300 to 500 meters from a highway or a major road.”¹⁵⁴ Similarly, the Mayo Clinic placed the highest pollution levels 400 meters from a road and advises to “avoid these kinds of areas when exercising.”¹⁵⁵ Out of the 25 parks located in formerly redlined areas in of West Oakland, Chinatown, and East Oakland today, most are located within the exposure zone of freeways. Park distances from freeways in the formerly redlined neighborhood were measured via google earth and then mapped (*see Figures 4, 5, and 6 below*).

West Oakland

Thirteen parks are located in West Oakland, and six were within 500 meters of the Cypress Freeway Viaduct prior to 1989: Willow Park, Ramondi Park, De Fremery Park, Wade John Park, Popular, and Lowell Park (*Figure 4*). Of these six parks, three, De Fremery Park, Ramondi Park, and Willow Park existed prior to freeway construction while Popular, Lowell Park, and Wade Johnson Park were acquired during and after the freeway construction and dedicated as municipal parks and/or recreation centers in 1960, 1974, and 1980.

De Fremery Park is located between 172-485 meters away from the Cypress Freeway and Ramondi Park is ~149-428 meters away. These two parks, the oldest in West Oakland, are situated on opposite sides of and very close to the freeway. Willow Park, located within 404-465 meters of the Cypress freeway prior to 1989, was a scrap yard during World War II before it was turned into a public park.¹⁵⁶ Post freeway construction, the air quality of these parks and surrounding neighborhoods was again compromised and also compounded by vehicle emissions that added to the already present industrial pollution. Parks like Popular, Lowell Park, and Wade Johnson Park where all established during and along-side freeway construction. While all six of these parks were relieved from the freeway-based car emissions from the Cypress Viaduct freeway after its collapse in 1989, all the parks except for De Fremery, Wade Johnson Park, and McClymonds Mini-Park are still in the air pollution exposure zone due to the four remaining freeways that encircle West Oakland.

¹⁵¹ Jeffrey I. Chapman, “Proposition 13: Some Unintended Consequences,” Sacramento, California: Commissioned by PPIC for the Tenth Annual Envisioning California Conference, September 24, 1998, 9.

¹⁵² “City of Oakland Open Space Conservation and Recreation: An Element of the Oakland General Plan,” City of Oakland, June 1996, 4-3.

¹⁵³ City of Oakland Open Space Conservation and Recreation: An Element of the Oakland General Plan,” City of Oakland, June 1996, 4-3 - 4-4.

¹⁵⁴ Traffic-Related Air Pollution: A Critical Review of the Literature on Emissions, Exposure, and Health Effects,” Special Report 17. Health Effects Institute, January 2010.

¹⁵⁵ Edward Laskowski M.D., “Does Air Pollution Make Outdoor Exercise Risky? What If You Have Asthma or Another Health Problem?” Mayo Clinic.

¹⁵⁶ “Oakland, California Turns a Run-Down, Contaminated Area into a Recreational Centerpiece,” Environmental Protection Agency, February 2009.

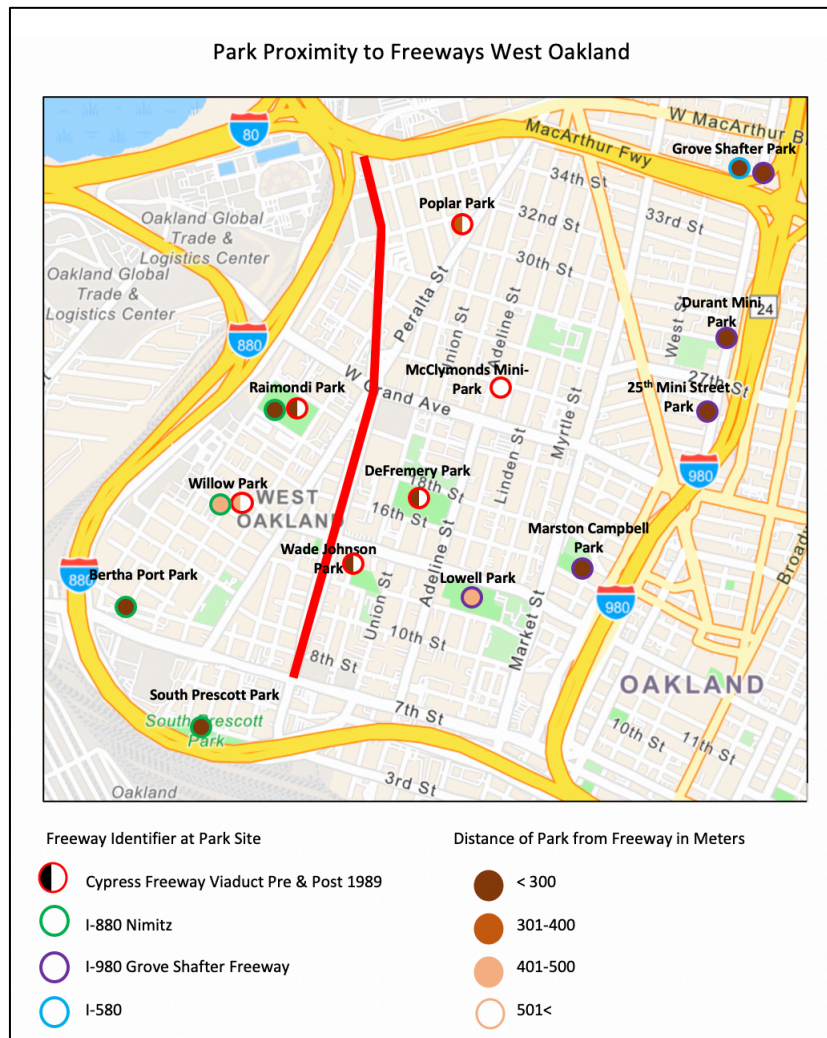


Figure 4: West Oakland Neighbor & Park Locations and Distance from Freeways. The red line demarcates the location of the Cypress Street Viaduct.

Chinatown/Downtown

The pattern of parks located within freeway emissions exposure zones, in the formerly redlined neighborhoods in the Oakland flats, is echoed in the Chinatown/Downtown district. All five parks in the Chinatown/Downtown area are within a 500-meter range of one or more freeways (Figure 5). The Chinese Garden is adjacent to the I-880 freeway and Madison Square is located within ~300 meters. Lincoln Square is within 400 meters of the I-880 and is positioned the furthest away from the freeways out of the five parks. Both Jefferson Square Park and Lafayette Square are located within a double exposure zone from the I-880 and I-980 freeways. Jefferson Park is with 300 meters of both the I-880 and the I-980 freeways, while Lafayette Square is located within 300 meters of the I-980 and ~400 meters away from the I-880 freeways.

Harrison Square/The Chinese Garden, Jefferson Square, Lafayette Square, Lincoln Square Park, and Madison Square are the five remaining original “seven squares established at the time

of Oakland’s incorporation.”¹⁵⁷ They were dedicated in 1853 and designed by Julius Kellerberger, a civil engineer who “mapped out and named the streets” for the new municipality established in 1852.¹⁵⁸ These parks are predominantly Asian serving recreational spaces, especially Lincoln Square Park which has one of the most well used recreation centers, it is the heart of Chinatown, and would be better described as a community center. Recreational areas like Madison Park have been longtime multigenerational spaces in which Asian communities and particularly Chinese Americans and immigrants have practiced Tai Chi in large numbers and on a regular basis, using this park for communal connection, exercise, and cultural practices.¹⁵⁹

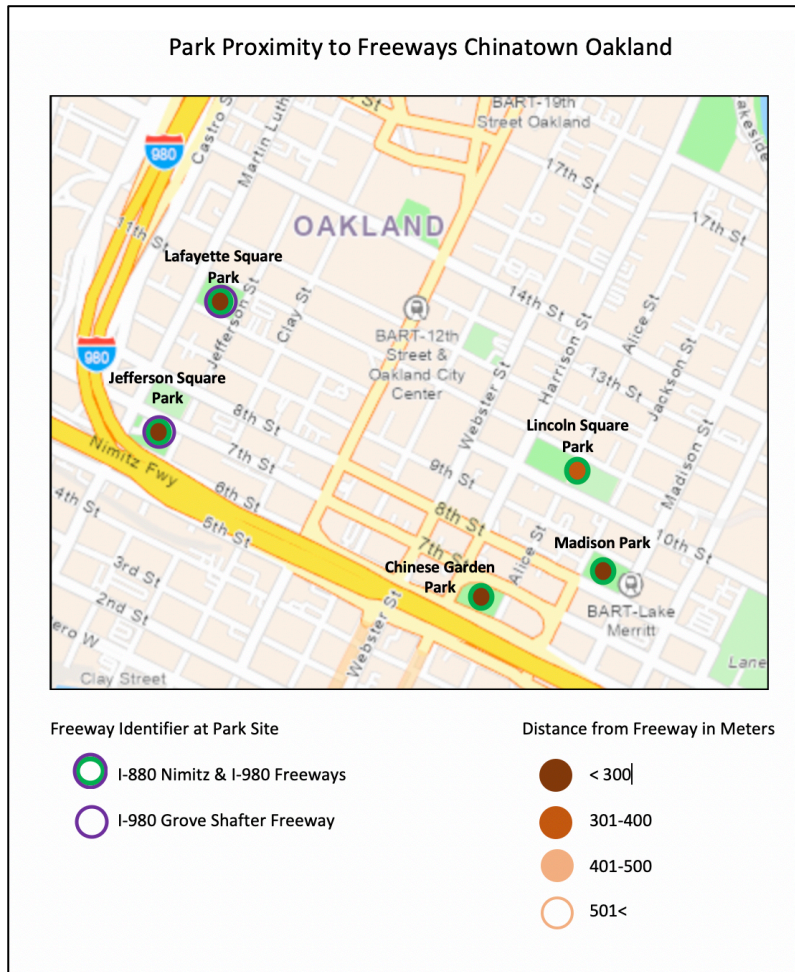


Figure 5: Chinatown Neighborhood Park Locations and Distance from Freeways.

East Oakland

East Oakland in particular is a park-poor area and lacking in overall green spaces. This pattern of environmental municipal neglect can be traced in all the formerly redlined neighborhoods in Oakland. Of the seven public parks located in formerly redlined areas of the vast area designated as East Oakland, which encompassing all the neighborhoods in the flatlands east

¹⁵⁷“City of Oakland Open Space Conservation and Recreation: An Element of the Oakland General Plan Volume 2—Technical Appendices Inventory of Park Conditions,” City of Oakland, June 1996.

¹⁵⁸ Friends of Lincoln Square Park, “Lincoln Square Park Timeline.”

¹⁵⁹ Tim Hussin, “Nature in Harmony: Tai Chi at Madison Square Park,” SFChronicle.com, March 5, 2016.

of Lake Merritt, three are located more than 500 meters away from the I-880's hazardous air exposure zone: Clinton Square, Garfield Park, and Josie del la Cruz Park (Figure 6). The remaining four are within the car emission danger zone: Vantage Point Park, William "Bill" Patterson Park (Brookfield Park), and Columbia Gardens are located with 300 meters of the freeway while Franklin Recreation Center and San Antonio Park are situated between 400-500 meters away. William "Bill" Patterson Park and Columbia Gardens were dedicated in 1968 and 1970 after freeway construction.

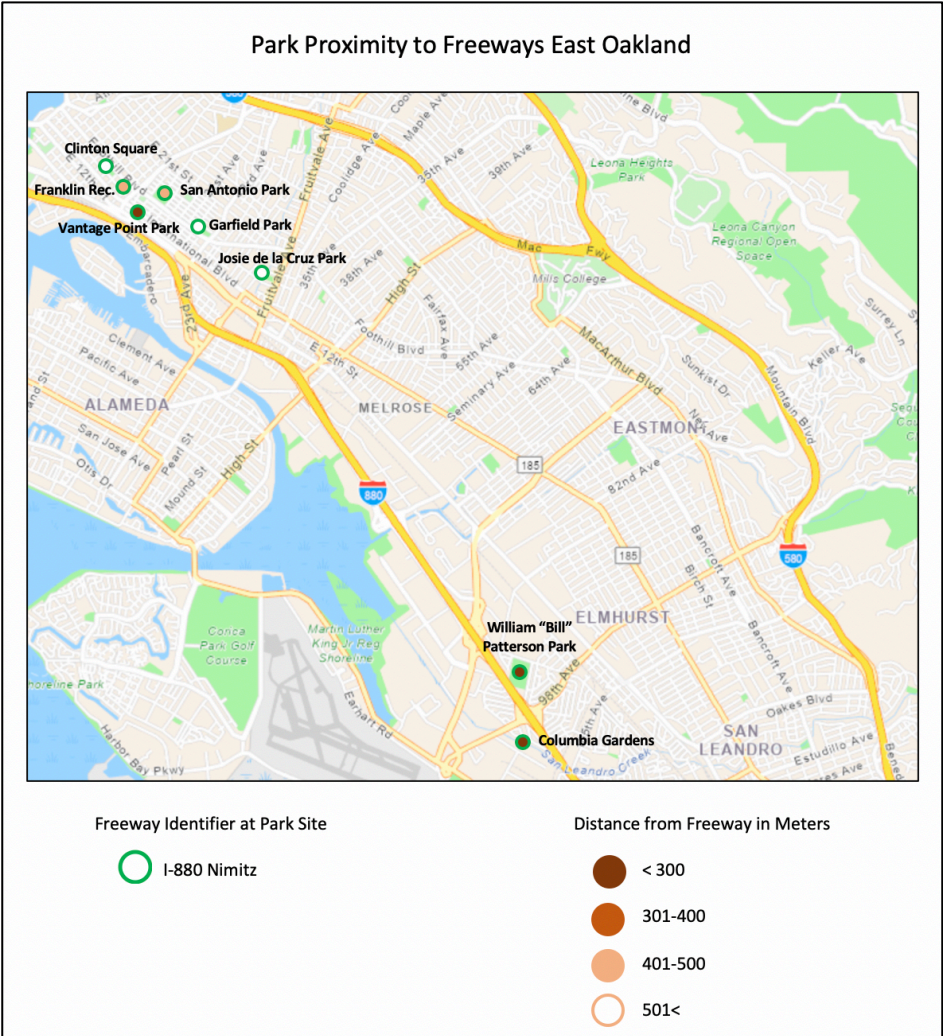


Figure 6: East Oakland Park Locations and Distance from Freeways.

These formerly redlined neighborhoods have incurred a new set of environmental harms due to the freeway construction projects of the 1950s through the 1980s. More parks were created, and more recreational spaces were provided after the 1964 Civil Rights Act ended legal segregation in public spaces, thus allowing more access to public green spaces for communities of color. Yet, the new municipal parks, in formerly redlined neighborhoods, did not mitigate the green space deficit between the flats and hills. These communities did not obtain comparable green spaces to the White residents in the hills, and the freeways nullified some of the environmental gains from these parks. The predominantly White residents in the Oakland Hills still lived in a suburban

aesthetic of tree-lined streets, thick with green spaces, and nestled among the public 500-acre Joaquin Miller Park described as “urban wildlands”¹⁶⁰ and the 1,830-acre Redwood Regional Park said to be “peaceful groves.”¹⁶¹ Despite the Civil Rights Acts and increasing Black political power during this era (1977-1999), the spatiality of race in Oakland stayed consistent from 1937-2010 (Figure 7 and 8). White residents continue to be the racial majority in the hills and African American, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian residents have remained in the flats.

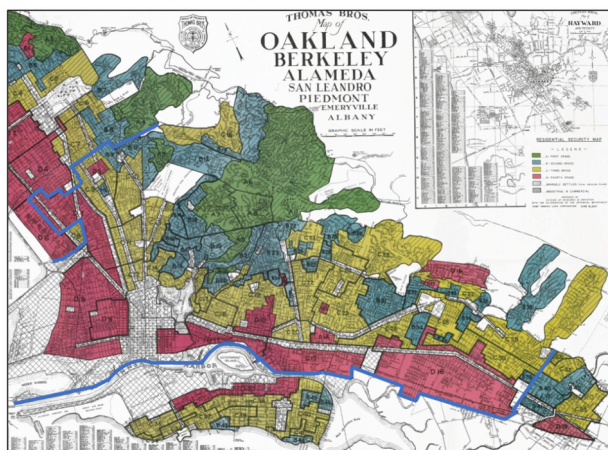


Figure 7: Thomas Brother’s HOLC Map 1937.

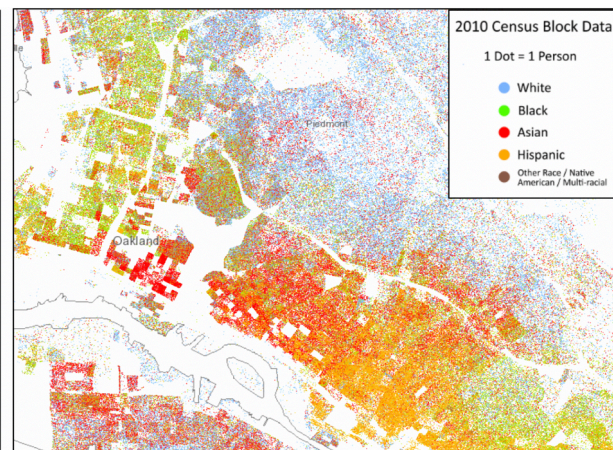


Image 8: 2010 Census Racial Dot Map.¹⁶²

Between 1990 and 2000, the African American population of Oakland began to steadily decline (Figure 3), which can be attributed to two housing shifts: 1) African Americans moving to the suburbs outside of Oakland and back to the South in what has been called black flight¹⁶³ and 2) the dismantling of public housing. The latter happened when a bundle of housing policies and environmental policies were adopted, created, and enacted starting in 1992 during Oakland’s Black political ecological era.

The City of Oakland began to erode the amount of affordable and low-income housing stock while simultaneously creating the foundation in which Oakland (re)envisioned itself as a green city. The decline of low-income brick and mortar federally funded housing facilities coincides with Oakland’s adoption and implementation of its environmental agenda. In 1996 and 1998, the City of Oakland adopted two environmental initiatives that were modeled from the 1992 Earth Summit and the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, starting its alliance with the UN and other global cities fighting climate change. Resolution No. 72809 authorized “the City of Oakland to join the Cities for Climate Protection Campaign and to apply to the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives,”¹⁶⁴ (ICLEI) and to “provide the City with information and assistance in developing a local climate protection action plan that will reduce energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions and provide tangible community benefits.”¹⁶⁵ Resolution No. 74678 authorized “the

¹⁶⁰ City of Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development, “Joaquin Miller Park.”

¹⁶¹ East Bay Regional Park District, “Reinhardt Redwood Regional Park.”

¹⁶² Dustin A. Cable, “Demographics Research Group,” University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, 2017.

¹⁶³ “Oakland’s Black Flight.” *KQED*. San Francisco, July 7, 2011.

¹⁶⁴ “Oakland City Council Resolution No. 72809 C.M.S.,” City of Oakland, July 23, 1996.

¹⁶⁵ “Oakland City Council Resolution No. 72809 C.M.S.,” City of Oakland, July 23, 1996.

City of Oakland to adopt part three of the ‘City of Oakland sustainability Development Initiative,’¹⁶⁶ which made the following policy recommendations:

implement a sustainable development strategy as an overarching principal guiding Oakland’s economic development; like the sustainable economic development strategy to a comprehensive approach to job training and continuing education; encourage affordable in-fill housing, mixed used development, and sustainable building practices; establish an on-going process of community participation/evaluation by community organizations, businesses, unions, and education institutions – using sustainable community development as a way to build the strengths of Oakland’s people [...].¹⁶⁷

Changes in housing policies in 1992 eroded affordable housing for those who relied on the federal government to secure stable housing in mainly low-income and communities of color. According to the Urban Institute:

The \$5 billion HOPE VI program represents a dramatic turnaround in public housing policy and one of the most ambitious urban redevelopment efforts in the nation’s history. It replaces severely distressed public housing projects, occupied exclusively by poor families, with redesigned mixed-income housing and provides housing vouchers to enable some of the original residents to rent apartments in the private market. And it has helped transform the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) approach to housing assistance for the poor.¹⁶⁸

HOPE VI, in practice, created more precariousness for low-income residents by removing dedicated brick and mortar government housing facilities and changing to a voucher system that placed public housing into the rental market. The program included:

(1) elimination of federal preferences emphasizing the lowest income household for admissions to public housing, (2) the elimination of the one-for-one replacement requirement for demolished public housing units and (3) authorization allowing housing authorities to utilize housing development funds and operating subsidies for projects owned by private housing organizations. One of the outcomes was a shift in focus away from the ‘most’ severely distressed public housing sites, towards sites with the greatest potential to attract private investment for HOPE VI.¹⁶⁹

Between 2000-2008, the African American population declined by 2.2% in San Francisco Bay Area with a 24% loss in Oakland. Neighboring cities like “Daily City and Berkeley had the largest declines in Black population, decreasing by 42% and 36% respectively. In Oakland and Berkeley, the drop in [the African American] population was offset almost completely by Whites.”¹⁷⁰ During this time suburban municipalities experienced a surge in their African American populations for

¹⁶⁶ “Oakland City Council Resolution No. 74678 C.M.S.,” City of Oakland, December 1, 1998.

¹⁶⁷ “Oakland City Council Resolution No. 74678 C.M.S.,” City of Oakland, December 1, 1998.

¹⁶⁸ Susan J., Popkin et al., “A Decade of Hope VI: Research Findings and Policy Challenges.” Urban Institute, May 2004, 1.

¹⁶⁹ James Fraser et al, “Public Ownership and Private Profit in Housing,” *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 5, no. 3 (November 1, 2012): 406.

¹⁷⁰ Junious Williams et al., “State of Bay Area Blacks: A Look at Black Population Trends in the Bay Area, Part I,” 1-55: Urban Strategies Council, September 17, 2010.

instance, Antioch's Black population increased by 115%, pushed in part by the housing subsidy HOPE VI voucher program.¹⁷¹ The HOPE VI program contributed to the removal of more than 4,000 low-income housing units in Oakland between 1992 and 2018.¹⁷² Low-income residents who were formerly placed in housing had to find landlords willing to accept vouchers. A rash of evictions began to displace long-term renters: between 2008 and 2011 there were total of 49,243 eviction notices, and 76 percent were "3-day notices to pay or quit;" this coincided with rising housing costs.¹⁷³ This particularly hit voucher recipients whose rents spiked when landlords began to reject vouchers with the intention of increasing their units to market rate, often three times higher or more than what the voucher covered. The increase in evictions had been attributed to the expanded use of the Ellis Act, a California eviction ordinance established in 1985 that "permits landlords to evict tenants in order to remove rental property from the rental market,"¹⁷⁴ in most cases to convert rental units into private condominiums at a designated later date.¹⁷⁵

The influx of tech workers, with much higher wages than long-term residents, started to trickle in from San Francisco and into Oakland in the early 2000s and accelerated by the 2010s. The lack of available housing stock and the need for housing by the new tech labor force, which was being pulled into the Bay Area from around the country and around the world, created the ability for property owners to capitalize by raising rents, converting rental units to condos, and for new developers to focus on luxury apartments and condo creation. The removal of affordable rental units and the increase in private property housing also provided the opportunity for the municipality to benefit through an increase in property taxes.

The Green Political Ecological Era, 2005-2020

On June 5th, 2005, Mayor Jerry Brown signed the United Nations Urban Environmental Accords Green Cities Declaration that "recognized for the first time in history, the majority of the planet's population now lives in cities and that continued urbanization will result in one million people moving into cities each week, thus creating a new set of environmental challenges and opportunities."¹⁷⁶ The Accords, a non-binding agreement signed by municipal governments, provided implementation strategies and offered cities recognition for their environmental efforts.

Also, in 2005 and just weeks after Mayor Jerry Brown signed on to the Accords, the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 vote, ruled on the *Kelo v. City of New London* case, giving municipal governments the power to implement eminent domain by expanding the meaning of public use to include economic development. The *Kelo v. New London* decision, emboldened the City of Oakland specifically and cities across the US more broadly by giving them "a powerful tool to redevelop inner cities, especially in brownfield sites where developers are wary of undertaking the unnecessary risk of landowners holding out and complicating the projects."¹⁷⁷ On June 23, 2005, the City of Oakland enacted eminent domain on two longtime family-owned auto businesses on 20th Street between Telegraph and San Pablo Avenue, dispossessing them of their property and businesses.¹⁷⁸ The City then created a new district, the Uptown District, as different space altogether, removing it from previous association with Downtown Oakland, and its former

¹⁷¹ Solomon Moore, "As Program Moves Poor to Suburbs, Tensions Follow," *The New York Times*, August 8, 2008.

¹⁷² Embarcadero Business Coalition Meeting," City of Oakland, December 6, 2018.

¹⁷³ "Counterpoints: Stories and Data for Resisting Displacement," The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2016.

¹⁷⁴ "Ordinance No. 12539," City of Oakland, July 15, 2003.

¹⁷⁵ Rebecca Parr and David Debolt, "Oakland Boosts Ellis Act Eviction Payments," *The Mercury News*, February 19, 2016.

¹⁷⁶ San Francisco Department of the Environment, "Urban Environmental Accords."

¹⁷⁷ Eric Rutkow, "Kelo v. City of New London," *Harvard Environmental Law Review* 30 (2006): 261-79.

¹⁷⁸ Jim Herron Zamora, "OAKLAND / City Forces out 2 Downtown Businesses / Action Follows High Court Ruling on Eminent Domain." SFGate, July 2, 2005.

designation as an auto-mall. The acquired property was sold to Forest City, a large national private development company that created condos on the acquired property, now known as the Uptown Apartments. The Uptown was at the center of Jerry Brown's "10K Plan" to bring 10,000 new residents into Oakland's economically lacking downtown.

The Uptown Apartments today touts its courtyard and Japanese style gardens and is recognized as Oakland's first (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) LEED Certified community,^{179,180} Most notably, the Uptown development is representative of a new hidden practice of private park construction that allows public access. It is a market-based fix to municipal budget shortcomings as population growth is outpacing civic green space needs. The building is marketed to potential new residents who can afford these green amenities.

As Brown moved to revitalize Oakland, African Americans and Black businesses were overlooked as new and mostly White residents took precedence and advantage of the favorable window opened for business creation.¹⁸¹ The Black population that voted him into office then as mayor and previously in 1974 as California's governor through Black Panther Party support was all but ignored.¹⁸² During Brown's term from 1999-2007 he was said to have "cut generous deals with developers, streamlined the approval process and pushed aside city officials who stood in the way."¹⁸³ The African American community began to call the 10K Plan *Jerryfication* a play on Jerry Brown's name and the gentrification process that was envisioned to be inevitable in the future.¹⁸⁴

In 2008, Oakland was in the midst of the economic downturn from the Great Recession and trying to grasp the full impact of the subprime mortgage crisis in which California was amongst one of the states hardest hit. African Americans and Latinx communities in California, were disproportionately affected by the crisis because they also had been targeted by subprime and predatory lending institutions at twice the rate of Whites.¹⁸⁵ Although subprime and predatory lending was a problem itself, what aided in the creation of the massive shock was the inflation of home values and the bursting of the real estate bubble. This left homeowners underwater, holding loans with higher balances than their properties were worth on the market.¹⁸⁶ This devaluation process forced many into foreclosure at a time when the US was also struggling with high unemployment rates between 2007-2009.¹⁸⁷

Race and geography played a crucial role in the housing and job crises that accompanied the Great Recession with the most segregated neighborhoods, the formerly redlined, and those with the highest concentrations of African Americans and Latinx residents in metropolitan areas being the most impacted.¹⁸⁸ According to the East Bay Solidarity Network 10,000 homes were foreclosed between 2007 and 2011 with individual and corporate investors snapping up 42% of these properties as of 2011.¹⁸⁹ Others have put the number of foreclosures between 2006 and 2011 at 10,508.¹⁹⁰ The mass dispossession of property and wealth from people of color provided an

¹⁷⁹ The Uptown, "View Our Amenities."

¹⁸⁰ U.S. Green Building Council "What Is LEED?"

¹⁸¹ Joan Walsh, "Jerry Brown Shakes up Oakland's Black Political Establishment." Salon, June 23, 1999.

¹⁸² Ishmael Reed, *Blues City: A Walk in Oakland* (New York: Crown, 2007).

¹⁸³ Zusha Elinson, "As Mayor, Brown Remade Oakland's Downtown and Himself," *The New York Times*, September 2, 2010.

¹⁸⁴ Elinson, "As Mayor, Brown Remade Oakland's Downtown and Himself."

¹⁸⁵ Carolina Reid and Elizabeth Laderman, "The Untold Costs of Subprime Lending: Examining the Links among Higher-Priced Lending, Foreclosures and Race in California," Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, November 2009.

¹⁸⁶ Jacob S. Rugh and Douglass S. Massey. 2010. "Racial Segregation and the American Foreclosure Crisis" *American Sociological Review* 75(5) 629-651.

¹⁸⁷ "The Recession of 2007-2009." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 2012.

¹⁸⁸ Rugh and Massey, "Racial Segregation and the American Foreclosure Crisis," 629-51.

¹⁸⁹ "Evict This! A History of Housing in West Oakland and Tools to Resist Displacement," East Bay Solidarity Network, December 3, 2013.

¹⁹⁰ Susie Cagle, "Oakland Wants You to Stop Calling It the 'Next Brooklyn,'" Next City, December 15, 2014.

opportunity for mostly White individuals and large scale investors to benefit from their losses and accumulate wealth by purchasing these homes at well below market rate, flipping these properties, and selling them at market rate which began to increase in price between 2010 and 2020.¹⁹¹

Despite the boom and bust cycles that impacted Oakland residents and reshaped the demographics of neighborhoods, the City undertook major greening projects that were funded by local bonds and federal grants. For example, between 1995 and 2020, the City of Oakland was awarded over \$4 million dollars primarily from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to assist with the assessments and cleanup of brownfields.¹⁹² The EPA defines a brownfield as “a property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.”¹⁹³ Millions more have been invested and leveraged for park restoration, beautification, and mitigation projects in Oakland. In 2005, the Mandela Parkway, a 1.3 miles linear park, replaced the Cypress Viaduct 15 years after its collapse. At a cost of \$13 million to refurbish, the project was a collaboration between local, state, and federal governments, local government officials, business leaders, and residents.¹⁹⁴ As an example of a smaller project, Willow Park, less than an acre in size, was reopened in March 2007 after benefiting from the EPA’s brownfield mitigation project grant of \$500,000; \$200,000 was used to remove high levels of lead contamination in the soil that were present since it was part of the WWII industry.¹⁹⁵ According to the EPA, “the project leveraged more than \$1 million state, federal, and local sources, including \$482,000 from the National Park Service under its Urban Parks and Recreation Program and \$568,000 from the California Department of Parks and Recreation for redevelopment and park improvements.”¹⁹⁶

Since 2000, there have been numerous master plans and specific plans located in formerly redlined areas including the Lake Merritt Master Plan (2002), Brooklyn Basin Plan (2005), West Oakland Specific Plan (2014), Latham Square Street Plan (2015), and Downtown Oakland Plan (2016) to name a few. Some have come to fruition, for instance The Uptown (under Jerry Brown’s 10K Plan), Latham Square, and the Lake Merritt Master Plan. In 2011, when the city began to restore and improve Lake Merritt, known as the jewel of Oakland, the Black population had declined from ~142,460 residents to 109,471 (from 44 percent to 28 percent) as the overall population climbed from 399,484 to 390,724 (*Figure 9*).¹⁹⁷ In 2002, Measure DD Oakland’s Trust for Clean Water and Safe Parks \$198.25 million bond measure focused on restoring and improving parks, trails, estuaries, rivers, and creeks while creating a new 4-acre park and amphitheater at Lake Merritt, was voted in by 80 percent of Oakland’s residents, at a time when Oakland had an African American plurality.¹⁹⁸ Most of the Lake Merritt green space creation and beautification projects were completed in 2019, including a new four-acre green space for use as an amphitheater and the 14-acre Green Streets Project to “facilitate pedestrian and bicycle use, calm traffic, increase parklands, improve Snow Park, and improve water quality.”¹⁹⁹ Many of the residents that voted for the environmental improvements and green amenities, challenged governments to clean up

¹⁹¹ Cagle, “Oakland Wants You to Stop Calling It the ‘Next Brooklyn.’”

¹⁹² City of Oakland California, “Brownfields Grants Awarded to and Managed by the City of Oakland,” Accessed February 15, 2020.

¹⁹³ United States Environmental Protection Agency, “Overview of EPA’s Brownfields Program,” Overviews and Factsheets, January 8, 2014.

¹⁹⁴ Kristin Bender, “Mandela Parkway Unveiled,” East Bay Times, July 13, 2005.

¹⁹⁵ “Oakland, California Turns a Run-Down, Contaminated Area into a Recreational Centerpiece,” Environmental Protection Agency, February 2009.

¹⁹⁶ “Oakland, California Turns a Run-Down, Contaminated Area into a Recreational Centerpiece,” Environmental Protection Agency, February 2009.

¹⁹⁷ US Census Bureau, “Census.Gov,” Census.gov, n.d.

¹⁹⁸ Waterfront Action, “Oakland’s Measure DD,” 2005.

¹⁹⁹ “Measure DD Lake Merritt Improvements: Lakeside Green Streets,” City of Oakland, n.d.

brownfields, and fought for better environments for those living in formerly redlined areas were no longer living in Oakland to enjoy them.

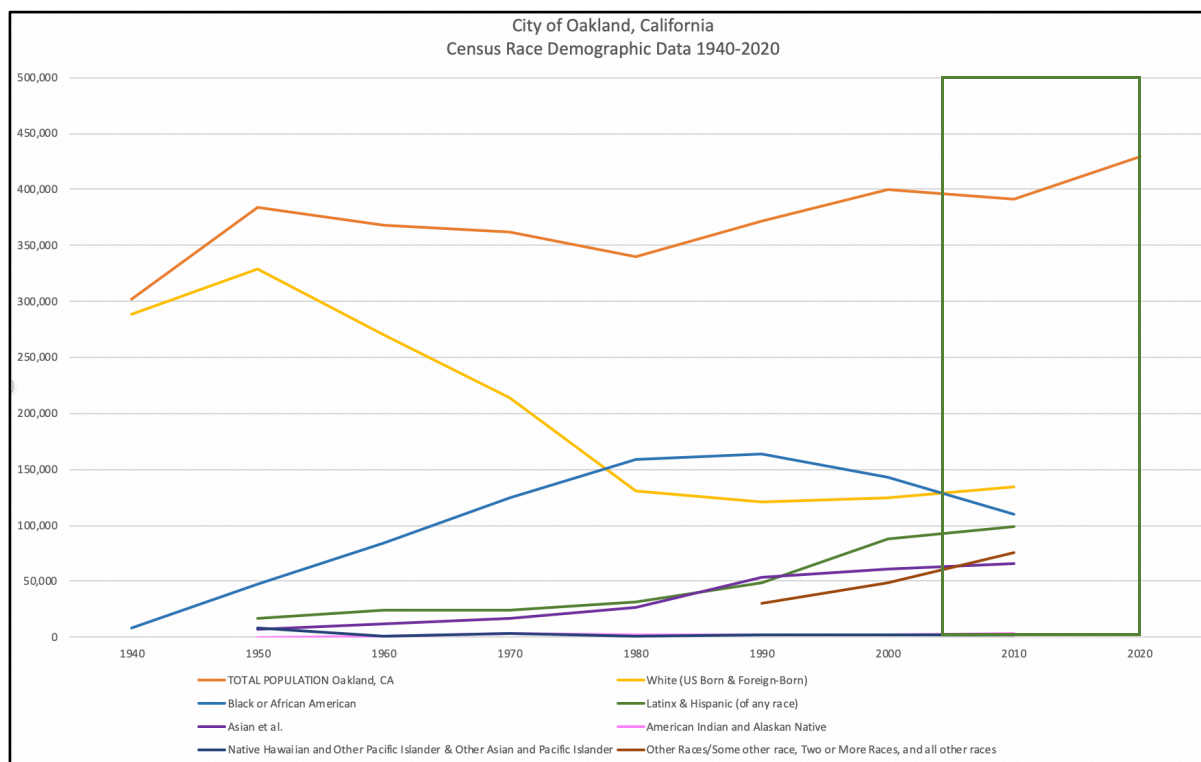


Figure 9: US Census Demographic Data for Oakland, CA 1940-2010 and projected population for 2020. The green box demarcates the Green Political Ecological Era, 2005-2020.

Still under construction is Brooklyn Basin, a 64-acre development on Oakland’s waterfront and estuary. It was rezoned from “M-40, Heavy Industrial to PWD-4” mixed-use development of housing and commercial retail in 2006.²⁰⁰ The environmental remediation process was conducted by Signature Development Group (SDG) that will be “performing a multi-year analysis of soil and groundwater contamination in compliance with the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), SDG developed a plan to effectively remove all contamination.”²⁰¹ The Brooklyn Basin project was made possible by Zarison-OHP I LLC, a Beijing company, which also manages SDG, and provided \$1.5 billion²⁰² for this massive LEED project, and also had connections with Oakland Mayor Jean Quan, Oakland’s first woman and Asian Mayor.²⁰³ Brooklyn Basin’s luxury units range from \$2,500 for a 1-bedroom until to just under \$3,000 for a two-bedroom apartment as of July 2020. The project will “include up to 3,100 residential units including 465 affordable housing units, 200,000 square feet of ground-floor commercial space [and] approximately 32 acres of parks and public open space, two renovated marinas, [and] an existing wetlands restoration area.”²⁰⁴ All plans center green spaces and are situated in the flats and near formerly redlined

²⁰⁰ City of Oakland, “Brooklyn Basin (Formerly ‘Oak to Ninth Mixed Use Development’).”

²⁰¹ Signature Development Group, “A New Waterfront District Rises in Oakland: Brooklyn Basin.”

²⁰² Blanca Torres, “Developers Complete \$18 Million Purchase of Oakland’s Brooklyn Basin.” *San Francisco Business Times*, June 10, 2013.

²⁰³ Nate Gartrell, “Brooklyn Basin Changes Waterfront--Will It Become Oakland’s Most Desirable Neighborhood?” *Oakland Magazine*, September 3, 2014.

²⁰⁴ City of Oakland, “Brooklyn Basin (Formerly ‘Oak to Ninth Mixed Use Development’).”

neighborhoods that have also been rapidly gentrifying. Using private-public development strategies that includes environmental remediation, funding by federal government programs and local tax incentives have enticed and benefited developers. This process has also benefited mostly White tech workers who have the income and the ability to live within or next to these green amenities often out of the reach of low-income and/or communities of color residents. The communities that need these opportunities the most are the least likely to have access to these new housing developments and green spaces.

It had been almost two decades since City of Oakland started its environmental agenda (in 1996) when on December 4, 2012, the municipality released its Energy and Climate Action Plan (ECAP) focused on “identifying and prioritizing action the City can take to reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas (GHG) emission associated with Oakland.”²⁰⁵ The ECAP represents a way forward in supporting urban forests and developing a plan “to ensure the continued health of all parks and forest land within the city.”²⁰⁶ In 2017, the Oakland City Council unanimously passed Resolution No. 86811 C.M.S. “in support of the Paris Climate Agreement, in opposition to president Trump’s decision to withdraw the United States from the Agreement, and stating the City of Oakland’s commitment to the goals and spirit of the agreement consistent with the City’s Energy and Climate Action Plan.”²⁰⁷ The ECAP was later updated in 2018 and is currently undergoing a new update in 2020 with a new name, the Oakland 2030 Equitable and Climate Action Plan. In this plan, Oakland public parks and their facilities are fully incorporated, and environmental justice issues are acknowledged within the plan for the first time.

As Oakland has moved forward with its environmental sustainability agenda, green resources and environmental goods have continued to be unevenly distributed, particularly in the formerly redlined, low-income neighborhoods that are predominantly communities of color. The Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation published *The Continuing Crisis: The 2018 Report on the State of Maintenance*, which shows that less wealthy Oaklanders are more likely to experience reduced maintenance and reduced park quality (*Figure 10*).²⁰⁸ Moreover, the parks in the formerly redlined neighborhoods were more likely have received a grade C or below with most of parks that were surveyed receiving a D grade. The exceptions that garnered an A or B grade includes De Fremery Park, Polar Park, Lincoln Square Park, Clinton Square, Franklin, and Garfield Playground. This is a current example of environmental injustices are embedded in Oakland’s environmental agenda in which new wealthy and White residents are able to afford the new developed locations while long-term, low-income, and/or people of color are being displaced most likely to other environmentally questionable and compromised areas, outside of their community and social networks. Figure 10 makes visible that the least maintained parks are in the formerly redlined neighborhoods.

²⁰⁵ City of Oakland, “City of Oakland Energy and Climate Action Plan,” December 4, 2012, 2.

²⁰⁶ City of Oakland, “City of Oakland Energy and Climate Action Plan,” December 4, 2012, 64.

²⁰⁷ “Oakland City Council Resolution No. 86811 C.M.S.,” City of Oakland, July 27, 2017.

²⁰⁸ “Continuing Crisis: The 2018 Report on the State of Maintenance in Oakland Parks,” Oakland, CA: Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation, Fall 2018.

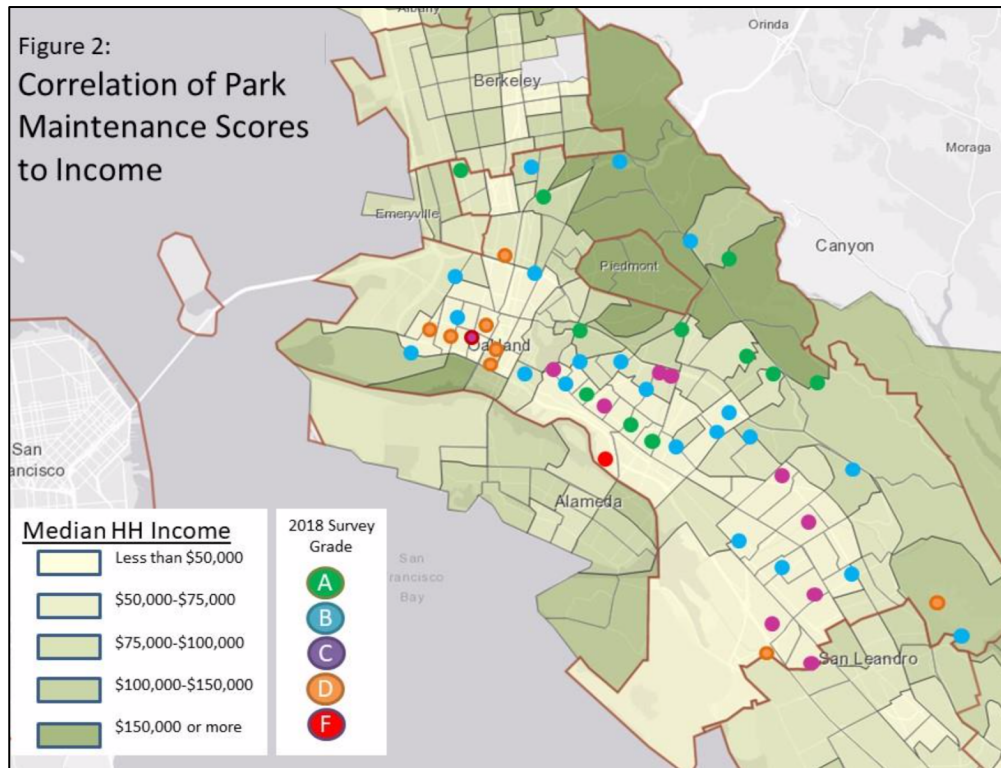


Figure 10: Correlation of Park Maintenance Scores to Income Map from the *Continuing Crisis: The 2018 Report on the State of Maintenance in Oakland Parks* by the Oakland Park and Recreation Foundation.²⁰⁹

Conclusion

In this paper, I focused on the relationships between race, class, housing, and access to green space in Oakland, California from 1937-2020. In doing so three political ecological areas have been identified and discussed: Red 1937-1968, Black 1977-1999, and Green 2005-2020. Across the historical arc from 1937-2020, I showed how race-based housing policies and practices not only impacted class, they also influenced the uneven distribution of green space and environmental goods at the neighborhood level. Within all three of the political ecological eras (Red, Black and Green), there is not just an accumulation by dispossession process taking place in Oakland but also an accumulation by benefaction process. Consistently throughout each era, White individuals benefit from resources in the form of property and homeownership, which are bestowed to them by governments and/or institutions through distributional programs, policies, and/or practices that disproportionately exclude or dispossess Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian residents of their wealth and property. As a concept, accumulation by benefaction acknowledges that some accumulation processes also include a racialized process of resource redistribution and exclusion. While most White beneficiaries, as individuals, may not have played a direct or primary role in the primitive accumulation or the accumulation by dispossession process, nonetheless they are beneficiaries through the material possession of those assets that were made possible through race-based laws, policies, and practices imposed by government and institutional interventions.

In the Red political ecological era accumulation by benefaction is two-fold, the race-based exclusionary practices provided the opportunity for a predominantly White population who were

²⁰⁹ "Continuing Crisis," Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation, 30.

bestowed property ownership, the single-family home with a front and backyard, and a healthy environment away from industrial pollution sources and surrounded by environmental amenities. Through government incentives provided by the Federal Housing Administration and secured by the HOLC as well as the legal practice of race-based covenants and US segregation laws protected White housing values while also excluded communities of BILA residents from the same opportunities and resources. Moreover, freeway construction in service to the suburban commuter, provided transportation infrastructure at the expense of low-income and community of color neighborhoods, their property was dispossessed using the government practice of eminent domain, their homes were razed, and their communities barricaded by the freeway's infrastructure. During the Black political ecological era accumulation by benefaction took on a different form in which the neoliberal restructuring of California property taxes by Prop 13 and the restructuring of public housing by the Hope VI program's policies and practices worked to dispossess the most precarious residents, those who were low-income and receiving government assistance. The Hope VI program removed secured federal housing facilities and placed these populations into the rental market using a voucher system which forced many to relocated outside of Oakland, their hometown. While Prop 13 reduced and/or eliminated crucial public park services and programs that maintained health green spaces and provided resources to low-income communities. The restructuring of these policies and practices was also in service to a predominately White population in California, particularly property owners who benefited from lower property taxes and new opportunities to accumulate more property created by Hope VI program. Lastly, during the Green political ecological era, the state policies and practices that created the Great Recession, yet again, dispossessed communities of color of their land and property through housing foreclosures and evictions. These properties were released as assets, with below market property prices, that were then offered up to the benefit of the White and wealthy as incentives for recreating Oakland as a green city with luxury apartments, condos, and privatized green spaces.

These political ecological eras reveal that there is a recurring capitalist mode of production in which low-income residents and communities of color are habitually excluded from and/or dispossessed of property ownership, quality housing, and green amenities while also having their housing, neighborhoods, and lives compromised by environmental harms and repeatedly sacrificed for the benefit of wealthy White residents. This work asserts that predominantly White populations in Oakland, CA have benefited and continue to benefit from the release of the assets in formerly redlined areas through state interventions that distribute and redistribute assets and resources through processes of accumulation by dispossession as well as accumulation by benefaction.

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CHAPTER 3.
**RENDERING GENTRIFICATION AND ERASING RACE: SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT & THE (RE)VISIONING OF OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA
AS A GREEN CITY**

Abstract

Oakland, California, has been historically represented as a racialized, high crime urbanity, but since the early 2000s the city has also been recognized as a top green/sustainable destination. In June 2014 the City of Oakland released the West Oakland Specific Plan, the "guiding framework for realizing the vision of a healthy, vibrant West Oakland." The Plan, a future vision of West Oakland proliferated local newspapers, online zines, blogs, and Facebook pages, with comment sections serving as a platform to both celebrate and contest the new plan and the spaces it depicted. Based on a content analysis of the West Oakland Specific Plan (WOSP), I examine how Oakland is envisioning its future as a green city. This study employs and operationalizes Claire Jean Kim's *colorblind talk* and Lewis and Gould's *green gentrification* concepts by applying them to visual culture. The prominence of the visual dimensions of these frameworks provides a unique opportunity to deconstruct images while illuminating the racialized and environmental discourses conveyed in master plans created by city planners, developers, and the City of Oakland. This paper argues that Oakland's WOSP positions Oakland as a top sustainable/green city while depicting erasures of its African American population and in so doing rebrands itself as green and White city.

Introduction

This paper positions Oakland, California as a self-described green sustainable city to interrogate and unpack how environmental narratives and histories shape policies and practices, and frame current discourses. These narratives and histories are embedded within the City of Oakland's West Oakland Specific Plan and convey the municipality's ideologies of what access to environmental amenities means and who will reap the environmental benefits. I argue that current urban sustainable development strategies are working in concert with historically rooted racialized environmental narratives and practices that remove populations defined as "undesirable" from both the landscape and within planning documents. By applying frameworks from ecological gentrification, environmental gentrification, and green gentrification and connecting these to race theory and visual media, I show that the City of Oakland's West Oakland Specific Plan (WOSP) act as both media propaganda and as a gentrification apparatus. Further, this planning document (re)creates depictions of Oakland as a green city while it effectively erases the African American population. The document hides the racialization of displacement. In so doing, the anti-blackness embedded in the government's propaganda is revealed as Oakland (re)visions its municipality as a sustainable green city.

The West Oakland Specific Plan (WOSP) is a 530-page document, developed by the City of Oakland Department of Planning and Building, the JRDV Urban International consulting team, and in collaboration with business and community stakeholders. The plan was approved by the Oakland Planning Commission on June 11, 2014 and according to the City of Oakland website, "the West Oakland Specific Plan's final hearing was at the City Council on July 29, 2014. The Plan and EIR [Environment Impact Report] became effective July 15, 2014 and the zoning amendments became effective in August 29, 2014."²¹⁰ The WOSP contains thirteen chapters and five appendices with maps, tables, and renderings showing a projected future of West Oakland.

As early as 1996 Oakland began its journey to becoming a green sustainable city by adopting its first climate change policy: Resolution No. 72809 C.M.S. "authorizing the City of Oakland to join the Cities for Climate Protection Campaign; and to apply International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives." This and subsequent sustainability initiatives modeled from and in response to the 1992 Earth Summit and the Kyoto Protocol worked to align Oakland with cities around the world in fighting climate change.

By June 5, 2005, Oakland became an official green city by adopting the United Nations Urban Environmental Accords signed by then Mayor Jerry Brown, the first White mayor in Oakland, since 1977. The Environmental Accords Green City Declaration placed cities and urban areas at the center of environmental concerns.²¹¹ A crucial part of creating the green city is the production of green spaces (e.g. parks, gardens/urban agriculture, and areas constructed with vegetation). The Urban Environmental Accords are indicative of how cities function much differently and independently today by adopting more stringent and ambitious environmental policies and practices than the federal or state government. Oakland has spent the last two decades creating an environmental agenda, through an adoption of policies and practices as it moves forward as a green city.

Environmental Narratives, Race & Parks

Early environmental movement narratives often obscure the historic practices of displacement for the creation of parks. Because of this, the shared and similar historical patterns

²¹⁰ City of Oakland, Planning and Zoning, "West Oakland Specific Plan," June 2014.

²¹¹ San Francisco Department of the Environment, "Urban Environmental Accords."

and practices get lost or relegated to the past, and thus are not vigilantly watched when promoting current green space creation, restoration, and beautification projects. Today, similar patterns of displacement along with exclusionary practices are being perpetuated on current populations.

During the mid-19th century, at the rise of urban formation, the industrial era, and the progressive movement, city parks were already thought to be a solution to human health problems.²¹² While places like Yosemite National Park became a refuge and retreat for the White elite, city parks like Frank Law Olmsted's iconic Central Park in New York City became urban recreational spaces for White immigrant working classes.²¹³ Central Park was a massive green space project for human health and recreation; it exemplified the environmental claims made for greening the city to provide healthier cleaner air for residents and was proclaimed to be the "lungs of the city."²¹⁴ Yet, the creation of Central Park also destroyed Seneca Village, a thriving African American and Irish community of residents and property owners. They were removed using eminent domain to make way for the Park.²¹⁵

Displacement was also central to the establishment of US national parks. The Native American populations of what became Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks were forcibly and violently removed through state sanctions following the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Between the late 1820s to mid-1850s, the Ahwahnechee people of the Sierra Nevada faced a series of attacks first from the "forty-niners," US citizens and gold rush miners, and then militia campaigns carried out in the Yosemite Valley.²¹⁶ Land management practices such as controlled burnings carried out by Indigenous populations of the Sierra Nevada Valley were called into question and perceived as land degradation, blight, and an eyesore by White Americans and became a pretext for removal. Indigenous populations were also (later) criminalized. Indigenous communities were decimated, displaced, and relocated to reservations which consolidated power to control land to the White affluent elite who began using these lands for recreation in the late 1850s.²¹⁷

The shared patterns within environmental narratives and practices that originated from the creation of the National Park System through the philosophy of wilderness protection and recreation can be seen in Table 1. These patterns also align within the narratives and practices taking place within the urban context as they connect to park and green space creation in the green sustainable city. The philosophy that nature comes first within the national park context can be articulated within the urban context as sustainability and climate change mitigation agendas used to create urban nature/green space. Notions and narratives of questionable, irresponsible land management, and the lack of capacity to use the land appropriately are (re)articulated into rhetoric of blight and empty waste lands. Practices of state action take place through the removal of the population by force: the Indian Removal Act, in the case of National Parks and eminent domain and evictions in the urban context. Forced removal is conducted through violence carried out by the state, the federal government, through militias in national parks while municipal government violence is carried out by police within the urban context. Both national parks and green spaces in the city are then repopulated by a different demographic, more affluent, usually White, urban dwellers. These are the patterns and processes of dispossession, displacement, and gentrification embedded in environmental narratives and within in the green sustainable city. These

²¹² Michael Greenberg et al., "Linking City Planning and Public Health in the United States," *Journal of Planning Literature* 1994 235-239.

²¹³ Anne Whiston Sprin, "Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Fredrick Olmsted," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2013) 91-113.

²¹⁴ Catherine Ward Thompson, "Linking landscape and health: The recurring theme" *Landscape and Urban Planning* 99 (2011): 187-195.

²¹⁵ Lisa W Fordero, "Unearthing Traces of African-American Village Displaced by Central Park." July 27, 2011. New York Times.

²¹⁶ Mark Spence, "Dispossessing the Wilderness: Yosemite Indians and the National Park Ideal, 1864-1930," *Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 1 (1996): 27-29.

²¹⁷ Spence, "Dispossessing the Wilderness," 27-29.

displacement and dispossession processes are only possible because the existing communities were racialized as others and lacked the economic, social, and political power to stay put. The historical lessons of urban and wilderness park creation can inform how we examine similar patterns and processes of community displacement and gentrification that are motivated and visually depicted in the WOSP.

<i>National Park Context</i>	<i>The Urban Context</i>
1. Nature is in need of protection	1. Environmental/Sustainability agenda
2. Narratives of an empty landscape, of improper land uses, and of the indigenous population lacking capacity to manage the land appropriately	2. Narratives of empty landscapes, blighted areas, urban wastelands, and the local community lacking capacity to maintain the area appropriately
3. State sanctioned forced removal. Displacement through federal policy and militia violence.	3. City sanctioned forced removal. Displacement through eminent domain, evictions, and police violence.
4. Appropriation of wilderness/natural lands for tourism and recreation for a different and more affluent population.	4. Appropriation of city lands for the creation of green space for tourism and recreation for a different and more affluent population.

Table 1: The Environmental Context of the National Park & The Urban.

The City Beautiful Movement, the Garden City Movement & Oakland, California

The City Beautiful Movement (1890s-1900s) and the Garden City Movement (1898-1930s) placed parks and green space aesthetics as central components for urban design and city beautification. The City Beautiful movement was also “an elite movement that imposed a top-down ideal on lower economic and social classes and ignored racial considerations...it represented perfection in design as well as the perfection of Anglo society.”²¹⁸ These green space movements (though not called that at the time) influenced and divided ideologies connected to the US landscape into vastly different ecologies, economies, and social realities when categorizing what constituted the wilderness, the rural, the suburban, and the urban. At the same time, discriminatory redlining policies of the pre-Civil Rights era worked to divide these landscapes by race and class, effectively segregating communities who resided on them for generations.²¹⁹

The City of Oakland was heavily influenced by the City Beautiful Movement introduced in the late 19th century and was aptly nicknamed the *White City* for its white stucco buildings. It also reflected the society for which it was produced.²²⁰ The concept of a white city was a new and utopic understanding of a *clean city* while in reality cities were still besieged with sanitation

²¹⁸ Helen Peterson, “Clarkdale, Arizona: Built Environment, Social Order, and the City Beautiful Movement, 1913-1920,” *The Journal of Arizona History* 49, no. 1, Spring 2008, 29.

²¹⁹ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017).

²²⁰ Elliot M. Rudwick and August Meier, “Black Man in the “White City”: Negroes and the Columbian Exposition, 1893,” 1965, 354.

problems, including raw sewage and bouts of infectious diseases that would decimate populations and whole city blocks.²²¹ The 1893 Chicago World's Fair Columbian Exposition brought forth a new movement in urban planning that "designed an idealized urban environment of boulevards, buildings, and park grounds that was to be emulated by towns everywhere."²²²

Ebenezer Howard's garden city was to be a "new type of community, neither urban or rural, that combined the advantages of the city and the country [...] a public garden stood at the center, surrounded by a range of public, cultural, and social institutions."²²³ The garden city was both the impetus and precursor for what would become the suburban landscapes of today. Just like with the creation of the National Park System²²⁴ and Central Park, the post-World War II suburbanization process excluded African Americans, in this case from homeownership and access to the garden city using then-legal segregation and racially restrictive covenants.²²⁵ These discriminatory legacies of the City Beautiful and Garden City movements are embedded in Oakland's urban landscape as well as its contemporary environmental policy and practices; moreover these historical racialized and classed ideologies continue to reverberate within the *green city* of today, albeit now grounded within an ecological sustainability framework that continues to rely on green spaces as a central aesthetic.

Gentrification Processes in the Green City

In 1964, Ruth Glass coined the term *gentrification* to convey the neighborhood change taking place in London in which new individuals, the working class industrial laborers, were moving into the local modest dwellings and improving both the property and the surrounding areas through their own capital.²²⁶ The individual actions carried out by this new population drove up property values which led to displacement of lower income residents. Today's gentrification is different, it lines up with Neil Smith's articulation of gentrification in that it has become a city planning tool,²²⁷ and not just the individual actions of a new workforce. The current gentrification process depends on neoliberal urban policy, providing tax breaks and incentives to the private sector while underfunding or eliminating public goods. These incentives and tax breaks are provided by municipal governments to the benefit of developers and industry. Environmental improvements and amenities have become mechanisms for catalyzing neighborhood change, by greening while also increasing housing costs, driving up eviction rates, and catering to new wealthier residents all of which are changing the class, racial, and cultural demographics of neighborhoods. These policies and practices are supported by and orchestrated through governmental policies.

In 2009, Sarah Dooling introduced the concept of *ecological gentrification* as the "implementation of an environmental planning agenda related to public green space that leads to the displacement or exclusion of the most economically vulnerable human population—homeless

²²¹ Carl Zimring, *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 29-31.

²²² Beth Bagwell, *Oakland: The Story of a City*. Second Edition (Oakland: Oakland Heritage Alliance, 2012), 171.

²²³ Kermit Carlyle Parsons and David Schuyler, eds. *From Garden City to Green City: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 7.

²²⁴ Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

²²⁵ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 113-141.

²²⁶ Ruth Glass, "Introduction: Aspects of Change," in *London: Aspects of Change*, ed. Center for Urban Studies Report No. 3 (London: MacKibbon and Kee, 1964), xiii-xlii.

²²⁷ Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy," *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 427-50.

people—while espousing an environmental ethic.”²²⁸ Dooling focuses on how both the city and its wealthy residents play a role in surveilling green spaces in which the visualization of a homeless/unsheltered person in *public* green spaces is motive to call law enforcement and enact policy to prevent access to this population. This can be extended to Black and Brown bodies who can and have also been rendered as trespassers, criminalized, and met by state violence historically and currently when in parks.^{229, 230, 231} In an effort to keep up the appearance of a green city, exclusionary practices are enacted through enclosures, physical (fences) and imaginary (social) boundaries, that gate off *public* parks and create opportunities for privatization while denying access to public green spaces.²³² Melissa Checker’s term *environmental gentrification* contextualizes gentrification and displacement from green space as a neoliberal practice that benefit developers while environmental justice language is coopted in the process.²³³ According to Checker, “while it appears as politically-neutral, consensus-based planning that both ecological and socially sensitive, in practice, environmental gentrification subordinates equity to profit-minded development.”²³⁴ Lastly, Gould and Lewis employ the concept of *green gentrification*, defined as “urban gentrification processes that are facilitated in large part by the creation or restoration of an environmental amenity” in which a “greening event” attracts a more affluent population into the already improved neighborhood.²³⁵ The commodification of urban nature and its scarcity within the urban landscape becomes the driver for increasing property values and a pull factor to bring in a whiter and more affluent population while also displacing people of color and those who are less economically secure and capable of staying.

The Racialization of Gentrification in the Green City

To understand the racialized structures and their constructions embedded in the West Oakland Specific Plan (WOSP), I pull from Claire Jean Kim’s three frameworks: racial ordering, racial triangulation, and colorblind talk. Kim defines racial order as a concept that “emphasizes that groups get racialized both relatively to one another and differently from one another,” in that racial order is a “shared cognitive map classifying different groups with concrete distributional consequences [with] certain privileges and/or exclusions.”²³⁶ In addition to the vertical hierarchy of racial ordering, Kim introduces a horizontal axis, which she defines as racial triangulation, in which outsider and insider add a new dimension to complicate the notion of racial ordering. Kim argues that Latinx and Asians in Oakland have been situated above Blacks, adhering to the notion of racial ordering, as they are also moved away from both Whites and Blacks as foreigners, outsiders, and as non-Americans. Colorblind talk can be understood as discourses that are deployed precisely to “hide the American racial order from view, protecting it from challenge[...] by obscuring [it].”²³⁷

²²⁸ Sarah Dooling, “Ecological Gentrification: A Research Agenda Exploring Justice in the City,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33, no. 3 (2002): 621-63.

²²⁹ Rebecca Solnit, “Death by gentrification: the killing that shamed San Francisco,” *The Guardian* March 21, 2016.

²³⁰ Ali, Safia Samee. “Tamir Rice Death: Newly Released Video Shows Cop’s Shifting Account.” *NBC News*, April 26, 2017.

²³¹ Sam Levin, “‘We’re Being Pushed out’: The Displacement of Black Oakland.” *The Guardian*, June 1, 2018, *US News*.

²³² C.N.E. Corbin, “Enclosure-Occupations: Contested Productions of Green Space & the Paradoxes within Oakland, California’s Green City,” *UC Berkeley: Institute for the Study of Societal Issues* (2019).

²³³ Melissa Checker, “Wiped Out by the ‘Greenwave’: Environmental Gentrification and the Paradoxical Politics of Urban Sustainability,” *City & Society* 23, no. 2 (2011): 210-229.

²³⁴ Checker, “Wiped Out by the ‘Greenwave,’” 210-29.

²³⁵ Kenneth A. Gould and Tammy L. Lewis, “The Environmental Injustice of Green Gentrification: The Case of Brooklyn’s Prospect Park,” in *The World in Brooklyn: Gentrification, Immigration, and Ethnic Politics in a Global City*, ed. by DeSena, Judith N. and Timothy Shortell (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 113-146.

²³⁶ Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 17.

²³⁷ Kim, “*Bitter Fruit*,” 17.

Within media theory, the relationship between the audience and the images they are exposed to is not passive. Through interpellation, in which images and renderings act upon spectators “calling people forth as subjects, setting conditions under which they can assume their identity.”²³⁸ The images are not just depicting an urban environment with people, rather, when situated within city plans and municipal documents they literally help construct the environments they portray and the populations they desire to attract. By applying the concept of interpellation to Kim’s concepts of racial ordering, racial triangulation, and colorblind talk, I show how the renderings of a future West Oakland not only position specific racial populations within a hierarchy but also call particular populations forth as subjects to acknowledge their place within a racial and spatial understanding of Oakland’s future landscape. Furthermore, through colorblind talk, the depiction of a diverse/multi-racial population obscures and hides the erasure of the African American population in the West Oakland Specific Plan (WOSP). Through these frameworks, dark skinned populations, in this case African Americans, are positioned as producers of blight, are not welcomed as residents in Oakland’s green city, and are erased from its future.

The gentrification processes described above are expressed in City of Oakland’s West Oakland Specific Plan (WOSP) published in June of 2014 and considered the “guiding framework for realizing the vision of a healthy, vibrant West Oakland.”²³⁹ In the Plan, images and renderings of a future vision of West Oakland, which proliferated in local newspapers, online zines, blogs, and Facebook pages, with comment sections serving as a platform to both celebrate and contest the new plan and the spaces it depicted. The West Oakland Specific Plan is only one of many specific and master plans created since 2010 (primarily for areas near downtown), a period during which Oakland sought to implement and (re)create itself as a green city.

History of an African American Presence in West Oakland

West Oakland has a rich African American history, dating back to the Second Great Migration between 1930 and 1950 when it was established as a predominantly African American neighborhood. Most African Americans in Oakland migrated from the South to the West with the hopes of escaping Jim Crow laws and conditions and finding a new lives and gainful employment in the World War II defense industry.²⁴⁰ During this time West Oakland became a segregated middle-class and working-class African American neighborhood and a “redlined” section of the city codified by the 1937 Thomas Brother’s Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) Map. These HOLC maps determined land values in which redlined areas were indicated to be *fourth grade*, the least desirable land for housing and often located next to industrial sites while also restricted homeownership and residential options for African Americans to these areas.²⁴¹ The freeway construction of the 1950s ripped through this neighborhood and razed Black owned homes and businesses. Some 10 years later, the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) commuter train construction further divided the West Oakland neighborhood razing more houses during the 1960s and 1970s.²⁴²

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, West Oakland became the epicenter of the Black Power Movement and home to the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP). The BPP emerged out of and was a response to economic neglect and disinvestment experienced by many inner cities of the 1970s in which white flight dramatically changed demographics from a majority White middle-

²³⁸ Pieter J. Fourie, ed. *Media Studies: Media History, Media and Society* (Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd, 2010).

²³⁹ WOSP, “Introduction,” 1-1.

²⁴⁰ Self, *American Babylon*, 157.

²⁴¹ Self, *American Babylon*, 156.

²⁴² Self, *American Babylon*, 157.

class city to a majority Black impoverished city. The 1970s and 1980s recreated Oakland as a chocolate city,²⁴³ a city with a predominant or concentrated African American population and a city in which positions of power (mayor, police chief, etc.) are held by African-Americans. In 1977 Oakland elected its first black mayor, Lionel J. Wilson, and in 1983 the *Oakland Tribune* became the first African American own metropolitan newspaper. At a time of cultural gains, the economic loss tied to White migration and capital flows to the suburbs was compounded by the collapse of the domestic manufacturing industry. This made both Oakland and its Black populations economically precarious well into the 2000's. The election of Jerry Brown as mayor in 1999 ended a generation of African American mayoral leadership as Oakland also began transitioning into a green city. Sustainable development and the creation of a green city is crucial for low-income and communities of color who tend to be the most environmentally compromised and are less likely to have access to healthy green spaces.

West Oakland continues to grapple with its redlined legacy and its industrial past, as it contains many environmental hazards and is one of the most environmentally impacted areas in Oakland, according to CalEnviroScreen 3.0, a public mapping tool of environmental hazards and social vulnerability indicators created by the California Environmental Protection Agency.²⁴⁴ The Pollution Burden Indicators Map shows the high pollution burdens in West Oakland due to the 580, the 880, and the 980 freeways that encircle the area (*Figure 1*).²⁴⁵ As an industrial site, West Oakland is also riddled with ground pollution. Cleanup sites are “contaminated with hazardous chemicals [and] people living near these sites have a greater potential to be exposed to chemicals from the sites than people living further away” (*Figure 2*).²⁴⁶

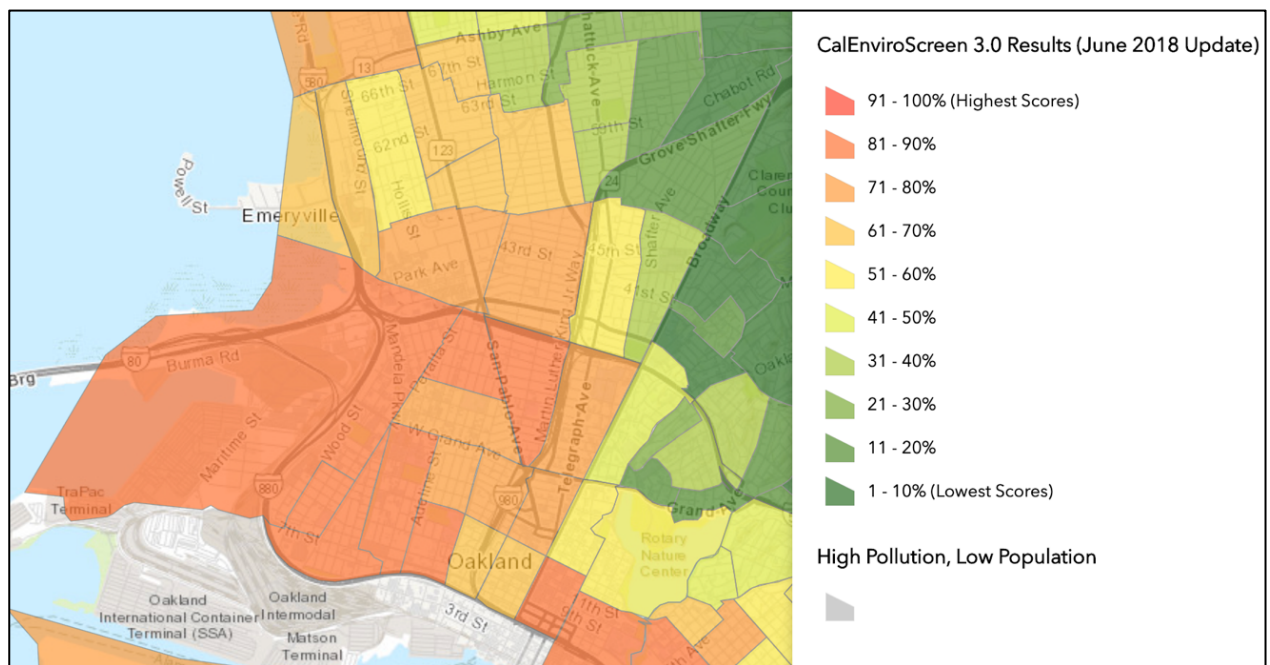


Figure 1: CalEnviroScreen 3.0 Pollution Burden Map of West Oakland.

²⁴³ Parliament, *Chocolate City*, Vinyl. Casablanca, 1975.

²⁴⁴ California Environmental Protection Agency. “California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment.”

²⁴⁵ California Environmental Protection Agency. “CalEnviroScreen 3.0 Pollution Burden Map.”

²⁴⁶ California Environmental Protection Agency. “CalEnviroScreen 2.0 Pollution Burden Indicators Cleanups.”

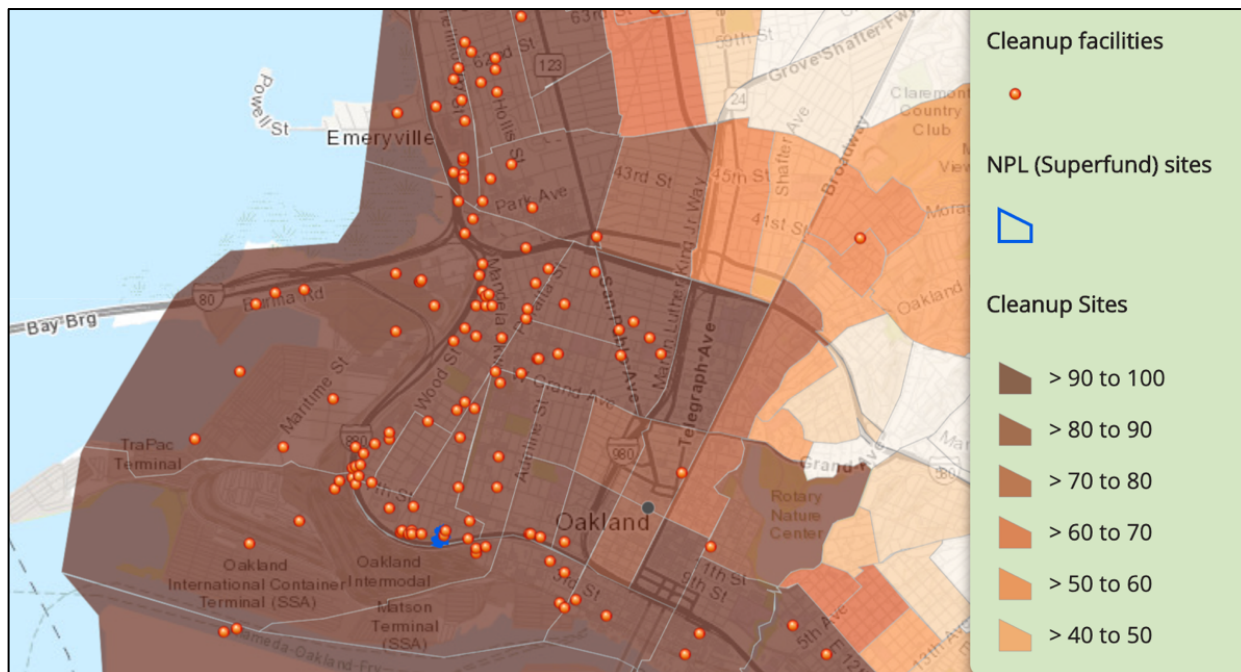


Figure 2: CalEnviroScreen 2.0 Pollution Burden Indicators Map Cleanup Sites in West Oakland.

According to the Bay Area Census, by 2000 the relative numbers of Black residents in Oakland’s Population decreased from ~44% in 1990 (163,526) to ~36% (142,460) in 2000, an approximate 21,066 Black population loss while the overall population of Oakland gained approximately 27,000 new residents.²⁴⁷ Between the 2000 and the 2010 Census, Oakland lost close to 33,000 of its African American population.²⁴⁸ Yet, Oakland still has a very diverse population when looking at demographics at a citywide scale. When focusing on West Oakland’s 94607 zip code, African Americans are the largest segment of the population (*Table 2*).

City of Oakland	West Oakland Zip 94607
African American/Black 28%	African American/Black 38.5%
White/Caucasian 25.9%	White/Caucasian 19.9%
Latinx 25.4%	Latinx 12.6%
Asian 16%	Asian 28.8%
Other 3.9%	Other 0.2%

Table 2: City of Oakland Overall and West Oakland Racial Demographics in 2010.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Bay Area Census “City of Oakland, Alameda County.”

²⁴⁸ Bay Area Census “City of Oakland, Alameda County.”

²⁴⁹ US Census Bureau, “Census.Gov,” Census.gov, n.d.

The West Oakland Specific Plan

The West Oakland Specific Plan's (WOSP) images, discussed below, are comprised of both site photos and renderings of the proposed future green city. The existing site images show an empty and blighted landscape while the proposed future development renderings show more trees and green spaces, depicting a significant *greening event*. A new Oakland is created in which wealthier and whiter populations are rendered into this new green future while replacing the existing Black population according to the US Census and thus is appropriating this historically African American neighborhood. Thus, I label it as an expression and promotion of green gentrification within Oakland's municipal city planning document.

This analysis focuses on the five sets of images within Appendix A of the WOSP. Appendix A consists of 13 images in total which include an Opportunity Area Map (Figure 3), five images of the existing opportunity sites (Images 1, 3, 5, 9, 11) and renderings of a greener future Oakland (Images 2, 4, 6, 10, 12). The Opportunity Area map contains 4 locations; Opportunity Area 1—Mandela/West Grand, Opportunity Area 2—7th Street and Peralta, Opportunity Area 3—3rd Street and Linden Street, Opportunity Area 4—San Pablo Ave. near West Grand. These Opportunity Area represent the potential sites for development and have shared characteristics based on “factors that have impeded development, [...] market studies, [...] similar land use policies and regulations, [and] street configurations and infrastructure systems that support future development;”²⁵⁰

In what follows, Opportunity Area site images are placed in conversation with one another, with three sets of images discussed in detail. The juxtaposition of these images tells a story through visual depictions of the state of these sites in 2014 and the desired future municipal outcome of West Oakland. I argue that the photos that show the existing opportunity sites are historically rooted in environmental narratives and practices that remove the existing population by portraying an empty unpeopled landscape while also depicting a blighted urban landscape and wasteland.

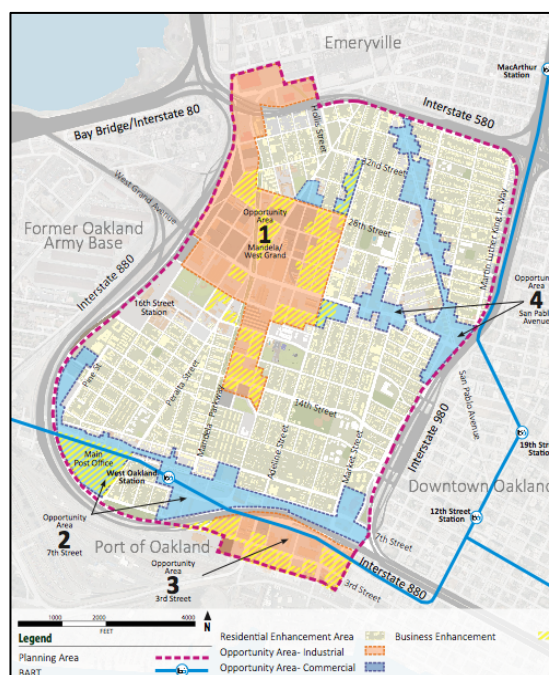


Figure 3: WOSP Opportunity Area Map.

²⁵⁰ WOSP, Intro 1-13.

The African American population is so diminished from their actual residential tract numbers, they are virtually disappeared from the site photos even as future renderings show a diverse population. Figure 4 is the Opportunity Area Map segmented into 11 census tracts and labeled A-K and corresponds with Table 3 which identifies each tract and shows the total population and race by percentages within each of these tracts, based on the 2010 US census. African Americans are the largest population in all the tracts except one, area “I” in which the Asian population is recorded at 51% (Figure 4 and Table 3).

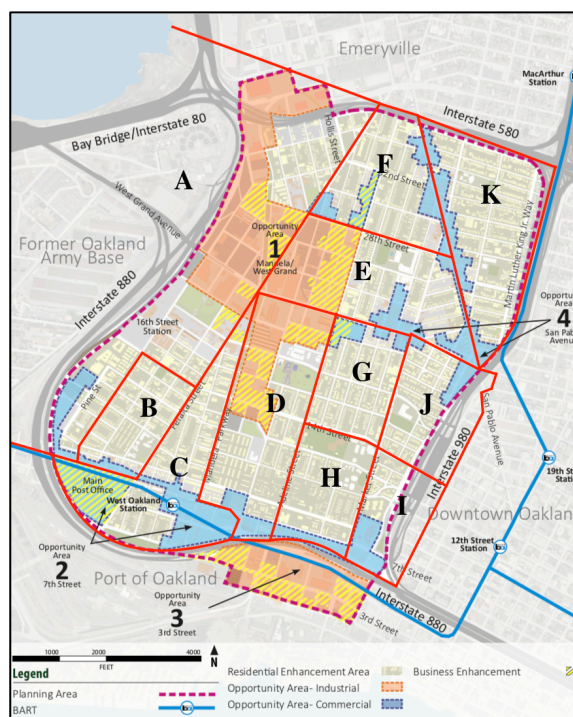


Figure 4: West Oakland Opportunity Areas with Census Tracts²⁵¹ Demarcated and Labeled A-K. The Tract Labels Corresponds to Total Population and Race Percentages in Table 3.

Area	Population Total	Black %	White %	Latinx %	Asian %	Other %	Native American %
A	2,667	33	26	26	10	5	-
B	1,703	57	15	19	3	5	-
C	2,385	36	16	30	12	5	-
D	2,193	62	7	9	17	5	-
E	2,163	47	16	21	12	4	1
F	2,630	53	20	15	8	4	-
G	2,351	58	13	9	14	6	1
H	1,784	67	8	5	17	4	-
I	1,151	30	11	6	51	3	-
J	1,569	56	13	16	10	5	-
K	4,314	48	13	21	10	5	1

Table 3: West Oakland Race/Ethnicity Census Tract Data 2010²⁵²

²⁵¹ California Environmental Protection Agency. CalEnvironScreen 2.0 Census Tracts.

²⁵² California Environmental Protection Agency. CalEnvironScreen 2.0 Census Tracts.

Racial Ordering, Racial Triangulation & Colorblind Talk

In this section I will discuss five sets of images from the West Oakland Specific Plan. Each set of images corresponds to each of the Opportunity Area sites, the first image represents the existing site and the second image is a rendering of the proposed future development of the existing site. All the site images in the WOSP show a type of colorblind talk in which the images show a diverse population to “hide the American racial order from view, protecting it from challenge.” This is done by misrepresenting the current African American population, through the lack of dark skin representation, and rendering fewer Black people than what is recorded by both the census tract data and citywide demographics.²⁵³ Lastly, the projected development renderings display a different and more affluent whiter population in a greener landscape, and thus green gentrification is expressed in this municipal document (*see images 1 and 2*).

Opportunity Area 1: Mandela/West Grand



Image 1: Existing View at 26th Street from Mandela.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Kim, “*Bitter Fruit*,” 19

²⁵⁴ WOSP, A-7.



Image 2: Proposed Development at 26th Street from Mandela.²⁵⁵

All of Kim's concepts of racial ordering and colorblind talk can be seen in Image 4, the Proposed Development at 7th Street and Peralta. Image 4 depicts an active intersection in West Oakland with a diversity population. This rendering also evokes the erasure of the African American population and constructs a racial ordering through the absences of accurate representation. There are only three identifiable Black people: two women and a man that is half within the image and half outside of it, connoting that he is not whole but severed from fully accessing this new green space. This image although bathed in a utopian understanding of racial diversity can also be understood within the realm of colorblind talk in which Asian, Latinx, and Whites move through this space in numbers not reflective of the current demographics of West Oakland.

²⁵⁵ WOSP, A-7.

Opportunity Area 2: 7th Street and Peralta



Image 3: Existing View at 7th Street and Peralta.²⁵⁶



Image 4: Proposed Development at 7th Street and Peralta.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ WOSP, A-10.

²⁵⁷ WOSP, A-10.

The images of 7th Street and Mandela Parkway are fraught with many contradictions and tensions in representing both race and space (*Images 5 and 6*). The existing view visually portrays a dystopic urban landscape overwhelmed by gray and anemic green spaces, emptied of people and lacking in community (*Image 5*). It is a far cry from replicating the standing racial demographics or activities on the ground. This connotes an abandoned landscape featuring blight. The population depicted within the proposed development, again, does not reflect the racial census of West Oakland specifically or Oakland more generally (*Image 6*).

The proposed development of 7th Street and Mandela Parkway displays a building identified as the Blues Art Cafe which could be understood as “honoring the culture, legacy, and history that have made West Oakland special”²⁵⁸ as articulated in Appendix A (*Image 6*). Yet in fact something very different is actually being conveyed. As much as this image identifies the historical legacy of a Black West Oakland, it breaks away from it by producing a visual equivalent of colorblind talk while also displaying a form of environmental gentrification in that it is performing social sensitivity while it is subordinating equity to profit-minded development.”²⁵⁹

Opportunity Area 2: 7th Street and Mandela Parkway



Image 5: Existing View at 7th Street and Mandela Parkway.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ WOSP, A-1.

²⁵⁹ Checker, “Wiped Out by the “Greenwave,” 210-29.

²⁶⁰ WOSP, A-14.



Image 6: Proposed Development at 7th Street and Mandela Parkway.²⁶¹



Image 7



Image 8

Enlarged images from Proposed Development at 7th Street and Mandela Parkway and Mandela Parkway.²⁶²

²⁶¹ WOSP, A-14.

²⁶² WOSP, A-14.

It could be understood that through interpellation, White bodies that are being called or hailed into these spaces. These images not only reflect the desired population that the municipal government seeks, it directly places this population into the landscape. Caught in the spectacle of what appears to be a racially diverse future of West Oakland, the current standing population of today is lost to the promise of a better, greener, whiter, and wealthier tomorrow depicting green gentrification and concurrent racialization. It portrays a historically African American neighborhood without its Black population. Yet, trees and green space are worked into the landscape again connoting the future of Oakland as a green city.

Images of the proposed development of 7th Street and Mandela Parkway which have been enlarged (*Images 7 and 8*) to make visible a group of Black men standing and together playing jazz music to a small all White crowd. This jazz quartet aligns with a New Orleans style of jazz historically associated with West Oakland and the people who came during the Second Great Migration of African American from the South. As much as this is a depiction of Black musical heritage through street performance, it also places these men as informal laborers. They are selling their music for dollars and cents to be collected in an instrument case that sits on the ground. These men are conveyed as street entertainers for the predominantly White residents, and most likely they cannot afford to live there. In the bottom left corner, a Black woman with a Black child are walking off and away from this space (*Image 6 and enlarged version in Image 8*). Within this racial ordering, Blacks are positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy as street performers and positioned walking out of this image connoting that they do not belong in the space, or to West Oakland anymore.

When these images juxtaposed together, the politics of green gentrification and environmental gentrification and historical racialized environmental ideologies are more clearly revealed in the West Oakland Plan. The Existing View at 7th Street and Mandela Parkway (*Image 5*) presents the landscape as a clean canvas evoking a purposeful absence through population erasure. Thus, the current population, many whom are undesirable low-income and homeless residents are removed, invoking a process of ecological gentrification. This is either a well-timed photographic opportunity to display an emptied urban space or, in a more nefarious interpretation, the image could have been digitally manipulated to remove the population, thus erasing them from the landscape. Either way the politics of gentrification and environmental displacement are replicated and embedded in these images.

The existing image of 3rd Street and Linden Street (*Image 9*) does not show the racial characteristics of this population, it still holds true to the previous patterns of emptied landscapes and a lack of healthy vegetation also seen in the existing view. Both images of the proposed developments for 3rd Street and Linden (*Image 10*) and San Pablo near West Grand Avenue (*Image 12*) below show a reverberation of the White city with new white buildings and lush green spaces with tree-lined streets. These white buildings are condos and/or luxury apartments that replace the existing low-income housing, again expressing the relationships between gentrification and historically rooted and racialized environmental practices of displacement.

Opportunity Area 3: 3rd Street and Linden Street

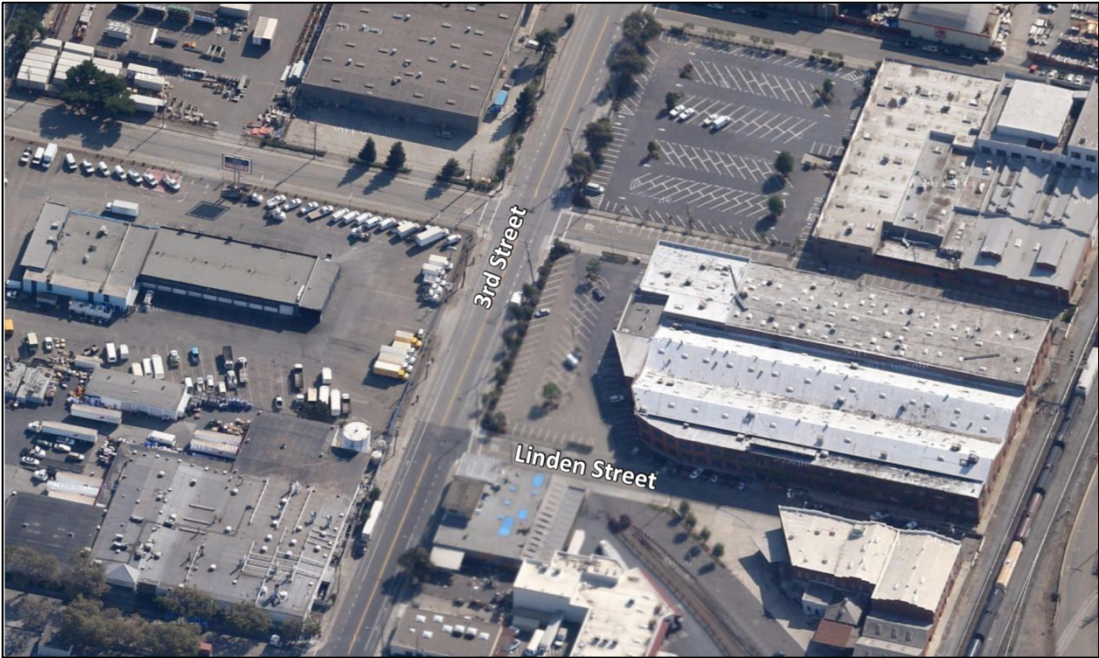


Image 9: Existing View 3rd Street and Linden Street.²⁶³



Image 10: Proposed Development at 3rd Street and Linden.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ WOSP, A-9.
²⁶⁴ WOSP, A-9.

Opportunity Area 4: San Pablo Ave. near West Grand



Image 11: Existing View at San Pablo near West Grand Avenue.²⁶⁵



Image 12: Proposed Development at San Pablo near West Grand Avenue.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ WOSP, A-13.

²⁶⁶ WOSP, A-13.

Conclusion

This chapter has used photos and renderings from the West Oakland Specific Plan to demonstrate the intentionality of a new racialization of Oakland's space, the disappearing of African Americans from the city they came to make their own, and racisms embedded within this municipal document. The WOSP, is acting as a gentrification apparatus by rendering green gentrification and erasing race through depicting a different demographic, one less Black and more affluent than the current residents in West Oakland. City Plans are important mechanisms of gentrification; I have shown how this plays out in the process and/or plans to gentrify and thereby beautify and green West Oakland. This is being done through both historically rooted environmental narratives and practices that align with the contemporary concepts of ecological gentrification, green gentrification, and environmental gentrification. The narratives and images depict a longing for green urban spaces and depends on African Americans being displaced—as they have being drawn in the plan and shown above. The analysis of these images brings a different perspective on the gentrification process and its racializing intentions in West Oakland. Municipal governments are creating the conditions through which affluent new residents are to be attracted to Oakland; these are not depictions of the individualized actions of White residents. The goal of the plan is obviously expressed in the exclusion of both low-income and African American communities from Oakland's future green city. Images and words tell a subliminal story as powerfully as the hope for “improvement” and urban development.

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Chapter 4.
**ENCLOSURE-OCCUPATIONS: CONTESTED PRODUCTIONS OF GREEN SPACE &
THE PARADOXES WITHIN OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA'S GREEN CITY**

Abstract

This study focuses on a small but highly used park in Oakland, California that is crucial to the local community. Tensions between park use, the commodification of park space, and lack of public park funding have been made visible on the landscape of Mosswood Park. This paper looks at two types of enclosure-occupations: one from *above*, government-sanctioned events which allow for the temporary enclosure of park space for private events, and the other from *below*, informal extralegal encampments of unsheltered residents. While those who participate in these enclosure-occupations have vastly different economic, political, and social power, both enclosure-occupations simultaneously create openings for some while constricting public park access for others.

Introduction

Over the last decade scholarship has focused on how green space creation, beautification, and restoration projects influence gentrification impacting the rise of property values and housing costs and displacing low-income and/or residents of color.²⁶⁷ Scholarship has also focused on how sustainability agendas and greening strategies have resulted in environmental (in)justices as they connect to green space creation.²⁶⁸ While many of these processes are also taking place in Oakland, California, an influx of high wage, predominately White, residents with connections to the Silicon Valley's tech industry has become the harbingers of gentrification and the benefactors of the city's greening processes. Long-term residents, particularly renters of color and those in low-income neighborhoods, have been priced out of their housing causing mass evictions and an exodus of Oaklanders leaving the city and possibility the state altogether.²⁶⁹ In turn, the economic and racial demographic changes within the municipality have created tensions between new and long-term residents who have different ideologies around public space, parks, and green space uses.

The City of Oakland's public park system consists of approximately 130 parks, 20 recreation centers, and 35 athletic fields.²⁷⁰ Its parks span in size and with differing green space amenities, from small urban pocket parks with little to no green space to the 500-acre Joaquin Miller Park that connects to the larger East Bay Regional Park system and is described as "urban wildlands."²⁷¹ Over the last decade, Oakland has been implementing an environmental sustainability agenda which has included green space creation, beautification, and restoration projects. The most notable has been at the restoration of Lake Merritt, the first wildlife refuge in North America and is known as the jewel of Oakland; since 2011 it has undergone more than \$200 million in restorations. The legal instrument that made this possible was Measure DD, that, in 2002 established the Trust for Clean Water and Safe Parks and was supported by 80% of Oakland's residents. Most of its green space creation and beautification projects were completed in 2019, including a new four-acre green space for use as an amphitheater and the 14-acre Green Streets Project to "facilitate pedestrian and bicycle use, calm traffic, increase parklands, improve Snow Park, and improve water quality."²⁷² Other parks in Oakland, like Mosswood Park and its recreation center, have been eclipsed by Lake Merritt and have garnered less municipal attention and resources. Mosswood is one of Oakland's high use recreational areas and home to long-standing community festivals; it has served as a local community center for generations.

The annual summer rock concert and festival, Burger Boogaloo, has taken place at Mosswood Park since 2013. Every year approximately half of the park is gated and closed to the public. Events like the Burger Boogaloo are representative of a growing industry of event organizers that use public parks as venues to provide fee-based entertainment and make a profit. In November 2016, the Mosswood Recreation Center suffered a fire which razed the building, and it was not until August 2018 that a new temporary center was constructed in its place. In the two-years, during the loss of its recreation center, Mosswood Park experienced an increase in unsheltered/homeless people residing in tents and forming encampments, in various parts of the park. The increase in encampments is both a city and statewide phenomenon, the result of a

²⁶⁷ Kenneth A. Gould and Tammy L. Lewis, "The Environmental Injustice of Green Gentrification: The Case of Brooklyn's Prospect Park," in *The World in Brooklyn: Gentrification, Immigration, and Ethnic Politics in a Global City*, ed. by DeSena, Judith N. and Timothy Shortell (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 113-146.

²⁶⁸ Winifred Curran and Trina Hamilton, "Just green enough: contesting environmental gentrification in Green Point, Brooklyn." *Local Environment* (2012): 1027-1042.

²⁶⁹ Laura Newberry, "Oakland's black churches struggle as African Americans Leave" *San Francisco Chronicle*. January 1, 2017.

²⁷⁰ City of Oakland, "Parks."

²⁷¹ City of Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development, "Joaquin Miller Park."

²⁷² City of Oakland, "Measure DD Lake Merritt Improvements: Lakeside Green Streets" City of Oakland."

housing crisis spurred on by sharp increases in rents and the reduction of affordable and low-income housing stock. Between 2016 and 2020 tensions between residents living next to the park, those residing in the park, and those who rent the park for events began to grow, sparking heated debates and raising concerns around park access, park use, and park value.

My study focused on the social and the spatial dynamics within the green space of Mosswood Park. This neighborhood park has not undergone green space creation, beautification, and/or restoration projects in the last decade. Based on participant observation, City of Oakland documents, public meetings, and interviews, I examine how residents with different economic, political, and social power have used this park's space and affected park access. As an extended case study on the tensions between green space access, commodification, and use within Oakland from 2016-2020, Mosswood Park shows how park users enclose and occupy park space. This practice is representative of the larger dynamics taking place within the municipality across various parks albeit in differing degrees.

I employ the term enclosure-occupations to capture the processes in which park users produce barriers by erecting fences or using park infrastructure to enclose green spaces and demarcate an area of occupation and exclusion, at times in service to the local government and at times to its disservice. I will show how the enclosure-occupations have created a paradox in which an increase in physical green spaces and in green space beautification, creation, and restoration projects within the city at-large has not necessarily translated into an increase in public park access by residents and park users. While enclosure-occupations are temporary, they simultaneously create openings for some while constricting public park access for others and make visible how residents are negotiating the realities, opportunities, and pitfalls of Oakland's transition to a green city.

The Karls in the Park: The Commodification of Green Spaces and Public Parks as a Commons

By deploying two Karls, Marx and Polanyi, to elucidate the tensions between *use-value* and *exchange-value* of a fictitious commodity, public parkland, I analyze how these commons are enclosed and occupied for exclusive use and to generate capital for certain segments of the population. Polanyi situates labor, land, and money as fictitious or false commodities, specifically because "none are [initially] produced for sale."²⁷³ Polanyi and Marx both focus on land as a fictitious commodity; Polanyi showing that land as commodity emerged in the aftermath of England's feudal system, in the sense that land is not initially produced for the market and cannot be subjected to market markets forces without regulation and protection or it will "die."²⁷⁴ Until recently, public parks were produced as a public resource, a commons for *the people*, and not necessarily the market.

Marx identifies that a commodity has both a use-value and an exchange-value within the capitalist system.²⁷⁵ Tensions between and among land-use and land-values as well as use-values and exchange-values have emerged as the municipal government and its residents recognize public park lands and green spaces as a highly valued amenity within the built environment, in which access has become commodified. How the government seeks to and provides opportunities for park users to profit from public parkland is central to understanding how municipalities and their differentiated constituencies have both divergent and convergent understandings around land-uses and land-values. Conflicts between use-values and exchange-values, between residents and park

²⁷³ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 76.

²⁷⁴ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 76.

²⁷⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 1* (London: Penguin Book, 1990), 125.

users, have led to concerns around access and the slippery slope towards a type of privatization through the exclusionary practices of enclosure.

The term *gentrification* was originally coined by Ruth Glass in 1964 to convey the neighborhood change taking place in the UK while operationalizing the term gentry, originally derived from Britain's feudal period.²⁷⁶ The transition from the British feudal system into a capitalist market included a process of enclosure acts leading to the occupations of the *commons*, "resources that are governed by common (shared) use-rights."²⁷⁷ The monarch, the owner of all land, bestowed upon the peasantry the ability to use communal lands, which directly contributed to their subsistence including food production, gathering housing materials from forests, hunting game, and the like. In this work, I call the commons, in relationship to our current system of public park lands and green spaces, a resource with shared use-rights. In Oakland, the municipal government has authority to govern the common use and administration, including the upkeep, of these public held lands and can bestow special form of access to this resource through a process of permits.

Public parks, especially in urban areas, in Oakland were established in ways reminiscent of a commons or commonly held resource *held* by the residents and citizens living in a city. Parks were initially intended to provide access to green spaces for well-being, and to enable residents the ability to escape the harshness of urban life by bestowing access to nature.²⁷⁸ Parks were initially created for a public good, not a commodity. These benefits were meant for rich and poor alike: for low-income, communities of color, and for all those within an urban space who do not have access to the kinds of private resources that could provide the same well-being, such as a back yard.²⁷⁹ These considerations have been expressed over the 20th century, when urban parks have been identified as crucial to human health, as "the lungs of the city", and a panacea to many social and health ills attributed to urban living.²⁸⁰

When Marx laid out what he called the process of primitive accumulation, he discussed its occurrence during a centuries' long transition from feudalism. During that time, peasants with use rights to the land were violently removed or forced from land many had used for centuries, losing access to their means of both production and subsistence, in a series of physical enclosures, followed by legal instruments called in England the acts of enclosure.²⁸¹ These exclusionary land practices drove the peasantry off of their once commonly held lands and severed their ability to subsist off the land. The enclosure of commonly held green spaces and parks for private use, as I describe below, are akin to the enclosures of forests and fields in England's feudal past although under an entirely different form of government. The city government in Oakland, for example, holds city park lands in a kind of common trust for the citizens and residents of the city, and allows residents from other places access as well. The city regulates use-rights and access to these park commons and green spaces.^{282, 283, 284}

²⁷⁶ Ruth Glass, "Introduction: Aspects of Change," in *London: Aspects of Change*, ed. Center for Urban Studies Report No. 3(London: MacKibbin and Kee, 1964), xiii-xlii.

²⁷⁷ Shin Lee and Chris Webster, "Enclosure of the urban commons," *Geo Journal* 66 (2006): 27-42.

²⁷⁸ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 191.

²⁷⁹ Elizabeth Carney, "Suburbanizing Nature and Naturalizing Suburbanites: Outdoor-Living Culture and Landscapes of Growth," *Western Historical Quarterly* 38 (Winter 2007): 477-500.

²⁸⁰ Karen R. Jones, "'The Lungs of the City': Green Space, Public Health and Bodily Metaphor in the Landscape of Urban Park History." *Environment and History* 24 (2018): 42.

²⁸¹ Marx, *Capital*, 875.

²⁸² Marx, *Capital*, 510- 521.

²⁸³ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 71-89.

²⁸⁴ E.P. Thompson. *Whigs and Hunters: The Origins of the Black Act*. London: Allen Lane, 1975.

Oakland, however, has enabled a series of gated or barrier enclosures within their public parks: at times these enclosures generate benefit flows to the city, and others create expenses for the city. Based on my findings from a case-study of Mosswood Park, I argue in this chapter that the uneven power dynamics among different groups of Oakland residents, and classed groups in the Bay Area, manifest in differential access to the park and its various benefits. Both types of enclosure diminish others' access to this same public resource. However, who encloses and occupies space under what conditions, and to what result, are different in practice and the ways they are understood. Looking at these efforts of individuals to occupy land, albeit temporarily, exposes the uneven power dynamics that allow for some members of the public to exert control over place through economic strategies and municipal support and, at the same time, to diminish access to this same public resource for others.

Much of the policies and practices regarding access to green spaces in cities focuses on residential proximity to parks and green space as the determining factor. Park advocates and organizations, such as the Trust for Public Lands, use a scale of proximity, a 10-minute walk (approximately a half-mile) to a park or a green space as an indicator of access.²⁸⁵ Oakland ranks 83 out of 100, according to the Trust for Public Land, suggesting that most Oakland residents (Oaklanders) have access to a public park/green space. While the National Recreation and Park Association is in concert with the 10-minute walk proximity they add that the walk must be to a high-quality park or green space.²⁸⁶

Proximity alone does not ensure safe and usable access. Ribot and Peluso conceptualize access outside of the traditional understanding of property rights and define access “as the ability to benefit from things—including material objects, persons, institutions, and symbols.”²⁸⁷ By focusing on “ability, rather than rights as in property theory, this formulation brings attention to a wider range of social relationships that can constrain or enable people to benefit from resources without focusing on property relations alone.”²⁸⁸ The social interactions within the shared green space, and the structures and mechanisms of access must also be considered in gauging access and use. Park users' ability to benefit as put forth by Ribot and Peluso is salient for Oakland park users and makes visible how use-value connects to park engagements in which residents seek to participate within their publicly shared green spaces.

To discuss how barriers are created and/or used as means of enclosure and demarcate a territory (however micro) of occupation, and site of exclusion by specific park users, I employ the term enclosure-occupations. Enclosure-occupations are produced by residents and park users with vastly different degrees of economic, social, and political power. The first type of enclosure-occupation I call *enclosure-occupations from below*. This refers to informal extralegal housing settlements created by unsheltered (homeless) residents through the establishment of encampments using barriers made of found materials that serve to demarcate and occupy space. The second, I call *enclosure-occupations from above*. These are municipal government-sanctioned semi-private events in which fee-based park use allows access through permits issued by the local governmental apparatus. Barriers in this case erected to demarcate the space to be occupied. The terms *from above* and *from below* speak to and are used to situate the socioeconomic status (SES) of these distinct groups with *enclosure-occupations from above* used to acknowledge those situated high

²⁸⁵ “The Trust for Public Land ParkScore index: The most comprehensive evaluation of park access and quality in the 100 largest U.S. cities,” Trust for Public Lands.

²⁸⁶ “Nation’s Mayors Launch Groundbreaking 10-Minute Walk to a Park Campaign,” *National Recreation and Park Association*, October 10, 2017.

²⁸⁷ Jesse C. Ribot and Nancy Peluso, “A Theory of Access,” *Rural Sociology* 68, no. 2 (2003): 153.

²⁸⁸ Ribot and Peluso, “A Theory of Access,” 154.

on the socio-political-economic hierarchy; *enclosure-occupations from below* acknowledges the SES of low-income, those living in the dire straits of poverty, and situated at the bottom of the socio-political-economic hierarchy and often at the bottom of the municipality's concerns. In the next section, I discuss how these types of enclosures have both modified access to the resources of Mosswood Park.

Mosswood Park & Neighborhood

Mosswood Park and Recreation Center is located on four acres of land with a grassy meadow dotted by trees; reminiscent of a bucolic past, it provides spaces for sports, picnics, barbeques, and large events within an urban setting. Mosswood is also one of Oakland's oldest parks. Located near downtown Oakland, the park is flanked by the I-580 Freeway to the south and the Kaiser Permanente Medical Center to the east along Broadway Avenue, and surrounded by a mix of businesses and mostly single-family homes to the north and west (*Figure 1*). From the 1960s, and through the early 2000s, the Mosswood neighborhood, like most in the flat lands of Oakland, was a predominantly Black community of homeowners and renters who were left with well-worn homes in need of repair after the exodus of the former White residents who moved out

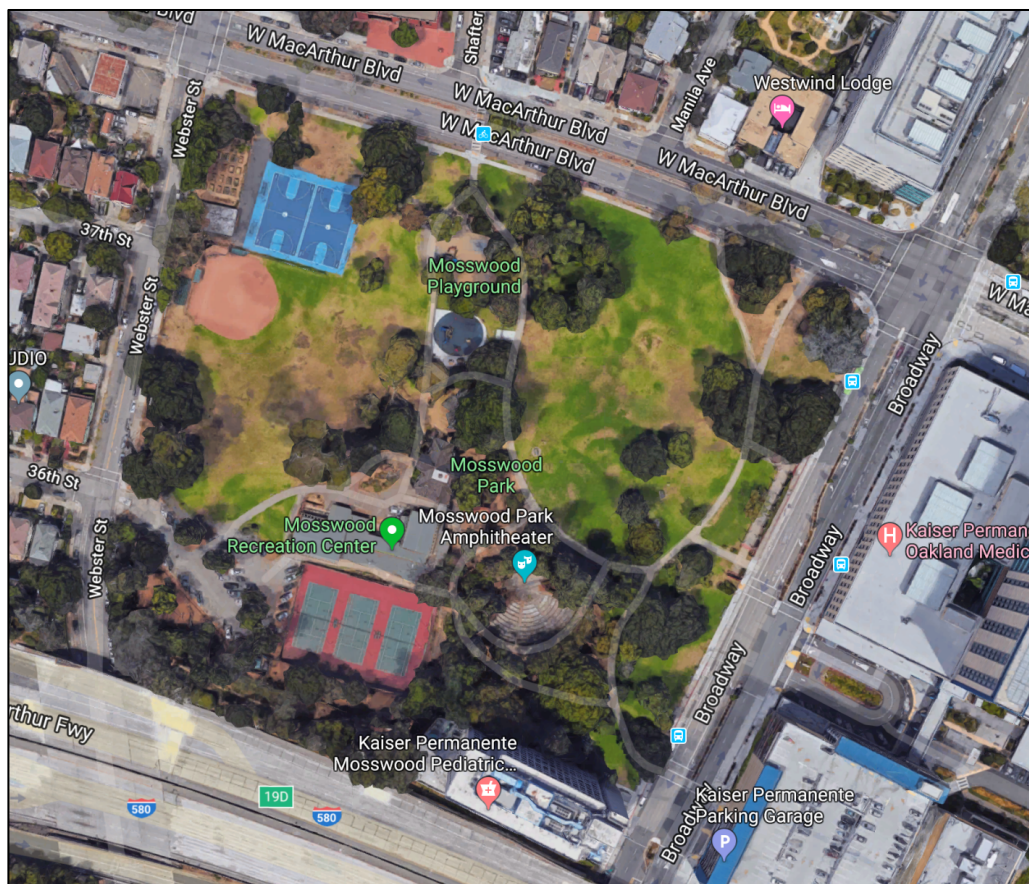


Figure 1: Mosswood Park, Oakland, CA.

during the post WWII suburbanization process between the 1950s and 1960s, what is referred to as “white flight.”²⁸⁹ After 2000, the Mosswood neighborhood demographics began to change again this time with African Americans moving out. Between 2007-2010 during the subprime mortgage crisis when foreclosures dispossessed homeowners of their homes, more White residents moved in and their numbers have steadily increased since then.

Today the Mosswood neighborhood is said to have “an urban suburban mix feel” with a majority White, 53%, population and with most of residents renting their homes.²⁹⁰ The neighborhood’s proximity to one of the largest employers, Kaiser Permanente,²⁹¹ and its access to public transportation and green space has made Mosswood a desirable neighborhood. Niche, a real estate site, ranks it “#12 in best neighborhoods to live in Oakland,” giving it an “A overall grade.”²⁹² Mosswood Park is one of the most accessible green spaces by public transportation in Oakland, with multiple bus lines and stops located at the park and its proximity to MacArthur Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station. The basketball court is heavily used by nearby residents, the larger Oakland community, and Kaiser employees. The tot-lot and play structures are teeming with children and their guardians on weekends and are used by the afterschool programs and summer programs held at the recreation center.

Enclosure-Occupations from Below

In the last decade, Mosswood Park and Recreation Center contended with a few unsheltered Oaklanders living in the park, whom the staff often knew by name and/or situation. Most of the homeless would position themselves next to the recreation center, behind and-between the dog park, on Oakland municipal land, and the fence closest to the freeway. This area is owned by the California Transportation Department (Caltrans). Using government fencing, these unsheltered Oakland residents could find some stability due to the blurred space of governance between city-owned and state-owned land in which both governments looked to the other to maintain and enforce, allowing the unhoused to stay. The failure of both government agencies to dismantle the encampments is a tacit recognition of their presence and even an acquiescence to their occupation of the space.

On November 26, 2016, right after Thanksgiving, the recreation center at Mosswood Park was engulfed in flames and destroyed. The local community was devastated by the loss of more than a building, as the recreation center had been a community gathering place for the surrounding neighborhood. Many of the rumors seeking to rationalize the cause of the fire became forms of blame pointed first at the aging facility and the possibility of old wiring being the source of the fire. In addition, some, community members pointed to the homeless living in the park. The official cause of the fire was never announced, according to staff. To date, no one has been held responsible. The notoriety of the Mosswood fire was eclipsed just one week later on December 2, 2016, when an Oakland live-work warehouse known as Ghost Ship caught fire during an illegal concert killing 36 people. It was recorded as the “deadliest fire in modern California history.”²⁹³ The Ghost Ship revealed the dire living conditions many low-income community members, and

²⁸⁹ Bay Area Census “City of Oakland, Alameda County.”

²⁹⁰ “Niche Mosswood #12 in Best Neighborhoods to Live in Oakland.”

²⁹¹ “City of Oakland Home to Major Employers.”

²⁹² “Niche Mosswood #12 in Best Neighborhoods to Live in Oakland.”

²⁹³ Thomas Peele and David Debolt, “Ghost Ship fire: Oakland releases long-awaited report on deadly inferno,” *The Mercury News*, June 12, 2017.

artists, had to endure to establish shelter.²⁹⁴ It also contributed to Oaklanders' fear of fire in homeless encampments, informal housing, and among the unsheltered populations.²⁹⁵

Mosswood's special needs afterschool program had to be relocated to another facility after the fire. The children were deeply saddened by the loss with many struggling with the change to a different location with different facilities and essentially losing access to their home park and environment. The loss of the recreation center also took a toll on parents who either had to find new daycare facilities and/or adjust to longer commutes to secure appropriate childcare. Before the Mosswood fire, most parents had to simply walk across the street to get to the recreation center. The surrounding residential and business communities also lost their community recreation space that served adults, including dance and other programs which have been a staple of the recreation center.

Between the fire in November 2016 and the establishment of a temporary community center in August 2018, Mosswood Park incurred a visible increase in informal encampments. Four major encampments in different areas of the park were set up with a few independent tents primarily positioned throughout the central grassy meadow area and along hidden treelined areas (*see Figures 2 and 3*). Although prior to the fire unsheltered residents slept in the park at night, this was the first-time dedicated structures like tents occupied park space during the day. During this time the county's unhoused population swelled from 4,040 in 2015 to 8,022 in 2019.²⁹⁶ The City of Oakland accounted for more than half of the overall homeless population in Alameda County: 2,191 in 2015 and 4,071 in 2019.²⁹⁷

Two encampments, the Dog Park (*demarcated by a yellow circle in Figure 2*) and the area between the tot-lot and the historic Moss house (*encircled in red in Figure 2*) were established in areas with dedicated park fencing. In so doing, unsheltered residents used an already present infrastructure to demarcate, occupy, and enclose the space. The two other encampments, located at the Pergola (*blue circle on Figure 2*) and at the amphitheater (*purple circle on Figure 2*), used the partially gated or walled structures and then positioned their tents to further enclose their occupation boundaries.

The Mosswood Dog Park became a major concern to other park users, local residents, and the City as the homeless encampment grew between the fences of City of Oakland park land and the gates that established by Caltrans lands. The change over time from a smaller unsheltered presence in the park to the establishment of much-larger enclosure-occupations and tented homeless encampments, took place when the recreation center and its community were mostly absent. According to park staff:

Before the fire they [unsheltered Oaklanders] stayed on the Caltrans land that bordered the park [...] They slept in front of the recreation center, they were pretty respectful, they cleaned stuff up in the morning, and they hung out in the park during the day, but they kind of weren't set up here on what appeared to be a permanent basis. We had a good relationship with them. Got into it sometimes, you know.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁴ Sam Levin, "Oakland warehouse fire is product of housing crisis, say artists and advocates," *The Guardian*, December 5, 2016.

²⁹⁵ Adam Mclean and Evan Blake, "California: Fire exposes conditions at Oakland homeless encampments" *World Socialist Website*, September 15, 2018.

²⁹⁶ Applied Survey Research Organization, "City of Oakland Homeless Count & Survey Comprehensive Report 2019," 2019.

²⁹⁷ Applied Survey Research Organization, "City of Oakland Homeless Count & Survey Comprehensive Report 2019," 2019.

²⁹⁸ City of Oakland staff member, interview, February 7, 2018.



Figure 2: Enclosure-Occupations from Below Tents/Encampment Locations at Mosswood Park, June 6, 2018.



Figure 3: Enclosure-Occupations from Below Images of Tents & Encampments in Mosswood Park June 6, 2018. Colors correspond to locations in Figure 2, above.

The homeless residents who had been active park users but remained mostly hidden prior to the fire had an understanding with park staff. They also kept a safe distance from, and out of sight of, the youth and children attending programs when the recreation center was open during the day.²⁹⁹ This relationship between the unsheltered and park staff began to change with a new growing unsheltered population enclosing and occupying space, becoming very visible and active throughout the park, and constructing informal housing out of materials other than tents. Spaces like the dog park and walking paths were now blocked by encampments and litter which prevented residents and park-users from physically accessing those areas of the park and became a deterrent to others from using Mosswood park altogether.

Mosswood Recreation Center Returns

In August 2018, the Mosswood recreation center returned in a temporary form: a bright yellow row of portable buildings trimmed in green with a connecting platform that created play areas and a black chain link fence enclosing its perimeter (*see Figure 4*). The new fence used to gate in the children attending summer and after school programs was a result of safety concerns connected to the growing unsheltered population within the park. The center was giving the nickname the Temporary Little Center (TLC) by the local community organization and park stewards, the Mosswood Recreation Advisory Council (RAC). The emphasis on its temporality is a political stance, as the Mosswood RAC lobbies for a new permanent recreation center that reflects community needs. The fear of being neglected by the City and being relegated to a perpetual temporary structure runs high within this community.³⁰⁰



Figure 4: The New Temporary Mosswood Recreation Center.

²⁹⁹ City of Oakland staff member, interview, February 7, 2018.

³⁰⁰ This sentiment was echoed at many of the Recreation Advisory Council meetings between 2016-2020.

The afterschool program's children and their safety were a top priority as the Mosswood Recreation Center (MRC) began to reestablish its presence in the park in its temporary facility. The Mosswood Recreation Advisory Council (RAC), the park stewards, walked a compassionate line between wanting the encampment removed while also providing services for the unsheltered. The response to the enclosure-occupations from below has been complicated by community members' concerns around safety. Safety issues were articulated in three major themes: fear of violence, public health, and fire. While it is important not to paint all unsheltered Oaklanders with the same brush, these fears are not necessarily one directional and are based on concerning incidents. For example, intra-community encampment violence was witnessed by rec center staff (physical violence between members within the Mosswood Park encampments); they also witnessed people not belonging to the encampments perpetrating violence upon the unsheltered residents living in the park.³⁰¹

In 2018, the City of Oakland Public Works department had to refrain from tending to and cleaning the dog park/encampment area out of safety concerns after park staff and City workers were attacked and harmed by members from the encampments. Drug use was rampant within this particular encampment; after the area was cleared in preparation for the return of the Mosswood children, it was rendered unusable and unfit to walk dogs. Needles were the major concern, with one staff member saying "7000 needles" were collected in one sweep of the park. The area remained closed to park users until the necessary remediation took place. The other encampment areas have been avoided altogether by park users when they do use the park.

The City has made little to no intervention in the declining park during the two years between the loss of the recreation center and its temporary replacement. The lack of response enabled the creation of an environment in which drug use and the establishment of tents and other informal housing structures could be established and grow. The City's failure to take care of the park—a governance failure—enabled unsheltered Oaklanders to enclose and occupy the park-as-commons—privatizing it in effect—through controlling the space using the established fencing infrastructure within the providing a means to exclude park users while also enabling informal structures to occupy the space.

Other local residents and park users have lessened or ceased their use of Mosswood Park. In interviews and at public meetings, some residents cited the loss of the recreation center for their declining use, but most said they stopped using the park space out of safety concerns and the decline of park quality. According to a community member and parent of a teen in the Youth Tennis Program, "95% of the tennis parents won't go to Mosswood [it started] before the portables came back and then after the portables came back we still could not get people to come back, and they wanted to go somewhere else." Although there was a visible drop in overall park use between 2016 and 2020 particularly in areas where encampments were located, the basketball court and tot-lot/playground were used as they are positioned away from the encampments and less likely to experience the hazards left from drug paraphernalia. The basketball court is positioned furthest away from the encampments and is usually used by men from the local community and/or Kaiser employees; the play structure is positioned between the basketball court and the encampments and is used heavily on the weekends and sporadically during the week. Due to the high use of these spaces by the surrounding community and the fact that most of the unsheltered stayed close to or within their encampment sites, these park users have managed to stay out of each other's way.

³⁰¹ City of Oakland staff member, in conversation during Earth Day Clean Up, April 21, 2018

According to a community report, written and funded by the Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation, on park maintenance, park grounds, and facilities:

[...] The homeless crisis has overwhelmed some of the [C]ity's parks, impeding them from serving the intended function and placing new demands on an already under-resourced system. The crisis is particularly glaring as it coincides with one of the greatest economic booms in Oakland's history.³⁰²

Another paradox is revealed: in this case of enclosure-occupation from below: in spite of the growth in wealth observed within the city, gentrification has impacted the most vulnerable during Oakland's financial boom. As a result, Oakland parks along with other public spaces have become the sites of possession through occupation by unsheltered residents and homeless encampments.

The Larger Context of Enclosure-Occupations from Below in Oakland Parks

The City of Oakland has held a series of citywide meetings focused on the ever-expanding unsheltered population in parks throughout the city. The Embarcadero business meeting, attended by a majority White middle aged to elderly audience (I observed this meeting personally), centered on Union Point Park. Community members from local schools and youth education programs expressed their views that the park was no longer safe for children.³⁰³ One White elderly woman seated next to me, who identified herself as a youth education teacher, leaned in and said, "I stopped letting the kids play at the park." An audience member from the business community announced, "We can't allow homeless to ruin the parks for the rest of the city,"³⁰⁴ and other attendees concurred in rumbles and head nods. The meeting was being held at Homewood Suites, located less than three miles from Union Point Park which is the closest park amenity to the hotel, its manager conveyed his fear of loss of business as guests left reviews that they would not return to the hotel citing safety concerns due to the presence of homeless encampments. At an Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation breakfast meeting, the business community articulated a reluctance to donate money to parks due to "the homeless issue," and one said that they would be "putting good money after bad" with the understanding that the City did not have the capacity to upkeep any of the improvements if they were made.³⁰⁵

During another public meeting located next to Lake Merritt, Joe DeVries, the Assistant to the City Administrator/Chief Privacy Officer, announced a camping ban (by homeless) in all of Oakland municipal parks, which would be enforced by the Oakland Police Department. Tensions were high as unsheltered residents exclaimed during the meeting that the camping ban and the City's process of inadequately communicating and engaging the homeless community was a "violation of human rights."³⁰⁶ At all the public meetings that focused on homeless encampments, tempers ran high, and some in the crowd reminded the others to have sympathy towards the unsheltered Oaklanders. A woman who identified herself as a homeowner, in tears, said, "We are all affected," referring to the homeless crisis.³⁰⁷ Another claimed, "No one wants to go to the park

³⁰² "Continuing Crisis: The 2018 Report on the State of Maintenance in Oakland Parks," Oakland, CA: Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation, Fall 2018, 30.

³⁰³ Embarcadero Business Coalition Meeting," City of Oakland, December 6, 2018.

³⁰⁴ Embarcadero Business Coalition Meeting," City of Oakland, December 6, 2018.

³⁰⁵ City of Oakland, "Oakland Park and Recreation Foundation Breakfast," 7:30-9 am, Wednesday, November 14.

³⁰⁶ City of Oakland, "Community Meeting: Homelessness around Lake Merritt and Community Cabins," held by City Councilmembers Abel Guillén and Lynette Gibson McElhaney, September 13, 2018.

³⁰⁷ "City of Oakland, "Community Meeting: Homelessness around Lake Merritt and Community Cabins," held by City Councilmembers Abel Guillén and Lynette Gibson McElhaney, September 13, 2018.

anymore because they don't feel safe.”³⁰⁸ All of these safety concerns were coupled with environmental concerns including erosion of park quality, environmental degradation, and for many business people and homeowners, concerns about financial loss and declining property values. Yet, while the enclosure-occupations from below have garnered extensive attention by residents and the City, the growing and ever-increasing enclosure-occupations from above, discussed in the following section, have attracted little civic attention.

Enclosure-Occupations from Above

According to interviews with city staff, most parks and their recreation centers have been operating with ever-diminishing budgets and reduced staffing over the last decade. As of 2015, most recreation staff have been urged to increase and seek out revenue-generating opportunities, not to close the budget gap, but to simply continue park operations. The Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development (OPRYD) budget has stayed consistently at or near \$25 million since 1996, with an increase to \$26 million in 2016, and as it stands in March 2019 the City has asked for the department to cut approximately half a million dollars from its budget due to the City's pension fund crisis.³⁰⁹ The OPRYD budget is woefully deficient for the current population and economy of 2019. Since 1996, Oakland's population has swelled by 47,000 residents and the OPRYD budget has stayed around \$25 million, while it should be \$40 million if it had kept up with inflation (see *Figures 5 and 6*).³¹⁰ While the budget decreased by almost half in real terms over the last two decades, OPRYD and the City of Oakland are supporting a much larger population and more park space with fewer resources, leading to cuts in staff and services. For example, in 1992 Oakland had Rangers in their city parks whose primary duty was preservation and protection of park property. By 2011, there were two rangers funded in the Oakland budget,³¹¹ and today there are no City of Oakland Park Rangers.

Due to the City of Oakland's diminished budget, OPRYD staff have been encouraged to rent out park facilities.³¹² Oakland's budget shortfall comes at a time when a growing entertainment industry is renting public parks to cater to the new and rising numbers of Oakland's population. One such event, the Burger Boogaloo, is a two-day music festival, which has been taking place at Mosswood Park since 2013. Almost half of the park is gated for five days to keep out the general public; fence construction starts approximately three days prior to the event for securing equipment for setup (*Figures 7 and 8*). The fence perimeter includes the complete Broadway side of the park and half of the West MacArthur Avenue side; it then splits the park into two following the walking path before enclosing the park's section that borders the MacArthur Freeway.

³⁰⁸ City of Oakland, "Community Meeting: Homelessness around Lake Merritt and Community Cabins," held by City Councilmembers Abel Guillén and Lynette Gibson McElhaney, September 13, 2018.

³⁰⁹ "Grand Jury: Oakland Facing \$860M Retiree Healthcare Cost Crisis." *KPIX CBS Bay Area*, June 29, 2018.

³¹⁰ US inflation Calculator.

³¹¹ City of Oakland FY 2009-11 Policy Budget December 2009.

³¹² City of Oakland staff member, interview, January 23, 2018.

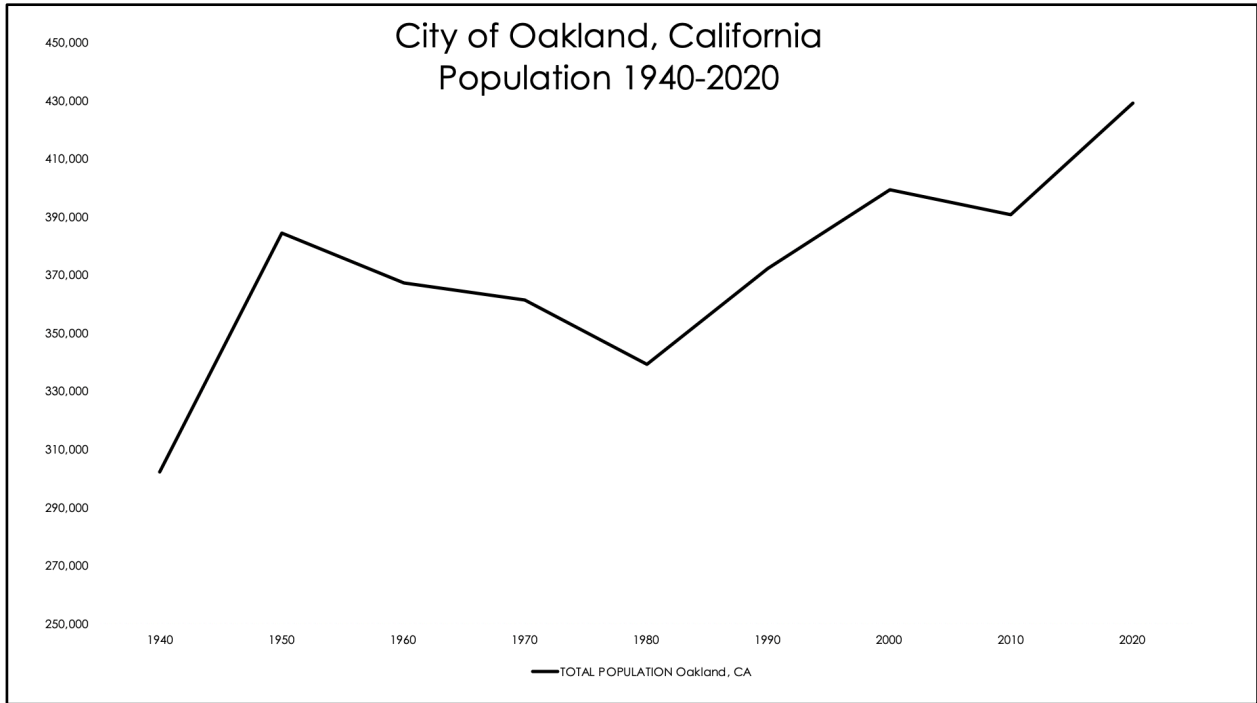


Figure 5: City of Oakland Population 1940-2020 U.S. Census Data.³¹³

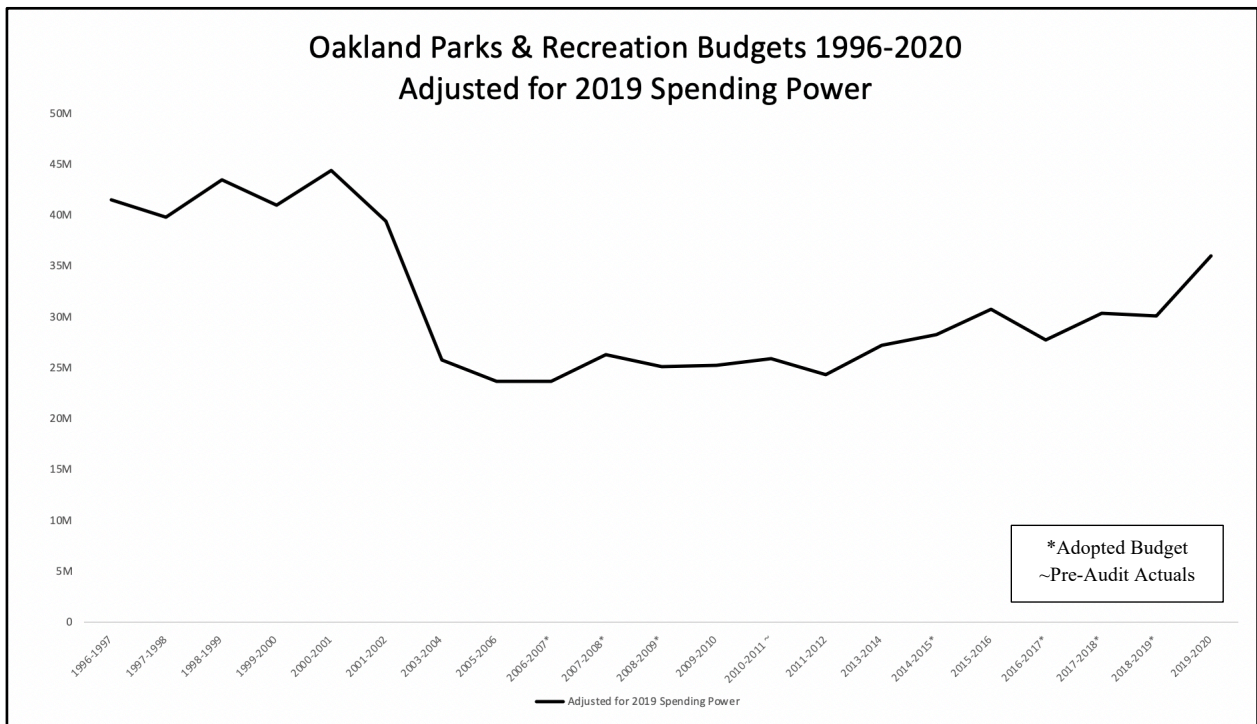


Figure 6: City of Oakland Park & Recreation Budgets Totals Adjusted for 2019 Spending Power 1996-2020.³¹⁴

³¹³ City of Oakland Population 1940-2010 with projected 2020 population from the U.S. Census.

³¹⁴ Data compiled from 1996-2020 City of Oakland Policy Budget Reports.

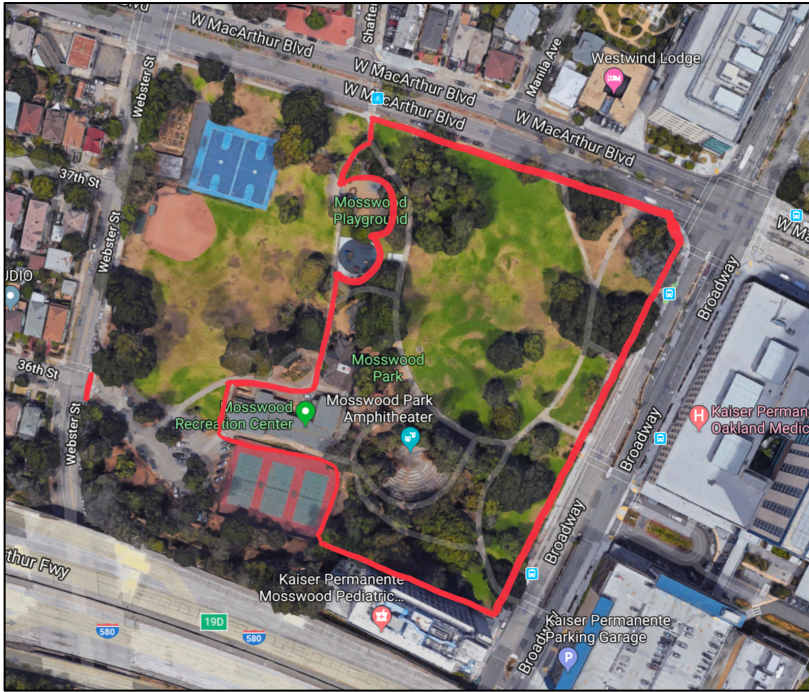


Figure 7: Demarcation of Burger Boogaloo Event Perimeter Fence, Thursday June 28 - Sunday July 1, 2018.



Figure 8: Images of Mosswood Park during a Non-event day and when Mosswood Park is Fenced During Burger Boogaloo Sunday July 1, 2018.

The first Burger Boogaloo was held in San Francisco at The Knockout, a live music/bar and concert venue, in 2009. In 2013, the Burger Boogaloo, organized by Mark Ribak and Amy Carver, moved to Oakland's Mosswood Park. It stands out as attracting a majority White crowd (Figure 9), for an event located in the historically predominantly African American neighborhood in the Oakland flats. The Burger Boogaloo occurs alongside other summer events and free community-based festivals organized predominantly by African Americans and people of color.³¹⁵

Based on the festivals that took place between 2016 and 2018, the Burger Boogaloo has been an anomaly within the City of Oakland park system and for the flats as it is one of only two events with an entrance fee and a fence fully enclosing a public park area to restrict entry. The Burger Boogaloo event encloses and occupies the park commons by gating the public park to accumulate. Thus, the enclosure in this case is explicitly meant to create private property rights by selling temporally defined, exclusive access to the space, albeit for a very limited period of time—4 to 5 days of being fenced off. The entrance fee charged amounts to a newly created exchange-value attached to the public park's limited access or exclusion of other park users during and just before the concert.



Figure 9: Burger Boogaloo audience 2018; Image by Erika Reinsel.³¹⁶

A similar situation pertains to events held in Joaquin Miller Park, home to the Woodminster Amphitheater. This site is dedicated to large ticketed concert events, such as Sunday in the

³¹⁵ Madeline Wells “In its Ninth Year, Burger Boogaloo Remains Lovably Quirky—But It Can Do Better,” East Bay Express July 3, 2018.

³¹⁶ Madeline Wells, “In Its Ninth Year, Burger Boogaloo Remains Lovably Quirky.”

Redwoods, an annual concert series which has taken place in Oakland for over a generation. The size of this park enables the concurrent park uses of both the events at Woodminster and more ‘traditional’ park uses, because the majority of the charismatic redwood landscapes and park space is not affected. Both exchange-values and use-values of the park are generated concurrently. In this bigger park, the concert events do not preclude everyday Oaklander’s park uses.

Another event at Mosswood that requested approval for admission fees was PRF BBQ West in 2017, an entertainment company that organizes music festivals at various park venues within the US and around the world. Yet, organizers provided “thirty tickets to be placed on reserve for individuals unable to afford the \$15 to \$25 entry fee.”³¹⁷ According to the PRF BBQ West 2017 request, “The [Mosswood] amphitheater will be roped off and a bonded security firm will be employed to promote safety.”³¹⁸ Events like the 2016 Belgium Tour and the Afrocentric Oakland annual event have both constructed gated areas for alcohol consumption, in essence making public park space private and allowing for alcohol sales, purchases, and consumption within the restricted and secured area of the park. Neither of these events required an entrance fee to attend. Staple annual events like Oakland Carnival and the Black-Eyed Pea Festival are free community-focused and primarily Black-organized events in which paid permits allow vendors to sell food and goods in Mosswood. The lion’s share of the profits accumulated through these events are through vending and vending permits. Most organizers reinvest any revenue gained from the event into the fees and expenditures needed to organize their next annual event.

The racial and class dynamics of Burger Boogaloo have generated a fraught response and lively discourses—both about the performers and the attendees—around the racial composition and costs of the gated events. It is, also my intention theoretically, to point out that the price of admission as well as the make-up of target audiences and performers at the event speak to the creation of exclusive exchange-value by this event alone.³¹⁹ In 2016 Burger Boogaloo touted itself as “crazy-affordable for a two-day festival” with ticket prices set between \$39-\$49 for a single day and \$59 for a two-day pass.³²⁰ In 2018, the prices dramatically increased to \$99-\$125 for a one-day pass, \$169 for a two-day pass, and \$269 for a two-day VIP, making it economically out of reach for many Oaklanders.

According to a staff member, “He [event organizer Ribak] has wanted to rent the whole park. I said, ‘Absolutely not.’”³²¹ Yet the staff continued to express some positive feelings about Ribak and Burger Boogaloo:

Every year he has, since he started the event, has been donating some of the revenue he takes in, he gives it right back to the recreation center. He has also sponsored our free baseball league we have for kids in the neighborhoods [...] He also employs a lot of local people through this event, local food business, local security company, all of the trash pickup [...] He has employed people just hanging out in the park looking for work.³²²

³¹⁷ Conan Newton on behalf of PRF BBQ West, “Proposal for PRF BBQ West 2017.” *Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission Meeting Agenda*. February 8, 2017.

³¹⁸ Conan Newton on behalf of PRF BBQ West, “Proposal for PRF BBQ West 2017.” *Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission Meeting Agenda*. February 8, 2017.

³¹⁹ Madeline Wells, “In Its Ninth Year, Burger Boogaloo Remains Lovably Quirky—But It Can Do Better,” *East Bay Express*, Tuesday July 3, 2018.

³²⁰ Jody Amable, “New acts and artists announced for Burger Boogaloo 2016,” *The Bay Bridged Bay Area Music*, May 12, 2016.

³²¹ City of Oakland staff member, interview, February 7, 2108.

³²² City of Oakland staff member, interview, February 7, 2108.

Ribak touted his support of the traditional community using the park as he spoke at a City Council meeting that focused on the Tuff Shed Program³²³ and unsheltered residents, “I have donated over \$20,000 to Mosswood,” and then he requested the removal of the homeless and their encampments for the 2019 festival. He is not alone in this request.³²⁴ During meetings of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Council (PRAC), which is the official commission that is responsible for approving all park events in which money is exchanged, community members and event organizers have asked if the homeless population could be removed. It was also asked during PRAC meetings if the City of Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development and Public Works could ensure that the park would be “cleaned” prior to the event, particularly the drug paraphernalia. The event coordinator indicated that he intended to do a pre-cleaning of the park due to the condition left by the unsheltered population who are also struggling with substance abuse issues.

The post-event reports on the Burger Boogaloo event submitted to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission between 2015 and 2018 show a change in perception of park quality and a rise in safety concerns. These post-event reports show an imminent tension growing between the enclosure-occupation from above and the enclosure-occupation from below and the conflicts between the values of these disparate communities. The post-event report asks event organizers to “list any problems, concerns, or other comments about your satisfaction in the way the event turned out.” In 2015, Ribak reported, “No complaints on our end. Mosswood Park makes for a fantastic musical experience.”³²⁵ In the 2017 report presented in May 2018, Ribak wrote, “There is a homeless encampment that has taken over Mosswood’s Dog Park, that poses a new risk for the event.”³²⁶ This report also indicates a potential loss of revenue by the City from the loss of the event if Burger Boogaloo decided to move its event from Mosswood Park and possibly the City of Oakland altogether. The reality of the loss of revenue from this event extends beyond park permits to include the hotels, restaurants and stores, and transportation costs out-of-town concert attendees contribute to the local economy.

The homeless encampments were, in fact, removed prior to the 2018 Burger Boogaloo event.³²⁷ According to the City of Oakland Parks, Recreation & Youth Development staff, the concert date merely coincided with the reopening of the Mosswood Temporary Recreation Center and the return of the afterschool program; the dismantling of the encampment was done to keep children safe. Even so, the Burger Boogaloo was blamed by the homeless community for the removal of the long-standing encampment in 2018.

The 2019 Compromise of Enclosure-Occupations from Above & Below

After the Burger Boogaloo 2018 concert, the encampments returned, grew, and formed new enclosures in the park. In 2019, the City of Oakland and enforced by the police moved the unsheltered living in the park and relocated them to the Broadway side of the park to contain and localize the impact of the encampment presence for residents and park users (*Figure 10*).³²⁸

³²³ Tuff Shed Program is dedicated to building and maintaining city constructed homeless encampments in which the housing structure is comprised of ready-made-sheds. Typically, these sheds are used to store gardening equipment and other tools and can be purchased at most big chain home improvement stores.

³²⁴ City of Oakland Life Enrichment Meeting, March 5, 2019.

³²⁵ Submission date May 25, 2016. Burger Boogaloo Post Event Report for July 25-26, 2016, Event Exhibit A Page 2 presented at PRAC June 8, 2016.

³²⁶ Submission dated April 24, 2018. Burger Boogaloo Post Event Report for July 1-2, 2017, Event Exhibit B Page 2 presented at PRAC May 9, 2018.

³²⁷ David Debolt, “Homeless cleared out of North Oakland Park,” *East Bay Express*, June 26, 2018.

³²⁸ Field Notes and Meeting Minutes from the Mosswood Recreation Advisory Council meeting February 6, 2019, by secretary of Mosswood (RAC) Brian Pearson with a presentation from Joe DeVries, assistant to the City Administrator and incharge of the “various City teams addressing homeless issues in Oakland.”

Between April 2019 and November 2019, the City of Oakland did not provide the encampment any sanitation services.³²⁹ A rogue encampment located behind the tennis courts and on the Caltrans property became an additional point of concern as debris, drug paraphernalia, and human biowaste accumulated and fell onto the courts impacting the free youth tennis program and raising new health and safety concerns.³³⁰ The new City-designated encampment was located in the areas used for Mosswood’s cultural festivals and the event space used by the Burger Boogaloo.

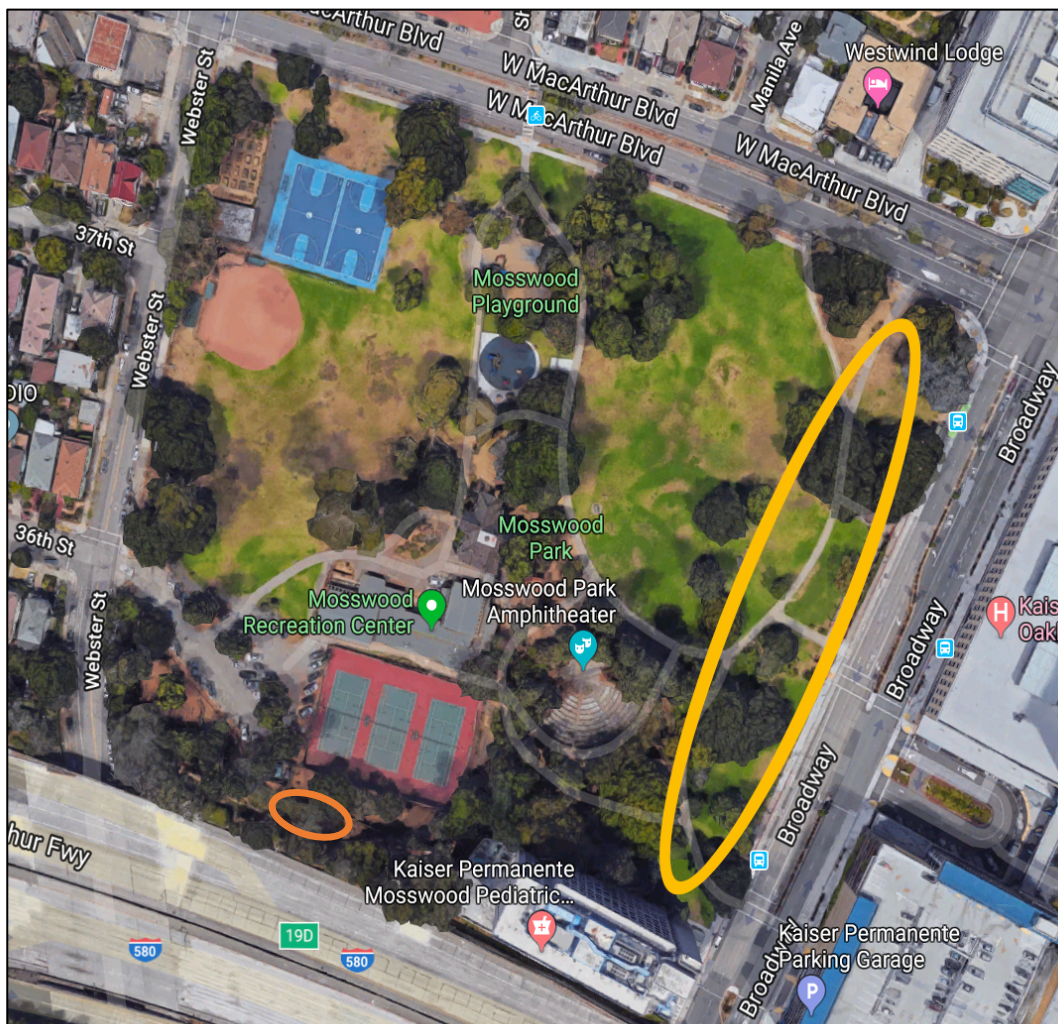


Figure 10: The yellow circle indicates location of the City of Oakland Permitted Unsheltered Encampment Area, April 2019-February 2020. The orange circle indicates location of the rogue encampment.

Some free annual cultural festivals in Mosswood, like Oakland Carnival, shifted over to accommodate the encampments and encouraged inclusion of the unhoused residents in the park, while others chose to relocate to other parks. In efforts to prevent another community backlash

³²⁹ Field Notes and Meeting Minutes from the Mosswood Recreation Advisory Council meeting November 8, 2019, by secretary of Mosswood (RAC) Brian Pearson.

³³⁰ Field Notes and Meeting Minutes from the Mosswood Recreation Advisory Council meeting November 8, 2019, by secretary of Mosswood (RAC) Brian Pearson.

that occurred the prior year around the removal of homeless encampments, Burger Boogaloo gated the outside of the encampment and away from Broadway Avenue (Figure 11). This compromise reduced the Burger Boogaloo’s overall footprint of their event space. A month later the Dream Day Festival, a new one-day event to Mosswood, mirrored the Burger Boogaloo’s reduced gated footprint. While the addition of a new gated event further contributed to the reduction of public park space access, the enclosure-occupations from above and below continued to reproduce the space that the Burger Boogaloo concert had previously enclosed.

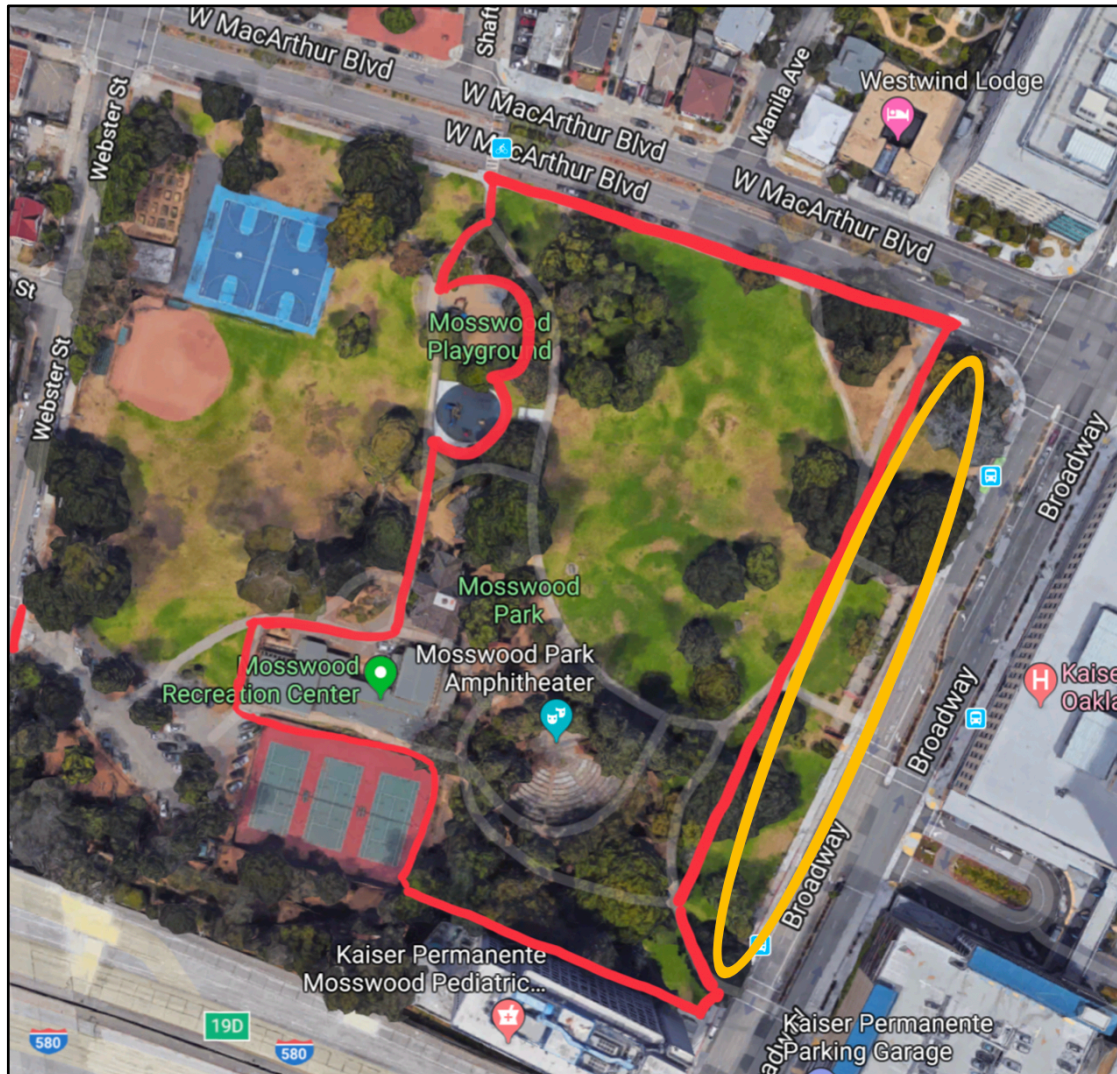


Figure 11: Enclosure-Occupations from Above in Red & Below in Yellow during the Burger Boogaloo Festival/Concert July 6 & 7, 2019.

A generous donation from Kaiser Permanente provided more than \$1 million in funding to Operation Project Dignity to coordinate Mosswood’s encampment relocation to the Broadway site alongside the park.³³¹ In November 2019, a fence and privacy screen was built around the

³³¹ Field Notes and Meeting Minutes from the Mosswood Recreation Advisory Council meeting January 8, 2019, by secretary of Mosswood (RAC) Brian Pearson.

encampment allowing the unsheltered to move from various sections of the park to the Broadway side if they chose to receive services and allowing others the right to leave the park. A guard was hired to secure safety within the encampment and prevent new unsheltered residents from entering and living in the park.³³² The residents in the fully enclosed encampment began to receive sanitation services, meals, and other needed resources. In the last week of January 2020, the encampment was dismantled and closed by the City of Oakland, with 50 of the unsheltered residents moved to permanent and temporary housing. The area was cleaned of litter and the grass has slowly returned.

Green Space Gentrification

Those who participate in enclosure-occupations from above versus below have vastly different economic, political, and social power, yet both forms of enclosure-occupations simultaneously create openings for some while constricting public park access for others (Table 1). While these enclosure-occupations both produce spaces of exclusion, their pathways for doing so and their impact are very different. Enclosure-occupations from above, such as the Burger Boogaloo event, use economic exclusionary practices through solicitation of admission fees, fortified through the construction of an exclusionary barrier (a fence) which in turns allows for organizers to possess control over public park space through temporary privatization of access.

Enclosure-Occupations from Above	Enclosure-Occupations from Below
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Exclusionary Practices • Construction of barriers • Possession → Privatization for Profit • Municipal supported • In service to the state for revenue generation • Temporary event • Recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Avoidance • Use of established barriers • Possession → Privatization for Self-Preservation • Extralegal • Cost to the state due to remediation • Temporary due to state removal • Informal Housing
<u>Green Space Gentrification</u>	<u>Green Space Ghettoization</u>

Table 1: Green Space Gentrification and Green Space Ghettoization

Event organizers and the municipal authorities who approve and create the institutions for doing so, commodify the commons, creating an exchange-value for access to these public parklands. The gates and fences constructed for the event become the necessary infrastructure to enclose and commodify public parkland through a state/municipal sanctioned apparatus which allows the event

³³² Field Notes and Meeting Minutes from the Mosswood Recreation Advisory Council meeting December 4, 2019, by secretary of Mosswood (RAC) Brian Pearson.

organizer to collect capital and profit from the public green space in which the exchange-value or commodification of this park space also benefits the state/municipality through revenue generation from rental fees and permits. Although these enclosure-occupations from above are temporary, they still prevent and restrict use for those unable or unwilling to attend the event. In so doing, fee-based events in public parks contribute to a type of green space gentrification by restricting and preventing park users the rights to use the commons through exclusionary economic practices. These events are still recognized by the state/municipality as recreational park use.

Green Space Ghettoization

Conversely, enclosure-occupations from below are understood as outside of traditional park use and are not recreation-driven, but they are acts of self-preservation due to the basic human need for shelter and the municipality's inability to provide affordable and low-income housing. The reactions by community members and housed Oakland residents to the enclosure-occupations from below are in the form of avoidance practices. Avoidance has also been advised by City officials and OPRYD staff. Avoidance practices are exercised by residents and park users who actively withdraw their use of the park or refrain from accessing areas in proximity to the informal housing encampments. The enclosure-occupations from below possess space due to desperation and state-based neglect. Park occupation and territorial controls by the homeless are accomplished by creating encampments within established barriers in the park, visually demarcating the space for the temporary informal extralegal housing encampments until these residents move and/or are removed by force by the state/municipality.

The political effects of an inequitable political economy and municipal neglect drives enclosure-occupations from below and in so doing allowed slum-like conditions to develop on public parklands, damaging this commons to such an extent that remediation is needed before these green spaces are considered safe to use by recreational park users. The remediation costs are then absorbed by the state/municipality or areas are left in a state of environmental degradation until funds can be produced to remedy the situation. Enclosure-occupations from below can be understood as green space ghettoization, in which parks become one of the last resorts for unsheltered Oaklanders to live, in a public space. Lack of municipal capacity and state neglect lead to the erosion of park quality and in some cases create dangerous conditions for recreational park users and for those who reside in the park. Green space ghettoization takes place when gentrification processes and pressures erode the quality of parks, compromise the safety within these recreational areas, and reduce access to green spaces.

In the Middle: Non-Park Residents and the City of Oakland

Oakland's housing crisis and gentrification pressures have increased the unsheltered population who are forced to subsist and establish informal housing encampments in public parks at a time when Oakland is implementing its sustainable agenda and creating, restoring, and beautifying its parks. Due to safety concerns from the established encampments and the damage to the area left from their dismantling, enclosure-occupations from below have impacted other publics, park users, barring them physically from using areas of parkland, thus reducing access to green space and rupturing the commons. In other cases, the threat and fear of safety and the reduction of park quality have caused residents and park users to avoid particular park areas or the park altogether. Enclosure-occupations from above have also reduced access to public park space through fee-based park events like the Burger Boogaloo which not all publics can afford, and they also prevent residents from accessing public park areas during these events. Both forms of

enclosure-occupation ultimately reduce access to *residents in the middle*, those who are sheltered yet are not wealthy enough to attend fee-based park events and those without access to a privatized or another local public green space within a 10-minute walk of their home.

The threat of revenue loss from rentals by fee-based park events (enclosure-occupations from above) due to the enclosure-occupations from below compromises potential capital streams in the form of contributions and donations to the Parks, Recreation & Youth Development Department and by extension the City. These rental fees allow programs and maintenance to continue despite reductions in the park budget and services. These events also provide employment to local businesses and residents while also contributing to the overall economy of the municipality. At the same time, the rising costs of maintenance and repairs due to vandalism of facilities, equipment, and park grounds produced by some of the individuals in the encampments continue to impact park quality. Enclosure-occupations from below also are making it harder for the City to generate support for park improvements from the business sector and have eroded some opportunities for public-private partnerships.

Conclusion

As I have shown, public parks have been commodified and proceeded on a slippery slope of privatization and possession possession-due-to-dispossession through enclosures and occupations by Oakland residents with different economic, political, and social power. Green gentrification scholars have focused on green spaces as a cause of increasing housing costs, displacement, and demographic changes leading to gentrification³³³ and shown how environmental agendas target homeless populations as trespassers in public urban natures.³³⁴ This work sought to extend this literature and elucidate a type of green space gentrification in which the municipal government becomes the proxy and path for wealthy residents to exercise power over public space through a series of barriers, both economic and physical while also making it possible for these residents to profit from the parks' parks' newly created commodities—exchange-value—and by extension also the state. Simultaneously, the enclosure-occupations from below co-produce a type of green space ghettoization in which vulnerable residents seek out shelter through the construction of informal encampments and occupy park lands due to lack of state support.

Enclosure-occupations from above construct barriers that reduce park use and access to green space through economic exclusionary practices, entrance fees, which is a form of privatization of park space backed by the state to generate capital. This raises the question, which this paper does not answer; how often can these fee-based events take place while still providing and supporting residents' access to public parks and green spaces?

Enclosure-occupations from below reduce park use and access to green space through social avoidance based on real and perceived physical harm and by the construction of informal housing encampments that takes possession over park space, which is extralegal and at a cost to the City. These enclosure-occupations are often temporary due to frequent state removal, but in the case of Mosswood and during Oakland's housing crisis, encampments are longer term due to municipal inaction. In the current housing situation, this becomes a moral question of how to take

³³³ Ken Kenneth A. Gould and Tammy L. Lewis, "The Environmental Injustice of Green Gentrification: The Case of Brooklyn's Prospect Park," in *The World in Brooklyn: Gentrification, Immigration, and Ethnic Politics in a Global City*, ed. by DeSena, Judith N. and Timothy Shortell (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 113-146.

³³⁴ Sarah Dooling, "Ecological Gentrification: A Research Agenda Exploring Justice in the City," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33, no. 3 (2009): 621-63.

care of our most vulnerable residents and just as important, our collective understanding of rights of public use of our municipal parks?

Oakland residents and park users are experiencing reduced green space engagements due to a series of exclusionary practices that create economic and social barriers preventing access to park space. I have defined these barriers to park use as enclosure-occupations from above and from below to identify the vastly different economic, political, and social power the enclosure-occupations have to simultaneously create access for some while constricting public park access for others. Due to these enclosure-occupations from above and from below, the promise of the green city has not been fully realized for those residents who are caught in the middle. In the case of Mosswood Park, the enclosure-occupations have exacerbated tensions around public park use and have reduced green space access for local community members, compromising the commons. This dynamic is creating new forms of environmental injustices that are being (re)produced within public green spaces through exclusionary practices, which in essence are acts of privatization of the commons by proxy and upheld by City of Oakland to help maintain public parks albeit in subpar conditions due to budgetary crises. Enclosure-occupations from below show how the housing crisis is displacing vulnerable residents such that they can only stay put by camping in their city's parks and other public spaces; thus, despite the greening of Oakland and its implementation of a sustainable environmental agenda in other parts of the city, many residents living adjacent to small urban parks are experiencing less access to green spaces.

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Chapter 5.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS RESTORATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The aim of this dissertation was to bring together scholarship from environmental studies, urban political ecology, race studies, and visual culture to elucidate Oakland, California's transition from redlining, legal residential segregation, to its current greening process in which the municipality is (re)establishing itself as a sustainable green city. I examined Oakland's historical legacy and the relationships between race, class, housing, and access to green space from 1937-2000, to assess the extent to which Oakland's greening process is creating, exacerbating, and/or mitigating environmental (in)justices. I researched both sides of environmental (in)justice, the uneven distribution of environmental harms and unequal development of environmental goods, in which low-income residents and communities of color are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards while also being prevented from benefiting from environmental amenities. I situated Oakland as a 21st century sustainable green city while also interrogating its historical urban policies and practices, and the current gentrification process which influences and contributes to the environmental (in)justices being (re)produced today.

The first paper entitled *In Red, Black, and Green: The Political Ecological Eras of Oakland, CA 1937-2020*, I made use of a double entendre. The title includes the colors of the Black Liberation Flag and demarcates key political ecological eras of Oakland during redlining, when it was predominantly a Black city, and its emergence as a green city. By laying out the historically rooted and recurring capitalist mode of production, I highlight the processes by which White capitalism and its attendant privileges were driven by government sanctioned racist policies of investment, disinvestment, and legal residential segregation. Although these policies have evolved, their legacies continue to dispossess low-income residents and communities of color of property ownership, quality housing, and healthy green spaces, while their neighborhoods are habitually compromised by environmental harms. Thus, Oakland's historical and current municipal formations are grounded in a repetitive pattern of race-based accumulation by dispossession. It is for this reason that I identified accumulation by benefaction as a more apt term that acknowledges how accumulation processes are racialized and rely on race-based exclusion strategies in which governments and institutions are complicit in driving wealth generating opportunities and market gains to predominantly White beneficiaries.

The second paper, *Rendering Gentrification and Erasing Race: Sustainable Development & The (Re)Visioning of Oakland, California as a Green City*, shows how municipal plans act as an apparatus that visually renders green gentrification by literally erasing Black residents and replacing them with a different demographic—one that is White and affluent. The images used in these municipal plans connect to historically rooted environmental narratives and practices that align with concepts of ecological gentrification, green gentrification, and environmental gentrification in which displacement from green spaces and displacement for the creation of green spaces are being drawn into Oakland's plans, by city planners, supported by city leaders, and voted in by city government. These municipal plans represent how Oakland is (re)visualizing its green city and its future without African American communities and low-income residents.

The last paper, *Enclosure-Occupations: Contested Productions of Green Space & the Paradoxes within Oakland, California's Green City*, presents another understanding of the gentrification process and its impact on community access to green space. Gentrification is often presented as the displacement of low-income and/or Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian

residents from their communities, neighborhoods, and homes. Yet this begs the question of, where do these individuals, families, and communities go when displaced? In the case of Oakland, it the most vulnerable displaced residents become the unhoused/the homeless living in public spaces including public parks. Moreover, parks have become contested spaces in which users with vastly different economic, political, and social power enact barriers and privatize public green spaces in service to the local government and at times to its disservice, while creating openings for some and constricting public park access for others. Ultimately, despite the greening of Oakland and its implementation of a sustainable environmental agenda, many residents are experiencing less access to healthy green spaces of quality.

The Neoliberal Green City & The Suburbanization of the Urban

Oakland is experiencing a process that I call the suburbanization of the urban, a co-production in which gentrification, green space creation, and housing privatization occur in tandem and replicates patterns similar to the racialization of the 1940s-1960s suburbanization process but within an urban setting. This is distinct from prior scholarship in which green spaces are said to be the cause of gentrification. I believe green spaces are the visual representations of government investment in the landscape. The original garden city was the precursor to the suburbs in which federal greening and investment practices created the suburban aesthetic; single-family housing, white picket fences, treelined streets, and the backyard as private park. The suburbs were constructed to be a White privatized space, while the urban has historically been a space of public use, shared living spaces in the form of multi-family units, and public amenities like parks. While greening through the creation of parks and construction of green infrastructure in urban areas could prove beneficial and provide a way forward in protecting cities and its residents by becoming more resilient during climate change events and severe weather crises, what is being reproduced is also the privatization ideologies and the racial exclusions witnessed during the creation of the suburbs. I will continue to analyze Oakland during its gentrification and greening processes.

Oakland is forming a sustainable, yet an unjust city, a neoliberal green city, that (re)creates the invisible suburbanized economic fences that systematically exclude low-income residents—by eroding affordable housing and enclosing public spaces in ways that make it almost impossible for non-wealthy residents to thrive. Participation in activities conducted in public spaces is often fee-based, and those unable to afford these once affordable services are deprived of amenities or endure divestment from the few green spaces that remain in their marginalized neighborhoods. Moreover, communities of color and the poor who have been cast out are often those who labor in support of the green city, as gardeners, maintenance workers, and other essential workers. These low-income and predominantly workers of color are positioned as the handmaids to the neoliberal sustainable green city from which they have been displaced and are forced to endure longer commutes to Oakland for their jobs. This trend aligns with what Alan Ehrenhalt calls *the great inversion*³³⁵ in which urban centers are taking on suburbanized characteristics of privatization of public space, and the suburbs are becoming the landscapes traditionally understood as urban particularly as the receptacle for displaced low-income and people of color who are forced to seek affordable housing outside the city. Because of this great inversion, President Trump's recent racist tweet in which he “inform[ed] all of the people living their Suburban Lifestyle Dream that [they] will no longer be bothered or financially hurt by having low-income housing built in [their] neighborhood,”³³⁶ was an outdated take on current trends in urban gentrification and displacement.

³³⁵ Ehrenhalt, Alan, *The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2012).

³³⁶ Donald J. Trump tweet July 29, 2020.

Nevertheless, Trump's tweet reminds us of lingering effects of the historical racial segregation and exclusion policies, such as redlining, that created the two different valued landscapes of the suburban and the urban.

Reflecting on our New COVID-19 Reality

Unprecedented challenges posed to public green space access by COVID-19, the novel corona virus, has drawn new and familiar historical, ideological, and political lines. Like other major cities the pandemic has bifurcated our reality into a pre and post COVID-19 world and society. While we are living within the liminal space of struggling with our current unfolding reality some urbanites, often the most privileged, have been escaping to the outdoors, getting their biophilia on, and going to parks in droves. Restaurants, bars, and movie theaters are closed, and we are unsure what "open" will look like in the future. Therefore, green spaces have become the only non-domestic entertainment in town and the only safe place for physical distancing while still being among others, community, and family.

The City of Oakland and its residents are still negotiating and navigating COVID-19 on the fly, often looking short term instead of seeking long-term solutions for safe public park engagement. Residents who live by Lake Merritt are growing increasingly concerned about the new crowds forming in their neighborhoods as the park becomes inundated, specifically the area in which the Black protest space continues to persist. Yet, this situation is not really new. Lake Merritt has been struggling with park user inundation, in particularly areas, as the city's population has grown and expansion of critical green spaces has not kept pace. To ease pressure on parks, Oakland has been championing slow streets, with a goal of 70 miles of road closures mostly located in the flats of Oakland for recreational use. The Slow Street website depicts a thickly vegetated treelined street. But, just like parks not all streets are created equal. Oakland's historical legacy of legal race-based residential segregation, redlining, and current urban environmental planning strategies have continued to leave out the needs of low-income and predominately Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Asian neighborhoods in their greening plans. The streets in these neighborhoods often look like a dystopian wasteland, full of potholes and lacking green spaces and trees. As COVID-19 continues to impact this municipality and its local population at the intersection of race, class, and green space access, I plan to explore what could potentially be developing into a new political ecological era in Oakland.

Policy Solution: Invoking the way of the Environmental J.E.D.I. Approach

To mitigate historical environmental enclosures and injustices, and to prevent new ones from forming, I proposed an Environmental Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion approach or what I call Environmental J.E.D.I., as environmental reconciliation process to atone for the government laws, policies, and practices that created and (re)produced environmental harms endured by low-income residents and Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian (BILA) communities. This approach engages with historically marginalized communities and center their needs and aspirations in articulating and envisioning how cities, such as Oakland can better integrate sustainability, equity, and social justice goals in the creation of a green city. In addition to traditional stakeholder engagement strategies, such as public meetings, hearings, public and comment periods, much of this work needs to promote collective long-term visioning for what an inclusive, equitable as well as socially and environmentally sustainable city should look like and function. Such visioning strategies can even leverage speculative fiction and frameworks like Afro-futurism to encourage communities to move beyond demands for temporary fixes and instead

dream big about environmentally and socially just futures outside the confinements of capitalism, racism, classism, sexism, and all the isms that cause schisms.

An Environmental J.E.D.I approach within Oakland acknowledges the municipal government as a key perpetrator of dispossession and environmental harms sanctioned by racist land-use planning and divestment strategies against low-income residents and BILA communities. This has resulted in what Rob Nixon calls slow violence, “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence typically not viewed as violent at all.”³³⁷ Within this context, the Environmental J.E.D.I approach would address the following:

1. Recognize that the environmental injustices carried out or sanctioned by the City of Oakland resulting in a “riskscape along a color line” that is characterized by the uneven distribution of environmental hazards and goods that continues to disproportionately impact the flats—specifically its low-income neighborhoods and its Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian communities.
2. The City of Oakland must admit to its responsibility in the causing of municipal environmental harms. A plan to repair these harms should be constructed and executed.
3. The people most affected by environmental injustices (low-income residents and BILA Oakland residents) should be the primary stakeholders in this endeavor and must be supported by scholars and activists through the creation of a Restorative Environmental J.E.D.I council. Monetary support, in the form of municipal stipends, must be provided to community representatives to sustain engagement of those who undertake this work. The municipality should no longer expect or benefit from the free labor of community members who have been most harmed. Moreover, these residents should be treated as experts with experiential knowledge(s) about their neighborhoods. This will allow for low-income inclusion and while creating an autonomous group that can directly engage over the long-term with the City of Oakland in decision-making regarding public space, housing, and parks.
4. The City of Oakland should create an environmental justice department or office that will work with Public Works, Transportation, Parks and Recreation, and the Race & Equity departments which are often too compartmentalized to work cross departmentally and on holistic solutions.

An Environmental J.E.D.I. approach could also provide pathways toward the construction and implementation of a just climate change strategy embedded in community civic participation and local government transparency and reciprocity. For instance, a state like California already has earthquake preparedness and recovery strategies. These strategies should be expanded and created at the municipal level which serve at the neighborhood level and includes the (re)organization and retrofitting of public facilities like park recreation centers, libraries, and schools to act as climate/severe weather centers in which community members can either find temporary reprieve

³³⁷ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

from severe heat events, poor air quality, and other environmental related crises. For this to be possible Oakland must close the historically rooted disparity gaps between wealthy White residents and residents who are low-income and those who are from BILA communities. Low-income and BILA communities are more likely to suffer during severe weather events and are also simultaneously and disproportionately bearing the burden of environmental harms right now. Today, because of climate change and severe weather events, the ability to geographically contain environmental hazards to particular areas of the city and within particular neighborhoods is no longer possible. We have seen this during flooding events in which a “toxic soup” is created from too much rain and contaminated soil, and we have seen this when wildfires burn homes and foul the air far off locations. These events impact everyone now. The ultimate goal of Environmental J.E.D.I. is to remediate historical environmental atrocities, prevent new environmental harms, and eradicate the possibility of future environmental injustices. I am proposing this community-based local government Environmental Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion approach for future policy and practice creation grounded in the fact that environmental justice issues are environmental issues because the climate has changed.

We are standing at a pivotal moment in human history in which our choices will have real life, spatial, and material consequences for our future cities and the generations who will inhabit them. In some cases this will be a matter of survival. This dissertation has shown and discussed how past environmental and city planning policies and practices based in racial and class discrimination and exclusion continue to impact all communities today. We can learn from the past because we already know the outcomes. We know what it looks like when governments make decisions that put profit before people. It is for these reasons, and I hope lessons, that it becomes a necessary imperative to implement an Environmental J.E.D.I. approach. As cities continue to design and construct their built environments, let us pause, and (re)think our urban plans before they become solidified infrastructures that does not serve our needs or wants. It is time to build a socially and environmentally just path forward and (re)imagine the possibilities of what *the urban* could and should be when the ultimate goal is creating spaces and places in which all of us (flora, fauna, and folks) can thrive.

REFERENCES

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