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Martin, Laura Renata

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**PRECARIOUS CITY:
MARGINAL WORKERS, THE STATE, AND WORKING-CLASS
ACTIVISM IN POST-INDUSTRIAL SAN FRANCISCO, 1964-1979**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY

by

Laura Renata Martin

March 2014

The dissertation of Laura Renata Martin is approved:

Professor Dana Frank, chair

Professor David Brundage

Professor Alice Yang

Professor Eileen Boris

Tyrus Miller, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

Precarious City: Marginal Workers, the State, and Working-Class Activism in Post-Industrial San Francisco, 1964-1979

Laura Renata Martin

This project investigates the effects of San Francisco's transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy on the city's social movements between 1964 and 1979. I re-contextualize the city's Black freedom, feminist, and gay and transgender liberation movements as struggles over the changing nature of urban working-class life and labor in the postwar period. I argue that as San Francisco was increasingly emptied of its white ethnic industrial work force, working-class life became more economically and socially precarious. People of color and poor women, queer, and transgender people continued to live and work in the city throughout the 1960s and 70s, but their relationship to the formal economy was rendered unstable by lack of steady access to waged labor. Unemployment, non-unionized informal and illegal employment, and unwaged work increasingly came to define the experience of being working class in San Francisco.

An analysis that centers precarious forms of labor must not expect labor struggles to look like those of the unionized industrial sector. In post-industrial San Francisco, labor struggles often took the form of conflicts not with employers but with state agencies and institutions that regulated the uses of urban space and access to resources such as social services and public housing. I explore these themes in a number of case studies, each of which examines points of contention between

precarious working-class groups and state institutions. I discuss the struggle of working-class women to secure access to welfare funds and public housing as compensation for their reproductive labor; the efforts of civil rights groups to win job training and employment for African Americans through city War on Poverty agencies; the organization of gay and transgender sex workers to fight heightened police harassment tied to the growth of the tourism sector; the effects of redevelopment on retired industrial workers; and the escalation of conflict between police officers and unemployed African American youth during the second half of the 1960s.

Finally, I locate the increasing precariousness of urban working-class life during this period within the framework of a new post-industrial spatial regime. The uses of urban space that were necessary for working-class survival came into conflict with the needs of government officials and a rising group of business elites, who sought to redevelop the urban environment in ways compatible with new economic growth sectors. Poorer sectors of the working class increasingly came into conflict with a whole web of state institutions and agencies being mobilized to transform urban land use patterns.

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Introduction

On July 3, 1967, one hundred and fifty African American young people from the Hunters Point neighborhood of San Francisco congregated at Fremont Elementary School, where staff from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) Summer Youth Work program were gathered at the end of the day.¹ Declaring themselves to be “sick and tired of being sick and tired,” the teenagers demanded to be hired by the work program when school let out for the summer. Less than a year after Hunters Point had gone up in flames in response to the police killing of a Black youth, they defiantly drew upon the specter of urban unrest to press for work, threatening “jobs or gasoline,” and promising to burn every factory in the area if they did not receive employment. Refusing to leave until a city official responded to their demand, the group met with a judge and eventually with Mayor Jack Shelley, who promised to produce sixty jobs for Hunters Point youth.²

Nearly two years later, on May 10, 1969, three hundred people gathered in San Francisco’s Union Square to protest proposed cuts to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the federal program that supplied welfare payments to working-class single mothers. Española Jackson, one of the leaders of the recently formed San Francisco Welfare Rights Council, spoke to the crowd, reminding them of the hard work that single mothers performed every day to care for their children.

¹ “Hunters Point” is not spelled with an apostrophe.

² George Murray, “Hunters Point Brothers Sock it to the Mayor of S.F.,” *The Black Panther*, July 20, 1967, 14.

She also pointed out that a lack of access to formal employment was a large part of the reason why poor women were forced onto the welfare rolls in the first place:

“We’re not on welfare because we want to be, but because there are no jobs for us.”³

Almost exactly eight years later, on May 9, 1977, sex workers and their supporters gathered on the steps of City Hall as part of an international day of action to protest police harassment of prostitutes. They enacted a mock trial of the political establishment, calling their case “Women v. Board of Supervisors, Police Chief Gain, Governor Brown, President Carter, General Motors and John Does 1-50.”⁴ The activists read a statement that accused city leaders of profiting off of women’s sexual labor and of using criminalization to prevent prostitutes from organizing for better wages and working conditions:

The Supervisors have no intention of abolishing an important source of income for the city....Forced to lead an underground life, prostitutes are also prevented from demanding money and services from the government—social security, disability, unemployment insurance, childcare.⁵

The sex worker activists also linked the criminalization of prostitution to the increasing prominence of the tourism and white-collar services sectors in San Francisco’s post-industrial economy, pointing out that “the work of prostitutes is a crucial service for the visiting businessmen and tourists who bring money into San

³“Union Square Rally Protests Welfare Fund Squeeze,” *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, May 11, 1969.

⁴“Mock Trial of Business and Government: Sentence: Lifetime of Housework,” *Oakland Tribune*, May 10, 1977.

⁵ San Francisco Wages for Housework and the Los Angeles Wages for Housework Committee, “Statement to the Board of Supervisors,” February 15, 1977, folder 541, COYOTE Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University (Cambridge, Mass.).

Francisco.”⁶ Finding the defendants guilty of “pimping off prostitute women,” they revealed the sentence: a lifetime of housework.⁷

These three incidents, spanning nearly a decade and located in different parts of the city, do not immediately evoke the familiar tropes of working-class labor struggles. Labor unions are nowhere in sight. The protagonists are not seeking justice from their employers. They are not even employed in the formal economy. However, all three of these anecdotes describe situations in which working-class people contested their relationship to work and their increasingly precarious position in a city undergoing deindustrialization and urban redevelopment. The African American youths threatening to riot were raising the issue of racialized exclusion from the formal economy and the social benefits granted to the white working class, while simultaneously invoking the simmering anger of Black urban dwellers subjected to daily harassment and violence by the police. The single mothers rallying to stop welfare cuts were pointing out that their work in the home went uncompensated, and how their position as women, and especially poor women of color, excluded them from access to steady wage labor. Finally, the prostitutes demonstrating against harassment fought for the basic rights and protections granted to formal sector workers.

Additionally, the teenagers’ demonstration, the welfare mothers’ rally, and the sex workers’ theatrical protest all shared a common target. In none of these labor struggles were the protagonists demanding concessions from employers. Instead, they

⁶ Ibid.

⁷“Mock Trial of Business and Government,” *Oakland Tribune*.

made demands upon the state, in particular specific agencies and institutions such as the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Welfare Department, the Board of Supervisors, and the San Francisco Police Department. Lacking the traditional relationship between employee and employer that characterized waged labor in the formal sector, and operating under economically and socially insecure conditions, these groups experienced daily life as a series of interactions with a web of local and federal state institutions, ranging from redistributive service agencies to the repressive apparatus of the city's police and prison system.

Certainly members of the working class but not always "working" in a traditional sense, the individuals described here had one thing in common: a precarious position in a postwar city rapidly shedding the industrial employment base that once served as the foundation of urban economic life.

Precarious Labor: Defining the Concept

The word "precarious" in relation to labor has become something of a buzzword in the last decade, both in mainstream media discussions of the "new economy" and in theoretical analyses of the impact of neoliberal global capitalism on the quality and quantity of jobs in both the Global North and South.⁸ In their 2004

⁸ Recent articles appearing in the media include Guy Standing, "Who will be a voice for the emerging precariat?" June 1, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/jun/01/voice-for-emerging-precariat>; Machiko Osawa and Jeff Kingston, "Japan has to address the 'precariat'" *The Financial Times*, July 1, 2010; Wawrzyniec Smoczyński, "Youthful members of the full-time precariat," *Press Europ*, September 15, 2011,

work *Multitude*, a follow-up to their widely debated *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri drew on both Marxist and Foucauldian theory to posit their concept of a new revolutionary subject, the twenty-first century equivalent of the working class: the “multitude,” a broad category of global subjects linked together by a new state of economic and social precariousness.⁹ Sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiappello used the concept to distinguish between Fordist and post-Fordist management regimes in their 2005 work *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.¹⁰ More recently, sociologist Guy Standing used the term “precariat” to evoke the emergence of a new “class” of precarious workers.¹¹ Though varied in their theoretical perspectives, these efforts have in common a desire to understand the consequences for working people of the massive economic changes of the late twentieth century, described variously as a global shift from a goods- to a services-based economy, the erosion of the Fordist work model and social contract, the decline of trade unionism, the retrenchment of the Keynesian welfare state, and the rise of “globalization,” or capital mobility in pursuit of cheaper labor.

Such efforts, while offering important new insights and theoretical frameworks for understanding a half-century of economic transformation, at times create the false impression that precariousness is a relatively recent phenomenon. As

<http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/953511-youthful-members-full-time-precariat>.

⁹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

¹⁰ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiappello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2005).

¹¹ Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

labor historians well know, since the rise of industrial capitalism most working-class people have labored under conditions that could not reasonably be called “secure,” lacking basic job security, health and safety measures, or access to state-distributed benefits.¹² Even access to paid work has been by no means certain throughout the

¹²Poverty and economic insecurity have been important themes in eighteenth and nineteenth century labor history. A sizeable literature exists that takes the precarious laborer as its subject. Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2010); Jennifer Dorsey, *Hirelings: African American Workers and Free Labor in Early Maryland* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011); Billy G. Smith, *The Lower Sort: Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 178-1860* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992); Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Ruth Wallis Herndon, *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margin in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Billy G. Smith, ed., *Down and Out in Early America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); Peter Way, *Common Labour: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1780-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (New York: Verso, 2012); Gloria L. Main, “Women on the Edge: Life at Street Level in the Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Fall 2012), 331-347; Seth Rockman, “Class and the History of Working People in the Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Winter, 2005), 527-535; Billy G. Smith, “The Family Lives of Laboring Philadelphians During the Late Eighteenth Century,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 133, No. 2, Symposium on the Demographic History of the Philadelphia Region, 1600-1860 (Jun., 1989), 328-332; Billy G. Smith, “Poverty and Economic Marginality in Eighteenth-Century America,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 132, No. 1 (Mar., 1988), 85-118; Billy G. Smith, “The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians, 1750 to 1800,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Apr., 1981), 163-202.

lifetimes of most working-class people.¹³ As Michael Denning has written, two key features of capitalism are its dispossession of people from the means of subsistence and its failure to guarantee them access to the wages necessary to purchase those means on the market:

Since the beginnings of the wage-labour economy, wageless life has been a calamity for those dispossessed of land, tools and means of subsistence...capitalism begins not with the offer of work, but with the imperative to earn a living. Dispossession and expropriation, followed by the enforcement of money taxes and rent: such is the idyll of 'free labour.'¹⁴

Precariousness, therefore, has been the norm, and working-class people have always been integrated into the economy in more complex ways than narratives dominated by unionized industrial workers would suggest. Another tradition within the field of labor history has challenged this narrative, building an alternative history that examines the complex labor arrangements that have allowed poor people, and especially poor women and people of color, to survive.¹⁵ In addition to working at the

¹³ Kevin Doogan critiques the notion of the “precariat” precisely for this reason, arguing that work itself has not necessarily become more precarious. He claims that workers don’t, according to existing data, actually work less hours or with less frequency than previously. Rather, he argues, the effects of un- and underemployment are simply more severe because of the retrenchment in state benefits. See Kevin Doogan, *New Capitalism? The Transformation of Work* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

¹⁴ Michael Denning, “Wageless Life,” *New Left Review* 66, December 2010, 79-80.

¹⁵ Historians of women’s labor have led this movement to establish an alternative narrative. Their scholarship has often emphasized domestic work and other forms of “caring labor.” See Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom*; Stansell, *City of Women*; Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*; Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990); Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the*

“point of production” for wages, many people have cobbled together the resources necessary for subsistence through a combination of state subsidies, involvement in the informal economy or in illegalized forms of labor such as prostitution, and petty crime such as theft.¹⁶

In fact, in the U.S. the emergence of a large number of working people employed full time, operating within a legally enforceable framework of workplace rights, and collectively represented through trade unions, only occurred in the 1930s and began to decline in the 1970s. The era of “non-precarity” lasted less than half a century, and is thus a historical anomaly rather than a norm.¹⁷ Additionally, as labor

Present (New York: Basic Books, 2009); Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Phyllis Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920-1945* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). Another set of literature examines the history of the “underclass” in the nineteenth and twentieth century U.S., describing the kinds of labor arrangements that have helped poor people survive. See Jacqueline Jones, *The Dispossessed: America’s Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Michael B. Katz, *The “Underclass” Debate: Views From History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

¹⁶ We must also consider the frequent co-existence of wage labor with slavery, indentured servitude, and peasant subsistence agriculture.

¹⁷ Labor historians and union activists attempting to understand the decline of union density and the social power of trade unions in the late twentieth century have frequently commented on the shift toward insecurity beginning in the 1970s. See Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises*; Fraser and Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order*; Moody, *An Injury To All*; Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press,

historians of women, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and Native Americans have pointed out, the era of the Keynesian social contract and Fordist work model largely excluded non-white, non-male working-class people because the types of work they performed were not eligible for many social benefits and protections.¹⁸ Even the so-called “golden age,” then, must be viewed as offering

2004); Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Doogan, *New Capitalism?*; Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (New York: The New Press, 2001); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, “The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 74 (Fall, 2008), 3-32.

¹⁸ For a discussion of the racialized nature of the “two tier” welfare state, see Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Labor historians who emphasize the exclusion of specific working-class groups from many of the benefits of the New Deal welfare state often focus on agricultural and domestic workers. Important works include Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Dorothy B. Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Jose M. Alamillo, *Making Lemonade Out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town, 1880-1960* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Neil Foley, *White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1993); Colleen M. O’Neill, *Working the Navajo Way: Labor and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nissei, Warbride: Three Generations of Japanese Americans in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Little, Brown, 1998); Xiaolan Bao, *Holding Up More Than Half the Sky: A History of Women Garment Workers in New York City, 1948-1991* (New York: NYU Press, 1991); Cletus E.

economic stability and security on a much more provisional and selective basis than some scholarship would suggest.

Our conception of working-class labor becomes even more complex when we consider the fact that a majority of working-class people engage in unwaged labor in the form of housework and childrearing. As feminist scholars have shown, working-class women have sustained their families, including male breadwinner fathers and husbands, through the work of childrearing, cooking, cleaning, and purchasing consumer goods, since the beginning of the wage labor economy.¹⁹ Although such work is key to the reproduction of society as a whole, in the history of the U.S. it has been largely unwaged, except when undertaken by paid domestic workers and childcare providers, or within the framework of forced labor arrangements such as slavery and indentured servitude. Some feminists have made a case for the remuneration of household labor by the state, arguing that its unpaid nature increases

Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981); Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African American Domestic Workers in Washington, D.C., 1910-1940* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 2010).

¹⁹ Radical feminists and socialist feminists debated the role of unpaid household labor in reproducing capitalist society and patriarchal gender relations in the 1970s. This set of exchanges is sometimes referred to collectively as “the domestic labor debates.” See Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union,” *Capital & Class* Summer 1979, Vol. 3 (2), 1-33. Susan Himmelweit, “Domestic Labour and Capital,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 1977, 1 (1): 15-31. Marxist feminists involved in the Wages for Housework campaigns of the 1970s (discussed in chapter five) argued that housework was productive of surplus value and that housewives were thus part of the proletariat. See Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975. Historian Jeanne Boydston has also documented the rise of housework in the early republic as a specific set of gendered tasks, in *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1990).

women's dependence upon and subordination to men who have greater access to wages through outside employment.²⁰ Such labor has always been precarious in that it has not taken place in a formal workplace but in the isolated privacy of the home, it has been only indirectly compensated in the form of a share of a family breadwinner's wage, and has not been protected by any kind of legal structure of workers' rights.

What many feminist historians refer to as "reproductive labor" thus further complicates Denning's notion of "wageless life," suggesting as it does a whole realm of unwaged labor lying beneath the surface of the formal economy.²¹

²⁰ This was the basic argument of the U.S. welfare rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the Marxist-feminist Wages for Housework movement in the U.S., Canada, and western Europe. For a discussion of these movements, see Selma James, *Sex, Race, and Class: The Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings, 1952-2011* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012); and Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012). For a history of the welfare rights movement see Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005). For background on the relationship between unpaid reproductive labor and state compensation see Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

²¹ The term "reproductive labor" refers to the work that goes into reproducing society as a whole, and in particular the work force. The term is used by Marxist feminists to distinguish between the productive sphere (the realm of waged labor) and the reproductive sphere (the realm of unwaged, private labor) in capitalism. For a thorough theoretical discussion see Dalla Costa and James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*; Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor, and Capital*, New York: Autonomedia, 1995. Historians and sociologists of gender and labor also frequently use the term. See Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Mignon Duffy, *Making Care Count: A Century of Gender, Race, and Paid Care Work* (Rutgers, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

If we acknowledge, then, that precariousness has been the norm throughout the history of the wage labor economy, why is it useful to ground a study of urban working-class life in 1960s San Francisco in this concept? I argue that such framing is useful for several reasons. First, this study is concerned specifically with the relationship between working-class life and labor and urban space. It takes as its subject urban working-class experiences during a period—the 1960s and 1970s—that has been discussed primarily as an era of blue-collar urban exodus. Historians interested in the trajectory of the industrial working class and the trade union movement have centered their narratives of postwar unionism in the blue-collar industrial suburbs that housed workers in key industries such as automobile manufacturing and steel.²² This does not mean, however, that cities were emptied of working-class people. The concept of precariousness offers a frame for looking at those who lived in de-industrializing cities like San Francisco as people integrated into postwar capitalism in complex ways, but still as working-class people compelled

²²This scholarship has been critical in helping us understand the dynamics of the labor movement in the postwar period, especially in the context of union bureaucratization, cold war conservatism, and deindustrialization. Examples include Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*; Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945-1968* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998); Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973); Jack Metzgar, *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000); Robert Asher and Ronald Edsforth, eds., *Autowork* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995); Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999); Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (New York: Verso, 1988); Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes: The Struggle Against the No Strike Pledge in the UAW During World War II* (New York: Bewick/Ed, 1980).

to labor in order to achieve basic subsistence for themselves and their families. Thus the exodus of the “traditional” blue-collar working class from San Francisco in the 1960s actually provides an opportunity to challenge some of the assumptions about working-class identity embedded in dominant labor history narratives by de-centering the white male blue-collar subject. This study centers groups and individuals that have historically been excluded from industry, and whose experiences have thus been understudied within the field of labor and working-class history. Indeed, the labor and “laborlessness” of major portions of the U.S. working class has been invisible to the eyes of many scholars looking for a certain image of “working class-ness.”²³ By centering the urban experience during a period when studies are largely split between labor histories of blue-collar suburbanites and urban histories of decay and “ghetto” riots, we can bring these two fields into dialogue and incorporate the perspectives of urban precarious groups more fully into the field of labor and working-class history.

The concept of precariousness, for all its imprecise usages, does point to something new occurring in cities like San Francisco in the 1960s. While precariousness itself was certainly not new, and certainly not new to cities, the urban transformations of the postwar era did constitute a reorganization of the relationship between race, class, and urban space. The concept can help us understand what felt new, and newly troubling, to the African Americans and poor women, gay, and

²³ See David Roediger, “What if Labor Were not White and Male?” in *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Vanessa Tait also addresses this issue in her study of poor workers’ unions. Vanessa Tait, *Poor Workers’ Unions: Rebuilding Labor From Below* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005).

transgender people living in San Francisco neighborhoods undergoing rapid change—and can thus help explain some of the causes of the social uprisings and movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The concept of precariousness allows us to highlight the contrast between the urban experience of these recent newcomers and that of a previous generation of urban migrants. The relative decline in the quality and stability of jobs available between 1945 and 1965 created a gap between expectations and reality, and the sense that the younger generation was taking a step backward. This was especially the case for African Americans whose parents had gained access to industrial jobs during World War II, but who were themselves unable to enter the same professions.²⁴ The concept of precariousness also allows us to foreground a contrast between the opportunities available to inner city dwellers and to white suburbanites. Inner city residents watched the fortunes of the “white flighters” rise while theirs failed to follow suit.²⁵

²⁴ Daniel Crowe, *Prophets of Rage: The Black Freedom Struggle in San Francisco, 1945-1969* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2000), 39-41.

²⁵ For insightful discussions of the growing divide between the economic fortunes of white suburbanites and Black inner city residents, see Heather Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); James Wolfinger, *Philadelphia Divided: Race and Politics in the City of Brotherly Love* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Thomas Byrne Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992); Thomas J. Sugrue, “

The concept of precariousness also allows us to take an expansive view of working-class struggles and movements because, while it emphasizes labor, it allows room for other aspects of urban working-class experience. The struggles explored in this study foreground various kinds of labor processes, including sexual labor and housework, but they also engage with other components of precarious urban existence, such as unemployment, neighborhood displacement, and the policing of poor neighborhoods. Struggles over the work process and the desire for economic stability were always part of the equation, but it would be inaccurate and reductive to describe the movements examined here as solely “workplace struggles.” Thus precariousness allows us to integrate work, rising costs of living, the policing of urban space, and the impingement of renewal projects on working-class neighborhoods into a three-dimensional description of everyday life, providing a more accurate picture of the range of experiences that galvanized people to organize collectively.

Finally, although precariousness is certainly not a new phenomenon in the history of capitalist development, it does offer some kind of a framework for engaging with the large-scale economic transformations of the second half of the twentieth century. In terms of periodizing U.S. labor, it can be a useful metric for pointing out the beginnings of a major shift, which did entail a move away from some of the hallmarks of the mid-century “secure” industrial economy: unionization, full time employment, the New Deal welfare state. As this study suggests, in some ways

Rights, and the Reaction against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940-1964,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 82, No. 2 (Sep., 1995), 551-578.

the inner city residents of the 1960s experienced a decade earlier the process of deindustrialization described so vividly by scholars such as Bennett Harrison, Barry Bluestone, Jefferson Cowie, and Ruth Milkman in their research on industrial decline in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁶ While key industries like steel and automobile manufacturing were still booming in the 1960s, many manufacturers kept their profit rates high precisely by relocating outside of cities. Thus the urban residents who were least able to successfully follow the migration of industry were the first to suffer the unemployment and insecurity of de-industrialization--a fact that the framework of “precariousness” allows us to bring to the fore.

A New Precarious, Non-White Urban Working Class

²⁶ Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982). Ruth Milkman, *Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*; David Bensman and Roberta Lynch, *Rusted Dreams: Hard Times in a Steel Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Judith Stein: *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Calvin Winslow, *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso Books, 2010); Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, eds., *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Paul D. Staudohar and Holly E. Brown, eds., *Deindustrialization and Plant Closure* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1987); Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999). An extensive bibliography is available in *Plant Closings: A Selected Bibliography* (Ithaca: Martin P. Catherwood Library, Cornell University, 1987).

As this discussion of precariousness suggests, while economic insecurity was by no means a new feature of working-class life, it did take specific forms in U.S. cities in the 1960s. These forms were closely linked to major changes in the makeup of the urban working class in the postwar era. I identify three key components to these changes: the racial composition of urban working-class groups and of urban dwellers in general; patterns of urban employment related to the flight of manufacturing from many American city centers and the resulting efforts on the part of city governments to introduce new forms of capital investment into cities; and the relationship between increasingly precarious urban working-class groups and local and federal state institutions.

Large U.S. cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and Detroit all saw a dramatic change in the racial composition of their populations in the postwar era. The most demographically significant change was the increase in African American residents as a result of two waves of migration during World Wars I and II. As scholars such as Gerald Horne and Thomas Sugrue have documented, tens of thousands of African Americans left their homes in the rural South to work in urban wartime shipyards and defense manufacturing.²⁷ A significant percentage of these migrants headed west, to cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland, which had managed to secure

²⁷ Gerald Horne, *The Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997); Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Arnold Hirsch, *The Making of the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Donna Jean Murch, *Living For the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*; Self, *American Babylon*.

lucrative defense contracts.²⁸ Immigration from Asia and Latin America was also on the rise. Immigration from China, especially to west coast cities like San Francisco, increased after World War II, following the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act and China's new status as a U.S. ally.²⁹ Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, two groups that had already established urban populations prior to World War I, began a new wave of state-sponsored migration to U.S. cities after World War II.³⁰ Puerto Ricans were recruited to work in factories in cities like Chicago and New York, and quickly became a largely urban population. Mexican immigrants at first clustered in rural areas, employed in agriculture, but many eventually moved to larger cities in search of better paying work.³¹

²⁸ Horne, *The Fire This Time*; Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*; Murch, *Living For the City*; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles From the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Self, *American Babylon*; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*; Broussard, *Black San Francisco*; Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Chris Romberg, *No There There: Race, Class, and Political Community in Oakland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District, From 1870 Through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

²⁹ According to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service over 20,000 Chinese immigrants settled in San Francisco between 1960 and 1969. Maurice Shiu, "Chinatown Housing: Its Situation and Possible Solutions," Student Paper, College of Environment Design, University of California, Berkeley, 1969.

³⁰ Zaragoza Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Gabriela Arredondo, *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-1939* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

³¹ Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 23-25; Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Altagracia Ortiz, *Puerto Rican Women and Work: Bridges in Transnational Labor* (Temple University Press,

For African Americans, the migration experience profoundly changed their position in the national labor market, transforming them from a population of primarily rural agricultural workers, often sharecroppers, into urban waged workers. The sudden opening of employment opportunities in industry presented African Americans with the possibility of entering the ranks of the industrial working class, which since the 1930s had been characterized by relative job security, union representation, and access to social benefits through the New Deal welfare state. However, much of the progress made during World War II in dismantling racial hierarchies in employment was reversed shortly after the war's end, when African Americans were the first fired from the shrinking defense manufacturing sector and were largely unable to secure jobs in the booming suburban manufacturing plants.³² As a result, as Ruth Gilmore writes, "African Americans who had migrated from the

1996); Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979); Mario T. Garcia, "Americans All: The Mexican American Generation and the Politics of Wartime Los Angeles, 1941-1945," in Rodolfo de la Garza, ed., *The Mexican American Experience: A Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 201-12; David Gutierrez, ed., *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (Wilmington, Del.: Jaguar/SR Books, 1996); David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Eduardo Obregon Pagan, *Murder At the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riots in Wartime Los Angeles, 1940-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

³² Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 39-41; Albert Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 210.

South and East to fight their way into wartime industries and their...children were poorer in real terms in 1969 than they had been in 1945.³³ The vagaries of capitalist economic forces had lured African Americans to cities like San Francisco, where they had established their own largely segregated neighborhoods and community infrastructure. Soon these same forces had removed their access to steady wages, and hence their ability to support themselves in an urban context where food, housing, and transportation were not only expensive but also only accessible with money.

Thus starting after World War II the Black urban population would continually struggle to gain access to the formal economy, as evidenced by increasing unemployment rates throughout the 1950s and 1960s. At the height of the postwar boom, African Americans and other urban non-white populations such as Puerto Ricans and Chicanos experienced economic decline rather than ascendancy.³⁴ The conditions of life in this “other America” (in the words of Michael Harrington’s well-known liberal expose of urban poverty published at the time) were all the more stark when contrasted with the rising fortunes of the nation’s white ethnic working class.³⁵ Thus, while for white industrial workers the 1950s and 60s were a time of relative economic stability and improved quality of life, for non-white groups, and African

³³Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 38-39.

³⁴ Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*; See also Daniel Enck-Wanzer, “Introduction,” in Daniel Enck-Wanzer, editor, *The Young Lords: A Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 1-3; Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*; Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley*; Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own*.

³⁵ Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: MacMillan, 1962).

Americans in particular, urban life and labor was becoming increasingly precarious.³⁶ Discussing the causes of the Watts riot of 1965, Gerald Horne writes of the consolidation of a Black precarious population in postwar Los Angeles:

Men waited on corners to be recruited for labor. They were not necessarily unemployed, though it may have seemed that way to the uninitiated. Some worked irregular hours, part-time, temporary jobs; others were in construction, and many were on corners after finding no work at the union hall.³⁷

Such work patterns exemplify the concept of precarious labor: individuals are not cast out of the labor market entirely, but are unable to consistently secure enough work to support themselves and their families.

The second major factor in the transformation of San Francisco's working-class population was the change in the city's economic base, resulting from the flight of the city's manufacturing industry to outlying suburbs. At the national level the 1960s were a time of soaring profit rates and a booming manufacturing sector, an era now fondly remembered by some as the "golden age" of capitalism.³⁸ But, as urban theorists such as Manuel Castells, John Mollenkopf, Neil Smith, and David Harvey

³⁶ Scholars emphasize the relationship between rising black militancy and the growth of white conservatism during this period, and tie both of these to the increasing economic polarization between the two. See Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; and Self, *American Babylon*; Kruse, *White Flight*. For discussions of the link between suburbanization and white political conservatism, see Kruse, *White Flight*; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Rise of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

³⁷ Horne, *Fire This Time*, 248.

³⁸ The causes of the "golden era," and of its eventual decline, are widely debated by economists and economic historians. In this study I have relied on the analysis in Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (New York: Verso, 2006).

have shown, this prosperity was secured through a process of uneven geographical development that benefited suburban spaces at the expense of urban ones.³⁹ As Castells notes, the process of postwar suburban expansion was also the process of central city decay.⁴⁰ Throughout the 1960s manufacturers began to move their factories from city centers due to rising land rents and taxes, drawn instead to the cheap, empty expanses outside of urban areas where they could also construct new facilities using up-to-date materials and machinery.⁴¹ The combination of capital flight and the exodus of white middle- and working-class urbanites created economic woes for many city governments, who sought to lure new growth sectors to invest in their now decaying downtowns. Recognizing the increasing profitability of financial, services, and tourism sectors of the economy, city officials around the nation spent much of the 1950s building pro-growth coalitions whose mission would be to use federal funding to redevelop, or “renew” deindustrializing downtowns and re-invent

³⁹ Castells and Mollenkopf describe the mutually constitutive relationship between urban and suburban forms in Manuel Castells and John Mollenkopf, “Introduction,” in Castells and Mollenkopf, editors, *Dual City: Restructuring New York* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992), 3-22. See also Manuel Castells, “The Wild City,” in Joe R. Feagin, ed., *The Urban Scene* (New York: Random House, 1979); and Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, Todd Swanstrom, *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the Twenty-First Century*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 37-64. David Harvey and Neil Smith develop the concept of uneven geographical development in their works on the production of space in capitalism. See David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (New York: Verso, 2006), 69-74; Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Reprint Editions, 1990).

⁴⁰ Castells, “The Wild City,” 8.

⁴¹ Mollenkopf points to a wave of wartime and postwar suburban plant construction, including the Will Run plant outside of Detroit, the U.S. Steel Fairless plant between Philadelphia and New York, and automobile manufacturing facilities in Hayward and Milpitas. John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 26.

them as corporate headquarters, financial districts, and tourist destinations.⁴² In San Francisco the “pro-growth coalition” reached its fullest expression in the figure of Mayor Joseph Alioto, whose administration initiated and aggressively pursued downtown redevelopment programs in the late 1960s.⁴³

The investment of San Francisco’s city government in new economic sectors altered the kinds of jobs available to working-class residents, and especially to unskilled newcomers. Increasingly, the jobs available were not part of the industrial sector, were non-unionized, had little to no job security or benefits, and were located in either the white-collar financial and commercial sector or the low-wage service sector. This shift, which was occurring in many large U.S. cities, had a decisive impact on the ability of unskilled working-class people to achieve upward mobility. As Thomas Bailey and Roger Waldinger note, “the shift from goods to services has undermined the historic role that cities have played as staging grounds for the integration of unskilled, newcomer groups.”⁴⁴ The new growth sectors also produced a mismatch between the city’s population and available jobs, as Robert Self points out:

[A]t one end of the services spectrum were white-collar jobs that increasingly required college degrees... but even at the entry level, service employers were reluctant to hire African Americans, because of the historic front-of-the-house/back-of-the-house racial line....[T]he bifurcation into well-paying service sector jobs and low-wage service

⁴²Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*, 15-19, 103-151; See also Chester Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 15-43.

⁴³Mollenkopf compares San Francisco’s redevelopment efforts with those of Boston. Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*, 139-179.

⁴⁴ Thomas Bailey and Roger Waldinger, “The Changing Ethnic/Racial Division of Labor,” in Castells and Mollenkopf, eds., *Dual City: Restructuring New York*, 43.

sector jobs ...contributed as forcefully to the growth of poverty as manufacturing job loss.”⁴⁵

As a result the spatial organization of economic inequality increased, as white-collar jobs went to suburban commuters, and inner city residents were left to either fight for low-wage service jobs or rely on state subsidies for survival.

The third component of the transformation of San Francisco’s working class was the historic federally subsidized redistribution of wealth organized through the Great Society programs of the 1960s, most famously the package of programs and agencies associated with Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. In response to the pressures of the civil rights movement, and in a context of unprecedented prosperity, the federal government undertook its last major Keynesian redistributive project of the twentieth century, seeking to expand some of the benefits of the New Deal welfare state to urban non-white groups.⁴⁶ Although the effects of these efforts were

⁴⁵Self, *American Babylon*, 173.

⁴⁶ Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward discuss the role of the civil rights movement and urban riots in pressuring the federal government to extend social benefits to non-white groups. See Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Random House, 1971), 256-284. More recently, a number of scholars of poor people’s organizing have revisited the War on Poverty, attempting to uncover stories of grassroots organizing that put pressure from below on federal and local governments. Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Orleck, *Storming Caesar’s Palace*; Jennifer Frost, *An Interracial Movement of the Poor: Community Organizing and the New Left in the 1960s* (New York: NYU Press, 2001); Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Kent B. Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises: Poverty, Citizenship, and the Search for the Great Society* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Robert R. Korstad and James L. Leloudis, “Citizen Soldiers: The North Carolina Volunteers and the War on Poverty,” *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (Autumn, 1999), 177-

much more limited than their architects had hoped, the War on Poverty project did direct millions of federal dollars into local programs providing employment training, tutoring, and other resources to mostly non-white, poor urban residents. As Premilla Nadasen, Mimi Abramovitz, and others have shown, the 1960s also saw a sharp rise in the number of families receiving subsidies through the Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, as a result of years of welfare rights organizing and the loosening of restrictions for qualification.⁴⁷ Additionally, the

197; Felipe Hinojosa, “*Medicina Sí Muerte No!*: Race, Public Health, and the “Long War on Poverty” in Mathis, Texas, 1948–1971,” *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Winter 2013), 437-458. There also exists a large body of scholarship on the expansion of the modern welfare state in the twentieth century. See Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press, 1989); R. Alan Lawson, *A Commonwealth of Hope: The New Deal Response to Crisis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Robert C. Lierberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Jill Quadagno, “Theories of the Welfare State,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 13 (1987) 109-128.

⁴⁷Piven and Cloward calculate that between 1960 and 1969 the number of recipients on the AFDC rolls increased by 107 percent. See Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, 183. For background on the history of welfare subsidies for women and families, see Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*, 329-340; Molly Ladd Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Jennifer Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform, 1945-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Marisa Chappell, *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Linda Gordon, “How We Got ‘Welfare’: A History of the Mistakes of the Past,” *Social Justice*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (55) (Spring 1994), 13-16; Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S Welfare State,” *Signs*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Winter 1994), 309-336; Joanne L. Goodwin, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mothers’ Pensions in Chicago, 1911-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); and Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of*

passage of the 1949 Housing Act led to a new wave of public housing construction. Construction came in fits and starts due to the instability of federal funding, but reached a high point at the end of the 1960s, largely in response to the pressure created by urban uprisings.⁴⁸ Therefore, by the mid-1960s San Francisco's precarious

Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996). For histories of welfare rights organizing, see Martha F. Davis, *Brutal Need: Lawyers and the Welfare Rights Movement, 1960-1973* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Guida West, *The National Welfare Rights Movement: The Social Protest of Poor Women* (New York: Praeger, 1981); Jacqueline Pope, *Organizing Women on Welfare: Planning at the Grassroots Level* (New York: Columbia University, 1986); Nick Kotz, *A Passion for Equality: George A. Wiley and the Movement* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977); Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*; Guida West, "Women in the Welfare Rights Movement: Reform or Revolution?" *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 15, No 2/3 (1990), 23-41; Premilla Nadasen, "Expanding the Boundaries of the Women's Movement: Black Feminism and the Struggle for Welfare Rights," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 2002), 270-301; Felicia Kornbluh, "The Goals of the National Welfare Rights Movement: Why We Need Them Thirty Years Later," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring, 1998), 65-78; Diana Zoelle and Jyl Josephson, "Promoting Freedom From Poverty: Political Mobilization and the Role of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union," *Feminist Review*, No. 82 (2006), 6-26; Cynthia Edmonds-Cady, "Mobilizing Motherhood: Race, Class, and the Uses of Maternalism in the Welfare Rights Movement," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 3/4 (Fall-Winter 2009), 206-222; Mimi Abramowitz, "Learning from the History of Poor and Working-Class Women's Activism," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 577 (September 2001) 118-130; Linda Gordon, "Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890-1945," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (September 1991), 559-590.

⁴⁸ According to Rachel Bratt public housing construction reached an all-time high in 1971, when over 91,000 units of housing were completed. Rachel Bratt, "Public Housing: The Controversy and Contribution," in Rachel G. Bratt, Chester W. Hartman, Ann Meyerson, eds., *Critical Perspectives on Housing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). For other relevant work on low-income housing and housing policy in the twentieth century, see Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); John F. Bauman, Roger Biles, and Kristin Szylvian, *From Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century*

working-class population was more likely than previous generations to be receiving some form of state subsidy as a way of supplementing meager or inconsistent wages, and to receive this subsidy through programs that were socially stigmatized as “handouts.”⁴⁹ Thus precarious workers were increasingly enmeshed in complex relationships with local and federal agencies such as the Welfare Department, the Housing Authority, and various anti-poverty program departments. As the protagonists of the first three chapters of this book will make clear, such relationships were often hostile, complicated by dynamics that combined liberal benevolence, racial paternalism, and barely contained working-class shame, fear, and resentment.

As a result of these three factors, by the 1960s San Francisco’s working-class population was in a markedly different position than its pre-World War II predecessor. There now existed a large and growing urban population that was racially segregated in terms of housing and employment, had much higher rates of un- and underemployment than its white counterparts, was employed in sectors lacking

America (University Park, P.A.: Penn State University Press, 2000); Rachel G. Bratt, Michael E. Stone, Chester W. Hartman, eds., *A Right to Housing: Foundation for a New Social Agenda* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Sudhir Venkatesh, *American Project* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Michael Stone, *Shelter Poverty: New Ideas on Housing Affordability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); Ronald Lawson, *The Tenant Movement in New York City, 1904-1984* (Rutgers, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986); Connie Young Yu, "A History of San Francisco Chinatown Housing," *Amerasia* 8, No. 1 (1981) 93-109; Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women’s Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the stigmatization of women, and especially women of color, receiving welfare benefits, see Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*; Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*; Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood*; Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights*; Orleck, *Storming Caesar’s Palace*.

job security or union representation, and received some form of state subsidy in order to pay for the necessities of modern urban existence. All of these factors contributed to the precariousness of urban working-class life, and would shape the kinds of struggles and movements that emerged throughout the decade.

The State as Antagonist

If, then, we choose to center the precarious sectors of San Francisco's urban working class in our narrative of 1960s working-class social movements, what looks different about the nature of these movements? First, precarious labor struggles have not necessarily been conducted in relation to employers or workplace management. While traditional labor history defines labor struggles as conflicts between workers and employers, a history of urban precariousness must grapple with the fact that people lacking stable access to formal employment might not have employers at all.

Precariousness is linked to work that takes place in informal spaces such as the home or the street, to increased involvement by necessity in criminalized activity such as sexual labor and drug sales, and to reliance on state agencies to provide economic support.⁵⁰ Thus precariousness is linked to an increase in interactions with the state, and my research suggests that precarious labor struggles often centered on antagonism toward specific state agencies and institutions, rather than employers.

I identify three sectors of the state with which precarious groups became enmeshed in conflict. The first of these is the "redistributive" state: state agencies

⁵⁰Venkatesh, *Off the Books*, 5-30.

tasked with redistributing social wealth to those defined as lacking in resources. This branch of the state includes the Welfare Department, the Housing Authority, and the various Office of Equal Opportunity agencies created by the War on Poverty.⁵¹ The second of these is the “repressive” state: state agencies tasked with policing urban populations, arresting law breakers, enforcing desired uses of urban space, and incarcerating those deemed guilty of engaging in criminalized activity. In the examples studied here the victims of these repressive agencies were targeted for their involvement or alleged involvement in sex work, political protest, rioting, theft, and unapproved uses of public space.⁵² The third state sector is that of the

⁵¹ Scholars have studied the complex relationship between working-class people and “benevolent” social service agencies such as the Welfare Department, the Housing Authority, and the various employment and job training programs of the Office of Economic Opportunity during the War on Poverty. I draw on their research throughout this study. See Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*; Orleck, *Storming Caesar’s Palace*; Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*; Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing*; Lawson, *The Tenant Movement in New York City*; Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches*; Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights*; Orleck and Hazirjian, *The War on Poverty*; Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, *Negotiating Poverty: Economic Insecurity and the Politics of Working-class Life in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, 1929-1969* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2003); Greene, *Our Separate Ways*.

⁵² My analysis of the “repressive state” and its institutions draws from the analysis of prisons and policing in Loic Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009); Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso, 1999); David Greenberg, ed., *Crime and Capitalism: Readings in Marxist Criminology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*; Edwar J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Race and Incarceration in an Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2013); Michael Tonry, *Malign Neglect: Race, Crime, and Punishment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American*

“developmentalist” state: state agencies tasked with funding, coordinating, and overseeing the redevelopment of cities along the lines desired by city officials and investors. In this study the primary examples of the developmentalist state are the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and other city agencies tasked with supporting redevelopment efforts, such as the Port Commission and the Manpower Commission.⁵³

Each chapter of this study focuses on points of conflict between a precarious working-class group and state agencies and institutions. The first three chapters trace different aspects of the city’s Black freedom movement, each examining a facet of the movement and foregrounding the role of precarious labor in Civil Rights and Black Power struggles. In these three chapters precarious groups come into conflict with redistributive, repressive, and developmentalist state institutions, as activists fight against the policing of Black youth, the demolition of Black neighborhoods such as the Fillmore and Western Addition, and the mistreatment of welfare recipients by

Apartheid: Race and the Making of the Underclass (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁵³ Scholars of urban renewal have researched the role of municipal agencies, such as redevelopment agencies, city planning commissions, port commissions, transit authorities, and manpower commissions, in facilitating the transformation of U.S. cities in the postwar era. See Hartman, *City For Sale*; Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*; Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013); Karl Beitel, *Local Protests, Global Movements: Capital, Community, and State in San Francisco* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012); Thomas H. O’Connor, *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993); Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill: Boston Since 1630* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994); Amanda Seligman, *Block By Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago’s West Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

government employees. The fourth chapter discusses the struggles of retired former industrial workers whose labor built much of the infrastructure of the urban west and facilitated San Francisco's rise as a manufacturing and shipping center in the early twentieth century. As retired, disabled people they lacked sufficient subsidies or savings to live a stable urban existence in redeveloping San Francisco, and were thus easily displaced by pro-development forces, including the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. The fifth chapter looks at workers involved in illegal sex work in the context of city government's growing commitment to a tourism-based downtown economy, and traces growing conflicts between sex workers and vice squad officers.

A New Spatial Regime

In their work on the theory of uneven geographical development, David Harvey and Neil Smith, both urban geographers, have pioneered the use of space as a concept for understanding the role of capitalism in developing cities in historically specific ways.⁵⁴ They argue that "spatial competition" leads capitalists to continually pursue an economic advantage based on the geographical location of production. This advantage is almost always temporary, however, as the dynamic, fast-paced nature of capitalist development inevitably leads to the emergence of new advantages and disadvantages, rendering the "geographical landscape of capitalism" perpetually

⁵⁴ Harvey *Spaces of Neoliberalization: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005). See also Smith, *Uneven Development*.

unstable.⁵⁵ For instance, industrialists in the late nineteenth century who located their manufacturing facilities in urban areas had an immediate advantage, as land rents were cheap, the labor supply was close at hand, and they were able to minimize the high costs of transportation by locating themselves so centrally. As transportation infrastructure developed, urban land rents increased, and urban space became more densely packed throughout the course of the twentieth century, urban manufacturing became less advantageous. At some point in mid century, manufacturers found a new advantage in relocating to land outside of cities, where land rents were cheaper, there was ample space to build expansive new facilities, and new highway and public transit systems overcame the problem of distance.⁵⁶ The spatial logic that built the system of urban manufacturing began to unravel, and by the postwar era a new kind of spatial logic was emerging.

Similarly, the spatial logic that led to specific land use patterns in the industrial city of the first half of the twentieth century also began unraveling, and by the 1960s was being replaced by a new, post-industrial spatial regime. The postwar changes in urban economies discussed above profoundly influenced the organization of cities such as San Francisco. The shift from an industrial to a services-based economy led city governments, developers, and business leaders to institute different land use patterns in cities, and especially city centers. I suggest that the shift in uses of urban space was so definitive and so transformative that it constituted a new spatial regime, a new pattern of spatial organization that re-arranged the distribution of

⁵⁵ Harvey, *Spaces of Neoliberalization*, 74-78.

⁵⁶ Aronowitz, *False Promises*, 342; Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*, 21-26.

housing, consumption, work, and leisure in the urban geography. This post-industrial spatial regime posed specific challenges for working-class people, whose uses of space came into increasing conflict with the needs of pro-growth coalitions.

In their work on urbanization processes John Mollenkopf and Manuel Castells describe two distinct kinds of urban forms dominating the twentieth century: the industrial city and the postindustrial city. Each of these forms produced a spatial logic that served as an organizing principle for the arrangement of housing, labor, leisure, and transportation systems in urban space. The industrial city resulted from the concentration of manufacturing facilities, warehouses, and ports in urban areas, close to distribution lines such as railroads, roadways, and waterways, and close to urban marketplaces. Workers in these industries logically moved close to their places of employment, ringing them with working-class residential and commercial districts that produced their own community institutions and cultural forms. As Castells summarizes, in industrial urban centers workers, means of production, means of consumption and transportation are concentrated.⁵⁷

The spatial regime that sustained the industrial city began to unravel after World War II. Federally subsidized suburbanization bled cities of middle-class and white ethnic blue-collar residents. Manufacturing, heavy industry, and retail followed suit, and new industrial parks and shopping malls began cropping up on the outskirts of urban areas. As city governments sought to restore income streams, they began re-developing downtowns as centers for banking, commercial headquarters, and tourism.

⁵⁷Castells, "The Wild City," 4.

In addition to transforming the labor market, this pattern of redevelopment constituted a major shift in urban land use patterns. Suddenly factories and industrial shipyards, once valued by municipal governments for the income and jobs they represented, were undesirable because of their physical ugliness and polluting smoke and chemicals; these qualities contrasted with new land use priorities that depended on making downtown a clean and attractive place for tourists, white-collar workers, and luxury condo dwellers. The era of working-class housing ringing industrial areas also declined as downtown employees increasingly lived outside of city boundaries.⁵⁸ Mollenkopf contrasts the two kinds of urban spatial regimes:

If labor and capital concentrated into factories defined the industrial city, the postindustrial city is characterized by the geographic diffusion of production and population. The office building, not the factory, now provides the organizing institution for the central city.⁵⁹

Beginning at the end of World War II up until the start of this study in 1964, municipal governments began creating transportation infrastructure linking suburban commuters to downtown workplaces. Poorer “ghetto” neighborhoods were frequently the casualties of such re-organization. Castells describes the elements of this new spatial logic as “combining urban renewal, real estate initiatives and easy access to the wealthy outer suburban ring through new highways reaching into the urban core over ghetto roofs.”⁶⁰ Thus we can see emerging the contours of a spatial regime whose logic was quite different from that of the industrial city. Beginning in the early 1950s, pro-growth coalitions formed and worked to implement the kinds of land uses

⁵⁸Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*, 12-20; Hartman, *City For Sale*, 3, 8.

⁵⁹Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*, 12-13.

⁶⁰Castells, “Wild City,” 9.

that would be most advantageous to new investment sectors: tourism, white-collar office headquarters, and upper-class housing construction. Land usage prioritized the aesthetic experience of urban life, cleanliness, sanitation, safety, crime reduction, and access to sites of leisure, entertainment, and consumption. As Neil Smith and Don Mitchell have shown, such land use patterns were in marked contrast to working-class uses of urban space.⁶¹

Scholars such as Arnold Hirsch, Thomas Sugrue, Kevin Kruse, Heather Thompson, and Becky Nicolaides have described the racial contours of this re-organization, which took place between 1945 and 1965 in cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, and Los Angeles, noting that the divide between urban and suburban was also a racial and an economic divide. They show how stratification within the working class in terms of access to stable and well-paid employment was closely correlated with race and organized spatially, with a precarious non-white population housed in segregated central city neighborhoods and a unionized white working class moving from urban ethnic enclaves to suburban areas.⁶² As Robert Self comments, spatial re-organization had profound effects on the well being of city dwellers: “urban reengineering redistributed more than jobs and capital; it redistributed social inequalities and the public resources with which to address them.”⁶³ Thus, as Self has skillfully shown in his study of geographical reorganization in postwar Oakland, the

⁶¹ Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 3-27; Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 134-141.

⁶² Hirsch, *Making of the Second Ghetto*; Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Kruse, *White Flight*; Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*.

⁶³ Self, *American Babylon*, 136.

racial conflicts of the 1960s must be understood as responses to the specific way that racial hierarchies were expressed spatially, as inequality was mapped onto the physical landscape of cities and suburbs in ways that brought whites and African Americans into conflict over resources.⁶⁴

Throughout this study I use the concept of a new urban spatial regime to explain the nature of heightened conflict between precarious groups and specific state agencies in 1960s and 1970s San Francisco. Precariousness, as discussed and defined above, was caused by increased unemployment and economic instability, to be sure, but it was also exacerbated by the growing incompatibility of working-class uses of urban space with the new needs of developers, business leaders, and government officials. The issue of conflicting uses of space is a thread throughout this study, but comes to the fore in chapters four and five, which deal specifically with the effects of urban redevelopment on working-class downtown residents. As I demonstrate, precariousness was heightened by the major overhaul in San Francisco's geographical landscape and spatial organization, from the physical demolition and construction of the built environment to the new kinds of neighborhood policing that were developed to enforce new land use patterns.

Social Movements, Race, Gender, and Class

As I have suggested, this study of precarious San Francisco aims to pull together fields that, through academic convention, remain unnecessarily separate. I

⁶⁴Ibid., 1-2.

have introduced the concepts of precariousness, spatial regimes, and conflict with state institutions in part as tools to provide a bridge between the fields of labor history, urban history, and African American postwar history. These concepts can also reframe our understanding of San Francisco's social movements of the 1960s and 1970s—in particular the feminist movement, the Black freedom movement, and the gay and transgender liberation movement—in ways that incorporate elements of all of these traditionally distinct areas of study.

A growing number of scholars within the field of labor history have already undertaken this work, drawing connections between the labor movement and other social movements of the postwar era. Scholars such as Dorothy Sue Cobble, Kathleen Barry, and Venus Green have demonstrated the impact of feminism on women's union organizing, while Michael Honey and Robert Korstad have examined Black workers' participation in both civil rights activism and labor organizing.⁶⁵ However,

⁶⁵Dorothy Sue Cobble: *The Sex of Class: Women Transforming American Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004); Venus Green, *Race on the Line: Gender, Labor, and Technology in the Bell System, 1880-1980* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2001); Kathleen Barry, *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2004); Mary Margaret Fonow, *Union Women: Forging Feminism in the United Steelworkers of America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Dennis Arthur Deslippe, *Rights, Not Roses: Unions and the Rise of Working-Class Feminism, 1945-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Nancy F. Gabin, *Feminism and the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Ruth Milkman, "Women Workers, Feminism, and the Labor Movement Since the 1960s," in Ruth Milkman, ed., *Women, Work, and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History* (New York: Routledge, 1985); Dorothy Sue Cobble, "Rethinking Troubled Relations Between Women and Unions: Craft Unionism and Female Activism," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Autumn, 1990)

on the whole scholars of working-class history have given much higher priority to debates over the causes of trade union bureaucratization and the decline of union density than they have to the social movements waged by nonunionized, precariously employed sectors of the working class, even when these struggles are specifically concerned with labor issues. Labor historians have presumably not viewed these struggles as labor struggles because of the informal nature of the work involved, or because at times they were actually struggles for *access to labor*, waged by unemployed groups. Neither have movements over housing rights, neighborhood

519-548; Dorothy Sue Cobble, “‘A Spontaneous Loss of Enthusiasm’: Workplace Feminism and the Transformation of Women’s Service Jobs in the 1970s,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 56 (Fall 1999) 23-44; Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Robert Rogers Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of American History* 73 (December 1986) 669-94; Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); David Wellman, *The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the San Francisco Waterfront* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Phil Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Nancy Maclean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Larry Griffin and Robert R. Korstad, “Class as Race and Gender: Making and Breaking a Labor Union in the Jim Crow South,” *Social Science History*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Winter, 1995), 425-454; Steven A. Reich, “Organized Labor and the Civil Rights Movement: Lessons From a Troubled Past,” *New Labor Forum*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Fall, 2009), 60-70; Jack Dougherty, “That’s When We Were Marching for Jobs: Black Teachers and the Early Civil Rights Movement in Milwaukee,” *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), 121-141; Thomas J. Sugrue, “Affirmative Action from below: Civil Rights, the Building Trades, and the Politics of Racial Equality in the Urban North, 1945-1969,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (Jun., 2004), 145-173.

displacement, and especially policing been given sufficient attention as forms of working-class political organizing. More often than not, the struggles examined here—African Americans organizing against police brutality, transgender sex workers organizing against the criminalization of sex work and non-normative gender expression, single mothers organizing for increased welfare benefits—are understood as somehow separate from the issue of class, and as lying instead within the purview of other categories of analysis such as race, gender, and sexuality. As a result of this conceptual shortcoming, within the field of labor history these struggles have not been sufficiently integrated into narratives about the re-making of class in the postwar era.⁶⁶

This study argues that social movements waged by precarious urban groups were in fact central to the constitution of the working class during an era when labor was being transformed by technological developments and the decline of Fordist work regimes. In particular, these movements exposed points of conflict and fissure

⁶⁶ There are a number of important exceptions. Labor historians with feminist and anti-racist commitments have challenged dominant labor history narratives and suggested that the field expand its definition of labor and of class. Examples include Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked: A Historical Overview* (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 1981); Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Dorothy Sue Cobble, editor, *The Sex of Class: Women Transforming American Labor* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007); Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

within the postwar working class, points that often correlated with racial and gender hierarchies. For instance, the Black freedom movement of the 1960s was a key component of the making of the Black urban working class in the postwar era, and it was closely tied to growing economic inequality between Black and white working-class people.

At the same time, with some notable exceptions, historians of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s have insufficiently emphasized the role of class in shaping the emergence and development of feminist, gay liberation, and Black freedom struggles. Histories of second wave feminism, for instance, rarely discuss the organizing undertaken by street-based sex workers directly impacted by urban renewal, who articulated a brand of feminism that demanded the decriminalization of sexual labor in the face of the policing of central city neighborhoods.⁶⁷ Nor have most histories of postwar gay and transgender liberation movements given adequate attention to the role of urban renewal and policing in shaping both the location of gay and transgender subcultures and the emergence of radical groups of queer street

⁶⁷ See, for instance, Alice Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); and Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000). Echols and Rosen do provide an important analysis of key events in the development of second wave feminism; however, their narratives do not give much attention to organizing by poor women who experienced gender oppression as a class issue. An important exception is Anne M. Valk's *Radical Sisters: Second-wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008). Valk explores conflict and cooperation between white and black feminists involved in welfare rights organizing in 1970s Washington, D.C.

youth.⁶⁸ Historians of the Black Power movement have been the biggest exceptions to this tendency, with scholars such as Donna Jean Murch, Peniel Joseph, Jeanne Theoharis, and Judson Jeffries all foregrounding the role of poverty and social marginality in the growth of Black Power politics.⁶⁹

In each chapter of this study, the efforts of precarious groups to improve the conditions of labor and daily life emerge as the actual content of urban working-class organizing. These struggles had many goals and, depending upon one's analytical point of view, many meanings. They were struggles over the changing nature of work, over access to the formal economy, over access to and uses of urban space, and over what David Harvey and Neil Brenner have called the "right to the city" in the face of rising land values and cost of living.⁷⁰ They were simultaneously concerned

⁶⁸ An important exception is Susan Stryker's groundbreaking *Transgender History*, which I discuss in chapter five of this study. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008).

⁶⁹ Murch, *Living For the City*; Judson L. Jeffries, *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities Across America* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2010); Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, Komozi Woodard, eds., *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2005); Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, eds., *Liberated Territory, The History of the Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Judson L. Jeffries, ed., *Comrades: A Local History of the Black Panther Party* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Paul Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution: The History of the Black Panther Party* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007).

⁷⁰ The phrase "the right to the city" is attributed to French urban theorist Henri Lefebvre, who proposed it as a slogan of radical urbanism in his 1968 work *Le Droit à la ville*. David Harvey revived the phrase to refer to twenty-first century urban social movements challenging gentrification and the increasing inaccessibility of cities to working-class people. See David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left*

with race, gender, and sexuality as these identities were being constituted in urban space during the transition to a postindustrial spatial regime. The ghettoization of African Americans, the criminalization of transgender sex workers, and the morality policing of poor single mothers were all central to the formation of racial, sexual, and gender hierarchies in 1960s urban America. The movements that emerged to challenge these hierarchies wove together race, gender, and class into a seamless whole, a fabric that we would do well to examine in all of its complexity.

Patterns in Precarious Struggles

My research on the struggles of San Francisco's most precarious working-class groups points to five major conclusions, all of which have implications for our understanding of the nature of urban working class life and labor in the 1960s and 1970s.

First, the available evidence suggests that the issue of precarious labor consistently emerged as a central concern in the city's Black freedom, feminist, gay, and transgender liberation movements. Members of the most marginalized sectors of the city's working class participated in these movements, and they articulated racial, gender, and sexual oppression in terms of an inability to secure economic and social stability. They highlighted the ways that racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia all increased economic precariousness and kept them at the margins of

*Review 53, 23-40; Mitchell, *The Right to the City*; and Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse, and Margit Meyer, editors, *Cities for People Not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City* (New York: Routledge, 2012).*

urban life. In the case of the Black freedom movement, members of CORE, the NAACP, and the United Freedom Movement noted the role that racial hierarchies in the labor market played in keeping them from entering the ranks of the unionized working class. The single mothers who formed welfare rights organizations and tenant unions pointed out that women of color had the highest unemployment rates of any group in the city, and that Black male unemployment rates destabilized the nuclear family model in ways that increased the pressure on Black women to both raise their families and support them economically. The unemployed youth who rioted in Hunters Point in 1966 decried the city's repeated broken promises to find them work, and directed their anger at the white-owned businesses in their neighborhood that refused to hire them.

Similarly, sex workers in the Tenderloin noted that sex segregation in the labor market and discrimination against gay and transgender people forced them into potentially more lucrative but much more precarious forms of criminalized sexual labor. They also pointed out that street sex workers were often survivors of sexual and domestic violence that was clearly linked to patriarchal, heteronormative family structures, becoming homeless when they fled abusive families and communities. Their resulting lack of resources made it even harder to find and keep a job in the formal sector of the economy. Because racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia took the form of economic and social marginalization, the struggles waged by precarious groups rarely looked like classical labor movements. Unemployed youth, poor single mothers, and street sex workers fought against various forms of

oppression and economic precariousness simultaneously, by fighting for access to labor, for the decriminalization of their labor, or for state subsidies to compensate for the unavailability of labor.

Second, my research suggests that, in their political organizing, precarious working-class people struggled to define the nature of the welfare state and to determine their relationship to it. Organizations debated whether they could reform the welfare state or whether it was an unsalvageable part of a social system based on economic exploitation. These debates led groups to choose different organizational strategies, which ranged from trying to gain access to the decision making structure of local anti-poverty agencies and police-community relations units (in the case of CORE and the United Freedom Movement), to organizing autonomously to pressure welfare and public housing agencies to reform their functions (in the case of most welfare rights organizations, tenant unions, the California Federation of the Poor, and the sex workers' rights groups Vanguard and COYOTE), to creating autonomous community institutions that would replace or undermine the functions of the welfare state (in the case of the Black Panther Party).

No clear consensus emerged within any of these groups, but all of them expressed disappointment and disillusionment regarding the accomplishments of the welfare state. Even the most moderate civil rights groups were skeptical of the motivations behind anti-poverty programs, and participants in welfare rights and housing struggles repeatedly expressed the opinion that their efforts to democratize these institutions had left them less optimistic about the possibility of reforming the

system from within. These participants emphasized the need for organizational autonomy, as they became increasingly concerned about co-optation or domination by politicians, social workers, and middle-class activists. Instead they called for the formation of autonomous groupings of poor people, Black people, sex workers, and mothers.

A third finding suggests that for precarious urban dwellers, struggles could not easily be divided into “single issues.” As people living in the social margins experienced a crisis of social reproduction—an inability to securely reproduce their existence—the lines between needing work, needing affordable housing, food, and clothing, and needing to resist police violence were not always clear. Single mothers, for instance, simultaneously fought for welfare benefits, housing subsidies, and job training programs that would help them find stable jobs. Indeed, my research shows that when unemployment was widespread, poor people might combine calls for jobs with calls for direct support from the state—arguing that if jobs were not available, then the state had a responsibility to socialize the costs of reproduction and redistribute wealth downwards to the poor.

Retirees and disabled former industrial workers evicted from their low-income housing by urban renewal projects similarly asked for direct subsidies from the state. They did not ask for work to help them afford rents in more expensive neighborhoods as they were displaced, but for state subsidies to ensure that they could pay those rents, and for state-subsidized housing designated for them—making the argument that

they had put in their time as productive workers and deserved economic security in their old age.

A fourth finding suggests that policing and precariousness became intertwined in specific ways in the context of the post-industrial urban economy of the 1960s and 1970s. Precarious individuals were often visibly idle or engaged in criminalized forms of labor such as soliciting, and thus the same economic regime that made them precarious was also threatened by their visibility in public space, especially when this public space was being redeveloped in ways that required it to look clean and safe to middle-class sensibilities. Thus the policing of precarious groups in this period involved geographical containment—keeping “undesirable” people from spilling out of their neighborhoods into spaces designated for middle- and upper-class use. In the case of street- and hotel- based sex work, policing efforts did not attempt to eliminate sex work (which was sought out by male tourists and white collar workers), but to regulate where it took place and to make it less visible to the public. Police worked to move sex work out of the Embarcadero area and to concentrate visible street prostitution in the Tenderloin. In the case of African American youth police worked to keep young people from leaving the segregated Hunters Point neighborhood, going so far as picking them up and driving them back to Hunters Point when they found them in other parts of the city.

Finally, the struggles of precarious groups often highlighted hierarchies within the working class. Specifically, the evidence demonstrates that more economically secure sectors of the working class did not always side with the demands of

precarious workers. The postwar model of economic development in San Francisco exacerbated the conflicts between precarious and unionized groups. As deindustrialization caused major setbacks for many of the city's blue collar unions, these unions jumped on the redevelopment bandwagon in order to secure whatever jobs they could for their members and in order to maintain good relationships with political leaders invested in redevelopment. However, the union jobs created through redevelopment did not usually benefit the most precarious, marginal sectors of the urban working class—single mothers on welfare and unemployed Hunters Point youth were not, for the most part, being hired, despite some affirmative action efforts. The working-class people who benefited from redevelopment were also more likely to be white suburbanites—members of the industrial working class who could afford to leave the city and move to the suburbs—and as a result were not directly affected by rising land values in the city. Thus the working-class people who were able to reap some of the benefits of redevelopment did so at the expense of more precarious groups. When these groups—in particular elderly retirees—tried to stop redevelopment plans from moving forward, union leaders and some rank and file union members denounced them as special interest groups standing in the way of “real” working-class interests.

In the case of policing, the mostly white members of the police officers' union largely supported a working-class “white backlash” against the Black freedom movement, reacting with anger to Black organizing against police brutality and to the Hunters Point riot in September 1966. The police officers' union organized a rally in

support of officers in the aftermath of the riot, after civil rights groups tried to hold an officer accountable for murdering a Black youth. According to newspaper reports a number of trade union leaders, and hundreds of rank and file supporters, participated in the demonstration. These union members did not see the Black freedom movement's call for jobs as a hard-earned demand for entrance into the unionized working class, nor did they see calls for state subsidies as demands for support in the absence of employment opportunity. White backlash supporters did not see their interests as aligned with those of poor unemployed or precariously employed people, instead embracing a white homeowner, taxpayer identity that placed the two groups in conflict.

Chapter Outline

This narrative takes place over a fifteen-year span, from 1964 to 1979, but the bulk of the story falls within a few short years, between 1966 and 1969. Over the course of my investigations into the precarious struggles of the 1960s and 1970s in San Francisco I observed that the majority of activism related to Black freedom, welfare and housing rights, police brutality, and sex work decriminalization struggles fell within this brief period of time. The reasons are several: the effects of the War on Poverty, started in 1964; the rise of Black Power in 1966; the global leftist uprisings of the second half of the 1960s. In addition there are deep economic and social factors, including the effects of redevelopment projects, de-industrialization, and militarized policing in low-income neighborhoods, all ongoing since the 1950s.

However, though this study hinges on a crucial half-decade of struggle, its chronology extends both before and after the central years. I begin this story in 1964 because I found an observable increase in low-income organizing as soon as the War on Poverty program was announced in August of that year. The immediate engagement of local civil rights groups in efforts to democratize the anti-poverty program establishes an important beginning to my longer narrative about the ambivalent relationships between low-income activists and the welfare state.

I end this study a full decade after the peak of precarious organizing because two of the struggles examined in this study, the fight against the Yerba Buena Center in the SoMa district and the fight against police harassment of sex workers in the Tenderloin, extended throughout the entire decade of the 1970s. The main sex workers' rights group examined here was not even formed until 1973. Chapters Four and Five of this study, although they touch on organizing and political and economic shifts in the second half of the 1960s, pivot towards the 1970s much more than the first three chapters. The primary reason is that both Tenderloin sex workers and South of Market retirees lived in downtown San Francisco, and major redevelopment projects in that area did not begin until the end of the decade. Thus, in order to include both the beginnings of poor people's activism alongside the War on Poverty and the full sweep of activism in response to downtown redevelopment in my study of precarious urban struggles, I extended the temporal lens of my research into the 1970s. By 1979 organizing efforts had dwindled, although it would be an exaggeration to suggest that they died out altogether. However, in the 1980s a new

range of political and economic factors emerged, including the rise of the Reagan Right and a citywide homeless epidemic, that shifted the terrain of precarious struggle in significant ways. Thus, although demarcating the end of movements is in some ways an artificial endeavor, I chose to end this narrative with the close of the decade.

The first chapter of this study serves as a prologue, detailing San Francisco's social, political, and economic development from the end of World War II up until the start of this study's narrative in 1964. In addition, the chapter sets the stage for the main case studies presented in Chapters Two through Five by providing a glimpse of San Francisco's civil rights movement in the mid-1960s, linking strands within this movement to precarious labor struggles. I identify key groups and discuss the implications of an emerging generational split between moderate church and professional based organizations and the younger direct action activists influenced by the movement in the south. I examine the consequences of the decision by local groups to work within newly established War on Poverty agencies as part of their project of dismantling racial stratification within the urban working class, including exclusion from the social benefits of the New Deal welfare state and from access to stable employment. Militant civil rights leaders fought to "democratize" the War on Poverty in the hopes that community control of decision-making would radicalize a state project initially designed to diffuse the Black uprising. I point to some of the reasons why these efforts largely failed, and suggest that the ineffectiveness of the democratization strategy was part of the reason why Black San Franciscans sought other forms of more autonomous organization in the late 1960s. This brief

examination of the civil rights movement's engagement with the redistributive state introduces many of the key themes of the larger study.

Chapter Two, the first of the more in-depth case studies that make up this project, examines some of these autonomous efforts, looking at how, between 1966 and 1970, poor women worked to secure access to state subsidies for their reproductive labor. I locate the precarious economic situation of working-class women, and in particular African American women, in the mid-1960s in the effects of the postwar economy on urban communities and family structures, and suggest that in their fight for public housing and welfare reform San Francisco's poor women were hoping to challenge the precariousness of their unpaid household labor. They fought to achieve some kind of security through state compensation when denied stable access to the formal sector of the labor market. I also show how these struggles were part of, and complicated, the city's Black freedom struggle, foregrounding a feminist component of Black liberation by centering the role of African American women in reproducing the community through unpaid labor. Welfare and housing struggles also pushed the movement to distance itself from state anti-poverty programs that increasingly seemed incapable of achieving the kinds of structural change activists were demanding.

Chapter Three uses the concept of precarious labor to examine the heightening of conflict between African American youth and the San Francisco Police Department in the second half of the 1960s. Framing my narrative around the riot that took place in September 1966 in the segregated neighborhood of Hunters Point, I

discuss the failures of the War on Poverty and the continuing exclusion, in the second half of the 1960s, of Black youth from the social benefits of the welfare state and the formal labor market. The continuing precariousness of the African American urban experience provides a partial explanation for the increase in rebellious activity on the part of African American youth. I also show how, between 1966 and 1970, the city's Black Panther Party chapter and the San Francisco Police Department's Tactical Squad developed in relation to one another as the city's Black freedom movement became increasingly oriented around the policing of Black neighborhoods.

After three chapters that center the struggles of African American precarious groups, in Chapter Four I examine political organizing against new land use patterns undertaken by retired and disabled former industrial workers living in the South of Market neighborhood, a hub for homeless, poor, and marginal single men for over a century. I show how a major downtown redevelopment project, begun in 1969, increased the precariousness of urban existence for former industrial workers whose homes were in the path of the new post-industrial spatial regime. Between 1969 and 1979 elderly retirees fought with the city Redevelopment Agency, which was tasked with managing San Francisco's transition to post-industrial land use patterns, to prevent their eviction from downtown residential hotels. I also examine the role of the International Longshore Workers' Union (ILWU) and the San Francisco Labor Council in supporting redevelopment at the expense of its former rank and file, and discuss the implications of organized labor's alliance with Alioto's growth coalition.

In Chapter Five I continue to examine the effects of downtown redevelopment on precarious groups, looking at sex workers in the Tenderloin and their conflicts with the vice squad of the San Francisco Police Department between 1966 and 1979. I examine the ways in which the precariousness of illegal sexual labor increased sex workers' exposure to the repressive sectors of the state, centering labor struggles on the issue of criminalization and uses of public space. I also highlight the ambiguous position of prostitution in an increasingly tourism-based urban economy.

Taken together, these diverse portraits of precarious San Francisco tell an unconventional story about urban working-class life in the 1960s and 1970s. In a city whose poor neighborhoods were populated by unemployed youth of color, single mothers supporting their families on welfare subsidies, retired industrial workers living on Disability and Social Security payments, and sex workers performing labor under the shadow of criminalization, the struggle to make ends meet took many forms. The protagonists of this study fought with the state agencies and institutions they encountered in their daily lives, demanding a "right to the city" in the face of a new spatial regime that threatened their ability to survive within the city's bounds. Refusing to be relegated to a state of permanent precariousness, they fought for stability and security and, at times, major social transformation. As this study demonstrates, these struggles were a key component in the re-making of the U.S. working class during the postwar era, and they deserve to be understood in all of their complexity.

Chapter One:

The War Over the War on Poverty: Civil Rights Groups, the War on Poverty, and the “Democratization” of the Great Society

On February 26, 1965 the Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church in the Western Addition neighborhood of San Francisco was packed full of people, although they were not there for any church function. With a mixture of anger and excitement they discussed the latest developments in what was turning out to be a heated struggle for political control. The topic of debate was the arrival in town of a new program, straight from Washington, which would supposedly funnel large sums of money into the impoverished, mostly African American neighborhood.¹ President Johnson’s War on Poverty had been announced one year prior, on January 8, 1964, with much fanfare, and city governments had greeted the news with a mixture of interest and caution. Desirous of government dollars but resentful of more federal intrusion on their turf, municipal administrations struggled to wade through the alphabet soup of new acts and agencies generated by the Johnson administration and to set up the infrastructure necessary to comply with new federal guidelines.²

¹ Willie Thompson, *Enemy of the Poor: The Struggle of the War on Poverty in San Francisco* (San Francisco: Willie Thompson, 1965); Eduardo A. Contreras, “The Politics of Community Development: Latinos, Their Neighbors, and the State in San Francisco, 1960s and 1970s), PhD diss., University of Chicago (March 2008), 63.

² The relationship between the federal government and municipal administrations in the implementation of the War on Poverty is discussed in Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

San Francisco's mayor, John Shelley, responded to the list of guidelines in September 1964, creating an Economic Opportunity Council and appointing an Executive Committee to plan and oversee the implementation of the various services and agencies created by Johnson's Economic Opportunity Act, which was signed into law on August 20.³ By late fall of 1964 Shelley had most of his administrative infrastructure in place.⁴ But he overlooked two key factors: the opinions of the program's target area residents, and the political power of the city's civil rights groups.

It was this issue—the representation of target area residents in the anti-poverty program—that was on everyone's lips at Macedonia Baptist Church that January night. Members of feuding civil rights groups as well as neighborhood residents curious about the impact of the new program on their lives were debating the merits and the limitations of Johnson's initiative, wondering if it was possible that the federal government would actually deliver on its promises to the country's poor. The overall sentiment was mixed: while many of the city's most outspoken African American civil rights leaders declared the War on Poverty an attempt by the government to co-opt and diffuse the movement, they also saw an opportunity to use the practically unheard-of influx of federal dollars to meet their own needs and—even more importantly—to build Black political power in the city. The young Congress On Racial Equality (CORE) leader Wilfred Ussery, an outspoken advocate of civil disobedience

³Orleck and Harzirjian, *The War on Poverty*, 7.

⁴"The City's Anti-Poverty Program," Alioto Papers, San Francisco History Center: San Francisco Public Library.

tactics who had earned the hostility of the more moderate established civil rights leadership, captured the sentiment well when he told the crowd: “Even though this program was created with the intention of putting the lid on the civil rights movement, it has potential. We must let the Mayor and the Council know that we are dissatisfied...and that we will not sit still about it any longer.”⁵

What Ussery and other civil rights leaders wanted was control. To them, the difference between a government program bent on co-opting and diffusing the era’s Black freedom movement, and a program that could be used as a base for spreading that movement further, lay in one of the Economic Opportunity Act’s most controversial clauses: a section that created Community Action Programs and called for “maximum feasible participation of the poor” in the management and implementation of the anti-poverty program. Democratization became the keyword for civil rights groups between the fall of 1964 and the spring of 1965, as members worked to transform the government bureaucracy into a tool of the Black freedom struggle. In the case of the Shelley administration, Ussery and other leaders, as well as many ordinary residents of the Western Addition, believed the critical battle was over the make-up of Shelley’s Economic Opportunity Council and Executive Committee. As we shall see, they set their sights on winning majority representation of target area residents on the decision-making bodies of the city’s War on Poverty program.

⁵Natalie Becker and Marjorie Myhill, *Power and Participation in the San Francisco Community Action Program, 1964-1967* (Berkeley: Institute of Urban and Regional Development, 1967), 25.

In this prologue to my larger study I suggest that when these civil rights and neighborhood groups challenged the parameters of the War on Poverty in 1965, they were participating in a struggle for access to labor, for a dismantling of the racialized hierarchies within the postwar working class that left African Americans in such an economically precarious position. Between September 1964 and the establishment of anti-poverty programs in the Western Addition in the spring of 1965, the Congress on Racial Equality, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and residents of the Fillmore and the Western Addition neighborhoods demanded that the newly created federal and local agencies, tasked with redistributing social wealth downward to the urban poor, use state resources to create jobs and job training programs for African American residents of San Francisco. In addition, they sought to use War on Poverty funds to stem the tide of urban renewal, replacing it instead with neighborhood programs that would make working-class urban life less precarious. They thus fought to retain the use of urban space for low-income housing, recreation, and commercial activity even as developers sought to re-make their neighborhoods into more lucrative middle-class residential areas. These struggles exposed and exacerbated internal cleavages within the civil rights movement by foregrounding the issue of class and centering the needs of working-class African Americans. They exposed the economic divide between the average working-class Black person and the middle-class civil rights leadership, and shifted the movement's goals away from ending legal discrimination and toward tackling economic inequality.

I discuss the internal conflicts that arose within the city's civil rights movement in 1964, describing the political disagreements that threatened to fracture the movement when a younger generation inspired by Southern direct action tactics butted heads with the established leadership of African American professionals and clergy. Conflicts that emerged between these two factions in 1964 over the question of tactics set the stage for collaboration and conflict in 1965 and 1966, when the War on Poverty program got under way. By tracing the cleavages within the movement between 1964 and 1966 I foreground the centrality of questions about how the movement should relate to the state and what kinds of tactics it should use. Specifically, civil rights groups and individuals active in the struggle debated the movement's relationship to the federal and local government, and especially to the liberal establishment that had designed and implemented the War on Poverty. Could these institutions be looked to as sources of fundamental change? Who would be co-opting whom if civil rights groups took the helm of local redistributive efforts? These questions would emerge again and again in precarious labor struggles between 1964 and 1979.

The push by young militants for a democratization of state redistributive efforts ultimately failed, though, to generate the large-scale mobilization for which they had hoped, leading to an increasing bureaucratization of the mass movement and a drift back toward more moderate politics between the spring of 1965 and the fall of 1966. Younger leaders like Ussery initially gained influence in 1964 by spearheading direct action tactics in the form of sit-ins and demonstrations against employment

discrimination and relocation. These actions created a groundswell of activity at the grassroots, pushing activists like Ussery into leadership positions within the newly formed anti-poverty program agencies. However, as they increasingly focused their energies on transforming those agencies in 1965, they lost the mass base that had placed pressure on those agencies in the first place. Once the mass mobilization dwindled, militant leaders found that they had lost their sway both within the anti-poverty program and within the civil rights leadership. It was this discouraging experience of working within the redistributive state that would push some civil rights activists to argue for more autonomous forms of Black and poor people's organizing. In this sense the experiences of these civil rights activists prefigured the organizing efforts of other precarious groups discussed in this study, including welfare mothers, public housing tenants, and street-based sex workers.

A City in Flux

Many of the African Americans who lived in the majority-Black Western Addition neighborhood of San Francisco in the mid-60s had moved to the city during World War II. From their segregated enclave they had watched the Golden Gate City undergo major economic and demographic transformations, and they had often emerged from these changes worse off than before. By and large the two decades after the end of World War II had not been good for the city's Black working class. As I will demonstrate, unemployment had gone up along with the cost of living;

residential segregation had increased; and income inequality between whites and people of color had grown astronomically. By the time the War on Poverty program arrived in late 1964 African Americans had endured nearly twenty years of declining status, and many were more than ready for change.

In some respects the roots of this decline can be traced back to World War II. Because of its port and its strategic proximity to the Pacific front, during the war San Francisco became the West Coast center for major war industries, in particular shipbuilding. The booming war economy drew tens of thousands of African American migrants from the rural south, giving them unprecedented access to skilled industrial employment. Between 1940 and 1950 the city's African American population grew from under 5,000 to 43,460—an eightfold increase.⁶

In the immediate postwar years these economic and demographic shifts propelled a re-configuration of urban space as white blue collar and middle-class families began their historic move to the suburbs and outlying smaller cities.⁷ In part they were following the movement of the manufacturing sector from the city center to cheaper and more spacious suburban industrial parks. An influx of federal funds directed toward the development of military technology launched new industries such as electronics, which continued to expand in the postwar era. Lockheed's Missiles and Space Company in Sunnyvale, Hewlett-Packard in Palo Alto, Ampex in

⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1950 Census of Population*, Vol. 2, "Characteristics of the Population," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952), 5-207. The political, economic, and social context of African American immigration to San Francisco is discussed in Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 16-17; Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, 210-11; and Self, *American Babylon*, 82-83.

⁷ Hartman, *City For Sale*; Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*.

Redwood City, and Sylvania in Mountain View were major sources of manufacturing employment that grew rapidly in the postwar era.⁸ Between 1960 and 1965 manufacturing employment in the Palo Alto-Sunnyvale-Mountain View corridor more than doubled.⁹ In 1968 the various electronics firms in the area between San Francisco and San Jose employed an estimated 75,000 workers.¹⁰

White flight from San Francisco was linked to major changes in the racial and class composition of the city. A city that in 1940 had been ninety five percent white by 1965 was over twenty percent non-white.¹¹ Much of this transformation was due to the arrival of African Americans during the war, a migration that became permanent even though industrial employment was not. Before the war San Francisco's African American population numbered under 5,000.¹² By 1965 it had reached 91,000.¹³ The city's Asian and Latin American population also grew during this period. In 1940 26,765 San Franciscans, or 4.2% of the total populations, were of Asian origin. By 1970 this number had risen to 95,095, or 13.3%. The Latino population is harder to quantify, because it did not have its own census category

⁸ Greater San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, *1964-65 Economic Survey*, 13.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ San Francisco Chinese Community Citizens' Survey and Fact Finding Committee, *San Francisco Chinese Community Citizens' Survey and Fact Finding Committee Report, 1969*, San Francisco: H.J. Carle and Sons, 1969.

¹¹ Sheridan Tatsuno, "The Political and Economic Effects of Urban Renewal on Ethnic Communities: A Case Study of San Francisco's Japantown," *Amerasia Journal* 1 (March 1971), 36; *San Francisco's Changing Population*, 12.

¹² Daniel Crowe, *Prophets of Rage: The Black Freedom Struggle in San Francisco, 1945-1969* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2000), 3.

¹³ Greater San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, *San Francisco's Changing Population: A Report on the City's Population*, by Population Study Committee, (San Francisco: Greater San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, 1967), 12.

during this period. However, the city's Spanish surname population was measured at 4.1% in 1950, whereas in 1970 the census found that persons of Spanish origin or descent constituted 9.7% of the total population. While the experiences of Latino San Franciscans in the precarious urban struggles of the 1960s and 1970s are not explored in this study, Latinos certainly formed a crucial part of the precarious working class during this period. It is essential to incorporate an analysis of Latino activism into any future research on this subject.¹⁴

Scholars such as Robert Self, Gerald Horne, and Daniel Crowe have shown that, while the white working class was able to recover from the downsizing of the war industry by following the private manufacturing sector outside of major U.S. cities, people of color were unable to gain the same degree of access to employment in skilled manufacturing. They were usually the first fired from their war industry jobs, and were left to search for work in the city's low-paying service sector.¹⁵ In San Francisco only one in six African American men was able to retain wartime employment in the industrial sector; by 1950 nearly all of the gains made during the war years had been erased.¹⁶

As manufacturing declined in relative economic importance, San Francisco's

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, *San Francisco City and County* (1940); U.S. Census Bureau, *San Francisco City and County* (1950); U.S. Census Bureau, *San Francisco City and County* (1970), retrieved from <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/counties/SanFranciscoCounty40.htm>, accessed on January 18, 2014.

¹⁵ The postwar firing of African Americans from the industrial sector has been a major theme of postwar African American historiography. See Horne, *The Fire This Time*; Sides, *L.A. City Limits*; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*; Self, *American Babylon*; Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*.

¹⁶ Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 40.

economic base began shifting toward new sectors. In particular, the finance, services, and tourism industries experienced rapid growth and expansion throughout the 1950s. San Francisco's location made it an ideal gateway to the growing Asian market, and it became the headquarters city for corporations interested in developing Pacific trade. San Francisco became the nation's leading export district, a hub for international shipping companies, and the headquarters for a large number of international banks such as Wells Fargo and Bank of America, as well as the 12th Federal Reserve district.¹⁷ It also established itself as the insurance center of the west, with twenty-seven stock and mutual companies and nineteen insurance associations, including Dodge and Cox and Pacific Mutual, basing their operations in the city by the mid 1960s.¹⁸

Other industries grew up around those, in particular the services and construction sectors. A boom in office building to house company headquarters and financial institutions rapidly transformed San Francisco's built environment and provided employment for some of the city's remaining skilled laborers. Chester Hartman writes that between 1960 and 1981, San Francisco built 30 million square feet of office buildings. Between 1960 and 1964 the average annual increase in office space was 573,000 square feet. Ten years later, between 1970 and 1974, it had risen

¹⁷ San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, *Economic and Population Growth in the San Francisco Bay Area*, by Clifford W. Graves, (San Francisco: The Commission, 1967), 20-30.

¹⁸ San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, *1964-65 Economic Survey*, 16-19. See also San Francisco Department of City Planning, *Labor Force Trends: Report Containing Background Information for the Commerce and Industry Element of the Comprehensive Plan of San Francisco*, by Robin Jones (San Francisco: Department of City Planning, 1975), 26-28.

to 1,631,400.¹⁹ The service sector grew to serve the needs of the new corporations and their white-collar employees. In 1965 it accounted for twenty percent of Bay Area employment.²⁰

San Francisco also saw significant growth in the tourism sector, a trend that was tied to the redevelopment of the city center and the funneling of city funds toward urban renewal projects.²¹ In 1965 the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau wrote in its annual report that visitor expenditures were at an all time high, increasing from 55 million dollars in spending in 1950 to 178 million in 1965.²² Local government encouraged the industry's growth in part by creating a hotel tax in 1961, which was to be used to launch a nationwide tourism advertising campaign. Officials also sought to expand the city's capacity to house lucrative conventions. In the early 1960s, the city's facilities for conventions were limited to a small Civic Auditorium in downtown and the Cow Palace complex, a much larger facility located outside of the city. In 1965 officials, along with powerful business interests, began plans to build the Yerba Buena Center convention and entertainment complex in a low-income downtown neighborhood.²³

The city's changing economic base led to increased socioeconomic

¹⁹Chester Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 3.

²⁰*Economic and Population Growth*, 24. See also Tatsuno, "Political and Economic Effects," 37.

²¹ The tourism sector is a designation that lumps together revenue from hotels, restaurants, retail stores, sports events, and taxi usage. See Hartman, *City For Sale*, 20.

²² San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau, *1965 Annual Report*.

²³ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 31. The construction of the Yerba Buena Center, and the resistance of residents to displacement, is discussed in Chapter Four of this study.

polarization, as much of the middle class and skilled working class left the city, leaving behind the wealthy and the poor clustered in sharply segregated neighborhoods. The shift toward white-collar employment produced a mismatch between the city's population and its labor market. As city officials complained in 1965, "The high proportion of unskilled people in the city population is making it increasingly difficult to hire the large numbers of competent workers required to staff the increasingly office-type operations."²⁴ As a result, central city corporations increasingly hired commuters, white middle-class residents of neighboring counties such as Marin and Santa Clara. In 1963 two out of every seven San Francisco employees lived outside the city.²⁵ The result was growing income inequality between racial groups. In 1940 African American unemployment was twenty percent higher than white unemployment, but by 1953 it was seventy-one percent higher, and by 1963 the gap had grown to 112 percent.²⁶

As a result of suburban expansion San Francisco underwent a population decline. Between 1950 and 1960 the city's population dropped by 4.5 percent, from 777,357 to 740,000, and by 1970 it had declined by another 3.2 percent. At the same time the population of surrounding counties doubled and in some cases even tripled.²⁷ The exodus combined with the changing class composition of the city eroded the city's tax base and led to a decrease in the quality of city services.²⁸

²⁴ *San Francisco's Changing Population*, 3.

²⁵ *1964-65 Economic Survey*, 21.

²⁶ Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 57.

²⁷ *San Francisco's Changing Population*, 12.

²⁸ Tatsuno, "Political and Economic Effects," 36. The effect of "white flight" on urban

All of these economic and demographic changes played a role in reconfiguring the spatial organization of people within the city's boundaries, in particular by hardening patterns of segregation by race. By the early 1960s African Americans were clustered in only a few neighborhoods due to widespread discrimination in housing and high poverty rates that made many neighborhoods' rental prices simply unaffordable. They were concentrated in the Fillmore and the Western Addition, two overlapping older African American neighborhoods situated near the expanding business district, and in Hunters Point, a neighborhood in southeast San Francisco that became a Black enclave during World War II.²⁹ Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans were concentrated in San Francisco's Chinatown, and Japanese Americans established their own ethnic enclave in the Western Addition, making up 10 percent of its population in 1965. With the passage of the McCarran Walters Immigration Act in 1952, Latin Americans began moving into the Mission district as the neighborhood's older population of Italian and Irish Americans moved out.

Not surprisingly, these neighborhoods had high percentages of deteriorated and dilapidated housing, and overcrowding was commonplace. The San Francisco Economic Opportunity Council estimated in November 1965 that one quarter of the Mission's population was Spanish speaking, and that of this quarter, the majority

tax bases was felt in many U.S. cities during this period. See Manuel Castells, "The Wild City," in Joe R. Feagin, ed., *The Urban Scene* (New York: Random House, 1979)," and John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

²⁹Hunters Point is spelled without an apostrophe. See Hartman, *City For Sale*, 413.

were Puerto Rican, Nicaraguan, and Salvadoran.³⁰ The combination of physical blight and proximity to the booming central city business district made some neighborhoods targets for urban renewal programs throughout the 1950s, as we shall see in Chapter Four. By the early 1960s the Fillmore and Western Addition had been identified by government programs as key sites for redevelopment, resulting in neighborhood struggles to fight displacement.³¹

Between 1945 and 1965 San Francisco's African American population had lost the gains it had made during World War II, in terms of penetrating the upper layers of the skilled working class. Black residents watched as the jobs that had lured them from the small Southern towns where their parents and grandparents lived dried up, and they were forced to return to the low-paying service sector. They watched as the white working class found high-paying jobs in the private manufacturing sector and moved to surrounding suburbs, leaving them behind in neighborhoods whose infrastructure had not been upgraded since before the war. And they watched as the few neighborhoods where they could find housing were suddenly targeted by real estate developers eager to be rid of them. By the mid 1960s a significant portion of San Francisco's African American population was fed up, and the signs of unrest were becoming increasingly visible.

³⁰ Economic Opportunity Council of San Francisco, *A Report to the Economic Opportunity Council of San Francisco on the Social and Economic Conditions in the Present Target Areas and on Designation of Prospective Target Areas*, (San Francisco: Economic Opportunity Council, November 29, 1965).

³¹Tatsuno, "Political and Economic Effects," 36.

The War on Poverty: A Response to Unrest

When President Johnson declared a War on Poverty in his State of the Union address in 1964, it was precisely the residents of poor segregated neighborhoods like the Western Addition he had in mind as the targets of federal aid. Throughout the 1950s, the public and Johnson administration officials had become increasingly concerned about a sharp rise in crime and juvenile delinquency rates in many U.S. inner cities. Though the large-scale urban riots with which the 1960s are often associated did not occur until after the program began, smaller riots and incidents of unrest were becoming more and more commonplace in many U.S. cities between 1962 and 1964, especially in the Northeast and the South.³² The persistence of poverty in urban minority neighborhoods was confusing to many white Americans, who were reveling in the benefits of an unprecedented period of economic growth and a rising standard of living.³³ By the early 1960s white Americans could not so easily ignore what was happening in the inner city as the effects of Black urban poverty began to spill over into their neighborhoods in the form of riots, political demonstrations

³² Roger Friedland, "Class Power and Social Control: The War on Poverty," *Politics and Society* 6 (December 1976), 464-7, 481. On the rise in gang activity and law and order campaigns in the Bay Area in the 1950s, see Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 79-83.

³³ It was this contrast that gave Michael Harrington's expose of inner-city poverty such moral force among its target audience of white middle-class liberals. His book *The Other America* influenced the crafting of federal War on Poverty programs. Harrington, *The Other America*. See also Annelise Orleck, "Introduction: The War on Poverty From the Grass Roots Up," in Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, editors, *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 5-6.

against segregation and discrimination, and increases in property crimes.³⁴

The War on Poverty was the federal government's last major initiative focused on expanding the welfare state in order to address poverty and inequality within a Keynesian framework.³⁵ It was an attempt to manage some of the problems that arose from the particular form of capitalist development that emerged in the postwar era. These problems included the social tensions that arose from the simultaneous creation of a racialized reserve army of labor and the rapid growth of the white middle class, as well as the breakdown of existing systems of capital accumulation in central cities. The era's relative affluence, combined with the fact that existing patterns of economic development did not seem likely to absorb the Black urban population into the work force on their own, led many liberals to view an expanded welfare state as a solution.³⁶

³⁴Gerald Horne, *The Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997); Williams, *Our Enemies In Blue: Police and Power in America* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2004); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

³⁵ I call this framework Keynesian because it attempted to achieve full employment through boosting demand. The welfare state attempted to deal with unemployment and underemployment through subsidies that in theory would boost the purchasing power of the unemployed, thus stimulating demand and leading to expansion of production. These concepts are defined in Brenner, *Economics of Global Turbulence*, 18, 189.

³⁶Orleck, "Introduction," in Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 6; Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The*

The War on Poverty also developed in response to the growing importance of the Black urban vote for the Democratic Party, at both the local and the federal level. As Frances Fox Piven has shown, the defection of the South from the ranks of the Party in the 1950s along with the rapid urbanization of African Americans in the World War II era led the party to re-think its electoral strategy. Additionally, the political infrastructure that developed out of the civil rights movement had created mechanisms for urban Black people to exert significant pressure on local governments, making them a more powerful voting bloc. Securing the allegiance of urban African Americans, especially in the North and West, became a cornerstone of party strategy.³⁷

At the level of ideology, the War on Poverty was an attempt to make sense of the persistence and even intensification of poverty and economic inequality in the midst of relative affluence. Grounded in an understanding of capitalism as generous

Functions of Public Welfare (New York: Random House, 1971), 256-284; Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace*; Jennifer Frost, *An Interracial Movement of the Poor: Community Organizing and the New Left in the 1960s* (New York: NYU Press, 2001); Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Kent B. Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises: Poverty, Citizenship, and the Search for the Great Society* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Robert R. Korstad and James L. Leloudis, "Citizen Soldiers: The North Carolina Volunteers and the War on Poverty," *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (Autumn, 1999), pp. 177-197; Felipe Hinojosa, "¡Medicina Sí Muerte No!: Race, Public Health, and the "Long War on Poverty" in Mathis, Texas, 1948–1971," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Winter 2013), pp. 437-458; Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).³⁷Frances Fox Piven, "Urban Programs as a Political Strategy," in *Handbook on the Study of Social Problems*, 592-3. See also Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

and infinitely expanding, theories expounding the War on Poverty emphasized both opportunity and culture as explanatory factors. Because material abundance appeared not just possible but inevitable, and because the economy seemed embarked on a path of permanent growth, liberal intellectuals and politicians surmised that poverty persisted because of poor people's inability to take advantage of the opportunities that existed in the economy. This inability was the result of a long history of discrimination and marginalization, which were expressed institutionally in the low quality education, housing, and job training received by the poor—material conditions that were beyond individual control.³⁸

The Kennedy administration began to experiment with federal anti-poverty policy in the early 1960s, with the creation of programs such as the experimental Food Stamp program in May 1961 and the passage of legislation such as the Manpower Development and Training Act in March 1962.³⁹In 1961 the

³⁸ For examples of this perspective see James L. Sundquist, "Origins of the War on Poverty," *On Fighting Poverty: Perspectives from Experience* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 30-32. Columbia University scholars Cloward and Ohlin, whose theories influenced Ford Foundation program development, developed this concept into what they called "opportunity theory." Attempting to explain the rise of juvenile delinquency in poor urban areas throughout the 1950s, they argued that delinquency was caused by a gap between aspirations and opportunities among the poor, who found their path to material success blocked by a number of institutional impediments. So while opportunity existed, it was not directly available to the poor. The role of the government, then, was to remove the obstacles that prevented the poor from achieving material success – through neighborhood development, job training, welfare, education reform, and housing reform. Piven, *Handbook of Social Problems*, 595.

³⁹ The Manpower Development and Training Act aimed to retrain workers made unemployed by technological changes such as automation. Kent B. Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises: Poverty, Citizenship, and the Search for the Great*

administration created the Mobilization for Youth program in New York City to target juvenile delinquency. Delinquency was an issue the administration found politically useful for its ability to win the support of both Black and white constituents, the former based on its promise of services and the latter because of its suggestion of crime reduction.⁴⁰

Johnson expanded upon Kennedy's programs and also launched a major public relations campaign to bring the concept of a federal offensive against urban poverty to the American public. The War on Poverty is usually remembered as beginning with Johnson's famous 1964 State of the Union address in which he announced: "this administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America."⁴¹ Within the next two years the Johnson administration passed an impressive amount of anti-poverty legislation, beginning with the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which created the basic organizational framework for the War on Poverty. The Act created the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), the Job Corps, VISTA, and Head Start, among others. Other important legislation included the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Food Stamp Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of

Society (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 42-45. Kennedy's anti-poverty programs and legislation, often referred to as his "New Frontier" programs, are discussed in Irving Bernstein, *Promises Kept: John F. Kennedy's New Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Mark J. White, *Kennedy: The New Frontier Revisited* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 1998); James N. Giglio and Stephen G. Rabe, *Debating the Kennedy Presidency* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); Alyosha Goldstein, *Poverty in Common: The Politics of Community Action During the American Century* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁴⁰Piven, "Urban Programs As a Political Strategy," 594.

⁴¹ James L. Sundquist, "Origins of the War on Poverty," *On Fighting Poverty: Perspectives from Experience* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 6.

1965, and the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966. In addition, amendments to Social Security in 1965 created Medicare and Medicaid, and further legislation created the Department of Housing and Urban Development in September 1965.⁴²

The Community Action Program (CAP), initiated in 1964 and linked to the Office of Economic Opportunity, was one of the more significant and controversial programs to come out of the wave of anti-poverty legislation. CAP created the Community Action Agency, which became the main coordinating body for the War on Poverty at the local level. Paid staff at the local level worked at different CAP agencies, all of which shared resources and infrastructure. Around forty percent of CAP funding was directed at local anti-poverty initiatives, while the remaining sixty percent went to federal programs with local chapters, such as Head Start and VISTA.⁴³ Crucially, CAP called for the "maximum feasible participation" of the poor in the development and implementation of their own neighborhood programs. This mandate, part of the War on Poverty's interest in providing poor people with "skills" and "empowerment training," became a major point of contention at the local level as

⁴² Germany, *New Orleans*, 42-45. See also Orleck and Hazirjian, *The War on Poverty*; Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace*; Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*.

⁴³Orleck, "Introduction," 10-13; Karen Mossberger, "From Gray Areas to New Communities: Lessons and Issues from Comprehensive U.S. Neighborhood Initiatives," presented at *Neighbourhood Working: Where Do We Go From Here? Towards a New Research Agenda*, De Montfort University, Leicester, U.K., May 7 2009, 4.

government officials, staff organizers, and neighborhood residents all fought to define the limits of "maximum feasibility" in a way that served their interests.⁴⁴

For many cities the War on Poverty began years before Johnson's legislation was passed, and even before the federal government had developed a comprehensive anti-poverty program at all. Cities such as San Francisco saw the fruits of the years of research and experimentation undertaken by liberal intellectuals and foundations in the late 1950s, much of which would later influence federal government policy. San Francisco first received significant funding for anti-poverty programs in 1960, when the San Francisco Board of Supervisors received \$400,000 from the Ford Foundation, the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, and the Department of Labor to combat juvenile delinquency through job training and placement.⁴⁵ When the Economic Opportunity Act was passed in 1964, this anti-delinquency program had just started placing youths in low-level jobs the year before. The program's three-year delay and poor track record of successful placements had already instilled skepticism in the minds of participants, whose doubts about the ability of government

⁴⁴Orleck, "Introduction," 5-6; Mossberger, "From Gray Areas," 4; Germany, *New Orleans*, 59-61. For more general discussion of conflicts over participation of the poor in the War on Poverty, see Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace*; Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's Movements*; Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*; Noel A. Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy: The Unlikely Success of the War on Poverty Community Action Programs* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007).

⁴⁵ Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 163.

bureaucracy to meaningfully address their problems seemed to be confirmed.⁴⁶ As we shall see, the pattern of raised expectations and frustrated outcomes would plague the city's anti-poverty program throughout its existence, and would serve as a catalyst for the emergence of new political formations in some of the city's segregated African American neighborhoods.

After the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964, San Francisco city officials selected "target areas" that would become the focus of the city's anti-poverty efforts. Mayor Shelley's administration initially selected four neighborhoods: the mostly African American Bayview-Hunters Point; Chinatown-North Beach; the Mission district; and the Western Addition.⁴⁷ These four areas included 61 percent of families earning less than \$4,000 in 1959, 50 percent of the city's unemployed, and 85 percent of Aid to Families with Dependent Children cases.⁴⁸ The Central City area, home to much of the city's transient population as well as a center of drug activity and prostitution, was later added as a fifth target area. Officials decided that each area would have its own neighborhood Area Board and hire its own staff, overseen by a board of directors elected by residents, which itself would be overseen by the War on Poverty's primary governing body at the local level, the Economic Opportunity Council (EOC). Mayor Shelley created the council as a private non-profit corporation with a governing board made up of mayoral appointees and citizens

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷ "The City's Anti-Poverty Program," Alioto Papers, San Francisco History Center: San Francisco Public Library, 1.

⁴⁸ "San Francisco Economic Opportunity Council," Alioto Papers, San Francisco History Center: San Francisco Public Library, 28.

elected by residents of the target areas.⁴⁹

By early 1965 Mayor Shelley seemed to have the infrastructure for the War on Poverty in place for San Francisco. He believed he had successfully translated the goals of the Johnson administration into the specific context of San Francisco.⁵⁰ However, he did not count on the reaction of the city's civil rights movement, which cried foul when Shelley revealed that the decision making body of the program was filled with mostly white political elites, businessmen, and labor leaders he himself had appointed.

Generational Conflict in the San Francisco Civil Rights Movement

In the early 1960s the civil rights movement in San Francisco, as in many other parts of the country, was fraught with conflict. A generational split was emerging as a young group of civil rights activists began to challenge the authority of the established African American leadership. This older generation was composed mostly of middle-class Black professionals, ministers, doctors, and lawyers of the "talented tenth" school of racial uplift, who saw it as their responsibility and their right to lead the Black masses toward equality.⁵¹ As professionals, these leaders were

⁴⁹ "The City's Anti-Poverty Program," Alioto Papers, 1. See also "Poverty Program Outlined," *The Spokesman*, December 3, 1965, 1.

⁵⁰ "The City's Anti-Poverty Program."

⁵¹ The concept of the "talented tenth" was popularized by W.E.B. DuBois in his 1903 essay "The Talented Tenth." DuBois argued that if African Americans received a classical education, rather than the industrial one advocated by Booker T. Washington, then the most talented tenth of the African American population would rise up to lead the rest. The idea was popular with middle class African American intellectuals and civil rights activists, in part because it seemed to legitimate their

not well positioned to understand the experiences of the city's precarious African American population, for whom racism was indistinguishable from the racial

leadership role. See W.E.B. DuBois, "The Talented Tenth," in Booker T. Washington, et al., *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today* (New York: James Pott and Company, 1903). Generational conflict within the Black freedom movement, and its relationship to class hierarchies, has been thoroughly discussed by scholars of the movement. For cleavages within SNCC, see Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 330-355; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream For a New America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Faith S. Holsaert, *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998). See also Peniel E. Joseph, "Introduction: Toward A Historiography of the Black Power Movement," in Peniel E. Joseph, editor, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Murch, *Living For the City*; Judson L. Jeffries, *On the Ground: The Black Panther Party in Communities Across America* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2010); Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, Komozi Woodard, eds., *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2005); Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, eds., *Liberated Territory, The History of the Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Judson L. Jeffries, ed., *Comrades: A Local History of the Black Panther Party* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Paul Alkebulan, *Survival Pending Revolution: The History of the Black Panther Party* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007); Jeanne F. Theoharis, Matthew Countryman, and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Brian Purnell, *Fighting Jim Crow in the County of Kings: The Congress of Racial Equality in Brooklyn* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013); Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

hierarchies within the postwar working class, which had effectively barred the masses of Black urbanites from reaping the benefits of prosperity that were accruing to the white unionized sector of the working class. Based in the San Francisco chapter of the NAACP and a coalition of labor union representatives and ministers called the Church-Labor Conference, founded in May 1963, these leaders focused on fighting cases of discrimination through the legal system, as well as using their social prominence to penetrate elite white political circles.⁵² Well-known examples included Terry Francois, an NAACP lawyer and later City Supervisor, appointed by Mayor Shelley; Cecil Poole, a Harvard graduate and the nation's first African American Attorney General; and George Bedford, president of the Baptist Ministers' Union, an influential church-based civil rights group.⁵³

As the use of civil disobedience and direct action tactics spread across the American South in 1961, when groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) organized the Freedom Rides and door-to-door voter registration drives, a younger generation of activists in San Francisco began to argue for the necessity of bringing such methods to the movement in the Bay Area. The younger generation joined the local chapters of SNCC and CORE, and also started a dissident faction within the local NAACP.⁵⁴ In San Francisco they formed a coalition group called the United Freedom Movement

⁵² "Rebellion Splits Negro Leaders," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 8, 1964. Also Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, 223-225.

⁵³ "Rebellion Splits Negro Leaders"; "Burbridge Explains Why He Quit NAACP Post," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 23, 1964.

⁵⁴ Becker and Myhill, *Power and Participation*, 4-5;

(UFM), in 1963, inspired by Martin Luther King Jr.'s strategy in Birmingham, Alabama. Their goal was to build a mass movement around the economic disenfranchisement of African Americans, using the Southern tactics of demonstrations, sit-ins, pickets, boycotts, and mass arrests.⁵⁵

These young activists were frustrated by the conservatism of the established leadership, as well as its economic and social distance from the masses of poor African Americans. On February 26, 1965, at the Macedonia Baptist Church meeting with which we began, Wilfred Ussery, the outspoken leader of the San Francisco CORE chapter, publicly criticized the city's African American leadership for its willingness to negotiate with the political establishment and to serve as token representatives of the African American community. Denouncing as insincere and ineffective Mayor Shelley's creation of a bi-racial committee to assess the status of African Americans in San Francisco, Ussery told the crowd that

the white community will not be permitted to name our leaders and spokesmen by appointing them to some well-intentioned bi-racial committee...The eyeballs-to-eyeballs confrontation with the power structure of San Francisco is not for the Mayor or the downtown interests to decide. The timetable now resides in the Negro community.⁵⁶

A multiracial organization called Freedom House became associated with this younger generation of civil rights militants, including both whites and African Americans, in 1964. Influenced both by the non-violent civil disobedience strand of

⁵⁵ Ibid., 5; The use of Southern tactics in Northern urban civil rights struggles is described in Theoharis, Woodard, and Countryman, *Freedom North*; Theoharis and Woodard, *Groundwork*; Purnell, *Fighting Jim Crow in the County of Kings*; Countryman, *Up South*.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 25.

the Southern civil rights movement and the philosophy of urban community organizers such as Saul Alinsky, Freedom House workers engaged in neighborhood-based political struggles that they believed would develop a leadership base in poor communities.⁵⁷ Freedom House was founded in early 1964 by Mike Miller, SNCC regional secretary, along with members of the United Freedom Movement, as an organizing base for Western Addition residents.⁵⁸ The organization coordinated a range of events and actions, from tutoring and summer classes for neighborhood youth to the organization of rent strikes.⁵⁹ However, Freedom House primarily focused on organizing the local residents to fight against the city's proposed massive redevelopment project, which would bulldoze most of the neighborhood and displace thousands of residents.⁶⁰

In 1964, the year before the War on Poverty came to San Francisco, the generational conflict in the city's civil rights movement sharpened, setting the tone for a further fracturing once the anti-poverty program began to be put in place. The conflict centered on two major organizing efforts: the United Freedom Movement's campaign against discrimination in hiring, and the struggle against redevelopment in the Western Addition, led by Freedom House and some members of CORE and the

⁵⁷ Alinsky wrote several influential books in the 1960s and 1970s aimed at providing tools for young radicals interested in community organizing. Saul Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969); Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971). For background on Alinsky's life and political involvement, see Sanford D. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky: His Life and Legacy* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1992).

⁵⁸ Dan May, "Who Started Freedom House?" *A-2 Stand*, October 10, 1964.

⁵⁹ *A-2 Stand*, August 8, 1964; *A-2 Stand*, October 10, 1964.

⁶⁰ *Fillmore Stand*, September 1964, 10.

NAACP. In both instances, leaders of the different movement tendencies clashed over the use of direct action tactics and the issue of the movement's relationship to the local political power structure.

In March of 1964 the United Freedom Movement began a series of actions targeting discriminatory employers across the city. Between March and May the coalition organized three major demonstrations at the Sheraton-Palace Hotel, Van Ness Avenue's Auto Row, and the Bank of America, demanding a written guarantee from employers that they would hire minority workers. Members of CORE and the dissident faction of the NAACP were at the forefront of the campaign, and they were eager to try out more confrontational tactics for the first time in the city's civil rights history.⁶¹

They began by calling for a mass demonstration in the lobby of the Sheraton-Palace Hotel on March 6, stating their intention to stay in the building until their demand of minority hiring was met. Built in 1875 to mimic the grand hotels frequented by royalty in Europe, the Palace Hotel was renowned for its opulence and its clientele drawn from the upper echelons of U.S. and European society. Among African Americans, however, it was also famous for its dismal track record in hiring.⁶² The hotel's lavish interior and wealthy clientele provided a dramatic

⁶¹ "Peace at Palace: Shelley Wins Agreement After Biggest S.F. Arrest," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 8, 1964; "On to Jail—For Freedom," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 8, 1964; "Auto Sit-In Talks Collapse" *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 15, 1964.

⁶²"On to Jail - For Freedom."

backdrop for the gathering of working-class Black residents, drawing attention to the racial contours of economic exclusion in a prosperous city.

The demonstration drew an estimated six hundred participants and resulted in the largest mass arrest in the city's history up to that time. Demonstrators entered the lobby of the Sheraton-Palace Hotel on March 6 and stayed through the night, chanting, marching, and sometimes taking breaks to nap on the lobby floor. United Freedom Movement representatives negotiated with hotel management throughout the evening and late into the night. At 3 a.m. CORE member Tracy Sims emerged from negotiations to announce that management had rejected their offer for the third time. In response demonstrators locked arms and blocked the hotel's entrances and exits, preventing hotel guests as well as police from entering or exiting the premises. San Francisco police declared a safety hazard and moved to arrest the demonstrators. Participants used the non-violent civil disobedience tactic of locking arms and going limp, refusing to respond with force as police carried them one by one to paddy wagons waiting outside.⁶³ The *San Francisco Chronicle* described the scene as protestors were dragged away one by one:

Demonstrators standing in the background yelled "Police Brutality–Nazi actions" as the officers tried to carry the squirming, kicking demonstrator down the stairs to a waiting paddy wagon outside....And everyone began smashing, hard, on the floor with their fists.⁶⁴

Members of the city's traditional civil rights leadership were quick to denounce the action. When interviewed by a *Chronicle* reporter, NAACP lawyer

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

Terry Francois commented that he was “not impressed by youths who assume they know all the answers.” He added “they made a terrible mistake in strategy. I’m afraid some of these youngsters see going to jail as the magic formula for success.”⁶⁵ Cecil Poole went further, condemning the demonstrators for using illegal methods: “I just cannot approve of even successful tactics that have the effect of violating the law. This kind of conduct brings into disrepute the entire movement, including its objectives.”⁶⁶ Reverend Bedford of the Baptist Ministers’ Union and local African American politician Willie Brown went so far as to side with the political establishment, praising the police force and the mayor for their responses. Brown congratulated Chief of Police Thomas Cahill, stating that he “did a terrific job in handling this situation....I have a lot of respect for the police department now.”⁶⁷

The hostility went both ways, as young militants denounced the conservatism of the established leadership. The *Chronicle* reported that demonstrators yelled “Uncle Tom” at Francois as he pleaded with them to leave the lobby of the hotel voluntarily.⁶⁸ Dissident member of the NAACP Dr. Thomas Burbridge challenged Francois’s assessment of the demonstration, arguing at a NAACP meeting held several days after the action that civil disobedience was a necessary tactic for achieving civil rights.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ “Rebellion Splits Negro Leaders,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Though the United Freedom Movement declared the action a success, demonstrators won little in the way of concrete gains for minorities through their negotiations. As a result of the action, which received widespread publicity and was the topic of heated debate in San Francisco, on the following day, March 7, Mayor Shelley called together hotel management and representatives of the United Freedom Movement to hammer out an agreement. The result was a document that both sides claimed paved the way for a new era of equal opportunity hiring, but the truth was that hotel management had actually conceded very little. They agreed to make a good faith effort to consider applicants for new positions without regard to race, and to assess their record of minority hires again in six months. In exchange the United Freedom Movement agreed to stop its campaign of direct action against the hotel.⁷⁰

The next two demonstrations organized by the United Freedom Movement were similarly dramatic and energizing for the participants, but again yielded little in the way of tangible results. The San Francisco NAACP chapter, led by Dr. Burbridge, coordinated two demonstrations at Van Ness Avenue's Auto Row over the following month. At the first protest on March 24 two hundred participants were arrested and charged with unlawful assembly, trespassing, and disturbing the peace, breaking the mass arrest record held by the March 6 Palace Hotel sit-in. After Auto Row dealers refused to accept their demands they returned on April 11 with thousands of demonstrators. When the dealers broke off negotiations the demonstrators went a step further, lying over, under, and inside the dealership cars, across desks and in

⁷⁰“The Hotel Hiring Agreement,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 8, 1964.

doorways. Another mass arrest occurred, but no deal was signed.⁷¹ A third campaign spearheaded by CORE targeted Bank of America, with the goal of pressuring the corporation to reach a statewide agreement with California CORE chapters, setting up pickets in front of the bank from May 23 to September 1.⁷²

Just as the momentum behind the United Freedom Movement's campaign began tapering off in the fall of 1964, a movement against redevelopment in the Western Addition began gathering steam. Like the sit-ins, the movement against redevelopment exacerbated the tensions that had been building all spring between factions of the civil rights movement. These came to a head right around the time when Mayor Shelley was initiating his plan for the city's war on poverty in September.

The city government's redevelopment projects were part of its strategic plan, begun in the mid-1950s, to re-invent its downtown as a corporate and financial services headquarters. Like many older U.S. cities in the mid-1960s, San Francisco was in the process of engineering a municipal "come-back" by transforming its built environment to better suit the needs of the new growth sectors. In practice this meant clearing out neighborhoods located in or near the target central city area and redeveloping them as either commercial zones or upscale housing for a growing

⁷¹"Auto Sit-In Talks Collapse," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 15, 1964. Two years later, in May 1966, the San Francisco Human Rights Commission criticized the dealerships for their failure to expand minority employment and training opportunities after the sit-ins. In fact, figures showed that employment of African Americans declined from 8.5% to 7.5% between December 1964 and February 1966. "S.F. Human Rights Commission Criticizes Dealers," *The Spokesman*, May 14, 1966.

⁷²Becker and Myhill, *Power and Participation*, 8.

professional class.⁷³ The city of San Francisco had undertaken one of its first major redevelopment projects in 1956, demolishing large portions of the mostly African American Fillmore district, which was part of the larger Western Addition neighborhood. During the war years the Fillmore had thrived as a vibrant working-class African American community renowned for its nightlife and artistic vitality, sometimes referred to as the Harlem of the West. Between 1958 and 1963 much of the Fillmore, designated as “Area 1” by the Redevelopment Agency, was bulldozed into oblivion and its residents displaced to other parts of the Western Addition or to Hunters Point.⁷⁴

The “Area 2” project set its sights on the remainder of the Western Addition. Redevelopment had begun in 1961, when approximately twenty-five blocks had been cleared to make way for middle income and luxury housing.⁷⁵ The residents once more fanned out into the surrounding neighborhood, some dealing with displacement for the second time. In the spring of 1964 the Board of Supervisors approved a plan to redevelop seventy-two more blocks of the Western Addition, providing only two hundred units of low income housing for the displaced residents.⁷⁶

In August Freedom House began working on a major campaign to challenge the city’s latest redevelopment plan. Volunteers, who were a mix of white and Black San Francisco State College students and Black neighborhood residents, went door to door in the Western Addition, organizing block clubs and building a system of elected

⁷³ Hartman, *City for Sale*, 25; Tatsuno, “The Political and Economic Effects,” 33-51.

⁷⁴ Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 54.

⁷⁵ Becker and Myhill, *Power and Participation*, 11-12.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

block captains.⁷⁷ The Freedom House storefront in the Western Addition became a center for anti-redevelopment meetings, for residents to gather to discuss neighborhood concerns, and for the writing and publication of the *Fillmore Stand* newspaper, a source of news and commentary on the anti-redevelopment struggle.⁷⁸ Through this structure word was spread of a public hearing with the city Board of Supervisors to be held on August 30. Freedom House staffers prepared an alternative redevelopment plan that was designed to minimize displacement and devote more resources to relocation, which they planned to present at the hearing.⁷⁹

The meeting, held at the Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church, was packed with residents of the Western Addition and Fillmore, eager to share their opinions about the proposal. According to one source as many as three thousand people may have been in attendance, and their frustration as they listened to the Agency's

⁷⁷ The fact that many Freedom House staffers were white could be a source of conflict between staffers and residents of the Western Addition. As an African American activist told a journalist for Freedom House's newsletter the *A-2 Stand*, white staffers going door-to-door in the neighborhood were often viewed with some suspicion. "An Interview with Aaron Chapman," *A-2 Stand*. A Western Addition resident also wrote to the *A-2 Stand* to complain about the organization's emphasis on resident self-improvement: "Freedom House is more concerned with self-improvement programs and clean-up campaigns. Residents know very well that Area-2 is, in the words of the Redevelopment Agency, 'very old, run-down, overcrowded and unsafe' ... But to rehabilitate a slum, overnight, is next to impossible. Furthermore, the stress, by Freedom House, on self-improvement is humiliating. It's as if to say, 'Look, white folks, we black people can be clean too. We've seen the light, so don't tear our houses down' ... No man likes to live in squalor. But neither does he like to have a stranger, regardless of good intent, point out his condition." "Editorial," *A-2 Stand*, August 22, 1964.

⁷⁸ *Fillmore Stand*, Vol. 1 No. 5 (San Francisco: Freedom House), August 8, 1964, 5.

⁷⁹ Becker and Myhill, *Power and Participation*, 12.

description of their neighborhood was palpable.⁸⁰ Longtime resident Eddie Maddox, who along with his wife stayed at the meeting until well past midnight, expressed his feelings of powerlessness and despair:

I'm a longshoreman, and I'm telling you the way the Redevelopment is going, when you wake up in the morning you're going to find out that a big fish swallowed you up. When you see things like this happen it makes you wonder what need of trying to do something? What need of me trying to work hard so my wife and kids don't have to go running to welfare when I die?⁸¹

Residents bitterly wondered how many times the pattern would repeat itself, and how many times the Redevelopment Agency would make empty promises. Allen Getter, Jr., a longtime resident of the Western Addition, was now facing his second city-mandated relocation. He told the crowd:

I was in Area 1 and the Redevelopment Agency told me many things that they were going to do for me and they didn't do them....I sold to them and then I didn't hear from them again until they told me to get out of my new place on Turk. I've been here twenty-one years.⁸²

At the same meeting Tom Bond, a hospital worker and member of the Hospital and Institutional Workers Union, pointed out that displacement had already lengthened commuting times and broken down patterns of neighborhood employment for many who worked in the area.⁸³

Individuals on both sides of the controversy were quick to recognize the connection between the emerging movement against redevelopment and the civil

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "The People's Voice," *Fillmore Stand*, Vol. 1, No. 8 (San Francisco: Freedom House, August 1964), 10.

⁸² "The People's Voice," *Fillmore Stand*, August 1964. See also "Community Assembly August 30," *A-2 Stand* 1:6 (August 1964), 1.

⁸³ Ibid.

rights sit-ins of the past few months. For some members of the political establishment the resistance to redevelopment rearing its head showed the telltale signs of Black militancy. “Some of the disruptive young militants of the civil rights movement have picked the Redevelopment Agency and its Western Addition Area-2 project as their next target,” complained the anonymous author of a July 30 opinion piece in the *San Francisco Examiner*.⁸⁴ The author urged the city to take immediate action, arguing that preemption was the key to preventing the movement’s growth. He or she added that the lesson learned from the Sheraton-Palace and Auto Row sit-ins was that “the episodes would never have occurred at all had firm countermeasures been taken last winter when the militants were perfecting their extortive techniques at drive-in and supermarket chains.”⁸⁵

The civil rights establishment was ambivalent when it came to taking on the city’s powerful redevelopment interests. This ambivalence came to a head within the NAACP in the fall of 1964, as the organization’s Executive Board vacillated between allowing its more radical members to agitate in the Western Addition and seeking to rein them in. According to a statement issued by NAACP dissident Dr. Burbridge on October 22, the Executive Board initially backed the alternative redevelopment plan created by Freedom House staff, but at the last minute—just as Freedom House seemed to be succeeding in pressuring the Redevelopment Agency to modify its plan—it withdrew its support and endorsed the Board of Supervisors’ plan. The agency

⁸⁴“Urban Renewal—Next Target?” *San Francisco Examiner*, July 30, 1964. Reprinted in *Fillmore Stand*, August 22, 1964.

⁸⁵“Urban Renewal—Next Target?”

was quick to use this backing to move ahead with its initial plan.⁸⁶ The NAACP Executive Board's actions infuriated Dr. Burbridge, and on October 22 he announced his resignation from the position of president of the chapter. Five other members quickly followed suit, throwing the chapter into disarray.⁸⁷

Burbridge's public statements made clear his understanding that the real basis for the political rift within the NAACP was the issue of class. The Executive Board had cited amongst its reasons for opposing Freedom House's alternative proposal the concern that it did not sufficiently promote integration of whites and minorities. To Burbridge, this was more proof that the older generation of civil rights leaders had an essentially "bourgeois" vision of equality: one in which legal barriers had been dismantled and the racist ideologies of the white middle class had been eroded to the point where Black professionals would be accepted into its ranks. "I couldn't care less whether middle class Negroes can get to live in white middle class neighborhoods," Burbridge declared. "The poor Negro is the real problem and my concern. And he is pushed around from one slum to another."⁸⁸ For him, as for many young civil rights militants, the older generation of moderates had shown itself to be in opposition to the interests of poor African Americans, and had thus lost all legitimacy as leaders.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ "Burbridge Explains Why He Quit NAACP Post."

⁸⁷ "Burbridge Explains Why He Quit NAACP Post."

⁸⁸ Becker and Myhill, *Power and Participation*, 13.

⁸⁹The proof came in December, when the NAACP San Francisco membership voted into office most of a dissident slate, which had been aligned with Burbridge. Apparently, the membership of one of the city's oldest and most established civil rights organizations was no longer satisfied with politics as usual. The losing "status quo" slate flew into an uproar, accusing CORE of attempting a takeover of the

Johnson's War Comes to San Francisco

Despite their differences both factions of the civil rights movement recognized the significance of the new anti-poverty program, and as soon as Mayor Shelley announced the formation of a local Economic Opportunity Council in September 1964, they scrambled to position themselves to take advantage of its resources. Although generally mistrustful of the intentions of city politicians, members of CORE, the NAACP, the United Freedom Movement, and the moderate church-based and professional groups saw potential in the influx of federal dollars, all earmarked to flow into poor minority neighborhoods. In other words, they believed it would be fruitful to engage with the state in a struggle over management and control of the redistribution of resources. For them, the difference between a co-opting apparatus that diffused unrest by minimally improving material conditions and a redistributive program that built Black political power lay in who controlled the management of resources. Having a common enemy—Mayor Shelley and his administration—allowed the warring factions of the civil rights movement to temporarily set aside their differences, as it became clear that they would have to work together to fight against mayoral control. However, these differences continued to assert themselves throughout the struggle for participation, and quickly rose to the surface as soon as their battle had been won.

organization and calling on the NAACP national office to step in and reorganize the branch. "NAACP Dissidents Win," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 21, 1964.

At the federal level, some of the legislation created as part of the War on Poverty provided a basis for the movement's demands for participation. Indeed, one of the War on Poverty's most controversial aspects was its rhetoric of self-empowerment of the poor. The Community Action Program (CAP) in particular was intended to function less as a service provider and more as an organizer training program, with the goal of organizing poor ghetto residents as voting blocs with political clout.⁹⁰ Drawing on the model of Saul Alinsky's work in Chicago slums, CAP inserted paid staff organizers into ghetto neighborhoods with the intention of "mobilizing" the constituency. Working on the assumption that poor residents were politically inactive because they lacked organizing skills and were caught in irrational cycles of defeatism and despair—and not because the government and the economy were fundamentally unable to meet their material needs—CAP's architects sought to awaken in these residents a desire for participation. In particular community organizers focused on teaching residents to put pressure on existing government agencies on whom they relied for subsidies and services: the welfare office, the Housing Authority, the Redevelopment Agency, and the Board of Education.⁹¹ Much of the controversy around the issue of "maximum feasible participation" revolved around the premise of CAP organizers that one branch of government could be used to put political pressure on other branches. Some critics—and some supporters—suggested that this amounted to the government organizing against itself.⁹²

⁹⁰Mossberger, "From Gray Areas," 4; Germany, *New Orleans*, 59-61.

⁹¹Germany, *New Orleans*, 59-61.

⁹²San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association, "The City's Anti-Poverty

San Francisco civil rights groups such as CORE, SNCC, the NAACP, and Church-Labor Conference seized on this rhetoric of participation to argue that residents of target areas should control the program's management. However, Mayor Shelley's initial organizational structure allowed limited room for participation of the poor. While acknowledging its obligation to fulfill the program's minimum requirements, the administration was apparently uninterested in the more controversial goal of extending political power to the poor.⁹³ Conflict over the issue of democratization emerged initially as a response on the part of civil rights activists to the way that Mayor Shelley designed the city's Economic Opportunity Council and the Council Executive Committee, the two main bodies that would oversee programming and the direction of resources. Shelley appointed the members of both in September 1964, choosing mostly white male politicians, businessmen, and labor union representatives.⁹⁴

Upon hearing of Mayor Shelley's plan for implementing the anti-poverty program, members of the established civil rights leadership sought to quietly consolidate their position as the legitimate representatives of the African American community. They created a Minority Action Committee in October 1964 and lobbied Shelley to be recognized as the official agency that would administer anti-poverty

Program: A Report on the Economic Opportunity Council of San Francisco, Inc.," San Francisco: SPUR, June 1968, 4.

⁹³ Willie Thompson, *Enemy of the Poor: The Struggle of the War on Poverty in San Francisco* (San Francisco: Willie Thompson, 1965), 2.

⁹⁴"The Big Fight in S.F. Poverty War," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 18, 1965.

program funds to the four target areas.⁹⁵ As two graduate student observers noted, their strategy suggested the degree to which they saw themselves as allies of the city administration:

The Mayor and the traditional Negro leadership had always held a number of goals in common. Both were more interested in establishing an orderly mechanism to transmit policy decisions to a client public than in broadening mass participation in the decision-making process. Although they both sought to correct conditions of inequality neither, in fact, wanted to confront directly the existing distribution of power in the Negro or the white community.⁹⁶

However, the mayor's rejection of the Minority Action Committee's proposal in December pushed the group to the left, and as the young civil rights activists began to organize to take on the administration, the older leadership found itself forced to align with the militants.⁹⁷

Declaring a temporary ceasefire, members of local civil rights and anti-poverty groups decided to work together to secure majority representation of the poor on the Executive Committee. On February 26 1965 they held a mass meeting of residents and activists at Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church in the Western Addition in order to develop their strategy.⁹⁸ According to Willie Thompson, a Western Addition resident who later published his account of the democratization effort, the meeting organizers expressed the conviction that "from the way the program was structured and administered and from the composition of the Council and Executive Committee...it was not intended that the community should play any

⁹⁵ Becker, *Power and Participation*, 19.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹⁷ Thompson, *Enemy of the Poor*, 5-7.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

part other than as recipient of very little dole.”⁹⁹ The more militant civil rights leaders, young activists from CORE such as Wilfred Ussery and Ken Simmons, argued that it was critical to prevent the War on Poverty from becoming a program of cooptation. They also condemned established Black community leaders who allowed themselves to become token representatives of the community. At the Macedonia Church meeting Wilfred Ussery, one of the more outspoken young members of CORE, declared: “We can no longer have selected Negroes sit downtown for us. Even though this program was created with the intention of putting the lid on the civil rights movement, it has potential. We must let the Mayor and the Council know that we are dissatisfied...and that we will not sit still about it any longer.”¹⁰⁰

At the meeting the organizers announced the formation of an umbrella group of organizations called Citizens United Against Poverty, or CUAP. CUAP was made up of over twenty-five local groups from the city’s four War on Poverty target areas, including CORE, the Negro American Labor Council, the Bayview-Hunters Point Citizens’ Committee, the Sunnydale Ad-Hoc Committee, the Yerba Buena Tenants’ Union, and Freedom House.¹⁰¹

In a follow-up meeting held in February, CUAP created and passed a list of resolutions demanding majority representation of the poor in the decision-making bodies of the War on Poverty. The group also passed resolutions demanding that a majority of Executive Committee members be people living in poverty; that

⁹⁹Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 25.

¹⁰¹ Becker and Myhill, *Power and Participation*, 25-26; Thompson, *Enemy of the Poor*, 5-7.

neighborhood residents without formal education or professional training be trained and hired for staff jobs; and that poor residents serve on the Neighborhood Action Committees in each target area, which were in charge of reviewing and approving Executive Committee programs, staff hires, and budgets. Although they sent their resolutions to the Executive Committee, the Economic Opportunity Council, and the Mayor, they received no response.¹⁰²

Between March and August CUAP pressured Mayor Shelley to accept its demands. The group held a press conference on April 29 publicizing his disregard of their efforts. At the conference Dr. Carleton Goodlett, owner of the African American newspaper the *Sun-Reporter* and spokesman for CUAP, argued that “the Mayor seems to have forgotten that he received his majority vote from the Black belts.”¹⁰³ Finally, at a July 9 council meeting Mayor Shelley relented and agreed to majority representation of the poor on the Executive Committee.¹⁰⁴ CUAP members and target area residents celebrated, but their victory was short-lived. It quickly became clear that Mayor Shelley had gained the upper hand by simply shifting decision-making power from the Executive Committee to the larger Economic Opportunity Council, which he again controlled. In response target area residents walked out of an August 15 EOC meeting and announced their plan to boycott the meetings entirely.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²Becker and Myhill, *Power and Participation*, 23.

¹⁰³*San Francisco Chronicle*, April 30, 1965.

¹⁰⁴“Hunters Point Wins Poverty War, Shelley Yields,” *The Spokesman*, September 1965.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

The boycott continued for two weeks, until on August 31 a meeting was held at City Hall, sponsored by local politicians who had been convinced to support the efforts of CUAP. In front of an enthusiastic and overflowing audience, over fifty speakers affirmed their support for majority representation of the poor in the city's anti-poverty program. The next day the mayor again capitulated, agreeing to expand the number of members on the EOC in order to allow for majority representation.¹⁰⁶ Residents of the four target areas would elect representatives from among themselves to serve in the new positions. A critical battle had been won. The challenge now would be to successfully use federal resources to mobilize the Black working class, without falling into the trap of cooptation many felt had been set for them by the government.

Factionalism and Bureaucratization in the Effort to Implement Community Control

An examination of the available documents suggests that once the goal of majority representation had been achieved on August 31, the fragile coalition of civil rights groups appears to have lost much of the basis for unity.¹⁰⁷ The fracture between

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Little documentation is available recording the conversations and debates that took place among the participants in the Western Addition anti-poverty program in its first two years of operation. Fortunately we do have one: a detailed monograph written in 1967 by two graduate students in City and Regional Planning at the University of California, Berkeley, who received a grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1965 to record and analyze the implementation of the anti-poverty program in the Western Addition. From 1965 to 1967 Becker and Myhill acted as participant observers. In 1967 they produced a monograph, entitled *Power and Participation*,

the young direct action leaders and the moderate establishment re-emerged in the fall of 1965 around the issue of what exactly the city's anti-poverty program could and should achieve. While initially Ussery's faction led the way in shaping policy and program direction, its hegemony was short-lived.

The militant faction, led by Wilfred Ussery of CORE, swept the election for members of the Western Addition Area Organizing Committee in March 1965. Approximately one hundred representatives from local community groups, social service agencies, and churches attended a meeting at the Booker T. Washington Community Center, and voted for a slate of militant civil rights workers, all but one of them African American. Almost all of the winning candidates had been involved with Freedom House and the anti-redevelopment movement, and many were members of CORE or CUAP. Only two were members of the older, established civil rights leadership.¹⁰⁸ The election results were viewed by some as a test of Ussery's political abilities. Dr. Carleton Goodlett, the prominent owner and editor of the *Sun Reporter*, described the challenge as he saw it: "Ussery has to organize the poor for a political base, and as long as he has mass support and keeps within his own territory, he's alright. If he can't hold the people, or if he gets too greedy, no one will help him."¹⁰⁹

which provides both documentation and a narrative of the activities of the Western Addition Area Board between 1965 and 1977. In my discussion of the decline of the militant faction I draw upon their research to piece together my own analysis.

¹⁰⁸Becker and Myhill, *Power and Participation*, 43.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

Taking the election results as evidence of a mandate to lead the anti-poverty program's development in the neighborhood, in March 1965 Ussery and his slate created an Area Development Plan that was designed to emphasize community self-management. Within their plan, the newly elected board chose to direct most of the city funds allotted to them toward community organizing rather than creating service agencies, designing an elaborate representational system based on ten-square-block units. Each unit would elect a council of thirty members to discuss and reach consensus on neighborhood issues, which would then be conveyed to the Area Board by representatives of the council. Within each ten-block unit, decisions would be made by different committees within the council, including manpower, economic development, education, youth activities, and housing committees.¹¹⁰

The militants quickly ran up against several obstacles as they attempted to implement their vision. First, their commitment to the principle of resident control over program implementation at times put them at odds with some of the residents themselves, who found it difficult to turn down any offer of resources from the federal government or private charity organizations, even if it meant ceding decision-making control to those organizations. The Western Addition Area Board established a reputation within the EOC for rejecting funding proposals by outside agencies because they were loathe to relinquish control over program management. In January 1966 Dr. Arthur Coleman, chairman of the EOC, listed to a *Chronicle* reporter all of the programs that had been turned down by target areas. Out of seven programs—

¹¹⁰“Coleman Fires Simmons as Poverty Official,” *San Francisco Examiner*, May 10, 1966.

including a tutoring program for high school students, a health screening program, and a health center providing hospitalization, together totaling over \$450,000 in federal funding—six were Western Addition projects.¹¹¹

In January 1966 this conflict came to a head, as Ussery and his allies Ken Simmons and Reverend Hall sought to block funding for a program overseen by the private charity organization, the Family Services Agency. At a public meeting on January 15, Ussery, Simmons, and Hall attempted to convince the audience of residents to turn down the proposal because it would cede organizational control to the Family Services Agency. Reverend Hall told the crowd, “We don’t want to choose services now when we have not organized the community to do the selecting for themselves.”¹¹² Ussery asked the audience whether “we are going to develop the organization in our community or again settle for the few crumbs given by a white social service agency.”¹¹³ Despite the impassioned speeches of the militant faction, according to Becker and Myhill those in attendance balked at the idea of turning down valuable resources, and questioned the motives of the Area Board for suggesting that course of action. Ultimately the debate grew so heated that the Board was persuaded to approve the proposal, even though it largely granted oversight control to the Family Services Agency.¹¹⁴ Faced with an actual offer of material

¹¹¹ Elmont Waite, “Who Called It? Furor Over Meeting of Poverty War Programs,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 12, 1966.

¹¹² Becker and Myhill, *Power and Participation*, 54.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

improvement, these residents apparently found it difficult to turn the proposal down on the basis of something like the issue of organizational power.

On the other hand, when Ussery's faction was able to persuade area residents to design their own proposals, they were not always approved by Washington officials. At a March 21 neighborhood meeting held in the Western Addition in March, Ussery and Simmons had to explain to residents that their programs had been rejected.¹¹⁵ In the face of residents' anger, they defended their efforts, arguing that government officials were threatened by the idea of community control. Simmons told the crowd:

You have to face some facts about your federal government. The War on Poverty was created for political reasons—to win friends and influence people for President Johnson. It is well known that Congress is nervous about the War on Poverty especially the Community Action Program. It has kicked up a lot of trouble.¹¹⁶

“The trouble is that we sent in programs from a neighborhood council, and the other target areas did not,” added Ussery. “It's not just a matter of writing up a program well, but also that this is the most politically advanced program in the country.”¹¹⁷

A second obstacle emerged in the form of increasingly factional struggles within the Area Board over staff hiring. Within a year of the Ussery slate's electoral victory in March 1965 the tables seemed to be turning in terms of the power dynamic between the younger militants and the older establishment leaders. Initially waiting quietly on the sidelines while the young activists tried their hand at “democratizing”

¹¹⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 22, 1966.

¹¹⁶ Becker and Myhill, *Power and Participation*, 73.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

the anti-poverty program, the moderate leadership sensed the opportunity to gain some control in early 1966. They began to challenge the election of particular individuals and much conflict emerged over the next several months as the two factions fought over appointments to committees and decision-making positions.¹¹⁸ As the members of the Area Board and of the city-wide EOC broke down into supporters of the old guard civil rights leadership and supporters of the new, young militants, each hiring decision became an opportunity for both sides to vie for power. For instance, the EOC was dominated by prominent figures from the established civil rights leadership, and Ussery's faction sought to shift the balance of council members in their favor. On January 10 Ussery denounced EOC Executive Director Everett Brandon, a well-known member of the civil rights establishment, in a meeting with Mayor Shelley, an act that, according to the *Chronicle*, scandalized the civil rights establishment. Dr. Arthur H. Coleman, chairman of the EOC and an ally of Brandon's, was present at the meeting and excused himself after realizing Ussery's intent. He told a *Chronicle* reporter, "I'm tired of power plays." An inside source at the EOC explained that Ussery and his allies were angry with Brandon's hiring practices, which favored African American professionals over neighborhood residents.¹¹⁹

The factional conflict escalated that spring, when Dr. Coleman fired Ken Simmons, a Ussery ally and former chairman of CUAP, on May 6, accusing him of "incompetence, abuse of professional trust and undermining staff morale." The firing

¹¹⁸*San Francisco Examiner*, January 12, 1966.

¹¹⁹ "Who Called It? Furor Over Meeting of Poverty War Program."

led the Ussery camp to charge Coleman with participating with Brandon in a factional play for control of the Western Addition program. Ussery also considered Simmons' firing a first step in the effort by the council's moderate faction to remove Ussery from his position as director of the Western Addition Community Action Program.¹²⁰ The conflict escalated until Ussery himself was fired on October 28 by a majority of the Western Addition Area Board, who accused him of stalling in hiring personnel, and claimed that under his leadership the neighborhood anti-poverty program had "failed to reach the poor people for whom it was intended."¹²¹

Becker and Myhill, two graduate students, argued that the downfall of Ussery and his camp of young direct action activists was related to the bureaucratization of the mass movement those activists had helped create during the sit-ins of 1964.

The dream of the militants had been that the anti-poverty organization would be *the* civil rights organization in the city. It would build a black constituency to back up radical Negro demands, and the militants would be the representatives of the interests of that constituency. A year later, however, there was still no constituency, and the threat of mass support could no longer be taken seriously.¹²²

Their analysis appears to have some merit. The fight for democratization of state redistribution had succeeded in electing more residents of target areas to decision-making bodies only when the political establishment had faced the threat of a mass

¹²⁰ "Coleman Fires Simmons as Poverty Official," *San Francisco Examiner*, May 10, 1966; "The War Within the Poverty War," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 16, 1966.

¹²¹ Don Warman, "Serious Charges: More Sniping at Poverty Chief," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 19, 1966. See also Don Warman, "Poverty Dispute: A Replacement for Ussery," *San Francisco Chronicle* December 22, 1966; New Western Addition Poverty Unit Suffers Toll," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 23, 1966; Thomas Fleming, "W.A. EOC Executive Director Dismissed," *Sun Reporter*, November 5, 1966.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 79.

movement of civil rights activists. As Ussery and his allies became increasingly focused on developing organizational infrastructure, the mass movement of sit-ins and rowdy demonstrations—the actual source of their political power in the first place—dissipated. The thousands of people that had briefly come together in the city’s streets to confront local elites seemed to have vanished into thin air, leaving behind only a thin layer of activists who were increasingly unable to make connections with the very people they had sought to “represent.” While the movement had united for a time around the shared goal of challenging city government control of the program, it had quickly fractured again once the common enemy had been defeated.

Conclusion

In their efforts to engage with the War on Poverty nationally, Black working-class people sought to use state resources to dismantle racial hierarchies. The story of their efforts is part of the narrative of postwar labor history. The organizing done by the San Francisco chapter of CORE, the Coalition United Against Poverty, and the United Freedom Movement, in addition to the participation of hundreds of ordinary citizens, was not limited to targeting racial discrimination. The civil rights sit-ins of 1964 as well as the pressure tactics used to win control of the anti-poverty program in 1965 highlighted the way that racial hierarchies shaped the nature of class in 1960s San Francisco. By challenging racism in the hiring practices of Auto Row and the Palace Hotel, and by demanding anti-poverty programs that would help them find

secure and stable employment, African American activists sought to shed their status as precarious workers and gain equal footing with white working-class people.

In the course of this struggle precarious Black workers came into conflict with the state in the form of local EOC decision-making bodies. City officials and city-appointed EOC staffers became representatives of the state's unwillingness to meaningfully help them achieve this goal. The War on Poverty itself took on an ambiguous status as it came to represent both an opportunity to gain access to valuable resources and the "status quo" of deeply entrenched institutional racism. While efforts to democratize the War on Poverty ultimately failed when militant activists found themselves unable to sustain the kind of mass mobilization that would pressure officials, they did help activists direct some needed resources to poor Black neighborhoods, and created important new political alliances that would continue to influence Black freedom struggles throughout the decade.

This narrative of struggle to reform the redistributive state and of conflict over the role of working-class African Americans within the freedom movement, then, provides an early glimpse of ambivalence regarding the relationship between activists and state institutions and of the centrality of issues related to precariousness to local social movements, major threads weaving through this study.

Chapter Two:

Crisis of Social Reproduction: Organizing Around Public Housing and Welfare

Rights

The working-class activists who sat in at the Palace Hotel on March 6, 1964 and fought for decision-making power in San Francisco's anti-poverty program sought to dismantle the racial hierarchies that failed to extend to them the benefits of regular employment and the social safety net granted to white unionized workers. However, it would be a mistake to imagine that unemployed San Franciscans did not already perform labor. In 1960s San Francisco, single mothers in particular struggled to combine housework, childcare, and waged work in the context of high unemployment among working-class women, and in particular among African American women. Under these conditions poor women became leaders in a wave of local and statewide organizing, beginning in 1964, which involved the formation of dozens of welfare rights groups and public housing tenant unions by 1966. Their organizing efforts pushed the redistributive agencies of the local and federal government to expand and increase their distribution of social wealth downward, to meet the needs of the urban poor. While this broad movement was not limited to African Americans—some of its key organizations defined themselves as participants in a “poor people’s movement”—there was much overlap with the existing and expanding infrastructure of the Black freedom movement. At the same time poor people’s organizing in San Francisco included other precarious urban groups,

including Chinese immigrants in the Chinatown neighborhood.

This chapter examines the crisis of social reproduction in poor communities throughout San Francisco in the second half of the 1960s, focusing specifically on local and statewide organizing around public housing and welfare reform. As scholars of welfare and housing activism such as Premilla Nadasen, Felicia Kornbluh, and Rhonda Williams have documented, the late 60s saw an intensification of unrest in the sphere of social reproduction, with urban poor people specifically targeting the arenas of housing, welfare, education, and consumption.¹ By 1966 the call for jobs was being eclipsed by the gravity of the crisis of social reproduction occurring in poor urban areas, and the freedom struggle expanded to include an urgent demand for socializing the costs of housing, food, clothing, and other necessities. The shift was evident in the emergence of public housing tenant unions and welfare rights organizations, seemingly out of nowhere, all across the urban north and west, between 1964 and 1967.

In general, the poor people's organizing described in this chapter maintained a commitment to the liberal project of expanding the welfare state. Broadly speaking, at the national level the welfare and public housing reform movements were part of the 1960s liberal reform moment, when the Kennedy and Johnson administrations

¹ Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle For Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Rhonda Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

responded to pressure from below by funneling resources into poor urban neighborhoods through a slew of federal programs. In many ways the welfare rights and public housing tenant movements were firmly rooted in the liberal infrastructure of the Johnson administration's War on Poverty, sometimes emerging directly from the organizing efforts of poverty program staffers. Like the reformers of CORE and SNCC who waged war with Mayor Shelley for control of local anti-poverty programming, the leaders of many welfare and tenants' rights groups sought to democratize a political and economic system they believed could be made to work for the poor—if the poor could have some say in its functioning.

In San Francisco, however, the participants in these local struggles were also part of a shift away from Great Society optimism. The members of San Francisco welfare rights groups and tenant unions frequently expressed their frustration and disillusionment with the War on Poverty project, government bureaucrats, and politicians. At times they questioned the ability of state agencies to meaningfully provide services for the poor and articulated a desire for organizational independence from all state agencies and institutions. In this sense these participants had something in common with the more militant Black nationalist sentiment that was beginning to surface in 1966. In my discussion of groups such as the California Federation of the Poor, the Poor People's Campaign, and the San Francisco Welfare Rights Council, I show how they were characterized by an internal tension regarding this very issue—the big question of whether the political system could be reformed—and how, although these movements generally remained reformist in practice, they contained elements of

the radical practices that were simultaneously becoming prominent both locally and nationally in the form of the Black Power movement.

Gender was a key factor in the development of welfare and housing struggles in San Francisco. As we shall see, the majority of activists in these struggles were women. This is not surprising when we consider the structure of racial and gender divisions of labor in 1960s San Francisco. As scholars such as Nadasen and Diane Pearce have noted, the War on Poverty itself was designed to combat African American male unemployment and enable African American men to serve as heads of household.² As Nadasen writes, the intellectual backers of the War on Poverty

framed the discussion of poverty within the circumscribed boundaries of male unemployment, and prescribed preparing the unemployed for available jobs, redeveloping deindustrialized area, and increasing the minimum wage. Lost in the discussion were how single mothers might support themselves, the lack of available day care, and increases in AFDC payments.³

In the case of the Black freedom movement nationally, the prominence of Black women in these struggles in the second half of the 1960s led the movement in new directions. As Annelise Orleck and Nadasen have shown, participants in Black freedom struggles were forced to confront the issue of gender because the division of labor between men and women, organized primarily through the structure of the

² For more discussion see Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, 13-15 and Diane Pearce, "Welfare is Not for Women: Why the War on Poverty Cannot Conquer the Feminization of Poverty," in Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 271-2.

³ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, 14.

family, created specific problems for women. The movement acquired a deeper feminist content as women began self-organizing.⁴

In addition to showing how women's self-organization emerged from the crisis of social reproduction, I demonstrate the overlap between many tenant unions, welfare rights groups, and poor people's organizations, suggesting that historians of welfare and of housing have in some ways preserved an artificial division between the two movements. Although historians have commented on the overlap between the two, they have still chosen to examine them as separate and distinct movements. My evidence suggests that for many women the two struggles hardly seemed separate or distinct from one another. Living in public housing and receiving welfare were two aspects of the same struggle to make ends meet and use state resources to support a family. Encounters with the Housing Authority and the Welfare Department were quite similar and were seen as just more state bureaucracy to navigate. For poor single mothers, if you lived in public housing you might also be on welfare. A common demand of tenant unions and of welfare rights groups was an end to the Housing Authority's practice of calculating the rents of AFDC recipients in such a manner that they ended up paying more than non-recipients. Further proof of the interrelatedness of the two struggles lies in the fact that, as we shall see, many welfare rights groups originated from tenant unions or informal groupings of public housing residents.

⁴Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*; Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

Studies focusing on only one point of contention such as housing or welfare also fail to capture the organizational form of the larger movement, which drew its strength in part from the organic relationship between these smaller struggles. Many of the groups formed by public housing tenants and welfare recipients were relatively loose and ephemeral, and drew on an overlapping membership of people who circulated through the same set of institutions: housing projects, social service agencies, and anti-poverty program centers. At the same time these small and sometimes short-lived groupings were linked to and helped generate the establishment of more formalized organizations such as the California Welfare Rights Organization.

Struggling at the Point of Consumption: Poor Single Mothers and Daily Life in 1960s San Francisco

Like so many other African Americans living in San Francisco in the 1960s, Española Jackson was born elsewhere. She left the small town of Shiro in East Texas at the age of ten with her mother and siblings in 1943 as part of the World War II-era migration of African Americans away from the rural South. The family initially moved around quite a bit, and Jackson spent time in the Western Addition, Chinatown, and the South of Market area before settling in Bayview-Hunters Point in 1948.⁵ At the time the city's public housing projects were segregated and only the Hunters Point project was designated for African Americans, forcing the vast

⁵ Wade Woods, "Community Activist Española Jackson Celebrates 75th Birthday," *Oakland Post*, February 6, 2008.

majority of families to find housing in one of a few overcrowded neighborhoods where landlords would rent to them. After segregation in public housing was outlawed in 1952, Jackson's family became one of the first to integrate the previously all-white Oakdale projects in Hunters Point.⁶

As an adult Jackson became involved in the Black freedom movement. She participated in the mass anti-discrimination actions organized by CORE and the NAACP in March and April 1964. She picketed Auto Row and also took part in protests against banks and grocery stores in Bayview that were notorious for hiring discrimination.⁷ By 1966 she had become a leader in the San Francisco welfare rights movement and in 1968 she was elected president of the recently formed California Welfare Rights Organization.⁸

Other female community activists who participated in welfare and housing struggles in Hunters Point appear to have shared some of Jackson's life experiences. In April 1966 the Bayview-Hunters Point anti-poverty program newsletter *The Spokesman* ran an article entitled "The Big Five," which profiled the five women who, according to the reporter, were recognized in Hunters Point as community leaders. These five women were Osceola Washington, Essie Webb, Julia Commer, Rosie Williams, Ruth Williams, and Eloise Westbrook. All of these women were African Americans and mothers who described childrearing as one of their most

⁶ Woods, "Community Activist."

⁷ Woods, "Community Activist."

⁸ Española Jackson, speech at Hunters Point rally, audio online, <http://www.islaiscreek.org/espanolajackson.mov>, accessed on September 23, 2011.

important responsibilities. Like Jackson, Westbrook, Webb, Commer, and Washington all recounted moving to San Francisco in the 1940s, and eventually settling in Hunters Point. Also like Jackson, they were known for their commitment to the Black freedom movement and involvement in numerous organizations related to the cause of racial equality. In 1966, at the time of the profiles, Essie Webb was a district organizer in the Hunters Point anti-poverty program and a member of the Advisory Committee of the neighborhood Youth Opportunities Center, also funded through the anti-poverty program. Julia Commer was a staff member at the Hunters Point Anti-Poverty Office, a member of the Bayview Crispus Attucks Club and the NAACP Housing Committee, and affiliated with the Coalition United Against Poverty. Elouise Westbrook was chairman of the Citizen's Advisory Committee to the Youth Opportunities Center, a member of the Mayor's Committee on Youth, and a member of the Crispus Attucks Club.⁹

While we don't know whether these particular women were welfare recipients, we have enough data to know that African American women in San Francisco experienced high levels of unemployment, which, when paired with unemployment levels amongst African American men, historically has led working-

⁹ Many of these life stories are recounted in the profiles of community organizers published in the Hunters Point newspaper *The Spokesman*. See, for instance, "Portrait of a Community Worker: The Character of Mrs. Essie Webb," *The Spokesman*, Vol. 1, No. 9, January 6, 1966; "Portrait of a Community Worker: Mrs. Westbrook Leader and Crusader," *The Spokesman*, Vol. 1, No. 4, October 15, 1965; "Mrs. Julia Commer Expresses Needed Ideas," *The Spokesman*, Vol. 1, No. 10, 1966; "The Big Five," *The Spokesman*, Vol. 1, No. 15, April 2, 1966. This last article provides a profile of five women who "run the Hunters Point community": Julia Commer, Osceola Washington, Ruth Williams, Rosie Williams, and Elouise Westbrook.

class mothers to turn to state subsidies for support. Daniel Crowe has documented the position of Black women at the very bottom of the job hierarchy during World War II, showing how they were the last hired in skilled positions and the first fired after the war. Within five years of the war's end any gains that had been made during the war years had been eroded: more than half of the Black women employed in San Francisco and Oakland were working as domestic servants, work that tended to be poorly paid and extremely insecure.¹⁰ In 1960 in African American majority neighborhoods like Hunters Point and the Western Addition, women had much higher unemployment rates than the citywide average: in the Western Addition the female unemployment rate was 13.4%, and in Hunters Point it was 11.8%, compared to a citywide average of 5.3%.¹¹

Records of public housing tenant unions and welfare rights groups suggest that women who were active in redistributive struggles in San Francisco lived in many of the city's neighborhoods, from Chinatown to the Mission to Hayes Valley. However, the names that appear most frequently in records of meetings, conventions, and demonstrations are those of women who lived, like Española Jackson, in one of a handful of neighborhoods where African Americans were concentrated: Bayview-Hunters Point, the Western Addition, the Fillmore, and Visitacion Valley.¹² In the

¹⁰ Daniel Crowe, *Prophets of Rage: The Black Freedom Struggle in San Francisco, 1945-1969* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2000), 40-41.

¹¹ 1960 Census Report, in San Francisco Economic Opportunity Council, *Chinatown-North Beach Area Poverty Program Report*, April 21, 1966.

¹² This assessment is based on perusing descriptions of the membership of San Francisco welfare rights groups in the NAACP Papers and the Gladys Worthington Papers at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

1960s these neighborhoods were in flux as a result of urban renewal projects, which were notorious for targeting minority neighborhoods. The Fillmore and the Western Addition had been particularly hard hit, with renewal projects destabilizing and displacing well-established African American and Japanese American communities. The effect of urban renewal on Black communities was especially severe. As Daniel Crowe has shown, the NAACP pointed out in the 1950s that while African Americans were only eleven percent of the city's population, they made up 72 percent of those evicted in urban renewal projects.¹³ As a result Black residents jokingly referred to the urban renewal phenomenon as "negro removal."¹⁴

As we have seen in Chapter One, these patterns highlight the racialized aspects of San Francisco's emerging postwar spatial regime. The transformation of the city's geography that accompanied its shifting economy had particular consequences for urban residents who, due to existing racial hierarchies in the labor and housing markets, did not have the option to relocate outside of the city's bounds. For these residents, precariousness was a never-ending cycle: as poor residents of older, increasingly dilapidated neighborhoods they were targeted for urban renewal projects that displaced them into even more dilapidated areas, which then became overcrowded and stretched state services to the breaking point.

For the women who came together politically inside public housing projects, the experience of state control and surveillance over daily life was universal. The home itself was state property, and the power of the city Housing Authority over

¹³ Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 69.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

entire neighborhoods went relatively unchecked. Public housing residents sometimes referred to the Housing Authority as a “giant parole board” because of its power to evict tenants at will, often based on moral assessments of tenants’ character.¹⁵ When sociologist Arthur Hippler interviewed Hunters Point public housing residents in 1970, they told him that the San Francisco Police Department rarely entered the neighborhood, essentially ceding the area to the Housing Authority police force, which was officially charged with protecting city property. In many housing projects Housing Authority representatives were notorious for their hostile attitude toward tenants and for their failure to address tenants’ health and safety complaints. Tenants told Hippler that the main function of most Housing Authority bureaucrats was to charge those who had been accidentally locked out of their apartments a five-dollar fee for unlocking their doors.¹⁶

Tenants also complained about the physical ugliness and rundown state of many projects. These problems were compounded by the hostile attitude of the surrounding neighborhood, which sometimes treated projects as receptacles for trash and disease. In 1973 students from the Environmental Design department at the University of California, Berkeley wrote a report entitled “Resident Dissatisfaction in Multi-Family Housing,” based on interviews with residents of San Francisco and East Bay housing projects. They found that tenants’ grievances were deep seated and long standing. The authors listed some of these:

¹⁵*Yerba Buena Plaza Tenant Union News*, July 4, 1965, 3.

¹⁶ Arthur Hippler, *Hunter’s Point: A Black Ghetto* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 193.

Residents of nearby middle-income housing walk their dogs to toilet them on the “lawn” at Yerba Buena Plaza; homeowners in areas near Hunters View avoid the cost of garbage collection by dumping it at Hunters View the night before the next collection....Broken glass and fleas in the tanbark play areas at Hunters View make play there hazardous; broken lights on the fire stairs at Geneva Towers and Yerba Buena Plaza make nighttime use of the stairs hazardous.¹⁷

Tensions were especially high in projects located in racially heterogeneous neighborhoods, such as Geneva Towers in the southeast San Francisco neighborhood of Visitacion Valley. White middle-class homeowners, primarily of Italian, Irish, and Polish origin, were apparently terrified of contact with Tower residents, according to the UC Berkeley report. When Towers children tried to use the common greens and swimming pool in the neighboring Geneva Terrace development and began cutting through Terrace property to get to a nearby supermarket, homeowners were so incensed and fearful that they contemplated building a wall around the entire neighborhood to keep out undesirables. They went to the lengths of hiring two design consultants to advise them on the matter, who apparently convinced them not to take such drastic measures.¹⁸

In addition to protecting their children from the racist hostility of their neighbors, mothers in the projects had to cope with the lack of functioning and

¹⁷ Clare Cooper, Noel Day, and Beatrice Levine, *Resident Dissatisfaction in Multi-Family Housing*, Working Paper No. 160 (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Institute of Urban and Regional Development, March 1973), 26.

¹⁸ Cooper et al., *Resident Dissatisfaction*, 34. Building structural barriers between middle-class white neighborhoods and poorer non-white ones was not unheard of during the 1960s. Kevin Kruse discusses the political struggles that emerged over plans to build such a wall in an Atlanta neighborhood. See Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

accessible childcare facilities on the project premises. At Geneva Towers space in one of the buildings was designated for childcare, but the Housing Authority had rented it out to a private individual who ran an expensive for-profit program.¹⁹ As a result many mothers living in the high-rise towers kept their children inside with them as they did their housework: “What does a mother of several small children do when she lives on the 16th floor?...Mothers rarely have the time or energy to take them down to the playground and stay with them, so they remain indoors most of the day,” noted the authors of the Berkeley survey.²⁰

As historians of women and welfare during this period have shown, being a single mother on welfare frequently meant feeling frustration at the absence of avenues toward upward mobility; material deprivation and dependency on state bureaucracy were difficult to overcome in an economy that had little interest in paying women of color to do any kind of skilled labor. Mothers living in poor urban neighborhoods in most major cities were caught between the meager opportunities presented by the labor market and the bare subsistence level subsidies offered by the state. They also had to negotiate constantly shifting standards within different layers of state bureaucracy regarding their relationship toward both reproductive labor in the home and wage labor. While the state clearly did not want to recognize mothering as a full-time job deserving of remuneration, it did not usually provide mothers with opportunities to access jobs that paid wages that would support their families. Women themselves had to wrestle with conflicting societal attitudes about the responsibilities

¹⁹Ibid., 36.

²⁰Ibid., 28.

of single mothers in regards to working for wages. While some recipients argued that childrearing and housework were full-time jobs in themselves, others sought wage work and saw their primary obstacles as the lack of opportunities in the job market and racial and gender discrimination in hiring.²¹

In San Francisco, women who participated in the Welfare Department's Vocational Services program in 1967 complained about its failure to find them decently paying work. A welfare rights handbook published by the Mission Tenants Union Welfare Rights Organization and the South of Market Welfare Rights Organization described a typical experience:

Most of these clients have been referred to programs for training homemakers or nurses' aides. The local market has been flooded with nurses' aides, and the pay scale is poor. In the homemakers program you learn such vital things as how to wash walls and scrub floors. After months of this sort of training you "graduate" and find that no decent-paying jobs are available for "scrub women."²²

In such a context many San Francisco women felt that they were being given demeaning busy work merely to create the appearance that they were "earning" their government checks.

In addition, local and state policies regarding welfare and work changed rapidly and mothers had to adapt to new reforms, despite often finding them nonsensical and pointless. Women found themselves in absurd positions, a fact that

²¹ For more on these debates see Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, and Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*.

²² Mission Tenants Union Welfare Rights, South of Market Welfare Rights, and San Francisco State College Associated Students Community Involvement Program, *Welfare Rights Handbook*, San Francisco: San Francisco State College Associated Students Community Involvement Program, 1967, 31-32.

the African American daily newspaper the *Sun Reporter* sought to highlight when it interviewed welfare recipients in July 1970. A single mother named Esther Dillard told the newspaper how the local welfare department punished her both if she stayed at home to care for her children and if she left the house to work. When she left for work she was told that her children could be taken from her since there was no one of an acceptable age at home to watch them. Yet she was repeatedly refused requests for increases in her monthly AFDC grant although she found it impossible to support a family of three and herself on \$221 a month. After entering state-sponsored vocational training she was diagnosed by her counselor as unemployable due to a combination of attitude, labor market conditions, educational deprivation, and family problems.²³

This kind of no-win situation in San Francisco and nation-wide led many women to get involved in tenant unions and welfare rights groups beginning in 1964. The combination of humiliating and pointless bureaucracy, ever-rising food and clothing prices, racist antagonism from state officials and middle-class neighbors, and the absence of decently paying work frustrated many women to the point of action. At a historical moment when, due to the War on Poverty, some resources for reform, though meager, actually did exist in many poor urban neighborhoods, these women were quick to take advantage of the existing infrastructure and to build their own networks as well. Española Jackson, for instance, was first made aware of the welfare rights movement in 1966 by activist social workers who were probably receiving

²³ “Plight of Welfare Recipients—Not Enough to Live On,” *Sun Reporter*, San Francisco, July 11, 1970, 6.

funding from an EOC program. Remembering her first encounter with the concept of welfare rights, she recalled, “I took a girlfriend of mine down to the welfare department and there were social workers there, and they had a little table outside....I picked up the material and I went to the meeting. One of them got up there and said I had rights, being on welfare.”²⁴

Poor women also lived in the same buildings for years and developed organic ties as they shared babysitting responsibilities and helped each other deal with sudden financial or personal crises. It was therefore a logical step for their talk to turn to the possibility of collectively challenging the structures that so powerfully dominated their lives, and for their struggle to take the form of demanding a redistribution of social wealth to pay for the immediate material needs of their families and communities.²⁵

The San Francisco Housing Authority: Public Housing in Postwar San Francisco

In 1960 the San Francisco Housing Authority celebrated its twentieth anniversary. To commemorate the event and reflect on its achievements, the agency published a glossy booklet entitled *Road to the Golden Age: A Report on the First Twenty Years of Operations, 1940 – 1960*. Filled with rosy, self-congratulatory prose, the booklet combined text recounting the agency’s formation, a chronology of the

²⁴ Española Jackson, interviewed in “Profile: Bayview Hunters Point,” http://journalism.berkeley.edu/ngno/reports/bayview/mult_2_1206.html, accessed September 14, 2011.

²⁵ On the relationship between spatial location, familiarity with neighbors, and participation in social movements see Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, 27-28.

construction of the city's housing projects, and photographs of immaculately painted and landscaped dwellings. In one image a white woman dressed like a typical 1950s ideal housewife sat in a chair reading to a group of children seated and listening intently at her feet. "Motherhood and happy children are the hallmarks of low-rent housing," read the caption below the photograph.²⁶ In another a group of white children, sharply dressed, stood together on a grassy lawn, a suburban-looking two-story row home in the background. The image's caption provided context: "It was a day full of bright hope for the future when Sunnydale, situated on a rolling hillside site, opened its doors. In place of crime-breeding alleyways there were gardens and safe play areas for children."²⁷

The booklet went on to describe all of the services provided by the Housing Authority, including property management, child care, playgrounds, and even medical facilities. The text described the role of the Housing Authority police force, noting that it operates

under the command of a veteran inspector of the San Francisco Police Department. The Housing Authority meets the entire cost of providing its tenants protection around the clock....Their duties and services take on many forms, not the least of which is returning lost children to worried mothers.²⁸

An accompanying photograph depicted a grinning white policeman escorting a young girl into the outstretched arms of her relieved and overjoyed mother.

²⁶ Housing Authority of the City and County of San Francisco, *Road to the Golden Age: A Report on the First Twenty Years of Operations, 1940-1960*, San Francisco: The Authority, 1960, 11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

This sunny picture of idyllic family life and harmonious relationships between tenants and management clashed with the descriptions provided by tenant activists. Sociologist Arthur Hippler, who interviewed tenants in 1970 for his study of Hunters Point, found that the Housing Authority had earned a reputation among tenants as a corrupt, poorly managed, and racist institution. They repeatedly mentioned the role of the Housing Authority police force in enforcing neighborhood racial segregation and harassing youth of color.²⁹

Although the Housing Authority's anniversary booklet read as laughably sugar-coated in 1960, the platitudes it expressed did convey the optimism with which the agency first set out to establish low-income housing projects two decades earlier. The San Francisco Housing Authority (SFHA) was established as part of a major federal undertaking in 1937 to develop state-funded housing for the nation's poor. A product of New Deal political agitation and Keynesian economic policies, the United States Housing Authority was seen as a major step forward in eliminating slum conditions. Throughout the Depression the predominant image of urban poverty had been the dirty and crowded tenement, with its greedy landlords, poor sanitary conditions, and dark alleyways filled with garbage and rats. By contrast the Housing Authority would bring clean, modern, spacious architecture and rationalized, humane management techniques to the poor, thus transforming not only living conditions but presumably the morale and psychological health of poor people—paving the way for

²⁹Hippler, *Hunters Point*, 174-175.

their road out of poverty.³⁰

The United States Housing Authority (USHA) emphasized local autonomy, providing local Housing Authorities with funds but granting them considerable leeway in developing their own programs.³¹ The San Francisco Housing Authority quickly began construction of its first project, Holly Courts, completed in 1940. In rapid succession followed Potrero Terrace in 1941 and Sunnydale, the largest project so far with 772 homes, also completed in 1941. Valencia Gardens and Westside Courts were under construction when Pearl Harbor struck and the nation entered World War II, at which point all projects were put on hold for the duration of the war.³²

Although the construction of new projects was frozen, the massive influx of war workers created a dire need for new housing. The Navy asked the SFHA to construct and manage temporary war housing at the Hunters Point shipyard. Housing for the 35,000 workers and their families was hastily built, with the intention of demolishing the buildings after the war's end. After the war, though, the severe housing shortage combined with widespread racial discrimination in the housing market compelled the Housing Authority to continue to house low-income tenants in these dwellings long after the war years. In 1954 the federal government relinquished

³⁰ Rachel Bratt, "Public Housing: The Controversy and Contribution," in Rachel Bratt, Chester Hartman, and Ann Meyerson, eds., *Critical Perspectives on Housing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 336-337.

³¹ Bratt, "Public Housing," 340.

³² *Road to the Golden Age*, 8.

all remaining war housing to the SFHA.³³

After a long freeze on construction nationwide, in 1949 Congress finally provided funds to complete ongoing projects and for construction of additional ones.³⁴ New construction was shaped by an important limiting factor: the Neighborhood Composition Rule, a policy that mandated that the racial composition of all new projects should match that of the existing neighborhood.³⁵ Under this rule the San Francisco Housing Authority excluded African Americans from all but one project until the policy was overturned in 1952 by the San Francisco Superior Court. Even after the ruling, however, in practice most projects remained largely segregated.³⁶

In San Francisco the first new project completed was Ping Yuen in Chinatown in 1951. All of the project's initial residents were war veterans.³⁷ The rest of the 1950s saw the construction of a handful of further projects: Bernal Dwellings and Hunters Point in 1953, and Yerba Buena Plaza in 1956. By the time the SFHA was celebrating its twentieth birthday in 1960, several more projects were nearing completion: Alice Griffith, Hayes Valley, and Ping Yuen Annex.³⁸ By 1960 the SFHA could boast of a sizeable fiefdom over which it had relatively unchecked

³³ Ibid., 8-9.

³⁴ Bratt, "Public Housing," 337.

³⁵ Ibid., 341.

³⁶ Albert Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 223-4.

³⁷ *Road to the Golden Age*, 12.

³⁸ Ibid., 14.

control: 7,098 apartments housing over 30,000 people.³⁹

A New Wave of Tenant Union Formation

Although tenant unions or associations had existed in public housing in San Francisco as far back as World War II, many of these had petered out after the war or become social clubs for a handful of residents. A new wave of union formation took place in the mid-1960s, part of the ripple effects produced by the anti-poverty program and the Black freedom struggles of the 1950s and early 1960s. In many instances unions received early support from civil rights groups or EOC staffers, who had access to some institutional resources.⁴⁰

One of the most active early tenant unions was the Yerba Buena Plaza and Annex Tenant Union in the Fillmore neighborhood. The group came together in February of 1964, when tenants began meeting to talk about immediate problems related to their living conditions. Mike Sharon and Judi Lynch, white activists from Freedom House, attended these early meetings and apparently encouraged the tenants to form an organization that could challenge the Housing Authority on specific issues. In February they did just that, forming a union that was voted on by the project's 819 families. Audrey Smith, a longtime resident, was elected chairman, and Ethel Mosley was elected secretary treasurer.⁴¹ Smith told SNCC members reporting on tenant struggles about the obstacles that she felt made fighting the Housing Authority so

³⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁰ Orleck, "Introduction," 7.

⁴¹ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee of California, "San Francisco: Housing Tenant Union Challenges Authority," *The Movement*, May 1965.

difficult:

There's a terrific fear in the people. It's not lack of intelligence, but it's a fear of the Public Housing Authority....When I want something from the Housing, I call up and demand it. Not everyone can do that. A lot of people are afraid they'll get thrown out of the projects if they stand up for themselves.⁴²

The tenants' union began working on two projects in April 1965: securing a room for their meetings inside the housing project, and challenging a new Housing Authority practice of charging tenants for extra electricity. According to an article in *The Movement*, the newspaper of the San Francisco SNCC chapter, Smith and tenants from the North Beach Place project met with the Housing Commissioner on an unknown date in April to discuss the charges and apparently were able to win a reversal of the policy and a possible refund on money already paid.⁴³ The union made other goals for itself: getting HA management to repaint apartments more frequently, pest extermination services, and bulletin boards where they could post notices about meetings and information about tenants' rights.⁴⁴

In the summer of 1965 the tenants' union started a newsletter, the *Yerba Buena Plaza Tenant Union News*, publishing information about public housing and tenants' rights, updates on ongoing struggles around housing and welfare in the Bay Area, and calls for action around specific issues. The first issue, published on July 4, 1965, suggests the close link between housing and welfare struggles, reporting on tenants' attendance at a Welfare Commission meeting in early March. Members of

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Yerba Buena Plaza told the Commissioners that they wanted the Housing Authority to reconsider the costs of rent, electricity, and repairs charged to families on Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). The Housing Authority charged ADC recipients higher amounts assuming that these were covered by the Welfare Department, but the Welfare Department budget only partially covered the discrepancy. The newsletter also informed tenants about the creation of a new welfare rights group meeting at Freedom House in the Fillmore, and provided an update on efforts to form an inter-project tenant organization with tenants from North Beach Place, Yerba Buena Plaza, Potrero Hill, and Hayes Valley. The newsletter listed some of the goals decided upon by tenants from these projects: getting rid of additional charges when the Housing Authority undertook improvement projects; reducing rents paid by welfare recipients to bring them into line with other tenants; creating recreation programs accessible to all tenants; creating a welfare rights organization; eliminating racial discrimination; and increasing tenant participation in decision making.⁴⁵

Ping Yuen Housing Project and Public Housing Activism in Chinatown

While many of the tenant unions formed between 1964 and 1966 were in predominantly African American housing projects, there were significant exceptions. The Ping Yuen Resident Improvement Association (PYRIA), for instance, was a forum for tenant activism among the Chinese American and Chinese immigrant community. Organized initially by the Chinatown-North Beach Employment

⁴⁵ Yerba Buena Plaza Tenant Union, "An Inter-Project Tenant Organization," *Yerba Buena Plaza Tenant Union News*, July 4, 1965.

Opportunity Council in January and February of 1966 as part of the Community Action Program, PYRIA attempted to address some of the problems resulting from the poor conditions of public housing in Chinatown. The two overlapping neighborhoods of Chinatown and North Beach together constituted one of the four initial War on Poverty target areas, and in April 1966 were home to an estimated 40,000 people.⁴⁶ Of these 40,000, an estimated 29,872 were of Chinese descent in 1965. The total Chinese population in San Francisco in 1965 was estimated at 42,000, or 5.7% of the population.⁴⁷

Public housing activism in Chinatown was shaped by all of the complicating factors present in immigrant neighborhoods: language barriers, citizenship status issues, overcrowding, and racial discrimination on the part of white citizens. While San Francisco's Chinatown had been a major hub for Chinese immigration since the nineteenth century, a new surge of immigration resulted from the loosening of immigration quotas in 1965. Between 1965 and 1968—the first three years after the relaxation of immigration quotas—the city's Chinese population grew by 20,000, suggesting a significant increase in new arrivals.⁴⁸

These immigrants tended to settle in the Chinatown neighborhood because of the unique resources it offered to new arrivals, but the neighborhood had little room

⁴⁶ San Francisco Economic Opportunity Council, *Chinatown-North Beach Area Poverty Program Report*, San Francisco: Economic Opportunity Council, April 21, 1966.

⁴⁷ San Francisco Chinese Community Citizens' Survey and Fact Finding Committee, *San Francisco Chinese Community Citizens' Survey and Fact Finding Committee Report, 1969*, San Francisco: H.J. Carle and Sons, 1969.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

to absorb the sudden growth. Bounded by the entertainment district to the north, the financial district to the south, and wealthy residential high rises to the east and west, Chinatown was an island of cheap, dilapidated apartments and small businesses in an encroaching sea of inflated land values and predatory real estate interests.⁴⁹ With the districts around it expanding rapidly and cutting into the neighborhood's perimeter, new arrivals continued to crowd into the existing territory, drawn by the resources available in a well-established ethnic enclave.⁵⁰

In terms of employment, a combination of racial discrimination, language barriers, and lack of skills suitable for the San Francisco labor market kept Chinatown residents disproportionately clustered in low-paying sectors. A 1965 study of Chinatown showed that 58 percent of Chinese females over fourteen years of age were in the labor force, and that of these, 65 percent were employed in a machine shop. An estimated 3,500 women worked in Chinatown garment shops, producing approximately fifty percent of San Francisco's apparel.⁵¹ In addition, residents found employment in Chinatown's commercial enterprises, which were geared either toward tourism—shops, art stores, and restaurants—or toward supplying the city's

⁴⁹ In April 1966 the Economic Opportunity Council reported on conditions in Chinatown. The Council noted that a combination of renewal projects, new businesses, and Housing Code enforcements were raising land values in Chinatown, creating a crisis for those who could no longer afford private housing. *Chinatown-North Beach Area Poverty Program Report*, 7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5. For more on the history of San Francisco's Chinatown as an ethnic enclave, see Victor Nee, *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1973).

⁵¹ *San Francisco Chinese Community Citizens' Survey and Fact Finding Committee Report*, 66.

Chinese population with food and goods.⁵²

General housing conditions in Chinatown were poor compared to other areas of San Francisco.⁵³ Chinatown was the most densely populated section of San Francisco: while the citywide average in 1965 was 24.6 persons per gross acre, in Chinatown there were between 120 and 180. A 1965 Arthur D. Little report showed that 77 percent of housing was substandard.⁵⁴ Seventy-five percent of units in the early 1970s still had no heat, and many were under the minimum size of 80 square feet. Despite the poor conditions rents were on the rise: Median rents increased 75 percent between 1960 and 1970 and tenants generally paid between 30 to 50 percent of their income on rent.⁵⁵ Ping Yuen was the only public housing project in Chinatown, and as of June 1968 had a waiting list of 778 applicants.⁵⁶ The San Francisco Housing Authority completed construction of Ping Yuen in 1961 to help relieve some of this overcrowding. By 1966 1,830 people lived in its four buildings.⁵⁷

PYRIA came into being largely through the efforts and resources of the Chinatown Area Board staff organizers. After funding came through from Washington and Chinatown residents elected Area Board representatives, in the fall of 1965 the Board chose to begin its anti-poverty efforts by targeting the residents of

⁵² Ibid., 44

⁵³ *Road to the Golden Age*, 13.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁵ Housing Committee of Cameron House, *San Francisco Chinatown: The Core Area—Conditions and Trends*, by Thomas Wong, San Francisco: Cameron House, December 8, 1975, 28-29.

⁵⁶ *San Francisco Chinese Community Citizens' Survey and Fact Finding Committee Report*, 52.

⁵⁷ San Francisco Economic Opportunity Council, *The Journal* 1 (June 1966), 4.

Ping Yuen, Chinatown's only public housing project in December 1965. Staff workers and volunteers were assigned to contact families in Ping Yuen by going door-to-door, telling residents about the new Area Board, and asking them about their particular needs as Chinatown residents. The Area Board, led by staff lead organizer Alan Wong, also set the goal of securing resident participation in a series of public meetings about housing conditions in Chinatown.⁵⁸

After this initial phase of outreach, in early January organizers identified residents that appeared interested in further involvement and sent bilingual letters, inviting them to a January 26 meeting to be held at the Presbyterian Church in Chinatown. The letters, sent out on January 19, asked residents to come meet the staff, learn about EOC programs and funding, and suggest projects for their neighborhood.⁵⁹

A report on the January 26 meeting written by Area Board staff describes the conversations that took place between staff and Ping Yuen residents. At the meeting tenants spoke up about the problems that made life at Ping Yuen difficult: dirty stairways and elevators, broken windows, lack of jobs for youth, and rents that were raised each time a family's income increased, making it difficult to save enough to move out of public housing. A resident of North Beach Place, a public housing project in neighboring North Beach, described the recent formation of the North Beach Place tenant union and spoke in favor of tenant organizing. According to the

⁵⁸ *Chinatown-North Beach Area Poverty Program Report*, 11-12.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 14, 19.

authors, the idea was met with enthusiasm by Ping Yuen residents.⁶⁰

Ping Yuen tenants began laying the groundwork for the formation of a building-wide tenant union. Discussions took place during two more tenant meetings, one held on February 11 at the True Sunshine Episcopal Mission, and another held on February 25 at Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Residents formally created the Ping Yuen Resident Improvement Association on March 2, electing officers and drawing up a constitution for their group. Resident Guin Hong Tom was elected as chairman of the association and Henry Chan was voted in as vice chairman.⁶¹ Among their first acts was to send members to citywide councils such as the Tenants Advisory Council, the Tenant Issues Council, the North Beach Place Improvement Association, and the Chinatown-North Beach Area Board.⁶² The group's first struggle, begun in March, was an effort to get the Housing Authority to convert their building's laundry room into a meeting space. In addition to tenant meetings they planned to use the space as a nursery, a place to hold English and citizenship classes, and a senior citizens' library.⁶³

While information about the activities of the Resident Improvement Association are scarce, this portrait of resident organization suggests that Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans also participated in the wave of low-income tenant organization that occurred in the late 1960s. Their participation in coalition

⁶⁰ Ibid., 20. See also James Lee, "The Grassroots Program in San Francisco's Public Housing," 3.

⁶¹ Ibid., 18, 23.

⁶² Ibid., 3.

⁶³ Ibid., 5.

groups such as the Tenants Advisory Council also suggests that they worked with tenant groups from around the city in multiracial contexts. The role of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans in the poor people's movements of the era calls for more in-depth research.

The detailed description of the tenant union formation also gives us some insight into the process by which anti-poverty program area boards collaborated with low-income residents. Unfortunately we don't know how much initiative and decision making came from the tenants, and how much was imposed by area board staffers who may have had their own vision of how tenant organizing should proceed.

Hunters Point: Testing the Rent Strike Strategy

The real hotbed of public housing activism, however, was Hunters Point. Originally a residential neighborhood housing Irish Americans, Chinese Americans, and some African Americans, Hunters Point underwent enormous change in the early twentieth century when government officials and industrialists began to recognize the value of its shoreline. As a result, after World War I the area was targeted for industrial development and sewage treatment facilities, equipment yards, and gas storage tanks were constructed on the flatlands by the coast. This strip of industrial buildings and yards cut off the area from residential neighborhoods to the north such as Potrero Hill. On the eastern edge of the Hunters Point-Bayview area a

“Butchertown” emerged, home to often foul-smelling tanneries, tallow works, and packing plants—all mixed in with residential blocks.⁶⁴

Waves of migration during World War II further transformed the area. The tip of the Hunters Point peninsula housed a federally-owned naval shipyard that expanded during World War II, when it became a major center for shipbuilding as part of the war effort. Thousands of African Americans along with a sizeable number of Anglo whites moved to the area to work in the shipyards, and were housed in hastily constructed barracks-style units built by the Navy. These buildings, designed as temporary housing, would become the core of the area’s public housing in the postwar era.⁶⁵

In the decade after World War II, Hunters Point transformed from a multiracial working-class neighborhood to a uniraical “ghetto.” As Crowe, Broussard, and Hippler have shown, the transformation began at the war’s end, when thousands of African American shipyard workers were laid off and unable to find new jobs. White workers were by and large able to secure employment in the booming private manufacturing sector, and they began their historic migration to the suburban areas expanding east, south, and north of the city.⁶⁶ Landlord discrimination, redlining, and restrictive real estate covenants made it difficult for Black residents to find housing in other parts of the city, and so the majority remained in Hunters Point despite the lack

⁶⁴Hippler, *Hunters Point*, 13.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 13-14.

of available employment there.⁶⁷ In the 1950s the displacement of thousands of African Americans from the Fillmore and Western Addition due to urban renewal projects brought an additional influx of Black people to the area.⁶⁸ Added to this was the Housing Authority's policy of concentrating public housing in the area (by 1961 Bayview-Hunters Point housed 42 percent of the city's public housing stock) and of reserving open units for Black tenants only. The result was that an area whose residents were 43 percent African American in 1950 had become 75 percent African American by 1960.⁶⁹

As a result, by the middle of the 1960s Hunters Point had a large public housing resident population that was frustrated with worsening conditions and negligent management. Tenants at Alice Griffith and Hunters Point projects came together to form the Hunters Point Tenant Union in March 1966 after an attempted eviction of a tenant at Alice Griffith on March 8.⁷⁰ Neighborhood groups marched on the Housing Authority office on March 15 and presented them with a list of grievances, including the failure of the Housing Authority to rid projects of rats and roaches, the agency's practice of hiring as employees members of unions such as the Building and Construction Trades Council, which had a reputation for discriminating against Black people, charges for opening of apartment doors and repairs, and arbitrary evictions.

⁶⁷ Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 43.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁹ Agee, *Streets of San Francisco*, 284.

⁷⁰ "Residents Stop Eviction," *The Spokesman*, March 19, 1966. An estimated 100 residents and EOC staffers successfully blocked a Housing Authority eviction van that had come to collect the furniture of tenant Ollie Wallace, father of two. Wallace was apparently not even behind on his rent, but only on paying late charges that had accrued.

Their letter announced that after years of trying for individual solutions, they were fed up:

For years we have protested strongly the kind of treatment exemplified by the eviction attempt on Alice Griffith today. It is a symbol of the many indignities which the Housing Authority has perpetuated through the years. We have long complained and long been ignored.⁷¹

In addition, the demonstrators demanded a decent laundromat, improved communication between management and tenants, and expedited transfer for health reasons. They told the Housing Authority “we expect immediate changes and plan to stop all further evictions for whatever cause until our demands are met.”⁷² When Steven Walters of the Housing Authority Commission attempted to leave the meeting, tenants blocked the doors and forced him to stay while they read their grievances.⁷³ Immediately afterward the tenants gathered at the Bayview Community Center in Hunters Point and began making plans to escalate their struggle. Someone suggested a rent strike and many in the room responded enthusiastically.⁷⁴

The Housing Authority was coming under fire from other Hunters Point neighborhood groups at the same time. The Hunters Point Inter-Block Council, a group formed through the anti-poverty program-funded neighborhood Community Action Program, met with Housing Authority Executive Director Eneas Kane on March 26 to discuss what they called Jim Crow hiring practices. Council members

⁷¹ “Hunters Point Residents March on S.F. Housing Authority—Rent Strike is Threatened,” *Sun Reporter*, March 12, 1966. See also “Housing Commission Forced to Listen,” *The Spokesman*, March 19, 1966.

⁷² “Hunters Point Residents March on S.F. Housing Authority.”

⁷³ “Housing Commission Forced to Listen.”

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

argued that the Housing Authority hired skilled workers through unions that excluded people of color, and they demanded that African Americans be hired for jobs in plumbing, tile laying, and electrical work. The Council was not afraid to invoke the specter of Black unrest to make its point: “The Housing Authority...must work with the community to avoid situations like Watts,” said Council President George Earl—who was also present at the Hunters Point Tenant Union meeting the week prior—pointing out that high unemployment was one of the factors associated with rioting.⁷⁵

Anger toward the Housing Authority in Hunters Point increased with the announcement by the Hunters Point Poverty Board in early October 1965 that much of the neighborhood’s public housing would be demolished by 1970.⁷⁶ Eighteen hundred units of housing—originally designed for temporary use during World War II but used as public housing for the two decades afterward—would be torn down and replaced by private housing, a decision the board had made in conjunction with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. The board argued that demolition was necessary because conditions in these temporary dwellings were so poor, even though a resident survey showed that the majority of tenants preferred to stay in their homes rather than be forced to search for housing in the midst of a citywide low-income

⁷⁵ “Block Council Calls Meet with Kane,” *Sun Reporter*, March 26, 1966.

⁷⁶ “Hunters Pointers Want To Stay,” *The Spokesman*, October 15, 1965. The Bayview-Hunters Point Area Board undertook a survey of over 1,000 neighborhood residents in October 1965, knocking on over three hundred doors in the area and asking people to fill out surveys on the issue of relocation. They found that Hunters Point residents overwhelmingly opposed the destruction of the housing units, and wanted to stay in their neighborhood in the event that temporary housing units were removed.

housing crisis.⁷⁷

The irony of the situation was not lost on San Francisco Mayor John Shelley, who, when cornered by two Hunters Point residents at a conference on urban architecture later that fall, on November 24, admitted that demolition was an unsatisfactory solution. The buildings, he said, are “not fit for habitation, and they should be torn down, but they can’t be torn down because we have to have a place to put the people in, and that’s our problem.”⁷⁸ Housing Authority Director Eneas Kane, also speaking at the conference, put it even more bluntly: “There’s only one way to bring these places up to code—and that’s to destroy them.”⁷⁹ When pressed he conceded that he did not have an answer to the question of what to do with the people who lived there. A Hunters Point resident writing in to the African American newspaper the *Sun Reporter* several days later argued that the housing situation had become desperate:

The ghetto at Hunters Point is trapped in a vicious circle, in which the long-suffering tenants are asked to be still more patient while they suffer in conditions unfit for human habitation. This vicious circle must be broken—soon!⁸⁰

In fact, tenants were already working to do just that. On September 30 the Hunters Point Tenant Union issued an ultimatum to the Housing Authority. Focusing on the need for money to bring buildings up to code rather than demolishing them, the group made a list of needed repairs and set a deadline of October 15 for work to be

⁷⁷“Hunters Point Public Housing Need Not Be Demolished!” *The Movement*, August 1966.

⁷⁸“The Failure of a Rent Strike,” *Sun Reporter*, November 26, 1966.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

completed. Otherwise they vowed to begin a rent strike on November 1, placing tenant rent money in a trust fund until their demands had been met.⁸¹

The strike spread quickly. It began with ten families in the Hunters Point project on November 1, and by December had grown to include forty more families in the project and one hundred more in five other housing projects across San Francisco, including Potrero Hill, Yerba Buena, Sunnydale and Valencia Gardens.⁸² By late December over 150 families were on rent strike, with several hundred more pledged to join in the coming months.⁸³ A body known as the San Francisco Tenant Issues Council (STIC), of which the Hunters Point Tenant Union was a member, organized the citywide campaign and added to the Hunters Point Tenant Union's demands, requesting that the majority of commissioners on the city's five person Housing Commission be public housing tenants. In its statement of support, the San Francisco Tenant Issues Council declared: "We know that the Commission can't correct all the problems of the projects, because they don't understand them. They live in homes and high-priced apartments. Two or three have never been through these projects."⁸⁴

The striking tenants received support from other local groups. A number of welfare rights groups based in public housing projects endorsed the strike in December. The San Francisco Social Service Workers Union was even able to

⁸¹ "Hunters Point Tenants Union Asks for Action," *Sun Reporter*, October 1, 1966; "Rent Strike to Start on November 1," *The Spokesman*, October 15, 1966.

⁸² "Hundreds Join Rent Strike," *The Spokesman*, November 12, 1966.

⁸³ Mike Sharon, "Public Housing Strike," *The Movement* 2:11 (San Francisco: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, December 1966), 3.

⁸⁴ Sharon, "Public Housing Strike," 1.

pressure the Welfare Commission into depositing striking recipients' rent money directly into the strike account.⁸⁵

The Housing Authority responded with classic carrot-and-stick tactics. In January it sent letters to enchant-poverty program Area Board telling board members to prepare to find housing for evicted tenants, and made this fact known to the strikers. It also tried appeasing projects that were only marginally involved, such as North Beach Place, with promises of repairs and upgrades, and a sudden interest in sponsoring holiday parties.⁸⁶

However, a few months earlier a major event tipped the scales in favor of the tenants: the September 27 Hunters Point riot, which took place after police shot and killed a Black teenager who was fleeing from a stolen vehicle.⁸⁷ In the ensuing weeks and months the Shelley administration and government agencies scrambled to grapple with what had taken place as they were forced to confront the severity of conditions in the area. In an effort to appease the residents of Hunters Point, Mayor Shelley made speeches about jobs and housing in the days after the riot, and promised to send more federal funding to the neighborhood. Among the agencies suddenly filled with humanitarian concern had been the Housing Authority, which was facing renewed pressure from the mayor's office to address low-income housing shortages and poor

⁸⁵ Ibid. See also "Western Addition Joins Rent Strike January 1," *The Spokesman*, January 1967, 1.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ The riot and its relationship to the politics of race are discussed in Chapter Three.

housing conditions in the area.⁸⁸

In the months after the September riot, the Shelley administration was fearful of another outbreak of rioting in the area. This fear eventually worked to the advantage of the striking tenants. In early March, the Housing Authority agreed to rehabilitate the remaining temporary war housing rather than destroy it, and to allow tenants to stay there until they could be relocated into newly constructed housing projects in the same neighborhood. At the same time, the Housing Authority also agreed to include tenant union participation in the design and implementation of the rehabilitation process, and made a number of reforms to its management policies. These included a reform of the rent collection system to make it easier for tenants to pay overdue rent and the creation of workshops for HA staff on communicating with tenants.⁸⁹

The strikers were less successful, however, in winning their other demands, including tenant participation on the Housing Commission board. According to the Housing Authority, participation in the strike decreased significantly after concessions were made in March, even though tenant leaders called on tenants to hold out until all demands were met. The Authority commented on this shift in its annual report to Mayor Shelley, written in January 1968, a year after the rent strike: "From outright protest of a year ago, tenants now are sitting down with the Housing

⁸⁸ Sharon, "Public Housing Strike," 3. See also a letter from a Housing Authority official to Mayor Shelley discussing the need to increase funding to the area in light of the recent riot: T.J. Kent, Jr., "Background Statement Concerning Revision of Proposed City Demonstration Program Application," March 9, 1967, John Shelley Papers, San Francisco History Center: San Francisco Public Library.

⁸⁹ Kent, Jr., "Background Statement," 2.

Authority to deal not so much with sweeping demands and generalities, but with the specifics of bread-and-butter issues of daily concern to most tenants.”⁹⁰ The final blow had come in June 1967, when a court upheld the Housing Authority’s right to receive payment from striking tenants. At that point, only eleven families in the Hunters Point project were still withholding rent. A few days later, tenant union leaders conceded at last, presenting the Authority with a check for the full amount owed in unpaid rent.⁹¹

Ultimately, then, the rent strike effort had mixed outcomes. Tenants did not win the degree of decision-making control over state redistributive programs that they sought, nor were they able to set a legal precedent uphold the rights of public housing tenants to withhold rent in the event of negligence. On the other hand, they won a major victory by stopping the demolition of public housing units, a process that in all likelihood would have caused major displacement and relocation issues similar to those that occurred in the Western Addition.

The California Federation of the Poor: The Beginnings of a Statewide Network

By 1966 tenant unions and welfare rights groups had spread across the state of California, especially in the Bay Area and Los Angeles. As Nadasen has shown, local groups had existed across the country since the 1950s, but by the mid 1960s they were forming with increasing frequency, encouraged by the social context of the

⁹⁰Housing Authority of the City and County of San Francisco, *Annual Report 1967* (San Francisco: Housing Authority, 1967), 7.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 7-8.

Black freedom movement and the resources provided by the War on Poverty. While the rent strike was unfolding in Hunters Point in the fall and winter of 1966, low-income groups were fighting local struggles in hundreds of cities and towns in California, from Watts to Fresno to Chico to Oakland.⁹² As these local struggles gained steam some activists began pushing for a greater degree of coordination between groups, and for the formalization of these struggles as a movement of the poor for political power, by which organizers meant primarily power to influence political decisions in different branches of government, especially regarding government spending on socialized reproduction. The ultimate result of this push was the formation of the National Welfare Rights Organization in August 1966, whose history has been chronicled by a number of scholars, including Guida West, Nadasen, Mimi Abramovitz, and Felicia Kornbluh.⁹³

The role of Bay Area welfare struggles in building the welfare rights movement is less well known than this national narrative. Welfare rights groups in the Bay Area played an important role in organizing the first coordinated statewide meeting of tenant unions and welfare rights groups in February 1966, a meeting that

⁹² These struggles are mentioned in the notes from the California Federation of the Poor statewide convention. "Proceedings and Summary—First Statewide Convention of the Poor," folder 23, carton 21, NAACP Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

⁹³ Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*; Guida West, *The National Welfare Rights Organization: The Social Protest of Poor Women* (New York: Praeger, 1981); Mimi Abramovitz, *Under Attack, Fighting Back: Women and Welfare in the U.S.* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995); Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights*.

led to the formation of the California Federation of the Poor.⁹⁴

The California Federation of the Poor was one of the first attempts in California to coordinate between local groups of low-income activists and envision a statewide movement of poor people. Despite its significance, it has not been studied in depth, perhaps because it did not have the organizational longevity for which its original participants hoped. Temporally, its formation overlapped with the peak of public housing tenant organizing in Hunters Point in 1967 and 1968 and came immediately after the War on Poverty democratization efforts of 1964 and 1965 discussed in Chapter One. Although its existence was brief, the Federation of the Poor served the important functions of strengthening material and political bonds between poor people in various parts of the state and laying the organizational foundation for statewide welfare rights and tenants movements. By defining its subject broadly—issues relevant to the lives of poor people—the organization left room for participants to articulate the relationship between different spheres of daily life, including employment, housing, education, and policing. When viewed together, these issues sketched a portrait of urban precariousness, and traced the fraught relationships between precarious groups and state agencies.

The idea for a statewide meeting of poor people emerged in early 1966, among members of low income groups in Oakland, Richmond, and San Francisco, including the Richmond Welfare Rights Organization, the Alameda County Welfare

⁹⁴“OEO Programs Are Ineffective: The Poor Meet, Form Statewide Federation,” *The Movement* 2:3 (San Francisco: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee of California, March 1966); “Poor Demand Rights at Convention,” *The Spokesman*, March 5, 1966, 1.

Rights Organization, the Mission Tenants Union, and Mothers Alone Working, a group of working-class single mothers in San Francisco fighting for accessible childcare. They secured funds from the University of California, Berkeley to organize a statewide convention of the poor early in 1966. After several months of coordination, the First Statewide Convention of the Poor was held on February 26 and 27 in Oakland.⁹⁵

One hundred and seventy people from across the state attended, most of them members of welfare rights organizations, tenant unions, and anti-poverty groups.⁹⁶ They came from San Diego, Chico, Watts, Long Beach, the San Joaquin Valley, and all over the Bay Area. Participating groups included the Tenants Council of Fresno, which had recently picketed the local Housing Authority to get apartments repainted, members of a Richmond public housing tenants group that won the appointment of the first African American to the local Housing Authority, and members of the Welfare Recipients Union from Central Avenue in Los Angeles, which collected and distributed food to the poor during the Watts uprising.⁹⁷ Welfare and tenant groups from Hunters Point were well represented, according to the news coverage from the Bayview-Hunters Point Area Board's newspaper, *The Spokesman*. The paper listed neighborhood groups and individuals in attendance, among them the Bayview Neighborhood Community Center, the Sunnydale Citizens League, the Hunters Point

⁹⁵ "OEO Programs Are Ineffective: The Poor Meet, Form Statewide Federation," "Poor Demand Rights at Convention," *The Spokesman*, March 5, 1966.

⁹⁶"OEO Programs Are Ineffective."

⁹⁷ Jerome Sampson, "The Poor Unite in California: A First Statewide Convention," folder 23, carton 21, NAACP Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Area Office, and the Bayview Youth Council. Individuals in attendance included prominent community activists Elouise Westbrook, Julia Commer, Harold Brooks, Jr., and Ralph Williams.⁹⁸

The conference was structured around three main workshops, which reflected the material struggles and political commitments of the participants: housing, welfare, and the anti-poverty program. These three topics corresponded to different branches of the redistributive state, each of which was composed of agencies that were familiar to low-income people. The workshops functioned as brainstorming sessions and spaces to vent anger and frustration, as well as opportunities to share stories and organizing strategies. Each workshop produced a set of resolutions that was then brought back to the whole group. At the end the conference attendees created a list of resolutions for the whole body and decided on some next steps.⁹⁹

Of all the workshops, the one attended focused on the anti-poverty program was the most heated. Participants' pent-up frustration, accumulated through many hours spent interacting with state bureaucracy, came to the surface as many people expressed serious doubt that the War on Poverty could or would make much of a difference at all. One participant remembered that people who were usually soft-spoken and friendly became extremely agitated when the issue was raised.¹⁰⁰ Another described the workshop afterward:

⁹⁸ "Poor Demand Rights at Convention."

⁹⁹ "Proceedings and Summary—First Statewide Convention of the Poor," folder 23, carton 21, NAACP Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; "OEO Programs Are Ineffective."

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

The first two and a half hours...were spent cursing, screaming, explaining, pleading and negating the war on poverty in its present forms....[People] poured out their feelings of indignation against the War on Poverty which barely acknowledges their right to participate in its skirmishes.”¹⁰¹

Bay Area residents expressed similar sentiments. Ralph Williams of West Oakland called for control of the anti-poverty programs by the poor:

We have been studied and surveyed to death and then a professional is hired to louse us up. We're tired, we're through, we poor and so called uneducated must unite our strength, choose our own specialists and leaders and assure that the poor control the poverty programs.¹⁰²

Elouise Westbrook of Hunters Point pointed out that, while such measures were positive, they by no means assured that those in leadership positions would serve the interests of poor African Americans: “It takes a Negro to understand a Negro problem and even then sometimes we push a Negro into leadership position and then he starts acting like a white man.”¹⁰³

The general sentiment in the room was one of mistrust of outsiders and a desire for autonomous organization. Others argued that they had wasted too much time and energy fighting for a program that did not benefit them: “Negroes fought like hell in San Francisco for the poverty program. When the money came, whites got the jobs.”¹⁰⁴ Some added that the Black people who did get hired quickly turned against the poor they were supposed to represent: “When you give a Negro a position

¹⁰¹ Sampson, “The Poor Unite in California.”

¹⁰² “Poor Demand Rights at Convention.”

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ “Workshop Report, Miss Barbara Roberson and Willie Thompson,” folder 23, carton 21, NAACP Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

he starts thinking like a white man.”¹⁰⁵ Participants shared the details of failed anti-poverty projects in Los Angeles, Stockton, Fontana, and San Francisco.¹⁰⁶ The outcome of the workshop was a strong sense that poor people had to begin organizing outside of and independently from the War on Poverty infrastructure, and that anti-poverty struggles needed to be more closely linked to the Black freedom movement and other anti-racist struggles.¹⁰⁷

At the tenants’ workshop participants discussed the lack of protections for tenants against mistreatment by the Housing Authority and their feeling that the Authority could arbitrarily harass and evict without repercussions. They act like “kings in their personal empires,” one tenant said of the local Housing Authority. Some individuals also complained about the opacity of Authority rules and regulations, which were never explained to tenants and were written in dense, difficult language. Finally, participants talked about the immediate need to establish a statewide tenants’ council.¹⁰⁸

The welfare workshop similarly served as a space for recipients to share their grievances and brainstorm a list of demands to be made to the welfare department. Participants talked, again, of the government bureaucratic culture of withholding information from clients, or presenting it in a confusing manner. One participant spoke of the need to provide recipients with clear, plainly written information about their rights. The group discussed the need for representation of the poor in decision-

¹⁰⁵ “Workshop Report, Miss Barbara Roberson and Willie Thompson.”

¹⁰⁶ “Proceedings and Summary,” 4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ “OEO Programs Are Ineffective.”

making, in this case the participation of recipients on the State Social Welfare Board. The workshop concluded by drafting a resolution demanding an increase in Aid to Families with Dependent Children grants, the abolition of state and county residence requirements, and the creation of meaningful educational and vocational training programs.¹⁰⁹

The conference concluded with participants voting to establish a California Federation of the Poor, and to include within this new federation of local groups three statewide councils: one for welfare rights, one for tenants, and one for anti-poverty organizations. Delegates from various local groups preferred to maintain relative autonomy and to function as a loose network of groups rather than as a centralized organization that would direct local groups from above. Finally, the conference attendees voted to hold another statewide conference as soon as possible, and set their target date for that summer of 1966.¹¹⁰

After several months of planning and a steering committee meeting held in Fresno in April, the second conference took place on June 4 and 5 in the auditorium of the Fontana High School in Fontana, California. Two hundred and sixty-nine people from all over California poured in to the small San Bernardino county town dominated economically and politically by the local Kaiser Steel plant. Fontana was not known as a liberal place, and some organizers had worried that attendees would face racial hostility from the locals. Indeed, Fontana residents reported that the week before the conference a rumor had spread through town that 12,000 African

¹⁰⁹“Proceedings and Summary.”

¹¹⁰Ibid., 5.

Americans were going to descend on the town and march in the streets, sparking panic. However, Fontana activists found that a small element of fear could work to their advantage. They were able to pressure Kaiser Steel into providing food for the meeting, and they suddenly heard word from county officials and OEO members who had previously ignored their requests to discuss the designation of their town as a target area in the War on Poverty. Shortly before the conference they finally received long-awaited poverty funds.¹¹¹

The conference put forward and voted on a number of resolutions. These included a resolution that uniformed policemen be required to wear nameplates “so that their names may be known and used by the citizens” and a resolution denouncing the Welfare Department’s practice of night raids and in support of fired Oakland social worker Benny Parrish.¹¹² Members of the welfare rights council within the Federation of the Poor announced the recent formation of the California Welfare Rights Organization in June, a development that presaged the formation of the NWRO early the following year. Members also read the statement adopted by the steering committee at a meeting in Fresno in April 1966, describing the purpose of the organization:

The purpose of the California Federation of the Poor is to promote and protect the general welfare and security of the poor by the consolidation of social, political and economic power of the poor in

¹¹¹“Convention of Poor Shakes Up Small Town,” *The Movement*, July 1966, 7.

¹¹²Ibid. The practice of night raids, used to monitor the private lives of welfare recipients and enforce state- sanctioned codes of sexual morality, was condemned by many welfare rights activists. The issue is discussed in Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*; and Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*.

California.¹¹³

The California Federation of the Poor deserves greater recognition as one of the first attempts since the 1930s to form an organized network of people broadly conceiving of themselves as “the poor” and linking the struggles in housing, welfare and state funding for anti-poverty programs into a broader struggle for redistribution of wealth. Though the Federation’s political vision was solidly reformist—building a political constituency to influence policy and the passage of legislation—it also represented a more radical expression of disillusionment with mainstream politics and a will to self-organize. This tension captured well the political tenor of 1966, a year when the paradigms of civil rights and liberal reformism were yielding to the newer Black Power and New Left movements.¹¹⁴ The short life span of the federation perhaps attests to the fact that organizationally it could not easily withstand these contradictions; however, it also demonstrates how effectively the federation served as a springboard for other struggles, especially the welfare rights movement.

Additionally, the Federation of the Poor provides a model of what politics might look like when conceived of as a struggle against economic and social precariousness. As this study argues, the struggles of precarious workers tend to take different forms than those conducted by workers in the formal sector. The Federation of the Poor provided a venue for a portion of the urban working class that was

¹¹³“Fresno Steering Conference of Poor,” *The Movement*, 2:4, April 1966, 2.

¹¹⁴ 1966 was famously the year when Stokely Carmichael emerged from a Mississippi jail and pronounced his embrace of “Black Power.” Peniel Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til The Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Macmillan, 2007), 145-163.

excluded from the world of secure, well-paid work to fight for access to the resources and training necessary to reproduce themselves and their families, and to break down the barriers that kept them from entering the ranks of the unionized working class.

The Welfare Rights Movement in National and Local Context

In April of 1966, around the same time that the Federation of the Poor was being formed, a young single mother from Watts named Johnnie Tillmon traveled to Washington, D.C. to take part in an anti-poverty conference. Already active in her public housing project tenants' group and in a neighborhood welfare rights group, Tillmon had been sponsored to attend the conference by a Los Angeles community group. During the April 14 conference, which was organized by a coalition of liberal civil rights groups and labor unions called the Citizens' Crusade Against Poverty, she gave a presentation on welfare organizing in her neighborhood, and she concluded her talk by telling the audience, "when the poverty program is over, the rich will be rich, the poor will be poor, and I will still get a welfare check." Her words echoed the mood of many of those in the audience—who earlier had booed Sargent Shriver, the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, off the stage—and received national coverage. Her fiery speech caught the eye of George Wiley, a former staff member for CORE, who approached her about getting involved in a national organization of welfare rights groups that he hoped to form.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Johnnie Tillmon, interviewed by Sherna Berger Gluck, 4b segment 2, 1991, The Virtual Aural/Oral History Archive, University of Southern California, Los Angeles,

The National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) was officially founded in August 1966, by which time the California Welfare Rights Organization (CWRO) was already in existence, and Tillmon was elected chairman of both groups. The CWRO was founded in June 1966, and the NWRO just two months later in August.¹¹⁶ The CWRO was the first statewide welfare rights organization and it served as a coordinating body for the hundreds of local welfare rights organizations across the state. It was made up of local welfare rights groups, some pre-existing, some newly created, who affiliated with the state organization. (Some local groups chose to remain independent or to affiliate directly with the National Welfare Rights Organization, bypassing the state organization altogether.) These local units participated in an annual election that selected fifteen members to serve on a new Statewide Welfare Rights Board, which was the decision-making body of the CWRO.¹¹⁷ These fifteen members held quarterly meetings and set policy for the state organization. In order to affiliate a local unit had to have at least 25 paid members and had to pay dues. Each unit also had one delegate who voted at the biennial State Convention. By 1970 there were 300 local units affiliated with the CWRO.¹¹⁸

In San Francisco quite a few welfare rights groups were in existence before

<http://symposia.library.csulb.edu/iii/cpro/CommunityViewPage.external?lang=eng&sp=1000026&suite=def>.

¹¹⁶Tillmon, 4d segment 6.

¹¹⁷ Bay Area Social Planning Council, "Interview with Lorraine Albritten," June 26, 1970, 1, Gladys Worthington Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹¹⁸ Bay Area Social Planning Council, "Staff Report on Alameda County Welfare Rights Organization," July 31, 1970, Gladys Worthington Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

the formation of the CWRO and NWRO. As mentioned earlier, many of these groups emerged from public housing tenant unions. They also received support from liberal community organizing groups such as the multiracial civil rights organization Freedom House or from anti-poverty program Area Boards. Some of these groups, such as the Yerba Buena Plaza Welfare Rights Organization and the Mission Tenants Union Welfare Rights Group, attended the Convention of the Poor in 1966.¹¹⁹

These groups, like most welfare rights organizations, focused in large part on educating recipients about the welfare system. In 1967, the Mission Tenants Union Welfare Rights Organization and the South of Market Welfare Rights Organization, in collaboration with San Francisco State College students, published a welfare rights handbook to be given to recipients outside of local welfare offices. The handbook explained the ins and outs of AFDC and told recipients how to advocate for themselves when dealing with a caseworker. The handbook also set out to convince recipients that welfare was their right:

Your tax dollars are paying for these welfare programs. They are to be used whenever the need arises. There is no real difference between welfare, social security, or unemployment funds. In fact, with jobs becoming fewer, the government may soon lump welfare together with unemployment funds.¹²⁰

The handbook explained the structure of the San Francisco welfare department and the hierarchy to which their caseworkers were responsible, information that was purposely kept from recipients in order to make it more difficult for them to challenge decisions. It also criticized the makeup of the Social Services Commission, the body

¹¹⁹“Proceedings and Summary,” 4.

¹²⁰ Mission Tenants Union, *Welfare Rights Handbook*, not numbered.

that made many of the city's decisions regarding welfare. The authors pointed out that the commissioners were mayoral appointees and that not one of them had themselves been on welfare.¹²¹

In addition to explaining step-by-step how to go about applying for welfare and how to challenge decisions made by caseworkers, the handbook issued a trenchant critique of the culture of the welfare department and the way social workers treated recipients. In a section written by a former social worker, the handbook described the department's "unwritten rules":

Do not pass through too many special needs each month. This causes paper work, and welfare's purpose is to save money, not service needs....Give special needs and services to the loud ones to cool them off before they start trouble....Do not mix socially with clients. If you have coffee with "them" [you are] accused of over identification....Treat welfare recipients as ignorant, stupid and shiftless.¹²²

Finally the handbook addressed the issue that most infuriated recipients: the department's policies regarding female recipients' involvements with men. The authors warned recipients that social workers could be very aggressive in their efforts to determine whether they were romantically involved with a man, and that they would use this information to reduce or eliminate payments under the assumption that a man would be contributing undeclared income to the family's monthly budget. They described recipients' legal rights regarding their relationship to men including ex-husbands, boyfriends, and friends and offered suggestions for how to keep their

¹²¹Ibid., 1.

¹²²Ibid., 4.

private lives private.¹²³

In addition many local welfare rights groups had links with the Black freedom movement. In 1968 local welfare rights groups participated in the Bay Area Poor People's Campaign, which was part of a national mobilization coordinated by the SCLC, culminating in a poor people's march on Washington in June. The Poor People's March was part of the nonviolent civil rights movement's attempt to bring its tactics to the realm of economic struggles, at the same time that many urban Black people were beginning to question those tactics. The Bay Area Poor People's Campaign organized a caravan of people to travel to Washington and to hold a simultaneous demonstration for those unable to make the journey.¹²⁴ Like the national movement, the campaign was part of the liberal reform movement of the mid 1960s, calling for a renewed War on Poverty and a robust, expanded welfare state.

On June 18, 1968 members of various poor people's groups held a rally in Sacramento in conjunction with the Washington events. The rally was conceived as an attempt to get Governor Ronald Reagan to meet with poor people about statewide cuts to social services. After Reagan told the press he would not speak to a bunch of

¹²³ Mission Tenants' Union, *Welfare Rights Handbook*, 15. These so-called "man in the house" policies were common practice in Welfare Departments across the nation. They were often referenced by welfare recipients when discussing the dehumanizing aspects of the welfare system, and welfare rights groups fought to put an end to them. These policies and the efforts to end the policing of welfare recipients' private lives are discussed in histories of the welfare rights movement. See Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*; West, *The National Welfare Rights Movement*; Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights*; Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace*; Abramowitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*.

¹²⁴ Poor People's Campaign, "Poor People's Notes: Bay Area Poor People's Campaign Newsletter," June 6, 1968, folder 38, carton 74, NAACP Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

“bums,” some activists decided to storm Reagan’s weekly news conference. The conference was cut short and Reagan was escorted out the back door. Eventually the Governor agreed to speak to the crowd, but when he appeared demonstrators booed and heckled his speech. As he left members of the crowd shouted “Wait a minute you pig, we want to talk to you; you’re a liar.” They pushed forward and chased after him, reaching the capital building doors and pushing back the guards. They forced their way through and followed Reagan as he ran to the elevator. Then participants roamed the capitol building shouting for Reagan to come back out. Someone shouted, “Take anything you want, it all belongs to you anyway.” As Reagan was being escorted out of the building, a demonstrator told one of his security guards, “Tell Reagan he’s not playing with Indians in one of his westerns or his Borax show; he’s dealing with us now, and we ain’t bullshitting.”¹²⁵

While the whole demonstration was planned in line with the civil rights strategy of nonviolent protest, relying heavily on support from liberal politicians and clergy, some of the participants were clearly pushing at the boundaries of this script. The tension and frustration apparent in the crowd in Sacramento is emblematic of the moment: increasingly cynical about the prospects of liberal reform and dissatisfied with efforts to win the support of the political establishment, yet uncertain as to alternative methods of struggle or even ultimate political goals. Although the ostensible purpose of the demonstration may have been to “speak” with the Governor, once he emerged it was clear that they had nothing to say to one another. Rather than

¹²⁵ Hardy Frye, “Jelly Beans for the Poor,” *The Movement*, August 1968, 2.

attempt to persuade Reagan for the umpteenth time of the validity of their cause, the crowd seemed to recognize that their relationship was ultimately an antagonistic one. After initially begging him for his time, they ended by forcing him to flee.

The formation of national and local welfare rights groups and the mobilization in Sacramento suggest that, between 1966 and 1969, the struggles of the poor were increasingly being coordinated across cities and states. The category of “the poor” was becoming a code word for the most precarious sectors of the working class in the 1960s, a category that overlapped with, but was not reducible to, the protagonists of the Black freedom movement. In part an anti-racist civil rights struggle, in part a struggle against the precariousness of women’s unpaid domestic work, and in part a struggle against the paternalism of the welfare state, welfare rights and poor people’s organizing between 1966 and 1969 brought together the racial, class, and gender aspects of urban precariousness.

The San Francisco Welfare Rights Council

While welfare rights groups had been involved in political work in San Francisco for much of the decade, they did not formally coordinate their efforts until the formation of the San Francisco Welfare Rights Council in February 1969. Española Jackson, the Texas native who had become involved in San Francisco antiracist and welfare rights organizing as a young single mother in the mid 1960s, took part in the formation of the new group and served simultaneously as chairman on the CWRO and of the San Francisco Welfare Rights Council (SFWRC). The

emergence of the SFWRC, which was affiliated with the NWRO and the CWRO, led to an increase in welfare rights activism over the next several years as recipients fought changes to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program and attempted to reform the political structure of the Social Services Commission and the Welfare Department.

Because it drew largely on an existing base of welfare rights organizations and tenant groups, the San Francisco Welfare Rights Council was immediately a sizeable organization. It began with eleven affiliated units, most of them welfare rights groups based in public housing projects. These units included Alice Griffith, Hunters Point, Hunters View, Sunnydale, Mission, Western Addition, Potrero Hill, and Bernal Heights welfare rights organizations.¹²⁶ In total the SFWRC counted over 400 members in 1969, most of them AFDC recipients, but some also recipients of Old Age Security, General Assistance, and Aid to the Totally Disabled. The group supported itself with dues from these members but also with the contributions of individuals who signed up as “Friends” of the organization.¹²⁷

In the spring of 1969 the SFWRC began organizing actions directed at challenging government efforts to restrict and cut access to welfare funds. One of the first of these was on May 10, when women, as part of a national effort, organized a Mother’s Day action to protest a proposed Congressional freeze on federal AFDC

¹²⁶“Welfare Rights Council Formed Here,” *Sun Reporter*, San Francisco, February 15, 1969.

¹²⁷ Bay Area Social Planning Council, “Staff Report on Alameda County Welfare Rights Organization,” 17.

funds that would have resulted in grants being cut by one third.¹²⁸ Three hundred people gathered to hear members of SFWRC speak at the rally in Union Square.¹²⁹ The *Sun Reporter*, the city's African American newspaper, editorialized on the potential impact of the freeze:

Today, a twelve year old child whose family is on welfare is given less than \$1.00 a day for food. This youngster is given \$2.95 a week to cover clothes, books, toys, transportation....If the "freeze" is enacted, this twelve-year-old will have even less.¹³⁰

Members of the SFWRC also packed a Social Services Commission meeting on June 20 that was called to discuss a possible freeze on local welfare funds. The room where the Commission met was jammed full of welfare recipients and their families as they came to disrupt the meeting. Ronald Born, director of the welfare department, read out the recommended proposals, which included eliminating the reissue of checks to recipients whose checks had been lost in the mail or stolen, discontinuing General Assistance if recipients missed a scheduled doctor's appointment, and eliminating "excess rents." Money for job training and educational funding would also be discontinued.¹³¹

A sympathetic *Sun Reporter* journalist described the mothers' impassioned arguments and the commissioners' stony silence: "As the speakers approached the box, one after another and all suffering from the precise humiliation, the commission

¹²⁸"Union Square Rally Protests Welfare Fund Squeeze," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, May 11, 1969.

¹²⁹"Union Square Rally," 5.

¹³⁰"Rally To Protest Welfare Cut," *Sun Reporter*, May 10, 1969.

¹³¹Rufus Byars, "Stormy Welfare Meeting," *Sun Reporter*, June 21, 1969.

sat there unmoved by their morbid frustration.”¹³² A teenage boy approached the microphone and let loose his pent-up anger: “Here you are getting ready to tell us we have got to live off of ten dollars....I’ll bet your damn dogs eat better than we do....Hell, we’re not animals. We’re people. I can see by the way the government is acting it’s going to be one hell of a summer.”¹³³

The following year, 1970, the SFWRC again attempted to prevent the welfare budget from being slashed, this time by targeting the mayor and the Social Services Commission. Beginning in December 1969 the group undertook a campaign of attending and disrupting Social Services Commission meetings in order to demand full funding and representation of welfare recipients on the commission. Earlier that year Mayor Alioto had promised the SFWRC that he would appoint a recipient to the commission but instead appointed George Chinn, considered by SFWRC to be hostile to the interests of people on welfare. In response, on December 4, 1969 Moiece Palladino, a welfare activist from Sunnydale projects, stood up at a Social Services Commission meeting and presented an agenda written by welfare recipients. WRC members then tried to take over the commission room and hold their own meeting.¹³⁴ On February 21 Palladino again stood up at a meeting, asking what would be done about a six-month backlog of applications for Aid to the Totally Disabled. Chairman Gary Vanelli warned that if she did not stop talking he would close the meeting, a threat on which he made good a number of times throughout the winter

¹³²Byars, “Stormy Welfare Meeting.”

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴“Vannelli Stand: A Tight Rein for Welfare Meetings,” *San Francisco Examiner*, March 30, 1970.

and spring.¹³⁵

By March of 1970 the Social Services Commission was again discussing plans for more cuts to the welfare budget, and the SFWRC was determined to block them successfully this time around. After a March 16 Social Services Commission meeting attended by Mayor Alioto, SFWRC members succeeded in securing an appointment to meet with the mayor privately to discuss the welfare budget. A spokesperson for the SFWRC told those in attendance that if the city could pay \$300,000 for free uniforms for the police, and \$100,000 for fences around the police stations, but nothing to remedy deficient welfare services, then "the city cares more about fences and cloth than they do about starving children and mothers trying to get off welfare."¹³⁶ Under pressure, Alioto promised those in attendance that he would hold a public hearing on the welfare budget and meet with the SFWRC twice before making a decision about cuts.¹³⁷

However, SFWRC members preparing for their March 28 meeting with Alioto received a telegram on March 27 notifying them that their appointment had been canceled. No explanation was given. About thirty demonstrators picketed City Hall the next morning to protest Alioto's rebuff, carrying signs demanding more money for welfare and criticizing the mayor for his refusal to meet with welfare recipients.¹³⁸

On the same day the *San Francisco Examiner* reported that the mayor was about to appoint a welfare recipient to the Social Services Commission. SFWRC

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Carol Long, "Welfare Militants Meet Alioto," *Sun Reporter*, March 21, 1970.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Carol Long, "Alioto Scorns Welfare Mothers," *Sun Reporter*, April 4, 1970.

members hurriedly rushed back to City Hall to present the administration with the names of their candidates, only to be told by one of Alioto's secretaries that he would not appoint a commissioner until the following year.¹³⁹

The SFWRC decided to up the ante by storming the mayor's office on April 1 and conducting a sit-in. The group released a statement:

The mayor's bare-faced lie in setting up further meetings with us is an indication of the contempt with which the administration regards poor people.... We are going to the mayor's office and we will remain there until such time as we are given an appointment to discuss the welfare budget, as promised, with the mayor.¹⁴⁰

More than two dozen mothers and welfare recipients, accompanied by babies and toddlers as well as several disabled men, entered Alioto's office and demanded that he not cut the welfare budget. They also presented the names of four candidates for the position of Social Services Commissioner, to be appointed whenever the next vacancy occurred. The four people listed—all mothers and most of them residents of public housing—included one woman, Naomi Campbell, whom the mayor had rejected the previous year because she had a child out of wedlock. A young SFWRC member, Sandra Humphrey, read a statement accusing the city welfare chiefs of mismanaging funds.¹⁴¹

Ultimately the efforts of SFWRC activists proved successful, and in fact the AFDC budget for 1971 was higher than any year previous.¹⁴² Overall the welfare

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Long, "Alioto Scorns Welfare Mothers."

¹⁴¹ *San Francisco Examiner*, April 1, 1970.

¹⁴² City and County of San Francisco, Department of Social Services, *Annual Report, Fiscal Year 1970-71*, San Francisco: Department of Social Services, 1971, 5.

rights movement, while not able to bring about a profound sea change in the welfare system, had produced significant reforms over the last few years. In its 1971 annual report the Department of Social Services alluded to this fact, acknowledging that legislative changes in favor of recipients had been on the rise in recent years, and in particular that recipients were more assertive than ever. The Social Services Commission noted that recipients had become much more likely to use the Welfare Department's appeals process, and that between January and June 1971 the number of appeals filed had increased over 600 percent.¹⁴³ In addition the California Welfare Rights Organization won a major court case in April 1971, when the California Supreme Court ruled that the state of California had to increase its AFDC grants to comply with the federal Social Security Act.¹⁴⁴ Pressure from welfare rights groups also led to an earlier court ruling in 1969 eliminating residence requirements.¹⁴⁵

In 1970 San Francisco welfare rights groups began turning their attention to the issue of job training, with the goal of getting mothers off welfare. The topic of whether welfare mothers should work was much debated within the movement, with national-level NWRO leader George Wiley arguing for subsidies to support stay-at-home mothers while Johnnie Tillmon preferred to emphasize funding for job training and education that would help mothers get decently-paid, skilled work.¹⁴⁶ The San Francisco Welfare Rights Council took the latter position and on June 22 1970,

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-2.

¹⁴⁵ City and County of San Francisco Department of Social Services, *Annual Report, Fiscal Year 1969-70*, San Francisco: Department of Social Services, 1970, 18.

¹⁴⁶ Tillmon, Part 4a segment 5.

Espanola Jackson presented a job training proposal to the Economic Opportunity Council. The proposal asked for funds to invest in a major job training program, which would hire and train welfare recipients in fields that would also serve the needs of poor single mothers: day care, sales work in nonprofit low-income groceries and clothing stores, and administrative work in Food Stamps and Welfare Department offices. The SFWRC was successful in its request for funding, securing a one-year contract, which began in October, to open and run a Food Stamp office in Bayview-Hunters Point, using welfare recipients to staff the office.¹⁴⁷

Conclusion

The local and statewide struggles described here represent the responses of some of the most marginalized sectors of the postwar working class to the increasing precariousness of urban life. When access to wage labor was uncertain at best, it made sense to make demands on the state for direct access to the resources necessary to maintain oneself and one's family. The single mothers of Hunters Point and other neighborhoods targeted the Housing Authority and the Welfare Department as the two state institutions with the most direct control over their ability to sustain themselves, and issued demands for the socialization of reproduction costs. As mothers who were responsible for unwaged housework and childcare, and as poor women of color who faced discrimination in the job market, they demanded either access to waged work or access to food and housing.

¹⁴⁷ Sayeeda Hodo, "New Proposal: To Make Welfare Recipients Self-Sustaining," *Sun Reporter*, San Francisco, June 20, 1970.

These welfare and public housing movements were largely women's struggles because of the position of poor women in San Francisco's postwar economic order, and because of their responsibilities as heads of households in many poor communities. The combination of extreme discrimination in the labor market and a gender division of labor that placed the burden of childrearing on women meant that women of color had no choice but to find other ways of securing access to food, shelter, and other basic needs. This crisis of social reproduction produced the conditions for a poor people's movement led by women of color, and in particular Black women. Single mothers articulated their demands in terms of their position in a division of labor as well as the efforts of the state to regulate and control their behavior as mothers and women. In addition to demanding higher welfare payments and better conditions in public housing, they demanded an end to policing of their sexuality by the welfare department and harassment by Housing Authority personnel based on agency standards of female morality.

For most of these single mothers, housing and welfare were interlocking pieces of their daily struggle to provide for their families and cope with the constant invasive presence of state agencies. Rather than isolating welfare rights and public housing reform as single-issue movements we should view them as part of a multi-faceted attack by women of color on many of the key institutions responsible for socializing the costs of reproduction. Life in public housing units revolved around daily interactions between women who pooled their resources and knowledge in order to navigate state bureaucracies—and this experience led to a situation where tenant

unions and welfare rights groups emerged within the same small groups of tenants.

This organic overlap shaped the movement's organizational forms and its evolution over time. Tenant unions based in public housing units like Yerba Buena Plaza went on to form welfare rights groups often also based in the same public housing units. The original groups might fade—indeed, many of the city's tenant unions dwindled in strength by the late 60s—but the membership would often carry over into the new formations, such as the welfare rights groups, which were at their height in the late 60s. These different groupings were loosely associated with a broader conceptualization of struggle—the framework of a poor people's movement, which was formulated most explicitly within the California Federation of the Poor and the Bay Area Poor People's Campaign. Many participants conceived of their actions as part of a movement of the poor, even if they put their efforts into one particular front of the struggle such as housing or welfare. Thus the Federation of the Poor, when it faded, evolved relatively easily into the CWRO and other tenant and welfare groups across the state.

The flurry of local tenant and welfare organizing was also part of the broader arc of working-class struggle in the 1960s, and as such it embodied all of the contradictions of a movement in the process of confronting the limitations of reform. The struggles discussed in this chapter were shaped by internal tensions regarding their relationship to the state and their ultimate goals. Groups like the CWRO and the SFWRC used many of the tactics and strategies of older civil rights groups like CORE and SNCC in an effort to build political power in order to make state agencies

more responsive to their needs. They sought to reform institutions such as the Welfare Department and the San Francisco Housing Authority in order to force the state to take on more of the costs of reproduction. In many cases their goals were even more modest, as groups organized purely defensively to prevent the erosion of already existing services.

However, although the strategies of public housing and welfare rights groups were solidly reformist, events like the first Federation of the Poor conference and the Bay Area Poor People's Campaign demonstration in Sacramento suggest the extent to which many participants were disillusioned with politicians and state institutions altogether. The extent of anger and despair expressed at these events suggests that the movement does not fit comfortably into the phase of liberal optimism characterized by the early days of the War on Poverty. The desire for autonomy expressed by so many participants, as well as their sense that efforts to reform the system were constantly co-opted and rendered ineffective suggests that many members were not unsympathetic toward the stance of new groups like the Black Panther Party, whose calls for Black self-sufficiency and self-defense were resonating with a younger generation of inner city residents.

Chapter 3:

Policing and Black Power: The Hunters Point Riot, The San Francisco Police Department, and The Black Panther Party

The postwar Black freedom struggle has featured prominently in the first two chapters of this study. I have primarily discussed the engagement of working-class Black urban dwellers with state agencies and institutions tasked with redistributing social wealth to the poor, through subsidies for housing, food, and job training. In the case of the Coalition United Against Poverty and the United Freedom Movement, young civil rights militants broke with the established middle-class leadership and used direct action tactics in order to “democratize” state redistributive mechanisms. Their revolt was based on the premise that some state institutions could be made to serve the interests of the most marginalized, if they had democratic control over management. In the case of tenant unions, the Federation of the Poor, and the San Francisco Welfare Rights Organization, precarious workers used many of the same tactics as their CORE and SNCC predecessors and again tried to reform state institutions, although this time by organizing independently outside of these institutions. Having experienced the War on Poverty’s work in their neighborhoods for several years they had stronger reservations about the anti-poverty program and about state institutions in general, no matter how liberal their political affiliations.

This chapter places greater emphasis on the interaction between African American

precarious workers and the repressive agencies of the local state with which they came into regular contact. The policing of African American neighborhoods in San Francisco, and the police targeting of African American youth, became a major focus of the Black freedom movement as it took up the rhetoric and tactics of Black Power in 1966. If the War on Poverty was the carrot used to quell a restless population of precarious workers, then the increasingly sophisticated policing apparatus developed by the San Francisco Police Department in the 1960s was the stick.¹ I situate the growing specter of urban uprisings in the context of the exclusion of African American youth from the formal labor market, and describe the role of policing in containing this population of poor and irregularly employed young people.

I discuss the emergence of the party in the fall of 1966 as a response to the failure of the efforts—pursued, with varying degrees of tenacity, by liberal politicians and the civil rights movement alike—to expand the New Deal welfare state to include the non-white working class. As the liberal state’s “carrot” strategy for diffusing unrest unraveled in the second half of the 1960s, it came increasingly to rely on “stick” tactics involving heightened policing, surveillance, and violence against nonwhite groups. As a result, a new generation of young African Americans reacted to police violence as the face of the same system that had failed them so profoundly in the War on Poverty. The Black Panther Party made police violence a centerpiece of its revolutionary project in no small part because, in its eyes, it exposed the violence of the entire system, including its redistributive arm.

¹ Center for Research on Crime, “Iron Fist and Velvet Glove.”

I look also at the development of police reforms designed to diffuse and manage increasingly volatile waves of Black revolt. At first responding to earlier cycles of uprising such as the sit-ins and pickets of 1964, and then to the less organized phenomenon of urban rioting, between 1967 and 1970 policing in San Francisco became increasingly focused on repressing the Black Panther Party, which itself continued to gain recruits because of its attack on the very police apparatus that was focused on destroying it. I place the tactics of the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) in the context of broader national developments in policing, especially the militarization of policing as a technique to control Black unrest in the second half of the 1960s. I also discuss the racial politics of the city's mostly white police officers, linking their racial conservatism to growing economic divisions between white and African American working-class people.

The growing popularity of Black Power in San Francisco was an expression of the rejection by portions of African American youth of the project of liberal assimilation and inclusion. In particular, as the economy worsened in the late 60s, young people felt more pessimistic about the possibility that they could shed their position of economic and social precariousness and enter the mainstream of the American working class. This disillusionment created the conditions for a stark battle between state repressive forces and young revolutionaries who sought to overthrow a violent, racist social order.

I begin my discussion of repression and resistance, policing and Black self-organization, with the description of a central historical event that was both the

product of years of police violence and Black resistance, and that itself set in motion a new sequence of police reforms and Black revolt: the Hunters Point riot of September 1966. By 1966 the urban riot had come to haunt the American political imagination, and debates about it were occurring both within the criminal justice system and in urban African American communities. Since so many cities had experienced riots by that time, all major cities were gripped by the fear that they would be next. Riots had come to symbolize the failure of the War on Poverty and the nonviolent civil rights movement. In San Francisco, when Hunters Point finally erupted, the San Francisco Police Department immediately began following the reform protocols being established by other riot-stricken cities such as Los Angeles and Detroit. As in many other cities, it was only when this “catastrophe” occurred that policing strategies evolved to better handle such uprisings and prevent them from occurring in the future. Thus the police department saw significant changes almost immediately after the riot took place.

I begin by describing the riot itself, and then discuss the emergence of African American inner city youth as the protagonists of a new cycle of struggles. I continue by showing how policing strategies and the Black Panther Party’s anti-police organizing developed in response to the riot, and then increasingly in response to each other. My purpose is not to discuss or assess the San Francisco Panthers’ work as a whole, for that has been done elsewhere and is beyond the scope of this project. Rather, I focus specifically on their anti-police work in order to demonstrate its relationship to SFPD practices.

An Unusually Warm Day in September

On the afternoon of September 27, 1966 Alvin Johnson, a white police officer, was working his normal tour of duty as operator of Radio Car Number One for the Potrero Police District. As he was driving through Hunters Point just after two o'clock he noticed a car in the center of the roadway on Griffith Street. He watched as the doors opened and two young men got out and began running, disappearing behind some nearby residential buildings. Suspecting that the car might be stolen, Johnson drove after them, heading toward Navy Road. He soon caught a glimpse of two figures emerging from behind a house. He got out of his car, revolver drawn, and began to give chase. He followed the two boys over the hilly terrain near Navy Road and then fired four shots straight at them. Matthew Johnson, a sixteen-year-old African American teenager, fell forward and landed face down in the dirt.² Witnesses saw Officer Johnson continue running after the second youth before doubling back. He returned to body of the dying boy and radioed for help.³

Immediately neighbors and passersby began gathering at the scene. They became increasingly angry as they watched a nurse from the nearby EOC office come out and attempt CPR, then announce that she thought the boy was dead.⁴ Inspectors

² San Francisco Police Department, *128 Hours: A Report of the Civil Disturbance in the City and County of San Francisco*, by Ford E. Long and Richard Trueb, San Francisco: The Department, 1966, 4.

³ "Happenings: Police Anxiety and Others," *The Spokesman*, October 8, 1966.

⁴ *128 Hours*, 5.

and officers began arriving, but no ambulance came for nearly an hour.⁵ At that point between 250 and 500 people had gathered. At 3:30 in the afternoon Matthew Johnson was pronounced dead by the ambulance's emergency medical team.⁶

A large group of people, mostly young African American men, began gathering at the intersection of Third and Palou Streets near the EOC office and talking about storming the Potrero police station. Fearing a riot, Potrero District Captain Nelson, a white man, and some African American members of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission held an emergency meeting at the EOC center in an attempt to calm the crowd. Some in the crowd began yelling out threats, at which point Captain Nelson and the HRC staff were forced to leave the premises.⁷

Audience members spilled into the street and began throwing objects at police cars and grabbing reporters' cameras. The crowd made its way down Third Street, breaking windows in stores that were not Black owned and looting a Rexall pharmacy.⁸

Although Mayor Shelley had initially declined requests by some EOC staffers to come to Hunters Point, by nightfall his office had decided that the mayor's presence was the only hope for preventing a full-fledged riot. Shelley arrived around 9:30 p.m. and spoke to an agitated crowd at the Bayview Community Center.⁹ However his words, rather than calming audience members, only riled them up

⁵“Happenings: Police Anxiety and Others.”

⁶*128 Hours*, 5.

⁷“Happenings: Police Anxiety and Others.”

⁸*128 Hours*, 7.

⁹*Ibid.*, 8.

further. As Bruce Kennedy, a white minister who worked in the neighborhood, recalled:

When the mayor first got up to speak the first thing he said was, ‘I can’t tell you how sorry I am about the death of that boy, it could have been my own son.’ From then on...nobody was listening. Because everybody in the place knew that it could not have been his own son. That was the very issue on which the whole thing was based, that this was a Hunters Point Negro, stealing a car, a boy with no influence.¹⁰

Others bitterly noted that politicians only paid attention to the people of Hunters Point when they feared an uprising, and doubted that Shelley or his staff had any intention of changing their ways. “Shit, man, that the first time the white motherfucker ever come down here to Hunters Point,” commented one youth, “Fuck, man, we should riot every week—that get something out of that motherfucker.”¹¹

The situation quickly deteriorated. Audience members began throwing eggs and rotten vegetables at the mayor and shouting obscenities. He was forced to flee out the back door as a white Mercedes Benz belonging to another city official went up in flames.¹² Rioting continued into the night as Shelley, back at City Hall, declared a State of Emergency and set a curfew in Hunters Point and the Fillmore District, where rioting and looting were also breaking out. Police officers spent most of the

¹⁰ Kennedy was interviewed by doctoral student Christopher Agee for his dissertation project on the San Francisco Police Department in 2004. Christopher Lowen-Engel Agee, “The Streets of San Francisco: Blacks, Beats, Homosexuals, and the San Francisco Police Department, 1950-1968” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2005), 352.

¹¹ Hippler, *Hunters Point*, 205.

¹² Will Stevens, “Hatred—Mayor Talks, Mob Screams,” *San Francisco Examiner*, September 28, 1966.

night clearing streets where crowds were gathered, and by early morning they declared the uprising contained.¹³

The following day, however, crowds again began to gather along Third Street near the Bayview Community Center. By midday close to seven hundred people were in the street, throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails.¹⁴ Police officials called in prominent African American politicians, including Terry Francois, who urged the crowd to disperse; they were largely unsuccessful and were jeered by some of the youth.¹⁵

The rioting, already gaining momentum, escalated in response to an incident that occurred later in the afternoon. Officers attempting to clear the streets had lined up in front of the community center with weapons drawn. What happened next is disputed: police officers claimed that shots were fired at them from a sniper inside the center, but witnesses claimed that they neither saw nor heard any shooting.¹⁶ In any case, officers were ordered to fire into the center, directly at EOC youth trying to get others out of the line of fire.¹⁷ Within seconds the building was littered with bullet holes and at least seven people were shot. Though none of the shootings proved fatal, some of the victims required serious medical attention.¹⁸ Officers forced their way into the center and began casing the interior, knocking in door panels and windows and throwing children's toys and school supplies to the floor. They found no guns or

¹³ *128 Hours*, 9-11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16; "Happenings," 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸ "Twelve Taken to Hospital," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 29, 1966.

snipers, only a roomful of terrified children who they then evacuated from the building. Hunters Point residents told Arthur Hippler that the shooting incident confirmed their conviction that the police in fact wanted to kill them, and that their lives had little or no value to these armed representatives of the political establishment.¹⁹

As word spread of the second shooting incident rioting again picked up along Third Street, spreading to the Fillmore area as well. The community center became a base for looting as small groups left together, looted local stores, and then returned to store their stolen goods before setting out again. As in Watts and other inner city uprisings, most of the looters were strategic in their choice of targets. As one observer noted, they left the Black-owned Vons liquor store untouched but stripped the nearby Spotlight liquor store bare: they “knew that the Maltese-American...owners of Spotlight gave free drinks to police officers in a back room of their shop. It was often after these complimentary drinks...that police officers took to the Hill and abused the Black residents.”²⁰

The night of the 28th was the peak of the rioting; it continued intermittently for the next four days but began dwindling. The National Guard and the California Highway Patrol had been called in on the 28th to clear the streets of Hunters Point and the Fillmore District, and they swept down Third Street over the next four days whenever activity began picking up again. By Sunday the 2nd the mayor and the

¹⁹Hippler, *Hunters Point*, 207-8.

²⁰Agee, “Streets of San Francisco,” 353-4.

SFPD declared an end to the State of Emergency and recalled the Guard. Six days after it had begun, they proclaimed an end to the Hunters Point riot.²¹

Shortly after the riot the San Francisco Police Department published a report assessing the damages incurred over the course of the six days. While the numbers were lower than in many other major urban riots, such as those that took place in Los Angeles in August 1965 and Detroit in July 1967, they still starkly revealed the intensity of what had occurred in such a short period of time: one person was fatally shot; 161 people were injured, 69 of them civilians and 10 of these from gunshot wounds; 457 people were arrested, and 253 incidents of property damage were recorded. Property damage was estimated at \$135,782.²²

Commentators noted that the damage had been light in comparison with other riots, and that the San Francisco uprising was on a much smaller scale than the one in Watts one year prior. But on the other hand the basic fact remained: the residents of Hunters Point had taken their cue from their counterparts in other cities and had chosen to show the city and the world that they, like other Black people, were fed up and angry, and that they had the power—the momentary power—to bring the normal functioning of the social order to a halt. San Francisco had now officially become part of the nationwide urban Black uprising.

New Protagonists of the Freedom Movement: Unemployed Youth and the Move Toward Black Power

²¹ *128 Hours*, 22-23.

²² *128 Hours*, iii.

Who were the young people who had participated in the riot, who had responded so angrily to the entreaties of government officials and found such satisfaction in attacking the physical manifestations of poverty and exploitation all around them? Children of the civil rights generation, constant targets of police harassment and surveillance, and casualties of the racialized postwar economic order, these young people were the central protagonists of the new Black Power movement. They were also the children and grandchildren of African Americans who had made tentative steps toward integration into the industrial working class, and who had hoped that urban migration would be a step toward economic security. These young people had watched anti-poverty programs half-heartedly try and fail to eliminate poverty in their neighborhoods, politicians endlessly renege on promises of jobs and better housing, and police beat and kill people like them with seeming impunity.

They were first of all a generation that had become the primary targets of police department patrol work. As Erick Girard, a Latino gang member from the Mission District, said of the rioters, “Ninety nine and forty four hundredths of the rioters were teenagers, and believe me, they weren’t rioting about bad housing or better schools. They were rioting about police brutality.”²³ The department’s focus on African American youth was part of a larger shift in policing during the second half of the 1960s that resulted from demographic and economic changes caused by deindustrialization and patterns of white suburbanization. These changes undergirded a reorientation of police work toward surveying and managing nonwhite populations

²³ Agee, “The Streets of San Francisco.”

concentrated in segregated “ghettos.” Scholars Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis, writing under the name “The Midnight Notes Collective,” describe this shift in police work during the 1960s:

The police community repression function became...far more directed toward the ‘irregular’ sectors of the class...the police developed a differentiated model....The ‘good’ (white) workers are presumed to be a part of society and thus to be protected. The ‘bad’ (largely non-white) workers are...to be treated as enemy and contained.²⁴

Thus urban precariousness, closely correlated with race, became a dividing line within the U.S. working class. On one side were white industrial workers, many of them recent property owners, who increasingly identified with the police and saw themselves as the victims of property crimes. On the other side were those left behind in decaying central cities, who became the main targets of urban policing. As Douglas Massey, Michelle Alexander, and Kristian Williams have shown, by the early 1960s the target of urban policing had shifted from organized crime (generally managed by white ethnic groups) and labor militancy to property and vice crimes and juvenile gang activity in poor nonwhite—and especially African American—parts of the city. In the eyes of many police officers, the work of policing had become the work of policing Black people.²⁵

This was especially true in San Francisco in the 1950s when urban slum

²⁴ Midnight Notes Collective, “Policing Us: Trends in Policing,” *Midnight Notes* 8 (1985), 12-14.

²⁵ This transformation is discussed by scholars who study race and incarceration. Kristian Williams, *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2004); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2013); Douglas S. Massey, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993).

neighborhoods with large nonwhite populations grew rapidly. As Daniel Crowe has documented, high unemployment combined with physical segregation led to rising rates of crimes such as theft and assault, and to the growth of youth gangs in neighborhoods like the Fillmore, the Tenderloin, and Hunters Point.²⁶ Starting in the early 1950s, San Francisco police attempted to deal with the emergence of gangs, referred to as “bopping gangs,” in Hunters Point by containing Black residents to the neighborhood. When officers came across teenagers whom they recognized as Hunters Point residents in other parts of the city they put them in their patrol cars and drove them back up the “Hill,” a reference to part of Hunters Point located at the top of a steep incline, sometimes also arresting them on false charges. One officer told Arthur Hippler what he would typically say during one of these encounters: “Get back up on the hill where you belong, n****r. If I see your Black ass down here again, I’ll shoot it off.”²⁷ Donna Jean Murch writes that police surveillance was so persistent in Hunters Point that the department forced some African American youth to wear identification necklaces for easy apprehension, which the teenagers referred to as their dog tags.²⁸

These young people were also members of a generation that had few options for skilled and decently paid work—fewer than their fathers and grandfathers who had been lucky enough to benefit from the boom of the war years. In 1960 the neighborhood’s official unemployment rate was 11.6%, nearly double San

²⁶ Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 79.

²⁷ Hippler, *Hunters Point*, 211.

²⁸ Murch, *Living For the City*, 134.

Francisco's overall rate of 6.7%.²⁹ The luckiest among these young people were able to find work in the nearby slaughterhouses, packinghouses, and shipyards, or to secure highly coveted government jobs as mailmen or bus drivers.³⁰ However, these jobs tended to be given to white workers, and the majority of young African American men were forced to find part-time work in the service sector.³¹

Young people who had not gained skilled labor experience during the war years had a particularly difficult time finding employment. Bayview-Hunters Point had a large youth population: in 1967 the Housing Authority estimated that 43 percent of the area's residents were under eighteen.³² In 1965 Hunters Point had an estimated 3,000 residents between the ages of 16 and 21.³³ These teens and young adults sometimes dropped by the neighborhood EOC office to hand in job applications or complain about the lack of available work. A reporter for the local EOC newspaper *The Spokesman* interviewed some of them and captured their anger in an article written just before the riot, but published several days afterward. One told him, "I've been begging and pleading for seven years and all it's got me is a \$1.35 an hour job, but you gotta do better than this, cause I won't beg anymore."³⁴

²⁹ San Francisco Economic Opportunity Council, *Chinatown-North Beach Area Poverty Program Report*, April 21, 1966. Data is derived from the 1960 U.S. Census Report.

³⁰ "City Demonstration Program Application," June 2, 1966, John Shelley Papers, San Francisco History Center: San Francisco Public Library.

³¹ Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 57.

³² Office of the Mayor, "Preliminary Application, City Demonstration Program," John Shelley Papers, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

³³ "Nobody Speaks For Me: Pulse of the Ghetto," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 19, 1965.

³⁴ "Young Leadership in Crisis," *The Spokesman*, October 8, 1966.

Another described the frustrating application process: “We’re being given the runaround whenever we go down for an interview for a job. Your applications lay around for months and never be considered.”³⁵

The young men who dropped off job applications at the EOC office feared turning into the generation of older men in their neighborhood who had been unable to find work. Sociologist Arthur Hippler, who was studying Hunters Point at the time of the riot, described the disregard commonly felt toward these older men on the Hill:

[There is] a parking lot where middle-aged men, sitting in or near middle-aged cars, quietly drink alcoholic beverages and occasionally talk...these men can be found there almost any time of day....These are the unemployed and often unemployable social rejects of Hunters Point. They are commonly scorned by the rest of the local population and referred to as those ‘useless old men,’ though none seems to be over fifty.³⁶

Yet Hippler noted that the neighborhood’s young men, initially so scornful of their elders, over the course of a decade or two themselves became these older men.³⁷

According to sociologists Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, high Black unemployment rates not only contributed to the widening racial gulf within the working class; they also unintentionally loosened some of the state’s mechanisms of social control. Piven and Cloward have written about the effect of high levels of unemployment on social control. Discussing the urban unrest of the 60s, they argued in their 1971 classic *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* that in a capitalist society employment is the primary mechanism for regulating behavior and

³⁵“The Man on the Street,” *The Spokesman*, October 8, 1966.

³⁶Hippler, *Hunters Point*, 19.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

integrating people into the social order. The relative absence of stable employment could undermine the effectiveness of this regulatory mechanism: “mass unemployment breaks that bond, loosening people from the main institution by which they are regulated and controlled.”³⁸ The resulting “disorderly behavior” is not necessarily political: “disorder may occur just because of its intrinsic values: it may yield profit, as in much crime; or provide escape from the boredom and frustration of daily life, as in much drug addiction; or drain off rage, as in much violence.”³⁹

According to Piven and Cloward, in the 1960s some of this “disorderly behavior” became politicized on a national scale. Over a decade of civil rights activity had profoundly impacted the consciousness of urban Black people, especially the younger generation, increasing their sense that their material conditions were linked to structures of exploitation and oppression. In their survey of the attitudes of those who did and did not participate in some of the urban riots of the 60s, Piven and Cloward found that those who participated in the riots were more likely to have accurate information about the economic and political condition of African Americans and to have previously participated in protest actions. They were also more likely to be critical of government reform efforts on their behalf. All of these factors suggested that for many people “disorder” had become more than an individual response to the loosening of regulatory structures: “the disorderly act

³⁸ Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Random House, 1971), 6-7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

[came] to be defined as morally proper.”⁴⁰

As Piven and Cloward’s research suggests, unemployment was not the only factor influencing young people’s lack of optimism about Great Society reformism. By 1966, years of betrayal and neglect by local politicians and government agencies such as the Redevelopment Agency, the Housing Authority, and the Welfare Department had made the younger generation of Hunters Point residents particularly cynical about supposedly benevolent state intervention in their community.

The Johnson administration had raised the hopes of some inner city residents when he declared a war on poverty in 1964, and San Francisco’s civil rights activists had fought to make the federal program meet the needs of the city’s poor by gaining control over its management. In Hunters Point a number of new organizations and programs cropped up throughout 1965 and 1966, many of them directly funded by the anti-poverty program. By September 1966 there were at least fifteen groups organizing anti-poverty campaigns, whereas in 1960 there had been only one major organization.⁴¹ The OEO funded ten programs in Hunters Point-Bayview in 1966, including a preschool program, an after-school tutoring program, a job development task force, and a health care program.⁴²

The problem was not that these programs made conditions worse, or even that they were entirely ineffective. It was that even an influx of funds, staff, and other resources was incapable of changing the basic conditions of life for the residents of

⁴⁰Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, 229.

⁴¹Hippler, *Hunters Point*, 176.

⁴²George Napper, letter to Office of the Mayor, John Shelley Papers, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library, July 8, 1966.

Hunters Point. The rhetoric of the War on Poverty had made some urban poor people believe that poverty might actually be eliminated in the near future; by 1966 this seemed less likely. As James Richards, a Hunters Point teenager, put it just days before the riot:

The white man brings these programs to our area and gives some nominal training, and he is supposed to have done you a favor. The problem is that these damn job-training programs and job development programs don't create any jobs and that's the real problem.⁴³

War on Poverty programs worked on the assumption that the urban poor were poor because of a lack of skills or training, but teenagers like Richards were realizing that the real reasons were deeper and structural: the postwar economy, with its racial division of labor and its rising unemployment rate, had no jobs to give them.

In the months before the riot these tensions appeared to be coming to a head. Ever since the Watts rebellion in August 1965, San Franciscan politicians and journalists had been monitoring the city's Black neighborhoods for signs of unrest. They focused in particular on Hunters Point, sending reporters to the area to interview the neighborhood youth. They found what they were looking for: young people seemed uninterested in the nonviolent civil rights leadership that the white establishment had come to consider legitimate, and they expressed high levels of frustration. When asked who in their community represented them, they replied that no one did. A middle-aged man, asked about the perspectives of neighborhood youth, told the reporter on September 18, 1966, "A fellow can be a leader today but he won't be tomorrow if he can't move fast enough. The old ones have to move over for the

⁴³"Young Leadership in Crisis," *The Spokesman*, October 8, 1966.

young ones.”⁴⁴ Just two weeks before the riot broke out on September 27, a reporter for the anti-poverty program newspaper *The Spokesman* was present at a meeting of local youth to discuss the employment situation. He wrote that many in attendance confessed that they had to steal in order to get what they needed, and one teenager warned of a riot if conditions did not improve.⁴⁵

SFPD Response to the Riot: New Tactics and a National Police Reform

Movement

In the aftermath of the riot police officials received pressure from the mayor’s office to reform their policing methods in Black majority neighborhoods. Police chief Thomas Cahill, an Irish American, like many urban police chiefs around the country, was facing pressure to follow the recommendations made by a new wave of expert scholarship on urban policing that was emerging in the wake of the decade’s student and Black uprisings. A group of criminologists writing at the height of the police reform era described the impetus:

The police response to Black rebellions was inefficient and brutal....This indicated that the police were not only incapable of containing the violence and disaffection of the sixties, but were actually...accelerating the decline of the legitimacy of the state. The recognition that an overtly brutal and ineffective police could have serious consequences for the stability of the system led to an unprecedented mobilization of the energy and resources of local and Federal government, universities, corporate foundation, and ‘think

⁴⁴ “Nobody Speaks For Me: Pulse of the Ghetto,” *San Francisco Examiner*, September 19, 1965.

⁴⁵ “Job Situation: Source of Tension,” *The Spokesman*, October 8, 1966.

tanks' in a massive effort to devise more subtle and effective strategies and forms of organization for the police.”⁴⁶

The result of this crisis in policing was a wave of studies published in the late 1960s, all providing an analysis of the failures of postwar urban policing and recommendations for improving the organization and methods of local departments. With titles like *The Urban Police Mission* and *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*, these studies emphasized two things: the changes in urban policing due to the dramatic transformation of American cities after World War II, and the increasing significance of relations between police and “minority groups.” A typical formulation stated:

Much of American crime, delinquency, and disorder is associated with a complex of social conditions: poverty, racial antagonism, family breakdown, or the restlessness of young people. During the last 20 years these conditions have been aggravated by such profound changes as the technological and civil rights revolutions, and the rapid decay of inner cities into densely packed, turbulent slums and ghettos.⁴⁷

These studies typically argued that resentment on the part of nonwhite city residents toward the police had some basis in a national history of racism, and that police departments had some measure of responsibility to act with sensitivity toward these groups.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Center for Research on Criminal Justice, *The Iron Fist and Velvet Glove: An Analysis of the U.S. Police* (Berkeley: The Center, 1977), 45.

⁴⁷ President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society: A Report by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice*, by Nicholas deB Katzenbach, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967, 91.

⁴⁸ See Ivan R. Gabor and Christopher Low, “The Police Role in the Community,” *Criminology*, 10: 4 (February 1973), 383-414; David H. Bayley and Harold A. Mendelsohn, *Minorities and the Police: Confrontation in America* (New York: Free

While many of these studies were meant to address urban police departments generally, some were commissioned to investigate conditions at specific local departments. In San Francisco in October 1967, the mayor's office appointed a committee, the San Francisco Committee on Crime, composed of members of business, labor, and the criminal justice system, to review the city's policing methods. Its published report echoed the sentiments of the national studies, reflecting a concern with social fragmentation and the de-legitimation of state institutions: "Today there is increasing dissatisfaction with government....The claim is heard that police action has become a weapon by which minority groups are oppressed and persecuted."⁴⁹

The first reform advocated by nearly all of these studies followed the tradition of "soft" policing: the creation or expansion of police-community relations units within local departments, in order to open lines of communication between officers and communities of color. Criminal justice historian Christian Parenti has traced the origins of such units to the research of well-known criminologists James Q. Wilson, George Kelling, and Lawrence Sherman, who argued in the 1950s that in order to ensure the legitimacy of the police institution among the majority of the population

Press, 1969); A. Brandstater, "Today's Police Need Extensive Training," *Michigan Municipal Review*, 41 (March 1968), 55-56; A.F. Brandstater and L.A. Radelet, eds., *Police-Community Relations: A Sourcebook* (New York: Free Press, 1968); Howard H. Earle, *Police-Community Relations: Crisis in Our Time* (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 1970); James Doig, James Q. Wilson, Herman Goldstein, George E. Berkley, and the American Society for Public Administration, *The Police in a Democratic Society: A Symposium* (Washington, D.C.: American Society for Public Administration, 1968); National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder, *The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968).

⁴⁹ San Francisco Committee on Crime, *Report on the San Francisco Police Department*, 2.

officers needed sensitivity training and citizens needed avenues within police departments along which to direct their suggestions and concerns.⁵⁰ The purpose of such efforts was to encourage citizens' identification with and positive attitude toward police and establish citizen consent to the policing function, viewing it as necessary for society as a whole.⁵¹

In San Francisco a Police-Community Relations Unit was first created in April 1962.⁵² While Cahill apparently resented the insinuation that his department harbored racist practices, he bowed to political pressure from liberal supporters of the city's civil rights movement. However, he limited the unit's scope and influence, refusing to give it a budget or promote its members. In addition he assigned all white officers to work in African American neighborhoods.⁵³

After the 1967 election of Democratic mayor Alioto, Cahill folded to pressure to revive and expand the unit. Alioto, seeking to strengthen his base among the city's growing liberal middle class while also maintaining good rapport with some of the more influential civil rights leadership, saw the Police-Community Relations Unit as a useful political tool.⁵⁴ Internal police department records show that the unit's activity heightened beginning in 1968, and that the unit had conducted an internal re-evaluation of its role in improving relations between police officers and San

⁵⁰ Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso, 1999), 25.

⁵¹ Kristian Williams, *Our Enemies In Blue: Police and Power in America* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2004).

⁵² "Police Community Relations in Poverty Office," *The Spokesman*, February 3, 1966.

⁵³ Agee, "The Streets of San Francisco," 427-431.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 446.

Francisco's low-income communities of color. The unit, a comparatively liberal bastion within the staunchly conservative department, issued a mild critique of fellow officers in an SFPD annual report: "the true purpose of a police-community relations program...[is] to lower the level of hostility in the environment of the policeman's work; and to lower any level of hostility that may have invaded the inner world of the policeman."⁵⁵

Beginning in 1968 the Police-Community Relations unit introduced a number of new projects and expanded upon older ones. The unit began working with the NAACP and the Neighborhood Legal Foundation, a legal aid office for low-income city residents, to improve citizens' ability to make complaints against personnel, and to provide mechanisms for more actively reviewing and acting upon these complaints.⁵⁶ In 1970 it also used funding from a Ford Foundation grant to create a training program for all officers in police-community relations. Training included Chinese and Spanish language classes for officers working in neighborhoods with large foreign-language populations.⁵⁷

The unit's primary work, however, consisted of forging ties with neighborhood groups, schools, and non-profit organizations, especially in African American and Latino neighborhoods. In 1969 unit officers sponsored outings and events for youth, including a trip to Marine World for elementary school students and

⁵⁵ San Francisco Police Department, *Annual Report, 1968*, San Francisco: The Department, 1968, 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ San Francisco Police Department, *Annual Report*, San Francisco: The Department, 1970, 13.

summer youth dances in Hunters Point and other neighborhoods. In the same year the unit expanded its relationship with the EOC, working with neighborhood youth employment programs to help young ex-offenders find job placements.⁵⁸ Such efforts, despite being poorly staffed and probably making a negligible impact on youth unemployment, were controversial with the police department itself; other officers often resented the PCR unit, viewing it as a haven for liberals.⁵⁹

Despite the popularity of police-community relations units nationally, the U.S. crisis of policing was not addressed solely through efforts to re-legitimize the policing function. In fact, in the second half of the 1960s far more resources and effort were channeled into the re-organization of police departments along military and corporate lines in order to more effectively quash uprisings. This was the “hard” side of the police apparatus, and it underwent significant advancements in the latter half of the decade.⁶⁰

At the federal level, after the Watts rebellion a wave of new acts and agencies directed funds toward updating police equipment and civil disorder response tactics. In 1966 the federal Highway Safety Act helped fund police hardware, including helicopters, which had been used to monitor crowd movements in Watts. In 1968 Congress created the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), a federal superagency designed to coordinate “crime control” between local, state, and federal

⁵⁸San Francisco Police Department, *Annual Report*, San Francisco: The Department, 1969.

⁵⁹ Ira Eisenberg, “The People and the Police,” *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, May 26, 1974.

⁶⁰ Center for Research on Crime, “Iron Fist and Velvet Glove.”

agencies. The new administration funneled federal money to police departments such as the SFPD for purchase of new equipment and technology. President Johnson also sponsored the Omnibus Crime Bill of 1968, which gave millions for riot control training and equipment, weakened Miranda rights in federal cases, and loosened the restrictions on police wiretapping.⁶¹

Along with the surge of federal resources for riot control came an emphasis on militarization of the police function, a strategy that drew heavily on military developments overseas in Vietnam. Engineers and technology companies providing equipment for the U.S. military were recruited to modernize police departments. In its study of policing in the 1960s the Center for Research on Criminal Justice quoted a systems engineer for North American Aviation, who in 1967 described the similarities between war in Southeast Asia and riot control in the urban U.S.:

The legal, sociological, and political implications and constraints may be different in dealing with the Viet Cong terrorist hiding in the outskirts of Saigon as contrasted to the agitator instigating a riot in the streets of Chicago, but some of the technical and tactical problems associated with detection, identification, and apprehension are the same. The law enforcement official is required to detect and identify his enemy - the criminal; the military man must detect and identify his enemy on the battleground.⁶²

Advocates of police militarization developed the Special Weapons and Tactics, or SWAT, team: a small, mobile squad of officers specifically trained in riot control techniques. The first attempt to employ this tactic took place in 1967 in Los

⁶¹Parenti, *Lockdown America*, 6-8.

⁶²Center for Research on Criminal Justice, *Iron Fist and Velvet Glove*, 76.

Angeles under the auspices of the Los Angeles Police Department, perhaps the most trailblazing department in the nation in terms of militarization of policing.⁶³

The LAPD created a special unit within its tactical operations group within which an elite force, some of them vets, was trained in handling civil disorders by members of the U.S. Army. The strategy of SWAT teams was similar to that employed by soldiers fighting guerrillas: they were trained in rescuing hostages, protecting officers from sniper attack, and neutralizing terrorist operatives.⁶⁴

The SWAT team model was the inspiration for the SFPD's Tactical Division, or Tac Squad, formed in 1967 in response to the Hunters Point riot as well as the general increase in radical activity at the time.⁶⁵ The squad was created only days after mayor Alioto's election on November 7, 1967, at around the same time that he also advocated for an expansion of the Police-Community Relations unit. It originally consisted of thirty-two officers who operated in squad units of eight. In the words of the department itself, the squad was intended to "provide immediate highly trained, equipped, and supervised manpower...[as] a mobile striking force for the control of major incidents and disturbances."⁶⁶

In its first year the Tac Squad made a name for itself by policing a number of highly publicized student and antiwar demonstrations. These included crowd and riot control operations at an anti-war demonstration outside the Fairmont Hotel on

⁶³ Parenti, *Lockdown America*, 16.

⁶⁴ Center for Research on Criminal Justice, *Iron Fist and Velvet Glove*, 93.

⁶⁵ "San Francisco Tactical Squad," Mayor Joseph Alioto Papers, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

⁶⁶ San Francisco Police Department, *Annual Report, 1967*, 36.

September 18, 1967, a gathering held on the day of Martin Luther King Jr.'s funeral the following year, on April 5, 1968, demonstrations held in support of the United Farmworkers' strike at Delano, and strikes at San Francisco's Kaiser Hospital in December 1968. They were also brought to Berkeley to assist in suppressing that city's draft riot in April 1968. By late 1968 the Tac Squad had gained national recognition, and had even been asked to assist the FBI in writing its report on riot control techniques.⁶⁷ In 1969 the squad was brought in to police demonstrations during the San Francisco College Third World student and faculty strike.⁶⁸

However, although the Tac Squad was widely known as a riot control force deployed in major disturbances, it actually devoted a small percentage of its working time to such activity. During its first month and a half of activity, the SFPD noted that it spent seven days on standby prepared for major civil disorder. On the remaining 39 days the squad patrolled in "areas of high crime incidents," making 174 arrests on a total of 293 charges.⁶⁹ In other words, in practice the Tac Squad was also designed to increase daily surveillance and repression of poor, often nonwhite, neighborhoods. As the department noted after listing in detail the squad's qualifications for riot control, the Squad "provides a flexible patrol force assignable to any high crime area for the prevention and repression of crime." Tacked at the end of the department's statement,

⁶⁷San Francisco Police Department, *Annual Report, 1968*, 35.

⁶⁸San Francisco Police Department, *Annual Report, 1969*, 40.

⁶⁹San Francisco Police Department, *Annual Report, 1967*, 36.

almost as an afterthought, this single sentence described the work to which the squad actually devoted the bulk of its time.⁷⁰

Black Power and the Black Panther Party: A Response to Police Violence and the Failed Great Society

While the daily activities of the Tac Squad may have remained hidden from most of the city's residents, they quickly became evident to residents of Hunters Point and the Fillmore district, where the squad carried out much of its work. A string of incidents in which Tac officers brutally beat African American teenagers and adults made the squad infamous in certain parts of the city. Among African Americans the squad became synonymous with racialized terror and violence.

Much has been written about the Black Panther Party, especially about its headquarters in Oakland. Though less has been written about Panther organizing in San Francisco, scholars such as Peniel Joseph and Donna Jean Murch have described aspects of the party's organizational structure, its participation in the San Francisco State College student strike, and its free breakfast and liberation schools programs.⁷¹ Here I do not attempt to re-narrate these efforts, or to provide a comprehensive discussion of the Panthers' work in San Francisco in the late 60s. Instead I focus specifically on the Panthers' relationship to the SFPD, and look at how their organizing became increasingly intertwined with police tactics as state repression of

⁷⁰Ibid., 36.

⁷¹ Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*; Murch, *Living For the City*; Bloom and Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire*.

Black militants increased. I use this focus to show how invested the Panthers were in breaking with traditions of reformism and welfare state inclusion inherited from previous generations of civil rights leaders and still practiced by groups such as the Congress On Racial Equality (CORE) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), with which the party was in conflict. Their emphasis on armed self-defense and on relentlessly attacking the police institution through propaganda separated them from these other groups, even those such as the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which moved to embrace Black Power in 1966.⁷² At the same time, I show that some of the Panthers' projects in San Francisco remained invested in petitioning the state for inclusion and control, with echoes of Ussery's campaign for democratization of the War on Poverty. Thus the Panthers present a sometimes contradictory position vis-a-vis the state, which is explained in part by the Party's own changes in strategy at the end of the decade.

The Black Panther Party was in some ways a child of the War on Poverty. It probably would not have emerged without the resources and networks provided by the anti-poverty program, but from its inception it pointed out the limits of that program and argued persuasively for the need to develop organizational autonomy from the welfare state. Still, the party was literally brought into being using anti-poverty program resources. The story of the group's founding is discussed in the autobiography of co-founder Bobby Seale. Seale writes that the formation of the party

⁷²Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, 146-150.

in the summer of 1966 (just months before the riot in Hunters Point) was closely tied to Seale's work as a foreman in a summer youth work program at the North Oakland Anti-Poverty Center. He used his time supervising young people to recruit them to his political perspective: after rushing them through the program's manual labor, he would "sit down and talk about the history of Black people...and how the system was really against us."⁷³ The first Panther recruit, Lil' Bobby Hutton, was drawn from the ranks of Seale's poverty program youth workers.⁷⁴ Seale and Black Panthers co-founder Huey Newton used the poverty program's resources to write and spread the word about their new group: they wrote their original Ten Point Program at the North Oakland office and used the office's mimeograph machine to make copies.⁷⁵

But from its first days in September 1966 the party went far beyond the liberal anti-poverty program in its analysis of society, and in particular of the function of the police. The party immediately made police violence and harassment the centerpiece of its organizing efforts. Even though the issue of the police was only the seventh point on its program (others dealt with housing, education, and jobs) it focused on it for its first major campaign in the fall and winter of 1966. In his autobiography Huey Newton explained why:

As we saw it, Blacks were getting ripped off everywhere. The police had given us no choice but to defend ourselves against their brutality....Interested primarily in educating and revolutionizing the

⁷³ Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (New York: Black Classic Press), 43.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 43-4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

community, we needed to get their attention and give them something to identify with.⁷⁶

Developing an analysis and critique of the police was one of the party's primary tasks. Unlike most civil rights groups before them, party members pronounced themselves to be unequivocally against policing, rather than in favor of reforming it or isolating individual "prejudiced" officers." As a revolutionary organization that combined elements of Black nationalism with an international socialist perspective, it viewed the capitalist system as fundamentally racist and imperialist. The police acted as the armed defenders of white supremacist capitalism and were thus merely the most visible and violent face of an entire economic system.⁷⁷ As the party wrote in its San Francisco-based newspaper in 1969, "Those who own and control everything have hired themselves a crew of strong-arm men to see to it that nobody interferes with their good thing, their pot of gold, their horn of plenty."⁷⁸ In his autobiography Newton quoted James Baldwin to convey that the role of the police in Black neighborhoods was inherently violent, regardless of the attitude or intentions of individual officers:

The only way to police a ghetto is to be oppressive. None of the Police Commissioner's men, even with the best will in the world, have any

⁷⁶ Huey Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 113, 127.

⁷⁷ This perspective became more developed over time as the BPP became more rigorous Marxist-Leninists inspired by the Third Worldist critiques of U.S. imperialism by revolutionaries such as Mao and Che Guevara. Initially the Panthers were more influenced by Malcolm X and emerging forms of Black nationalism, including a critique of capitalism but emphasizing racial domination of Blacks by whites more heavily. For a discussion of this transition see Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 269-308.

⁷⁸ "Community Imperialism," *Black Panther Party* 10, April 24, 1969.

way of understanding the lives led by the people they swagger about in twos and threes controlling. Their very presence is an insult, and it would be, even if they spent their day feeding gumdrops to children. They represent the force of the white world.⁷⁹

In other words, the police apparatus could not be reformed, for the very existence of a ghetto that necessitated policing by a white establishment already ensured a dynamic based on domination.

Famously, the Panthers chose to address police violence in Black communities by advocating armed self-defense and organizing armed patrols that observed police interactions with residents. They were not the first militant Black group to organize such activities. They drew inspiration from the Deacons for Defense in Bogalusa, Louisiana, who between 1964 and 1966 organized armed patrols to defend their neighborhood from Klan and police attacks.⁸⁰ Closer to home, they modeled themselves on recently organized patrols in Watts, created after the 1965 uprising to follow and observe police.⁸¹

For the Panthers, guns were both a recruiting device and an absolutely essential component of their campaign to protect themselves from police violence. In Newton's words,

In some places, organized citizen patrols have followed the police and observed them in their community dealings. They take pictures and make tape recordings of the encounters and report misbehavior....However, the authorities responsible for overseeing the

⁷⁹ James Baldwin, quoted in Huey Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 120.

⁸⁰ For an in-depth history of the Deacons, see Lance Hill, *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁸¹ "One Answer to Police Brutality," *The Spokesman*, July 9, 1966.

police are policemen themselves and usually side against the citizens...we hoped that by raising the encounters to a higher level, by patrolling the police with arms, we would see a change in their behavior.⁸²

Patrolling the streets with guns (which was legal at the time) would hopefully intimidate officers, especially if they knew that Panthers were prepared to use them when attacked. But perhaps most importantly, the use of arms communicated to neighborhood youth an air of seriousness and intensity that resonated with the frustration of many young people. With their rhetoric of war and occupying armies and their military organization, the Panthers projected the image of oppressed people ready to fight and win, by any means necessary.

The Panthers in Hunters Point

Though the most well known leaders of the Party resided in Oakland, in early 1967 the Panthers also created a chapter in San Francisco and established strong political and cultural ties there. Eldridge Cleaver, an ex-convict who joined the organization within its first year and soon rose to prominence as its Minister of Information, lived and organized primarily in San Francisco. Cleaver associated with Black radicals interested in developing Black arts and culture, and lived with some of them in the well-known Black House, a large brownstone in the Fillmore. Other residents included LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) and Sonia Sanchez, and Emory Douglas, the cartoonist and graphic illustrator whose images became iconic through the

⁸² Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 127.

circulation of the *Black Panther* newspaper.⁸³ As Bobby Seale told a crowd of young people at a Hunters Point rally in July 1967, the party had as its goal developing a strong base in the Black majority neighborhoods of San Francisco: the Fillmore, the Western Addition, and Hunters Point.⁸⁴

After the shooting of Matthew Johnson and the riot on September 27, some Hunters Point youth were ready to hear the call of Black Power. Anti-police sentiment was strong in the wake of the riot. A journalist interviewing Hunters Point residents arrested during the uprising found that police “bore the brunt” of their anger. “That cop didn’t have to shoot. That boy’s life was worth more than a car,” said one teenager.⁸⁵ The EOC office in Hunters Point collected the words of neighborhood youth who came by in the days after the riot: “Wednesday...was cowardly slaughter by white dogs,” wrote one young man. “The youth out here are not Uncle Tom stuff...They’d rather fight than be killed,” said another, in response to a religious leader who urged neighborhood youth to return to the nonviolent path of Martin Luther King, Jr.⁸⁶ An African American officer interviewed by the *Chronicle* confessed that ever since the riot African American youth were uninterested in joining the police force. While young people in Hunters Point used to approach him

⁸³ Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour*, 213-214; Murch, *Living for the City*, 155.

⁸⁴ Bobby Seale, “Black Panthers and Hunters Point,” *The Black Panther*, July 20, 1967.

⁸⁵ “Bitterness and a Hope at City Jail,” *San Francisco Examiner*, September 29, 1966.

⁸⁶ “The Angry Words of Youth,” *The Spokesman*, October 8, 1966.

often with questions about employment, since the riot he had not received any such inquiries.⁸⁷

In the weeks and months after the riot disillusionment grew. Faith in the benevolence of the liberal welfare state was again betrayed by the unfulfilled promises of employment and funding for neighborhood resources made by the mayor and other business leaders in the days following the riot. EOC staffers initially expressed some optimism when, in the days after the riot, the mayor's office met with the Hunters Point Young Men for Action Council and the Chamber of Commerce pledged to find immediate employment for neighborhood youth. But sociologist Arthur Hippler in his interviews found that only months later almost all of these promises had gone unfulfilled, and as a result local youth had become increasingly pessimistic about the potential for political change within the system. An anti-poverty program staffer told him:

It is no longer possible to get the kids here to be enthusiastic about...waiting for all those jobs to come through. They just don't believe it will happen. They are right! After the first big rush of kids coming here for jobs after the riots, when no jobs happened, they just stopped coming. It's just as well, we don't have anything for them.⁸⁸

Local community organizations disintegrated, and "the general belief that nobody cares" became widespread.⁸⁹

And yet, if the experience of Hunters Point youth was at all similar to that of their counterparts in Watts, they may have also felt a new kind of pride and defiance.

⁸⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 6, 1968.

⁸⁸ Hippler, *Hunters Point*, 213.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.

As Gerald Horne documents in *The Fire This Time*, sympathetic psychologists working with youth in Watts immediately after the riot found a significant boost in self-esteem as a result of the uprising. Dr. Alfred Cannon, a Black psychiatrist at UCLA, commented that this newfound pride was a positive development: it suggested that “the Negro isn’t going to have to destroy himself in his frustration by drinking and similar behavior.” Black people had learned to externalize their anger and direct it toward their oppressors, a step that he viewed as critical to the psychological health of the Black community.⁹⁰ If the psychological effects of the Watts uprising were similar to those of the uprising in Hunters Point, it is possible that young people there also felt a renewed sense of power and righteous anger, waiting to be channeled in the right direction.

The Panthers tapped into both disillusionment about reformism and nascent racial pride when they began organizing in Hunters Point in 1967. On July 10 Black Panther Party Chairman Bobby Seale spoke at the Fremont Grammar School as part of an anti-poverty program event. Seale used the event as an opportunity to introduce the teenagers and young adults in attendance to the basic tenets of the party, and to present the party’s analysis of the police. He encouraged his audience to view themselves as part of a movement of Black people in revolt:

The actions of the brothers and sisters in Hunters Point in September of 1966, the actions of the brothers in Watts in 1965, the actions of Black brothers and sisters across this country who heroically participated in over 60 black rebellions since July 18, 1964, strongly

⁹⁰ Horne, *The Fire This Time*, 188.

indicate... that Black people are going to resist the oppression that is being inflicted upon them.⁹¹

Seale also pointed out that police departments were developing new methods specifically to deal with the Black revolt: “All across the country...where Black people live, police forces have been doubled, tripled, and quadrupled.”⁹² Seale advocated armed self-defense, telling his audience to learn how to use guns if they did not know how. He emphasized that the goal of their movement was not violence but to drive the police out of Black communities. Without officers patrolling their streets, he argued, “the man’s racist police will begin to be ineffective in suppressing our struggle to get our basic demands and needs to live and survive.”⁹³ In other words, the job of the police was to prevent Black communities from building autonomy and unity; without police presence Black people could finally undertake the work of self-organization without the paternalistic support of the state.

In the summer of 1967 the Panthers began youth organizing efforts in Hunters Point, encouraging young people to use more confrontational tactics to win demands. On July 3 they participated in an action along with the members of Young Men for Action, a Hunters Point youth group with ties to the civil rights establishment, in which 150 young people gathered at Fremont Elementary School, the site of an anti-poverty program-affiliated Summer Youth Work program. The young men came demanding jobs as team leaders and supervisors for the summer, announcing their

⁹¹ Bobby Seale, “Black Panthers and Hunters Point,” *The Black Panther*, July 20, 1967.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 4.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 4.

slogan as “Jobs or Gasoline”: they threatened to burn down every factory in the area if jobs were not found for them.⁹⁴ After staff members said they could only promise 40 jobs, youth refused to leave. An African American judge was brought in to calm the crowd, but some in attendance recognized him as the same judge who had sentenced them to jail terms in the past. They demanded that he help them speak to the mayor, and the man did indeed secure an appointment with Mayor Shelley for later in the week.⁹⁵

A smaller group of young people went to the appointment with the mayor, where they reacted with anger when he immediately began “to pass the buck.” A young man told Mayor Shelley that he was “tired of eating beans, being raggedy and being beat over the head and stomped by the racist cops.”⁹⁶ They charged the podium and began cursing at the mayor. One man declared, “We know that whitey does not feel any responsibility for, or to Black people...but we will get what we need and want by any means necessary.”⁹⁷ As they left they exploded firecrackers in the halls and outside City Hall. They gave the mayor an ultimatum: come up with jobs by 5 p.m. that evening or they, along with other Hunters Point residents, would riot. Later in the day the mayor announced that 122 jobs had been found. The number soon

⁹⁴ George Murray, “Hunters Point Brothers Sock it to the Mayor of S.F.,” *The Black Panther*, July 20, 1967, 14.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

dropped to twenty in the days that followed. According to the *Black Panther* newspaper, even these twenty jobs were eventually rescinded.⁹⁸

This early foray into youth organizing suggests that, though their tactics were more confrontational, the Panthers' short-term goals were not always so different from other civil rights groups who also petitioned city officials for jobs and services. At the end of the day they were given the same run around that CORE and the NAACP had been given after their employment sit-ins back in 1964, and the same broken promises. Perhaps the most important difference lay in the way that the younger generation of men expressed themselves: with a lack of deference toward elected leadership and a language of threats. While apparently this style did not always achieve success, it did foster confidence and self-organization. Black Power advocates believed that it was an independent, defiant, and threatening Black community, not a conciliatory and deferential one, that would eventually win its demands.

The Police and the Panthers: Dialectic of Repression and Resistance

The issue of police violence remained at the center of the party's work in San Francisco for the rest of the decade. The intertwined relationship between SFPD and Panther actions between 1967 and 1970 reveals a dialectic of repression and resistance: the constant violence of the police presence in African American neighborhoods, which sometimes flared up into more dramatic beatings and killings,

⁹⁸Ibid., 23.

itself created a base of angry and motivated youth for the party, and they tapped into this anger in their anti-police organizing. Then as the party's strength grew the local political establishment became more threatened and increased its repressive tactics directed at the party, in particular using the Tac Squad to harass and terrorize members. Police repression of the Party again served as a method to galvanize supporters, and Panthers increasingly focused their organizing work on campaigns to free party political prisoners and end police targeting of the organization. Thus the tactics of repression and resistance were tightly interwoven, as the evolving strategies of each side created a new set of conditions to which the other had to respond.

On October 2, 1968 the *San Francisco Chronicle* published an article arguing that police brutality had been on the rise since 1967, or around the time of the Tac Squad's formation. The reporter, Charles Howe, investigated charges of brutality related to incidents beginning in August 1967 and noted an increase in the frequency and violence of these incidents. He also noted that the majority of cases involved white officers and nonwhite youth, and that the SFPD displayed a track record of whitewashing incidents and withholding information from the public. He focused in particular on several recent events. The first was an incident from several months prior, which, according to some, nearly led to the disbanding of the Tac Squad altogether. On August 1, 1968 two off-duty members of the squad met for a night of drinking, after which they went on a violent spree in the Mission district, brutally beating at least seven young men. Numerous witnesses identified the two white

officers in a police line-up.⁹⁹ Although it was not the first time that Tac Squad officers had committed violent acts against youth of color, the incident made newspaper headlines.¹⁰⁰

The second incident had occurred the previous day, on July 31. George Baskett, 28 years old, an African American father of two, and a recent transplant from New Jersey, was shot and killed by a white off-duty Tac Squad officer named Michael O'Brien outside of his home. According to numerous witnesses, O'Brien and another officer were driving their car down a narrow street in the SoMa neighborhood, towing their 15-foot boat behind them. O'Brien became incensed when another driver scraped his boat as he drove past. O'Brien exited his car, shouting obscenities and racial epithets. A scene ensued when the block's residents poured onto the street to witness the commotion. Several witnesses described O'Brien pointing his revolver at Baskett, saying, "I'm going to kill a n****r," counting to three, and shooting in cold blood.¹⁰¹

For the first twenty-four hours after the shooting the incident was hushed up by the police department. Chief Cahill declared O'Brien's actions to be in self-defense, while at the same time officials attempted to frame Baskett's brother and three friends with charges of assault. Facts began to leak out two days after the

⁹⁹ Charles Howe, "Violence and S.F. Police," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 2, 1968.

¹⁰⁰ Dexter Waugh, *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, August 4, 1968; Birney Jarvis, "Elite Cops Charged in Beatings," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 2, 1968.

¹⁰¹ Charles Raudebaugh and Birney Jarvis, "Police Taking Another Look at That Shooting," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 2, 1968.

shooting, including the information that O'Brien had been transferred from the Potrero police district five weeks earlier after civil rights groups complained about his wearing a tie clip inscribed with the words "Gas Huey"—a reference to the ongoing manslaughter trial of Panthers leader Huey Newton.¹⁰² By the following day enough information had been released for Howe, the *Chronicle* reporter, to condemn the SFPD for its cover-up.¹⁰³

The *Chronicle* article was provocative and forthright for a mainstream newspaper, and its discussions of police violence were presented as something of a revelation—but its analysis was not new. The San Francisco chapter of the Black Panther Party had been making similar arguments ever since it began organizing in Hunters Point and the Fillmore the year prior. One of the ways the party attempted to address police violence was through the creation of propaganda: a near constant stream of information about policing, police murders, and acts of Black resistance published in the organization's newspaper, *The Black Panther*. Articles regularly described an epidemic of violence:

The combined police forces of all Bay Area counties have joined together in a step-up of the power structure's relentless war to suppress Black people. In the last few months, these police agencies have shot and killed many Black people....Everybody knows that the gestapo pigs murdered Denzill Dowell in North Richmond, Mathew Johnson in Hunter Point...in San Francisco, Jerome Cook, and in Berkeley they have gunned down Charles Hansen.¹⁰⁴

The party also discussed the increase in violence in terms of a white backlash against

¹⁰² Ibid., 26.

¹⁰³ Howe, "Violence and S.F. Police," 2.

¹⁰⁴ "Police Slaughter Black People," *The Black Panther*, July 20, 1967.

Black uprisings. An article in its newspaper from 1968 described the organization of white racist vigilante groups around the country and a new trend in which city governments recruited citizen volunteers to staff riot-control units.¹⁰⁵

Party members also wrote about the danger of trying to reform the police institution, in particular by trying to isolate “good” cops from “bad” cops. Taking this position was also a way for the party to distinguish itself from the more moderate civil rights groups whom they viewed as too committed to nonviolence and political reform. In a May 4, 1968 article they criticized CORE’s “Adopt-A-Cop” program, which encouraged Black people to find a cop, get to know him, and make him a friend. The Panthers argued that the problem was structural rather than a problem of individual prejudice: “their job is to maintain law and order, protect white property, and keep us from causing any trouble.”¹⁰⁶ Instead they argued in favor of self-organized armed patrols that would actually protect community members.¹⁰⁷

Community patrols were a common practice in the Bay Area, and were one of the first projects set up by the Panthers after their formation. The group patrolled around the Bay Area, in Richmond, Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco. Newton described how patrols were organized:

Most patrols were a part of our normal movement around the community. We kept them random, however, so that the police could not set a network to anticipate us.... We passed out our literature and ten-point program to the citizens who gathered, discussed community defense, and educated them about their rights concerning weapons.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ “Arm Ourselves or Harm Ourselves,” *The Black Panther*, May 4, 1968.

¹⁰⁶ “Adopt-A-Pig is Suicidal,” *The Black Panther*, May 4, 1968.

¹⁰⁷ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 127-130.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 128-9.

Party members with openly displayed weapons stopped whenever they saw the police questioning someone from the neighborhood. They walked nearby and observed the interaction, asking the individuals if their rights were being violated. In many instances they found that officers became uneasy or even panicky and retreated quickly.¹⁰⁹ Over time, however, the police began to retaliate. They kept a record of Black Panther vehicles and whenever one was spotted, it was pulled over and searched for possible violations.¹¹⁰ Party members were frequently arrested and charged with minor crimes such as “displaying a weapon in a rude and threatening manner” or “carrying a concealed weapon.”¹¹¹

In San Francisco the Black Panther Party chapter sometimes took up the cause of specific individuals who had been victims of police assaults. In August 1969 the chapter helped publicize the case of an African American Hunters Point boy named Jimmy Connor, age 16, who on August 9 was shot in the back by white Tac Squad officers who opened fire on a carload of teenagers in the Bayview neighborhood. Jimmy had been a passenger in a stolen car driven by friends. As they turned a corner near Jimmy’s house the Tac Squad appeared, firing at the car. The driver panicked and ran into a fence. Jimmy and the other boys exited the car and ran to some nearby bushes. Jimmy was shot in the back just before he reached cover. He fell to the ground and a Tac Squad officer rushed over to him, grabbed him and punched him in the back, telling him “N***** you’re going to die!” He was handcuffed and hit in the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 127-8.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 130.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 133.

head with a billy club, then thrown into a paddy wagon. At that point his mother ran outside to investigate and upon realizing her son had been shot and arrested, screamed, “Please don’t kill my son.” The officer threw his mother to the ground and threatened her with arrest too.¹¹² The doctor treating the boy at the hospital had become so outraged that he called Charles Garry, attorney for the party, and informed him of the situation. He told the rest of his story at a press conference organized by the San Francisco Panthers chapter on August 11.¹¹³

At the press conference party spokespeople argued that in order to prevent what police officers had done to Jimmy Connor from happening again the city of San Francisco needed to adopt a policy they called “community control of policing.” They announced a new campaign to decentralize police power, and circulated a petition that demanded that residents of Black majority neighborhoods be able to select and supervise their own police forces.¹¹⁴

The party took up the issue of community control of police as part of a larger movement on the left beginning in 1968 and especially among Third World Left groups, to push for decentralization of state governance of the institutions that regulated community life such as schools, hospitals, and police departments. This movement included campaigns for neighborhood control of schools and of health care. One of the more well-known actions included in this movement was the takeover of Lincoln Hospital by the Young Lords Party in New York’s Spanish

¹¹²Rufus Byars, “Senseless Assault By Tac Squad,” *Sun Reporter*, August 16, 1969.

¹¹³ Ibid. See also Rufus E. Byaq Byers, “Right On,” *Sun Reporter*, September 6, 1969.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Harlem in 1970. Members of the revolutionary Puerto Rican group occupied the hospital, running services themselves and demanding preventive health services, maternal and childcare, drug addiction care, and an increased minimum wage for hospital workers.¹¹⁵ Two years prior, in Brooklyn in 1968 Black Power activists came into conflict with white-led teachers' unions as they sought community control of public school curriculums, hiring, and administration procedures.¹¹⁶ Donna Jean Murch has described in detail similar efforts spearheaded by the Black Panther Party's Oakland chapter to win control of public education in Oakland in 1970.¹¹⁷

All of these efforts came out of a shared political analysis that emerged from the loose coalition of Third World Left groups, which emphasized the importance of community autonomy and self-sufficiency. The concept in some ways echoed the democratization efforts of Wilfred Ussery, CORE, and SNCC members back in 1964, based as it was in a conviction that decision-making power over the management of institutions would allow them to serve the needs of working-class people. But the community control movement as practiced by groups such as the Panthers and the Young Lords generally went further than the efforts of civil rights groups: they viewed community control as the first step in a revolutionary process. From their perspective, building working-class unity and power through gaining control over and

¹¹⁵ Darrel Enck-Wanzer, ed., *The Young Lords: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

¹¹⁶ Daniel H. Perlstein, *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004). See also Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

¹¹⁷ Murch, *Living for the City*.

access to resources would weaken the power of the state and its ability to repress a revolutionary movement.¹¹⁸

It was in this tradition that the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area undertook a campaign for community control of policing in August 1969. The plan as put forward by the San Francisco chapter of the party envisioned the creation of a charter amendment that would place control of the police in the hands of five different neighborhoods. Because San Francisco was so clearly segregated by race, the Party mapped racial groupings onto the spatial organization of the city. Essentially San Francisco would be divided into an African American area (Fillmore, Bayview-Hunters Point, part of the SoMa), a Latino area (the Mission district), a “Chinese” area (Chinatown), a white area (Haight Ashbury, the Sunset, Richmond, Tenderloin, SoMa), and a “ruling class” area (Twin Peaks, St. Francis Wood, Pacific Heights).¹¹⁹ Each of these areas would be divided into fifteen smaller precincts. The residents of each precinct would elect a representative to a neighborhood police council. This council would determine policy, enforce disciplinary measures against officers, and elect a commissioner to oversee the police officers. Finally, and significantly, police

¹¹⁸ For a discussion of this political approach see Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). For histories of Third World Left groups and community control see Enck-Wanzer, ed., *The Young Lords: A Reader*; Perlstein, *Justice, Justice*; Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*; Murch, *Living For the City*; Jeffries, *On the Ground*; Joseph, ed., *Neighborhood Rebels*.

¹¹⁹ “Chinese” is the Party’s wording—despite the presence in Chinatown of other Asian Americans and recent immigrants from Southeast Asia.

officers would have to live in the area where they worked.¹²⁰

To build support for this amendment the Panthers worked with a larger coalition called the National Committee to Combat Fascism (NCCF). This committee emerged as a result of a United Front Against Fascism conference sponsored by the Black Panther Party, July 18 to 21, 1969, at the Oakland Auditorium, which sought to build relationships between Black Power activists and white leftist groups.¹²¹ Out of the conference the Berkeley chapter of the National Committee to Combat Fascism was born, founded by white radicals who had worked with the Party for several years. The Berkeley National Committee to Combat Fascism was unusual in that it was made up of white leftists who essentially functioned as a chapter of the Black Panther Party, attending party political education classes and helping distribute the Party newspaper in San Francisco. The group spearheaded a campaign for community control of police in Berkeley, which spread to San Francisco in August 1969. The campaign in Berkeley actually built more steam than the one in San Francisco, with activists succeeding in placing the proposal on the ballot in April 6, 1971, though it was defeated by a narrow margin.¹²²

In San Francisco the Panthers focused on targeting residents of Black majority neighborhoods to support their campaign. Throughout the month of August, 1969 party members circulated petitions at neighborhood events in the Fillmore District

¹²⁰“Panthers Mount Campaign for Community Control,” *Sun Reporter*, August 30, 1969.

¹²¹ Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 303.

¹²² “It’s About Time: Black Panther Party Legacy and Alumni,” http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/our_stories/Chapter1/The_iccf.html, April 5, 2012.

and Hunters Point and talking to people on the street. Although we don't have data on the extent of support for the campaign, some anecdotal evidence suggests the proposal was popular in Black majority neighborhoods. A *Sun Reporter* journalist who claimed to randomly select and poll people walking by in the Fillmore district in the last week of August found that everyone he asked was in favor of the amendment. Typical statements by residents focused on the fact that police officers currently did not "know" the community and its needs, and that currently Black people did not have much of a say in how police conducted their work.¹²³ Despite this popularity amongst some city residents, however, according to the *Sun Reporter* the reform measures were opposed by a strong coalition of police department insiders, City Hall, and white middle and working-class residents.¹²⁴ No evidence is available suggesting that the measures were ever successfully placed on a local ballot, and the campaign appears to have fizzled out quickly.

This campaign for community control of police raises many questions about the ability of such measures to successfully eliminate police violence against poor and nonwhite communities. For instance, if the party believed that the police function was a structural product of the capitalist system's need to protect private property, then would local selection of officers, or even the selection of officers of the same race as residents, solve the fundamental problems of policing? The political focus on police behavior on the street as the source of violence in Black neighborhoods omitted the

¹²³ "Panther Campaign for Community Control of Police," *Sun Reporter*, August 30, 1969.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

role of the legal apparatus that determines the actual definition of crime, as well as the criminal justice system that determines guilt and enforces punishment. If laws themselves result in the targeting of people of color or poor people, should officers enforce them? The notion of community control is also based on the idea that racial groups are unified and have a common interest, thus downplaying the presence of intra-racial hierarchies and conflicts. “Community” members would presumably also be divided about the policing of various criminalized activities depending upon whether they are a prostitute, a homeowner, a young person who engages in petty theft or burglary to deal with unemployment, a middle-class professional, or a small business owner. Finally, by homogenizing neighborhoods into single racial/ethnic groupings, the party was unable to account for racial heterogeneity in many parts of the city. Their simplified five-part scheme erased the presence of Chinese Americans in the Richmond district, for instance, and of recent Southeast Asian immigrants in the Tenderloin and South of Market neighborhoods.

The campaign itself in many ways seemed to contradict the party’s earlier vehement stance that only armed patrols of neighborhood people, organized by residents themselves, could keep them safe. It gave much more credence to the possibility of successfully reforming existing political structures, and left behind some of the organization’s earlier opposition to efforts aimed at democratizing state programs and institutions, in particular its critique of the civil rights movement’s embrace of the War on Poverty.

At the same time the available evidence suggests that the campaign was part

of a calculated shift in strategy by the party leadership. Scholars such as Donna Jean Murch and Panther leaders such as Elaine Brown have discussed the organization's shift in the late 60s and early 70s toward programs that provided needed services and resources for the Black community.¹²⁵ The Free Breakfast Program and the liberation schools, both of which were established in the Fillmore and Hunters Point by 1970, were the most prominent examples of this shift. Several years of intense, violent state repression against the party, as well as a growing sense that the party had to begin focusing on more of the points covered in its Ten Point Program, had encouraged a reassessment of party strategy. These programs still differed from the efforts of War on Poverty civil rights activists in that they were not aimed at reforming the welfare state but rather at providing some of its functions autonomously. They did, however, signal a transition away from direct confrontation with the state. Three years later the party went so far as to enter the mainstream political arena, launching a campaign to elect Bobby Seale for Mayor of Oakland in 1973. Thus the community control of police campaign was part of a general change in focus that was more sympathetic to political efforts that the party might have previously considered "reformist."¹²⁶

White Backlash: Police Rank-and-File Racism and Targeting of Panthers

State repression of the Panthers emerged swiftly and brutally. Between 1967 and 1970, key members of the national and local leadership spent time behind bars,

¹²⁵ Murch dates this shift to late 1968, when Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver had gone into exile. Murch, *Living For the City*, 169. See also Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994).

¹²⁶ Murch, *Living For the City*, 169–70.

including Huey Newton, David Hilliard, Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver. The FBI launched a now-infamous campaign of misinformation and psychological warfare against the party in 1968 as part of a larger operation against radical left groups, called the COINTELPRO campaign.¹²⁷ The FBI spearheaded the repression campaign, but at the local level the Alioto administration, police officials, and rank-and-file officers of the SFPD were responsible for most of the repressive efforts against the Panthers.

Rank-and-file police hatred of the Panthers was part of a broader white backlash against the Black uprising of the past two decades. As the era of nonviolent resistance turned into an age of riots and armed self-defense, white people organized to defend the privileges they had accrued as members of a dominant racial group. This included white working-class people who, in part due to their upward economic mobility, increasingly saw their interests as being in direct opposition to those of more precarious groups such as inner-city African Americans.¹²⁸ The police, both because of a long tradition of political conservatism and because of their position at the front lines of interactions between urban Black people and the state, were at the forefront of the backlash. As Gerald Horne observed in his study of the Watts rebellion, the meaning of Watts was Black revolt against police, but also police revolt

¹²⁷ Bloom and Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 226-265.

¹²⁸ Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

against Black people. This revolt was part of a rising wave of white conservatism, he argued, that was ultimately more potent than the Black uprising, sending Ronald Reagan to the governor's mansion in 1967.¹²⁹

Signs of this white backlash were visible among SFPD officers during the second half of the 1960s. Throughout the decade SFPD officers had complained about a decrease in their status among the public and the growing power of an array of liberal and radical forces organizing to limit police autonomy. In June 1965, over a year before the Hunters Point riot, the San Francisco Police Officers' Association railed in its newspaper against local efforts to create a police review board. The *Notebook* published article after article decrying the supposed assault on officers' rights and freedoms, which the editors and contributing authors saw as part of a broader liberal attack on the police institution. Members of the Police Officers' Association, the rank-and-file officers' professional association, wrote to the paper threatening to organize officers against the creation of the review board:

It is our fervent hope that San Francisco policemen will never be reduced to the situation where picket lines become necessary but in the fight against police review boards anything is possible...review boards are the most significant threat to the status of law enforcement that has ever darkened the scene.¹³⁰

The officers were slightly appeased in 1966 when, as a compromise, the Shelley

¹²⁹ Gerald Horne, *The Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 16. For a history of the rise of white conservatism in the 1960s and 1970s, see Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹³⁰ "Untitled," *The San Francisco Police Officers' Association Notebook*, June 1965, 1.

administration allowed the department to create an internal Bureau of Inspection. The new commanding officer of the Bureau reassured them that typically 94 percent of officers were exonerated in internal investigations.¹³¹

Officers regularly wrote to *The Notebook* to express their frustration toward liberal reforms to the criminal justice system. In a typical letter from December 1965, an officer addressed his colleagues with an air of desperation:

Are we to become a herd of do-nothings...turning our backs on crime and criminals....If the high officials of government and the department choose to ignore our rights...to regard lawful and necessary action taken by policemen with inquisition, kangaroo courts and punitive action...then they...are answering the question for us.”¹³²

Another officer complained about accusations of police brutality from civil rights groups: “Is it really brutality when a Police Officer is compelled to meet force with force? Who cries ‘hoodlum brutality’ when a policeman or policewoman is injured or killed in the line of duty?”¹³³ While such complaints were often framed in the abstract language of crime and criminality, one did not have to dig very deep to see how closely they were tied to the increasingly volatile topic of race relations.

Officers were especially sensitive to accusations of brutality or unjustified acts of violence, and when an officer was suspected of any such acts they usually rallied to his defense. Thus after the murder of Matthew Johnson and the ensuing uprising in Hunters Point on September 27, 1966, many officers rushed to defend Officer Alvin

¹³¹ Planning and Research Department, *A History of the San Francisco Police Department*, San Francisco: San Francisco Police Department, May 1972, 8.

¹³²“Letter to the Editor,” *San Francisco Police Officers’ Association Notebook*, December 1965, 1.

¹³³Herman Clark, “Thoughts on Contemporary Justice,” *San Francisco Police Officers’ Association Notebook*, June 1966, 2.

Johnson from what they perceived as unfounded biases on the part of some portions of the public against the police. Some officers were outraged when Johnson was suspended without pay, and publicly rejoiced when a Coroner's Jury cleared him of wrongdoing with a finding of Excusable Homicide in November. Chief Cahill immediately reinstated Johnson after the verdict and restored his lost pay.¹³⁴*The*

Notebook editorialized:

The shooting of Matthew Johnson was not the killing of a Negro boy by a white policeman, but the excusable shooting of a suspected criminal by a law enforcement officer...San Francisco's citizens can sleep a little more soundly tonight because it is not against the law for a policeman to do his job.¹³⁵

In response to heated debate in the mainstream press and in local political circles about the SFPD's conduct during the riot, members of the SFPD helped organize an October 19 rally to demonstrate public support for the police. The rally was co-organized by James Rourke, Business Agent for the Teamsters International Union Local 85. An estimated one thousand police officers and firemen and members of their families gathered in front of City Hall, with off-duty men lined up on the building's steps. Sergeant Lee Marelli, president of the Teamsters-affiliated Police Officers Association, addressed the crowd, assuring them that "as police officers, we are not here demonstrating, but to express our thanks to those who, by this method, are indicating that support of law enforcement has become a necessity."¹³⁶ He called attention to how police were treated while doing their jobs in Hunters Point, Fillmore,

¹³⁴"Johnson Vindicated," *The Notebook*, November 1966, 1.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶"The Demonstration," *The Notebook*, November 1966, 6.

and the Tenderloin. James Rourke spoke as well, lamenting that officer Johnson was prejudged, his family made the subject of ridicule.”¹³⁷ Protestors in attendance carried signs reading “Law and Order,” “Police Power,” and the slogan “White Backlash.”¹³⁸

Discussion of the event during an October 18 officers’ meeting, recorded in the pages of *The Notebook*, reveals both the insecurity some officers felt about their status in the public’s eye and their ambivalence about participating in what could be perceived as protest activity: “Remember that we are not demonstrating and are not criticizing department action,” said one officer, while another drew a line between responsible citizens and rioters, saying that “The rocks are not coming from the voting public and we must stick together.”¹³⁹

Members of the Police Officers’ Association had a special hatred for the Panthers, who so boldly mocked and humiliated them, representing them as pigs and calling openly for their assassination. An article published in the *Notebook* created something of a furor in September 1970 when it used the Panthers as a rationale for targeting residents of public housing and low-income Black neighborhoods. An anonymous officer wrote that the “Black Pussycats” were on a cop-killing spree, and suggested that the Black Panthers were responsible for the recent murders of three Bay Area officers during the course of duty (There is no evidence to suggest that this was the case). “Don’t you think it’s about time we took some positive action?” the

¹³⁷ “Pickets Attend S.F. Police-Fire Rally,” *The Times of San Mateo*, October 20, 1966.

¹³⁸ “City Police and Firemen Rally,” *The Spokesman*, October 29, 1966.

¹³⁹ “Highlights of Tuesday, October 18 Regular Meeting,” *The Notebook*, October 20, 1966, 6.

author asked.¹⁴⁰ He suggested a new set of protocols for responding to calls from housing projects or predominantly African American neighborhoods: first, the calls should be screened and if the incident was deemed minor, the complainant should be sent a form by mail to be completed and returned. If more serious, police should attempt to verify the authenticity of the caller by obtaining their name, address, and telephone number. If the call came from a housing project resident police should contact the Housing Authority police to establish that the caller's name was listed on the lease. The author further argued that all radio car crews operating in districts with housing projects and in African American neighborhoods be equipped with an automatic rifle, and that they should carry this rifle with them when leaving the car.¹⁴¹ The article created a stir in the Black community and was discussed and denounced in the widely read Black newspaper the *Sun Reporter*.¹⁴²

We cannot speculate as to how representative were the opinions expressed in *The Notebook*, but we can assume that they were not the words of a solitary reactionary. The extent of rank-and-file officer hostility toward the Black Panthers, and toward low-income Black San Franciscans more generally, suggests the degree to which the city's working class was divided along racial lines. Significantly, these racial lines were inextricable from economic and social hierarchies that granted white working-class people access to skilled, unionized professions such as policing. As scholars such as Robert Self and Jefferson Cowie have shown, as these white

¹⁴⁰“Terrorism in San Francisco,” *The Notebook*, September 1970.

¹⁴¹“Terrorism in San Francisco.”

¹⁴² George Johnson, “Police Article Creates Furor,” *Sun Reporter*, September 19, 1970.

workers, many of them from European immigrant families, achieved upward mobility in the postwar era, they did not see themselves as part of a unified, multiracial working class. Instead, they saw militant and organized Black precarious urban dwellers as a threat to their own economic and social interests, and were increasingly drawn to conservative politics as a result of their resistance to the civil rights movement.¹⁴³ The racist component of white working-class political conservatism is certainly on display in the records of San Francisco officers' reactions to the Black Panthers discussed here.

Repression Against the Panthers

Tension built throughout 1967 and 1968 as state forces aligned to sabotage the efforts of the Black Panther Party. The offensive against the Panthers was coordinated at the highest levels of government, most systematically by J. Edgar Hoover himself.¹⁴⁴ By October of 1967 Panther leader Huey Newton had been arrested and charged for the murder of an Oakland police officer, though he claimed it was the officer who had attempted to murder him (he was eventually acquitted). Officers throughout the Bay Area wore buttons and tie clips reading "Gas Huey" to show their position on the issue. Party members had engaged in shootouts with officers in

¹⁴³Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven; Self, American Babylon*.

¹⁴⁴ A decade later the Church Committee concluded that the FBI's campaign against the BPP was one of the most violent and aggressive campaigns of domestic repression in U.S. history. Murch, *Living For the City*, 167.

Oakland and other cities, and on April 6, 1968, two days after the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., officers shot and killed the Party's first recruit, seventeen-year-old Bobby Hutton, after he emerged from a house under siege with his hands up.¹⁴⁵ In June Seale was convicted on a weapons charge and sentenced to three years of probation.¹⁴⁶ At a December 8, 1969 rally in support of imprisoned Panthers Black Panther Party lawyer Charles Garry claimed that a total of 28 Panthers had been killed in police shootings over the previous two years.¹⁴⁷

In San Francisco tensions came to a head in April 1969 when the SFPD, led by the Tac Squad, raided the chapter's headquarters on Fillmore Street. The incident began in the afternoon on April 28, when two party members were driving a sound truck around the Western Addition to advertise a forthcoming May Day rally outside the courthouse during Huey Newton's bail hearing. A loudspeaker was also installed in front of the Panther office on Fillmore Street urging passers-by to attend the rally.¹⁴⁸

At around 3:30 pm a police radio car halted the truck and told drivers that they were in violation of the law because they did not have a permit to operate a sound truck. The officers arrested the drivers and confiscated the sound truck. Forty-five minutes later around 150 police officers surrounded the Panther office and launched an attack on the eleven people inside. Somewhere between two and eight gas canisters were shot into the building and rounds of bullets were fired from automatic

¹⁴⁵ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 126.

¹⁴⁶ Murch, *Living for the City*, 166-7.

¹⁴⁷ "Authorities Vs. Black Panthers," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 9, 1969.

¹⁴⁸ Tom Fleming, "Panther's Story of Arrest," *Sun Reporter*, May 3, 1969.

weapons. Gas canisters set fire to a couch and some curtains, forcing occupants to flee into the backyard where a ring of police was waiting, armed with M16 automatic rifles and submachine guns. Party member David Cox described bullets whizzing past him as officers fired just above him, and joked that he was thankful for his natural style hair, or the bullets might have struck him in the head. The eleven party members were ordered to climb the fence and taken to the district station for questioning. They were eventually released.¹⁴⁹

Meanwhile somewhere between two and five hundred people had gathered on the street and were throwing rocks and bottles at police. A small-scale riot ensued as people traveled through the Fillmore district throwing rocks and bottles and looting several stores.¹⁵⁰ The riot took on characteristics of a race riot when some people pulled white motorists from cars and beat them. The *Chronicle* reported that Panther members disrupted several beatings and helped white passengers escape.¹⁵¹

After the raid, backlash grew over the SFPD's conduct. On April 29 liberal religious leaders held a press conference at Grace Cathedral denouncing the police action and describing it as part of a pattern of white racism. Father Eugene Boyle, a white man who hosted the Panthers' free breakfast program at his church in the Fillmore, spoke, along with Bishop C. Kilmer Myers and Bishop Charles Golden, the African American head of the United Methodist church. They stated: "We are gravely

¹⁴⁹ Fleming, "Panther's Story," 3.

¹⁵⁰ "Fillmore Flareup After Police Raid Panther Headquarter," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 29, 1969.

¹⁵¹ "Rash of Violence After Police-Panther Incident," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 29, 1969.

concerned over the threat facing our city which results from the increasingly deteriorating relationship between our police and the citizens of minority groups.”¹⁵² They called on Mayor Alioto to create a police community relations committee that was entirely separate and independent from the SFPD. They also announced tacit support or at least sympathy for Black militancy: “A violent reaction is to be expected from black and brown people who observe themselves oppressed by a dominant group.”¹⁵³ As a result of backlash police officials made an agreement to disclose information to Party lawyer Charles Garry if they were planning a raid in the future, a decision that angered many officers.¹⁵⁴

Police harassment continued throughout the summer. On August 4 Seale gave a press conference with two Panther women who had recently been arrested on loitering charges while selling the *Black Panther* newspaper outside of a bus terminal. He accused Alioto and the police of trying to prevent the Party from distributing its paper, and threatened a civil suit. In the previous three months eight paper vendors had been arrested on charges of loitering or obstructing traffic. In each case the charges were dropped after the Panthers posted bail. “They’re doing it to try and bust the party treasury,” said Seale. “The pigs don’t like our paper because it’s the baddest around.”¹⁵⁵

In December several Panther chapters came under attack, as violent and bloody raids took place in Chicago and Los Angeles. On December 4 in Chicago

¹⁵² “S.F. Warned on Hate,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 30, 1969.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ “Terrorism in San Francisco,” 1.

¹⁵⁵ “Panthers Charge S.F. Harassment,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 5, 1969.

police officers murdered Panther leader Fred Hampton as he slept in his bed and attempted to cover up their act by claiming he had shot first, an assertion that was later disproved.¹⁵⁶ San Francisco Panthers feared they could be next. In the days after Hampton's assassination they put their supporters on high alert, at one point sending out an emergency call for assistance outside their headquarters when they noticed unusual activity by police foot patrolmen and the Tac Squad was seen cruising the area. An organized vigil was held outside the building overnight. An identical vigil was held on December 10 outside of the Party headquarters in Berkeley when observers noticed San Francisco Tac Squad members nearby.¹⁵⁷

The Panthers mobilized in response to the wave of crackdowns. They organized a press conference on December 11 in front of Berkeley's Hall of Justice. Religious leaders spoke, as did Dr. Carlton Goodlett, publisher of the liberal African American newspaper the *Sun Reporter* and critical supporter of the Panthers, though he leaned more toward the nonviolent civil rights tradition. Yet his words at the press conference were full of the rage of Black Power; the reporter referred to them as "the angriest speech this reporter has seen him deliver." "It is time we all realized that a blow against the Panthers is a blow against all Black people," he declared, "and we will not sit idly by and see the government ...massacre the Panthers. Blacks represent only 10 percent of the people in this country, but 10percent is enough to destroy America, if need be."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 245.

¹⁵⁷"Angry Bay Area Response," *Sun Reporter*, December 13, 1969.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Panther supporters held a mass rally several days later on December 14 outside of the federal building in San Francisco. Organizers demanded that Alioto formally promise that no raids would be carried out on the Panther office in San Francisco. Even the city's small group of Black nationalist Muslims, usually fierce opponents of the BPP, called on the Black community to come to the aid of the Party in the face of brutal repression. While another raid did not occur, the Panther membership continued to operate in constant fear of arrest and state violence, a dynamic that, as key leaders have noted, made their organizing efforts increasingly difficult.¹⁵⁹

Conclusion

The San Francisco chapter of the Black Panther Party focused much of its efforts between 1967 and 1969 on organizing against the “stick” of the repressive state. As has been well documented, the party as an organization continued to face massive state repression throughout the 1970s, coordinated at the highest levels of the FBI through the COINTELPRO operation.¹⁶⁰ The incarceration of party members redirected the organization's resources into support campaigns, making day-to-day community organizing increasingly difficult. The 1972 decision by party leadership to de-emphasize local organizing and channel organizational resources toward developing the city of Oakland as its base of operations also undermined the work

¹⁵⁹ Brown, *A Taste of Power*, 134; Bloom and Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 226-266.

¹⁶⁰ Bloom and Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 200-203.

done by Panthers in San Francisco neighborhoods like Hunters Point, as the San Francisco chapter essentially moved across the Bay that year to boost efforts there. Still, the legacy of the Black Panthers in Hunters Point remained, as the neighborhood continued to organize against police violence throughout the 1970s and up to the present.¹⁶¹

The African American youth of San Francisco who were drawn to Black Power politics, and who rioted in Hunters Point in 1966, epitomized the position of precarious workers unable to find a way into the mainstream of the American working class. Simultaneously excluded from the labor market and harassed by the police for their visible idleness, they were drawn to Black Power's radical analysis of the sources of Black urban poverty and social marginalization. The Black Panthers made the repressive state, in the form of the San Francisco Police Department and its Tac Squad, a central component of their organizing, but they did not frame their struggle as a police reform movement. They identified the police apparatus as the repressive arm of an entire social system that depended on racialized economic exploitation.

Their efforts highlight once more the role of race in shaping the postwar working class, and the role of the repressive institutions of the state in managing the conflicts produced by racialized economic precariousness. As the police department increasingly focused its efforts on managing an "unruly" population rebelling against

¹⁶¹ This influence is discussed in the documentary film *Straight Outta Hunters Point*, a portrait of local rap musicians that also examines poverty and police violence in 21st century Hunters Point. Kevin Epps, *Straight Outta Hunters Point* (San Francisco: Mastamind Productions, 2002).

a state of perpetual precariousness, divisions between Black and white working-class people came to the fore. The white police officers of the SFPD and their blue-collar allies, including the Teamsters, with whom the Police Officers' Association was formally linked, identified with the "white backlash" against Black Power. Rather than viewing the struggle of African American youth to achieve economic security as a working-class struggle not entirely unrelated to their own, the white workers who rallied in support of the SFPD saw Black unrest and self-organization as a threat to their own interests. The role of unionized white workers in opposing the struggles of San Francisco's precarious workers would not be limited to their embrace of "white backlash" politics, however, as the next chapter will show.

Chapter 4:

Labor Against the Working Class: The International Longshore Workers' Union, Organized Labor, and Downtown Redevelopment

Introduction

In 1979, at the tail end of a decade-long struggle to prevent displacement by urban renewal, photographer Ira Nowalski in 1979 documented the lives of the low-income residents of San Francisco's South of Market (SoMa) neighborhood. One resident, Pete Mendelsohn, showed Nowalski a letter that another resident, George Woolf, had sent in November 1969 to Harry Bridges, president of the International Longshore Workers Union. As a former union member, Woolf appealed to Bridges for support in opposing the redevelopment project that would expel them from their long-time home. "We are your brothers," he wrote. "We fought the bosses together. We stood with you against the police and strikebreakers on the Embarcadero during the General Strike...The Redevelopment Agency is taking our homes. It's all we have. We need your help." Bridges returned the original letter with a note written in the margin: "Sorry but I'm on the other side [in] this."¹ Indeed, Bridges and ILWU Local 10 endorsed the construction of the Yerba Buena Center, a massive tourism, shopping, and entertainment complex, in 1970, even going so far as to join the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency in court to oppose a tenant lawsuit to halt construction.

¹ John Elberling, in Ira Nowalski, *No Vacancy: Urban Renewal and the Elderly* (University of Michigan: C. Bean and Associates, 1979).

This exchange between Mendelsohn and Bridges highlights the dynamics of a conflict that played out between San Francisco's organized labor movement and some of the most marginalized members of the city's working class, which included retired union members and industrial workers. The conflict between organized labor and low-income tenants raises the question: why did the city's labor leadership pursue a redevelopment agenda even though it made the cost of living in San Francisco unaffordable for poor and working-class people?

In part, the answer is related to the classic labor history tale of postwar union bureaucratization and political opportunism. As scholars such as Martin Glaberman, Stanley Aronowitz, Nelson Lichtenstein, and Kim Moody have shown, the most militant unions in the United States took a rightward turn during and after World War II, embracing business unionism and seeking more cordial relationships with business and political leaders.² I will trace the history of the ILWU during the postwar era to show how a famously progressive union became an influential pro-growth force. I will link the union's rightward drift to the devastating impact of mechanization on maritime workers. As, throughout the course of the 1950s and 60s the union lost much of the fighting power it had held since the 1930s, it sought to strengthen alliances with San Francisco politicians in order to maintain its political position.

² Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes: The Struggle Against the No Strike Pledge in the UAW During World War II* (Berkeley: Bewick/Ed, 1980); Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (New York: Verso), 1988; Aronowitz, *False Promises*; Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

However, bureaucratization and business unionism are not sufficient explanations for organized labor's response to redevelopment. The answer is also rooted in the nature of postwar patterns of economic development. As this chapter will show, national and international economic trends that led to growth in the finance and services sectors and a slowing of growth in the manufacturing sector took on a specific character in U.S. cities such as San Francisco, New York, Boston, and Chicago. City governments had to figure out how to solve the revenue problems they had been experiencing since the 1950s, due to a combination of manufacturing flight and the migration of white middle-class residents to the suburbs. Downtown redevelopment became a popular solution to the city's financial woes. Redevelopment involved reconfiguring urban land use patterns to accommodate new patterns of investment. These new land use patterns were predicated on rising land prices, which had the corollary effect of making urban life more difficult for the city's working class and poor residents. In other words, cities put their energies into an economic motor that required a different kind of city, a city where working-class people could not afford to live.

In San Francisco, this dynamic put labor unions such as the International Longshore Workers' Union and the Building and Construction Trades Council in a difficult position by the mid-1960s: attempting to salvage what remained of their political clout by aligning themselves with the political establishment, which was deeply invested in a form of development that directly undermined the conditions of life in the city for the unions' rank and file and for non-unionized poor people. This

chapter will demonstrate what was gained as well as lost when that strategic decision was made.

Postwar patterns of economic growth in cities nationwide thus highlighted a contradiction within working-class interests. In San Francisco, labor unions pursued job creation by hitching their wagons to redevelopment in the second half of the 1960s, and pushing local government to use redevelopment as a vehicle to boost employment. At the same time working-class people living in parts of the city affected by redevelopment fought for affordable housing and a reasonable cost of living. Between 1965 and 1975, key San Francisco unions fought at the point of production while groups of low-income tenants fought over the terms of reproduction. For if redevelopment was the only framework within which unions could secure jobs for their members, then those jobs came at the direct expense of affordable housing, food, and other necessities of life.

As historians, then, we need to emphasize more than bureaucratization in our accounts of union conservatism during this era, and not reduce this conservatism to a problem of “bad ideology” or too much power concentrated in the hands of leadership. We also need to view the positions taken by organized labor as occurring within a mode of economic development that dramatically highlighted the existing contradictions in working-class life, pitting a union leadership and rank and file desperate for jobs against an increasingly impoverished and disposable precarious urban population.

This dynamic was shot through with racial and gender hierarchies in ways that were not always straightforward. On the one hand, racial and gender discrimination in hiring and within unions skewed the composition of the unionized working class toward white males, who dominated the building trades, and who also had found it easier to make the transition to the suburbs outside of San Francisco, and were thus less likely to be directly affected by urban redevelopment. On the other hand, the retirees who fought against redevelopment and who lived a precarious existence in low-rent single resident occupancy hotels were also mostly white and male. These were not, by and large, single mothers or unemployed youth of color who were being displaced. The racial and gender dynamics that produced this unique population of precarious older white men are tied to the history of neighborhoods like the SoMa, which served as a home base for casual laborers during the first half of the twentieth century, but were often racially segregated. These men, and some women, had participated in migratory labor patterns that made it difficult to establish long-term family ties, and thus in old age had settled into a modest bachelor mode of life.

Redevelopment: An Overview

As discussed above, San Francisco, along with other major U.S. cities, began a series of economic transformations after World War II. When manufacturing and other traditional blue-collar industries began their migration to the suburban fringes, city coffers felt the impact of industrial flight. City planners, politicians, and business leaders were quick to argue that, in order to restore profitability and maintain San

Francisco's status as a "world city," city government needed to invest heavily in new growth sectors: finance, tourism, and the booming service sector. As we have seen, investment in these new industries, they believed, also necessitated a major renovation of existing urban land use patterns, a renovation that would massively overhaul the city's spatial organization and the arrangement of people—as residents, as consumers, and as workers—in urban space. This spatial renovation, a response to economic transformations already underway and an attempt to prepare the city to receive the benefits of the new post-industrial economic order, was known as "urban renewal" and, more broadly, "redevelopment."³ As urban historians and geographers such as John Mollenkopf, Chester Hartman, Stephen McGovern, and Neil Smith have noted, the pursuit of redevelopment by the governments of cities such as Boston, New York, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. in the 1950s and 60s can be thought of as a "growth regime," a mode of mobilizing municipal resources to secure the remodeling of urban centers. These regimes created their own infrastructure to manage the redevelopment process: a whole new set of bureaucracies and new political relationships between developers, planners, politicians, labor, investors, and neighborhood groups.⁴

³ Chester Hartman, *City for Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Bruce B. Brugmann and Greggar Sletteland, eds., *The Ultimate Highrise: San Francisco's Mad Rush Toward the Sky* (San Francisco: San Francisco Bay Guardian Books, 1971); Stephen J. McGovern, *The Politics of Downtown Redevelopment: Dynamic Political Cultures in San Francisco and Washington, D.C.* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998).

⁴ Ibid.

In San Francisco, a pro-development coalition began to organize city resources to facilitate redevelopment in the early 1950s, when local business leaders and their allies in city government began to realize that the city's small size and limited ability to expand geographically were major potential inhibitors to their model of economic dynamism. As we shall see, they realized that the downtown office district was far too small for the anticipated demand for office space. As pro-growth forces began to identify what they saw as a mismatch between the existing organization and use of urban space and the city's economic needs, they began putting in place the pieces necessary to undertake a massive overhaul.

Pro-growth politicians and business leaders were aided in their quest at the state and national levels, where parallel pro-growth forces were gaining political influence. The need to redevelop, or "renew," cities was being recognized nationally as a solution to urban fiscal problems. The state of California was at the forefront of the movement. In 1945 it became one of the first states to adopt a redevelopment law, the Community Redevelopment Act, allowing towns and cities to clear slum housing, to be replaced with, in its own wording, "good" housing in "planned neighborhoods."⁵ In 1949 the federal government weighed in, passing the National Housing Act, a major piece of legislation that provided federal funds to cities seeking

⁵ San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, "The Human Side of Renewal: A program for residents of Western Addition Area 2," Community Services Division, San Francisco: San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, April 1964, 1.

to pursue redevelopment. The Act also granted local Redevelopment Agencies the power of eminent domain, with the approval of city government.⁶

Without a doubt the most important agency in San Francisco's growth regime was the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA), a "superagency" founded in 1948 with broad leeway to coordinate and implement major redevelopment projects. From its creation the Redevelopment Agency had close ties to and strong support from the mayor's office; its Commissioners were appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the Board of Supervisors. As Hartman notes, in the 60s and early 70s the agency's power ballooned because of its access to large amounts of federal funds from urban renewal programs. Hartman estimates that between 1959 and 1971 the Redevelopment Agency was responsible for securing \$128 million federal dollars to be used for downtown redevelopment.⁷

If the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency was the single most powerful agency within the growth regime, then the individual with the most power within the agency was undoubtedly Justin Herman. Hero to some and villain to others, Herman quickly gained a reputation as an aggressive, politically savvy proponent of major renewal projects. Appointed director in 1959, he is widely considered the leading force behind the agency's sudden increase in activity by the early 1960s. Revered by other members of the growth regime, Herman became a symbol of "Negro removal" to residents of the Fillmore and Western Addition. "Negroes and the other victims of

⁶ Rachel G. Bratt, Michael E. Stone, Chester W. Hartman, *A Right to Housing: Foundation for a New Social Agenda* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 1, 201.

⁷ Hartman, *City for Sale*, 15–16.

a low income generally regard him as the arch villain in the Black depopulation of the city,” wrote Thomas Fleming in 1965 in the *Sun Reporter*.⁸

Major Projects

Redevelopment began in San Francisco in the mid-1950s, when the federal government approved requests, submitted by city officials, for the funding of eight proposed renewal projects.⁹ These projects can be roughly divided into two types, each targeting an aspect of the growth regime’s vision for a redeveloped San Francisco. The first, most lucrative projects, focused on redeveloping commercial and business districts to produce urban space ideally suited for offices, retail, and tourism. The second set of projects focused on redeveloping residential districts to clear low-income housing and encourage middle-class neighborhood formation—the Western Addition project being a prime example.

One of the first redevelopment projects of the former type to get underway was the Golden Gateway project near the old waterfront, located on the only remaining strip of land east of the business district. The Redevelopment Agency sought to transform the area into an office headquarters zone and a high-rise, upper-

⁸ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 18.

⁹ In 1955 official renewal plans were approved for federal assistance in eight city areas: Diamond Heights, Golden Gateway, Western Addition A-1, Western Addition A-2, Yerba Buena Center, Hunters Point, Butchertown, and Regal Pale. See “Community Development and Housing: New Directions for Programming,” Mayor’s Office of Community Development, February 14, 1974, folder 32, box 2, Alioto Papers, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

class residential complex.¹⁰ In 1956, the influential Blyth-Zellerbach Committee funded a study of the area, which had once been the site of the city's bustling produce market. The study, which emphasized the dilapidated character of the area, helped the SFRA lay the groundwork for the district to be officially declared a slum—thus qualifying it for federal aid for renewal and allowing the SFRA to purchase it using its eminent domain powers. By 1959, when construction began, the Golden Gateway had come to encompass fifty-one acres and included luxury apartments and townhouses, the five-block high-rise office and hotel complex known as the Embarcadero Center, and a series of pedestrian walkways and platforms.¹¹

Golden Gateway, the Embarcadero Center, and the controversial Yerba Buena Center formed the core of the city's downtown commercial redevelopment campaign. In December 1967 the mayor's office commented in its internal documents on the key role of downtown redevelopment in the city's plan for economic growth:

The district, which is the business, shopping, entertainment, and government core area of the growing metropolitan San Francisco Bay Area, is vital to the economy of the City and the Bay Area. City policies have deliberately and effectively supported the remarkable expansion of economic activities now taking place in this uniquely concentrated metropolitan central district.¹²

The second group of projects, begun in 1956, targeted residential neighborhoods, in particular the predominantly African American and Japanese neighborhoods of the Fillmore and the Western Addition. Such projects were

¹⁰ Hartman, *City for Sale*, 8

¹¹ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 10.

¹² T.J. Kent, Jr., letter from Shelley's office to mayor-elect Alioto, December, 1967, box 1, folder 10, Alioto Papers, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

conceived of by the city government as efforts to counter urban demographic trends, which were skewing away from white, middle-class, nuclear family-based residential neighborhoods and towards nonwhite, immigrant, working-class residential neighborhoods, with higher percentages of renters, single-parent households, and non-nuclear living arrangements. White middle-class urban dwellers were considered desirable by city officials and planners both because they were presumed to pay into higher tax brackets, and because they were members of an economic group that officials imagined would be well-suited to participate in the remodeled downtown district, both as employees and as consumers.¹³

As these examples demonstrate, city officials and developers saw redevelopment as a way to reorganize the city, to move people and buildings around in a way that to them seemed more rational, desirable, and, especially, economically beneficial—for investors, for city coffers, for developers, and for increasingly powerful “interest groups” such as organized labor. To promote redevelopment to the public, the SFRA and the mayor’s office produced a slew of documents, brochures, and articles over the course of the 1960s. These documents reveal much about the growth regime’s priorities and, indeed, its vision of a new postwar city.

Typical brochures placed heavy emphasis on the problem of “slums,” drawing attention to the public health, aesthetic, and economic effects of such areas. An October 1969 brochure promoting the Golden Gateway project described the pre-development area as “a colorful but inefficient and badly blighted nest of low

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

buildings” and prominently reprinted a quotation from a *Harper’s Magazine* article on San Francisco redevelopment: “Rats and vermin infest the hotels and rooming houses where its tiny population...lives in squalor.”¹⁴

Such depictions also typically emphasized the economic benefits for the city of investing in middle- and upper-class housing. Low-income neighborhoods were presented as leeches on city coffers, while redeveloped commercial and residential zones attracted revenue. In this sense “slum” areas also took up potentially lucrative space in a city whose land values were on the rise—within the logic of redevelopment they represented wasted space, and wasted profits. As the Golden Gateway brochure declared, “Like all slums, it does not pay its way, yielding only about a quarter of a million dollars in annual taxes for more than fifty prime acres in the heart of the city.”¹⁵ The phrasing skirts around the fact that they are home to human residents; instead they are typically discussed in architectural terms as clusters of dilapidated buildings.

Finally, city officials highlighted the role that redevelopment would play in job creation:

More and more, investment capital is attracted to communities which provide efficient transportation facilities, economical public services and pleasant residential environments for workers. Attainment of these objectives will in the long run insure that San Francisco maintains its position as a dynamic core city serving one of the most rapidly growing metropolitan regions in the nation.¹⁶

¹⁴ San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, *The Decade Past and the Decade to Come*, San Francisco: San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, October 1969, 4.

¹⁵ Allan Temko, *Harper’s Magazine*, April 1960, quoted in *The Decade Past and the Decade to Come*, 4.

¹⁶ San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, *1961 Annual Report*, 13.

This description highlights the central components of the growth regime's vision for a new urban spatial regime, a reorganization of the city's infrastructure that would prime it for new patterns of capital investment.

Unions Losing Ground

The city's changing economic base, and its accompanying new vision of urban land use, had long-lasting effects on its traditionally powerful blue-collar unions.¹⁷ The political fortunes of these unions were closely tied to the economic fortunes of the industrial sectors where their rank-and-file members were employed. Throughout the 1960s, labor union officials, and especially the San Francisco Labor Council, watched the hemorrhaging of blue-collar jobs with much apprehension. As their members struggled with high unemployment, speed-ups, and rapid technological change, labor officials sought ways to reverse industrial decline and, when that possibility seemed beyond reach, endeavored to position themselves as best they could within the new economy. Initially opposed to most redevelopment proposals, which generally sought to further displace manufacturing from the downtown area, they were ultimately persuaded to join forces with the growth regime in order to

¹⁷ See Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990); David Wellman, *The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the San Francisco Waterfront* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Weir, *Singlejack Solidarity*.

secure key political alliances and access to the jobs created through the redevelopment process.

The cities blue-collar base shrank significantly between 1958 and 1972. In a 1973 survey of San Francisco's overall economic development, the Alioto administration's Manpower Planning Council found that over the course of the 1960s industrial employment decreased as a percentage of total San Francisco employment, from 14.2% in 1958 to 9.7% in 1972. Over the same time period financial, insurance, real estate, and government sector jobs increased from 24.5% to 30.5%. The number of people employed in construction, manufacturing, and transportation-communication-utilities declined by 10,400 in just ten years, between 1962 and 1972.¹⁸

Labor union representatives, still hopeful that they might reverse the tide, sought to better understand the causes of these declines. At a 1967 conference members of the Labor Council, including Secretary-Treasurer George Johns, met with University of California, Berkeley economists to study the situation. Their findings, published in the labor press, focused on the decreasing incentives for manufacturers to rent urban land sites for their operations. Industrially zoned land in the city of San Francisco was becoming increasingly unaffordable: land prices in the city were as high as \$8 per square foot in 1967, while in nearby Santa Clara and the East Bay they

¹⁸ Manpower Planning Council, "Overall Economic Development Program, San Francisco, California," submitted to the US Department of Commerce, September 1973, 19, DeLuca-Labor, Manpower Planning folder, box 4, Alioto Papers, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

seldom exceeded \$2.75 per square foot.¹⁹ Other reasons included a shortage of land for expanding operations, higher overall operating costs, and the improvement of transportation infrastructure in the suburbs and between city and suburb.²⁰ ILWU official David Jenkins reflected on this period of transition, recalling, “industry in that area was moving out....To have a printing plant with four floors when you could buy one out in South San Francisco or Brisbane all on one floor, which eliminated elevators, eliminated handling.”²¹ By the early 1970s only a handful of manufacturing sectors continued to be based in the city, among them food processing, garment making, and some printing and publishing.²²

Major changes in waterfront work accompanied this manufacturing flight, affecting longshoremen and naval shipyard workers. The Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, which had once drawn migrants from across the country to work in its yard, continued to lay off workers throughout the 1960s. Employment spiked slightly during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, but by the early 1970s shipyard employment was in steady decline.²³ In 1973 the Alioto administration’s Manpower Planning Council noted over 1,700 layoffs at the yard over the previous few months, commenting that rapid layoffs were a “vivid example of the type of industrial

¹⁹ “Labor, UC dig for answer to job loss,” *San Francisco Labor*, October 13, 1967, 2.

²⁰ Manpower Planning Council, “Overall Economic Development Program, San Francisco, California,” 10.

²¹ David Jenkins, *The Union Movement, The California Labor School, and San Francisco Politics, 1926–1988*, International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union Oral History Series, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 240.

²² Manpower Planning Council, “Overall Economic Development Program, 10.

²³ *Ibid.*

employment decline that has been occurring.”²⁴ The shipyard closed operations in 1974. Further north, the Port of San Francisco was also facing decline, as years of neglect had rendered its piers and equipment outdated and poorly maintained. In terms of modern facilities and warehouse space it lagged behind nearby ports such as the Port of Oakland, and as a result between 1968 and 1973 a number of major shipping companies moved their contracts to these newer ports.²⁵ Shipyard work also began moving up the coast to the Pacific Northwest in the mid-60s, where lower tax rates and the existence of new industrial parks lured business.²⁶

Shrinking job opportunities also haunted the building trades, which faced a major standstill in new building construction in the mid-1960s. Even as developers were fighting to get their renewal plans approved by the local and federal government, construction workers faced record unemployment. The San Francisco Labor Council’s newspaper *San Francisco Labor* regularly commented on the plight of the Building and Construction Trades Council’s rank and file throughout 1966 and 1967. The council noted in April of 1967 that 32 percent of California union members in the construction industry were jobless.²⁷ The council blamed the downturn on tight money policy, which boosted interest rates to record highs and therefore made it difficult for developers to secure funds for major projects.²⁸

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁵ Manpower Planning Council, “Overall Economic Development,” 15.

²⁶ *San Francisco Labor*, October 13, 1967, 2. See also Wellman, *The Union Makes Us Strong*; and Weir, *Singlejack Solidarity*.

²⁷ *San Francisco Labor*, April 14, 1967, 3.

²⁸ *San Francisco Labor*, December 9, 1966, 7; *San Francisco Labor*, March 10, 1967, 5.

The Building and Construction Trades Council turned to the legislative arena to remedy its woes. At a labor legislative conference in Sacramento in April 1967 representatives urged the labor movement to support statewide legislation to plan and expand state construction. The council also linked the construction standstill to the standstill in building new low-income housing for predominantly nonwhite city residents. It argued that “the construction depression threatens to exaggerate racial tensions through a lack of decent low-cost housing in ghettos.”²⁹

Another available solution to building trades workers’ woes was downtown redevelopment as envisioned by the city’s growth regime boosters. Even as redevelopment displaced other industrial workers, it offered the possibility of thousands of new construction jobs. Thus it is no surprise that the Building and Construction Trades Council was one of the first San Francisco unions to support redevelopment and to urge the San Francisco Labor Council to back the Yerba Buena Project.³⁰ Hartman notes that by the mid-1960s the Building and Construction Trades Council backed any planned construction that would create jobs for its members.³¹ This position was also easier to take because the Council, long known as a federation of conservative business unions, lacked the progressive base of unions like the ILWU. In fact ILWU leaders at times chastised the Council for its pro-building stance in all cases. Jenkins recalled his conflict with the Council when he opposed the redevelopment of the Panhandle: “I said, Oh, fuck. You guys would build

²⁹ *San Francisco Labor*, April 14, 1967, 3.

³⁰ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 33.

³¹ *Ibid.*

concentration camps as long as it is union labor.”³²

The San Francisco Labor Council initially sought an alternative to the redevelopment vision of the Redevelopment Agency and its coalition of business interests. Throughout the 1960s Labor Council representatives pushed the political establishment to use federal urban renewal funds to reverse industrial decline. Specifically, the Labor Council sought to convince city leaders to pursue redevelopment of the SoMa neighborhood. However, the council did not want the area transformed into a commercial and entertainment complex like the Yerba Buena Center. Instead, it wanted the city to invest in the creation of modern industrial parks, in essence expanding the city’s downtown industrial zone rather than shrinking it.³³ In November 1966 the Labor Council presented the city with a formal proposal urging city government to create a demonstration city program to redevelop South of Market. Significantly, the Labor Council’s proposal also advocated “slum clearance” and relocation, suggesting a conflict of interest between the needs of labor leaders and the most precarious sectors of the city’s working class. The proposal called for “a campaign to bring to these cleared locations those industries who have been unwilling to locate modern facilities in the midst of slums.”³⁴ At a Labor Council meeting in April 1967 Secretary George W. Johns expressed his frustration at the city’s lack of

³² Jenkins, *The Union Movement*, 241.

³³ “Action on all levels, Council Urges,” *San Francisco Labor*, April 14, 1967, 1. In the words of Labor Council Secretary George W. Johns, “The labor movement cannot directly create jobs. We have repeatedly and unsuccessfully called upon city hall and downtown interests to do something about loss of blue collar job opportunities by installing a program of industrial development.”

³⁴ *San Francisco Labor*, November 1966.

response: “We have repeatedly and unsuccessfully called upon city hall and downtown interests to do something about loss of blue collar job opportunities by installing a program of industrial development.”³⁵

The Labor Council’s plan, presented in November 1966, included the redevelopment of Chinatown, which also bordered the city’s industrial areas. San Francisco’s labor unions had longstanding antagonisms with many Chinatown manufacturers, who hired non-union employees and paid them low wages, thus pushing down wages citywide.³⁶ The Labor Council sought to persuade city officials to designate Chinatown as a Model Neighborhood, thus qualifying it for federal urban renewal funds. These funds could then be used to have “all industry...removed from there” and to redevelop Chinatown as “a tourist center with its housing, restaurants, and retail stores.”³⁷ This redevelopment would go hand in hand with the construction of industrial parks further south and east. Thus, though labor leaders had a different vision of urban land use than the visionaries in the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, they too sought to drastically remake the urban environment, uprooting people and complex community networks to secure the kinds of land usage economically beneficial to them.

However, as David Jenkins later noted, city officials never appeared remotely interested in labor’s vision of urban renewal.³⁸ The economic forces at work were

³⁵ *San Francisco Labor*, April 1967.

³⁶ The SFLC supported the efforts of labor unions to organize in Chinatown in 1967. “Action on All Levels,” *San Francisco Labor Council*, Bulletin, 1.

³⁷ Johns, “Model Neighborhood?”

³⁸ Jenkins, *The Union Movement*, 240.

simply too strong, and the potential for profits too high, to summon the political will to attempt to reverse the trajectory of the postwar economy. Thus, the majority of organized labor came around to supporting redevelopment by 1970, when conflict over the building of the Yerba Buena Center was at its peak, in the hopes of maintaining important political alliances and securing access to the jobs produced by the development boom. Even representatives of unions that would not benefit directly from new construction supported redevelopment. Hartman considered the ILWU's support for the growth regime a political strategy in response to its relatively weak position at the time, commenting that ILWU leadership "saw it in their best interest to generate more jobs by backing business and political forces determined to advance San Francisco and the Bay Area as a service and trading hub for the Pacific Rim."³⁹ Others saw redevelopment as a last resort strategy for job creation for future generations. Referring to the planned Yerba Buena Center, a representative for the Machinists Lodge told a meeting of Labor Council members on September 9, 1970 that he supported the project because of its potential for job creation. "They aren't jobs for machinists," he said, "but they are jobs for machinists' kids."⁴⁰

The ILWU, Automation, and Bureaucratization

The ILWU leadership also became an outspoken supporter of the redevelopment regime, especially during the Alioto administration, which lasted from 1968 to 1976. How did this famously progressive union end up backing an agenda

³⁹ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 34.

⁴⁰ "Jobs for Tomorrow? An Inquiry," *San Francisco Labor*, Sept 11, 1970, 1.

opposed by most of the city's leftist and progressive elements, and one so devastating to the city's poor? The union's position on redevelopment was part of a broader rightward drift, and an accompanying move toward the kind of business unionism that dominated the postwar labor movement. This shift, which resulted in an embrace of Democratic Party machine politics, was also the culmination of over a decade of conflict within the ILWU over the union's response to automation and job loss in the maritime industry. I will examine the ways in which automation heightened conflicts within the union, pushed the leadership politically rightward, and spurred the leadership to suppress dissenters within the rank and file. These factors laid the groundwork for the ILWU's close alliance with the Alioto administration and its aggressive redevelopment program.

Beginning in the mid 1950s, employers in the maritime industry began pressuring the ILWU to yield on issues related to productivity. Technological advancements in cargo handling methods suddenly offered employers the chance to dramatically increase the amounts of cargo they could load and stow, but union work rules established in the 1930s prevented them from pursuing these gains in productivity to the fullest extent.⁴¹ Employers also anticipated the "container revolution," which would drastically transform the process of stuffing and unstuffing containers, mechanizing much of that work and also moving it off the docks and into

⁴¹ Lincoln Fairley, *Facing Mechanization: The West Coast Longshore Plan*, Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Los Angeles, Monograph Series: 23, 1979, 55. See also Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010); Brian J. Cudahy, *Box Boats: How Container Ships Changed the World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

warehouses located away from the waterfront. Although large-scale containerization would not take place until the mid-1960s, employers recognized its potential by the mid-1950s and sought to clear away any obstacles to future mechanization.⁴²

The ILWU leadership largely saw mechanization, job loss, and the loss of work practices as inevitable. As Bridges remarked in 1956, “We are fighting a losing battle. We can change our methods or continue to try to hold on, but they will slip away anyway.”⁴³ Believing resistance to the pressures of productivity demands to be untenable, the leadership in 1960 negotiated the Mechanization and Modernization Agreement (known as the M and M Agreement), a major contract between the ILWU and the Pacific Maritime Association that many in business and labor circles viewed as groundbreaking. One of the first union contracts to surrender control over work practices and mechanization in exchange for benefits and monetary gains, the M and M Agreement laid the groundwork for labor’s general acquiescence to automation in the 1960s and 70s.

The groundwork for the M and M Agreement began to be laid in 1956. During contract negotiations, the Pacific Maritime Association started pressuring the ILWU to give up certain work practices in exchange for a shorter workweek. In his detailed reconstruction of the negotiations, former ILWU negotiator Lincoln Fairley described the process as a precursor to M and M. He noted that even at this early date the concept of trading work practices for other benefits was extremely controversial within the rank and file. The proposal just barely passed, and Fairley commented,

⁴² Fairley, *Facing Mechanization*, 271.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 63.

“The no votes at this time may be interpreted as unwillingness on the part of a very substantial minority of the longshoremen to give up a mode of operating on the job to which they had long been accustomed.”⁴⁴

Divisions within the rank and file came to a head during negotiations over the M and M Agreement, which began in May 1960. It became clear that the Pacific Maritime Association essentially sought to purchase all the work rules won in the 1930s—rules governing the pace of work, load limits, and the length of breaks—in exchange for a greatly expanded retirement fund and job security measures.⁴⁵ The rank and file was split as to whether or not such an exchange should be seen as a good deal in the context of inevitable change, or whether it represented the abandonment of the union’s tradition of labor militancy and the voluntary surrender of the gains won by strikers in the 1930s. After much leadership lobbying within the rank and file, the agreement passed on October 8, with serious opposition. The referendum vote was 6,488 in favor and 3,985 against. Significantly, three out of the four big locals voted against. All in all 38% of the rank and file voted against the contract, signifying a deep lack of consensus within the union.⁴⁶

Many on the left, and especially the labor left, reacted to the contract with disapproval. As Fairley, who himself supported it, recalled, “Within the labor movement...the M and M Agreement for the most part was greeted by silence, perhaps a shocked silence reflecting concern that any union should barter away any of

⁴⁴ Fairley, *Facing Mechanization*, 51-2.

⁴⁵ Stan Weir, “The ILWU: A Case Study in Bureaucracy,” *New Politics*, 24.

⁴⁶ Fairley, 253.

its hard-won work rules.”⁴⁷ Leftist economist Paul Baran referred to it as “class collaboration,” and political commentator Harvey Swados denounced it in an article based on interviews with rank and file members.⁴⁸ He wrote that the agreement would in effect wipe out “conditions that made West Coast longshoring the most attractive way of life for a casual laborer in the United States, if not the entire world.”⁴⁹ This way of life was sustained by work rules that included the freedom to work when and if one pleased, the right to rest periods up to 40% of the working day, strong job security, and load limits that constrained the pace of work.⁵⁰

Stan Weir, a San Francisco longshoreman and labor militant, wrote two articles in 1964 discussing the crisis of internal democracy within the ILWU, which he saw as tied to the passage of the M and M Agreement. He wrote that the agreement’s effects were felt almost immediately: within a few months most loads to be built or stowed quadrupled in size and workers were given significantly shorter rest periods. In addition, he noted that in the year following the Agreement’s implementation the accident rate increased by 20% in San Francisco and 16% on the west coast as a whole—in all likelihood as a result of speed-ups.⁵¹

In addition, the agreement served to discourage workplace action. The contract included a clause stating that employees must “work as directed,” which effectively took away workers’ right to take direct action on the job to correct

⁴⁷ Fairley, 169.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 148.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 171.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Weir, “The ILWU,” 25.

contract violations. According to Weir, leadership also discouraged the rank and file from job actions and was generally reluctant to strike.⁵²

Finally, the agreement cemented in place a two-tier status amongst longshore workers by approving the creation of a second class of workers called “B men.” B men were union members who were given the more difficult and undesirable jobs, had to work under union jurisdiction, but lacked full membership rights. They had no job security and their working conditions were not protected. For instance, they could and frequently were made to work over 50% more tonnage than “A” status workers.⁵³

The formalization of B status resulted in a serious conflict within Local 10, as the leadership sought to crack down on B men who vigorously opposed the M and M Agreement. In June 1963 82 registered longshore workers, all B status workers, and 90% of them African American, received termination notices from the Joint Labor Committee for allegedly violating dispatch rules.⁵⁴ The Pacific Maritime Association officially listed them as cheats and irresponsibles, designations that disqualified them from receiving unemployment benefits and also served to blacklist them from the industry.⁵⁵ The ousted workers, who in July formed a Longshore Jobs Defense Committee to get back their jobs, asked to see the specific rules they had violated and, when they were denied, proclaimed that they had been fired for their opposition to the Agreement. Indeed, the Pacific Maritime Association eventually admitted in

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 23–24.

⁵⁴ Weir, “The ILWU,” 23, 26–28. Stan Weir, “The Retreat of Harry Bridges,” *New Politics*, 62. Also David T. Wellman, *The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the Waterfront* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 82–83.

⁵⁵ Weir, “The ILWU,” 27.

court that the alleged “rules” for which the men had been fired were devised in informal discussions between Bridges and PMA representatives only months before the firing—and were never posted or communicated to the rank and file. Thus an Appeals Board ruled that the men had clearly not been fired for their misconduct, and that they should not have been fired at all.⁵⁶

A year after the firings, Weir wrote that only 5 of the 82 men had found jobs.⁵⁷ As one fired man wrote in a public letter, “Most of us 82 men didn’t have a chance for survival. Most of the men fired were Negroes and with a misconduct listed on the records it was much harder for us to find other jobs.”⁵⁸ Another man described his disenchantment with the ILWU after years of dedicated work:

Working in the hold carrying bananas and more than a hundred pounds of coffee and various other items, following so closely what I thought to be the right rules for a Class B longshoreman only ended up a total loss for myself and 81 other longshoremen.⁵⁹

By the mid 1960s, Bridges and the ILWU leadership based in San Francisco had strayed from the union’s tradition of labor militancy forged in the strikes of the 1930s. Increasingly employing the tactics and policies of business unionism, the leadership had developed sophisticated mechanisms for suppressing internal dissent, in particular dissent that jeopardized the terms of the relationship officials had forged with management in response to mechanization. Indeed, automation and job loss tended to push the leadership toward more a conservative, bread-and-butter approach

⁵⁶ Weir, “The Retreat of Harry Bridges,” 63; Wellman, *The Union Makes Us Strong*, 83-84.

⁵⁷ Weir, “The ILWU,” 28.

⁵⁸ Weir, “The Retreat of Harry Bridges,” 66.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

to unionism as officials desperately sought to maintain what they saw as a reasonably good position in the face of daunting change. As the labor supply became increasingly redundant the union lost much of its leverage, and was thus drawn to more conservative solutions to its loss in status. These factors help explain why the leadership probably saw an alliance with Alioto and the growth regime as necessary; lacking the power it used to derive from tightly controlling management's access to a vital labor supply, the leadership felt too weak to "go it alone." Thus, bureaucratization was not just the cause of a move toward business unionism; it was also an effect, developed to better contain rank and file unruliness in the face of what some considered selling out.⁶⁰

San Francisco Unions and the Alioto Machine

While Local 10 and other leftist San Francisco locals had long worked closely

⁶⁰ Similar changes took place in other major industrial unions around the same time period. See Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes: The Struggle Against the No Strike Pledge in the UAW During World War II* (New York: Bewick/Ed., 1980); Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992); Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Robert Asher and Ronald Edsforth, eds., *Autowork* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995); Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999); Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (New York: Verso, 1988); Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

with the Democratic Party, they had traditionally forged relationships with politicians with close ties to the labor movement and who held relatively progressive political stances. Alioto, when he suddenly appeared as a mayoral candidate late in the 1967 race, lacked these qualifications; therefore the decision by a majority of organized labor to support his campaign was a controversial one. Originally the San Francisco Labor Council had endorsed Shelley in his bid for reelection. Shelley had a long history of involvement in organized labor, including service as president and secretary of the Labor Council and president of the California State Federation of Labor in the 1930s. He had been strongly backed by labor in his successful 1963 campaign, with Jenkins going so far as to declare, "We elected Shelley."⁶¹ Shelley easily won the two-thirds vote necessary for endorsement by the Labor Council at its convention in September 1967.⁶²

The election took a sudden turn when Shelley unexpectedly announced his resignation on September 8, just two months before election day. While officially Shelley resigned from the race due to health issues, many political insiders believed that the resignation was the consequence of pressure from an organized faction of business interests concerned with Shelley's lack of enthusiastic support for redevelopment. In his account of Alioto's campaign, Hartman presents evidence that key business and political leaders, including Ben Swig, Cyril Magnin, and former mayor Elmer Robinson, met at the Fairmont Hotel several weeks before the resignation to discuss the upcoming election and its prospects for redevelopment. He

⁶¹ Jenkins, "The Union Movement," 222.

⁶² "COPE votes but can't agree," *San Francisco Labor*, October 13, 1967, 1.

points out that Alioto held a press conference announcing his candidacy just one and a half hours after Shelley's resignation, at Ben Swig's Fairmont Hotel. Congressman Philip Burton, leader of the liberal wing of the city's Democratic Party, announced, "Truthfully, it smacks to me like a deal."⁶³ The *Examiner*, in breaking the story, also reported that Alioto, Shelley, and former Mayor Robinson had met in the back room of Shelley's office three days before Shelley's announcement. The *Chronicle* made similar speculations, and noted that Alioto "is considered a much stronger 'downtown' candidate than Shelley."⁶⁴ Indeed, downtown redevelopment would become Alioto's pet issue, the project with which his lengthy mayoral tenure would be most closely associated.⁶⁵

With Shelley now out of the election picture, the ensuing struggles to fill the vacuum caused by his absence led to major divisions within the local labor movement and the left. Many left-wing unionists wanted labor to back County Supervisor Jack Morrison, generally viewed as the most progressive member of the board. The ILWU leadership felt that Morrison had no possibility of defeating either Alioto or Republican opponent Harold Dobbs. Jenkins was candid about the union's calculations at the time: "We had a frankly opportunistic line of staying with a guy who we thought could win, and indeed he did."⁶⁶ Alioto's family also included many longshoremen and ILWU members, a connection that Jenkins said was "not a

⁶³ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 27.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁵ Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*, 187-190.

⁶⁶ Jenkins, "The Union Movement," 233.

negligible factor.”⁶⁷

Most of the city’s powerful unions lined up behind Alioto. In addition to Local 10, Laborers’ Local 261 signed on to mobilize Latino voters in the Mission district. The Building and Construction Trades Council also pledged support and was responsible for raising much of Alioto’s campaign money.⁶⁸

Despite these key supporters, and despite the fact that Alioto received Shelley’s endorsement, Alioto remained a controversial figure within organized labor. Uncharacteristically, at its October 1967 meeting the Labor Council was unable to secure the two-thirds vote needed to officially endorse Alioto. Leftist trade unionists, and the local New Left more generally, opposed Alioto, considering the endorsement a sellout of labor militancy and a symbol of a new alliance between labor and business. Sid Roger, then editor of the ILWU’s bulletin *The Dispatcher*, recalled that the Alioto endorsement was so divisive that it caused the breakup of long standing political alliances and friendships within the union. Jenkins recalled that the Left was “furious,” because Alioto was seen as a “reactionary, and in the most extreme cases, a boss-style politician, and ...we had all sold out for power and money.”⁶⁹

Remaining firm in their support for Alioto, the ILWU and other key unions played a major role in his campaign. Most importantly, they aggressively mobilized their political base to get out the vote. Jenkins, as chairman of the labor committee in support of Alioto, focused on winning over the rank and file of the left unions, and

⁶⁷ Ibid., 232.

⁶⁸ Dick Meister, “Labor Power,” *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, December 23, 1970, 2.

⁶⁹ Jenkins, “The Union Movement,” 273.

using the ILWU's influence in the African American community to mobilize its members in favor of Alioto.⁷⁰

These tactics appeared to pay off handsomely. When Alioto won the election on November 7, he held a victory brunch the next day with representatives from the ILWU, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and other supporting unions. There he declared, and without exaggeration, "The decisive and controlling element in my victory was the support of organized labor."⁷¹

From the start of his term Alioto swore to run an administration "that will first of all be sympathetic to organized labor."⁷² If sympathy is measured by the influence held by labor officials, then Alioto certainly kept his word. Indeed, commentators of all political stripes noted the unprecedented power granted labor leaders in the Alioto administration. As *Guardian* columnist Dick Meister wrote in a lengthy December 23, 1970 article on the "cozy" relationship between labor and city hall, "Never has their influence been so strong; never have they had such easy access to City Hall, and never were they heeded more in the decision making that goes on there."⁷³ Jenkins concurred: "With the Alioto victory we had literally, as far as trade unionists, created a period which had not been seen in the city since 1910....Suddenly, we were in a position to be top dog."⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Jenkins, "The Union Movement," 233.

⁷¹ "Mayor-elect credits labor with key role in victory," *San Francisco Labor*, December 8, 1967, 1.

⁷² Dick Meister, "Labor Power," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, December 23, 1970, 2.

⁷³ Meister, "Labor Power," 2.

⁷⁴ Jenkins, "The Union Movement," 227.

Alioto appointed labor officials to all of the city commissions. Bridges was appointed to the Port Commission, ILWU International Representative Bill Chester was appointed to the BART committee, and Wilbur Hamilton and Joe Mosley were appointed to the redevelopment commission. Jenkins himself, though not officially on the city payroll, was granted a position as a consultant to the redevelopment commission.⁷⁵

Alioto also gained a reputation for supporting unions during strikes, including using his influence to persuade reluctant employers to settle. Jenkins recalled Alioto's support during a longshore strike that lasted from July 1971 to February 1972, when he contributed to the pickets and visited the picket line.⁷⁶ Dick Meister also described an "unwritten agreement" in which police were lenient in dealing with strikers, including situations in which strikers physically blocked scabs.⁷⁷

These favors did not come free, of course. In exchange for his support of organized labor Alioto received a strong, organized political base and a labor leadership that could be counted on to devote its resources to turning out that base at election time. Alioto would also expect organized labor to back his projects, including redevelopment. The Alioto alliance could at times put organized labor in difficult positions, especially as more progressive union leaders struggled to maintain a good relationship with the mayor's office without alienating their political base. According to David Jenkins, Alioto clashed with leftist unions like the ILWU on key issues such

⁷⁵ Ibid., 235.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 216.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 215.

as the Vietnam War, bussing, and the San Francisco State student strike, but Jenkins claimed that they found a way to “agree to disagree.”⁷⁸ When it came to redevelopment, however, despite disapproval amongst the left, especially over the issue of relocation, the ILWU fell in line.

The SoMa Neighborhood and San Francisco’s Urban Working Poor

Redevelopment is not just a story of a shift in the city’s economic base, of the exodus of blue-collar manufacturing and the rise of finance and tourism. It is also the story of how a particular mode of economic development remade parts of the city into places where working-class people could no longer afford to live. This is the ultimate irony of union support for redevelopment. Redevelopment pitted the needs of some portions of the working class for jobs and for union representation against the need of precarious urban workers for affordable housing and a reasonable cost of living; it heightened the conflict between the working class’s needs at the point of production and its needs in the sphere of reproduction. Thus when the ILWU, the Building and Construction Trades Council, and the San Francisco Labor Council got behind Alioto’s growth regime it was working class people, many of them current and former industrial workers, some of them former union members, who they participated in displacing.

The history of the conflict around Yerba Buena Center is the history of a neighborhood that became ground zero in this conflict of interests. The SoMa

⁷⁸Meister, “Labor Power,” 2.

neighborhood, perhaps more than any other in the city, reflects land use patterns that paralleled the rise and fall of the city's industrial working class. Specifically, throughout the century of its existence prior to redevelopment, the neighborhood operated as a home base for the casualties of a mode of development premised on the availability of casual, disposable, and cheap unskilled and skilled labor. In times of high unemployment it functioned as a holding area for homeless, unemployed, and poor men. In times of labor shortage it combined this function with a network of temporary and seasonal employment agencies. In all times it sustained an infrastructure designed to meet the needs of poor men, a network of cheap eateries, rooming houses, and charity centers available for those who lacked access to social services or the resources of kinship structures.

Though initially populated by Gold Rush settlers and Chinese immigrants in the 1850s, the SoMa by the 1860s became the city's first industrial district, its waterfront built up into a manufacturing strip. Between 1870 and the 1906 earthquake the SoMa was a reception area for European immigrants seeking to join the industrial working class. Irish, English, German, and Jewish immigrants came, some as whole families, but many as single workingmen. In addition to factory work they sought and found seasonal agricultural work, work in the shipyards and on merchant ships, and casual day labor across the city. Others used the neighborhood as their base when they returned from temporary work outside the city, in mining and railroad

construction.⁷⁹ Not surprisingly, this influx of immigrant industrial workers shaped the character of the neighborhood, making it into the center of the city's working-class political cultures and of ethnic social life. The Workingmen's Party and the Industrial Workers of the World were both headquartered in the SoMa during the late 19th century, and the neighborhood was filled with immigrant social centers and saloons.⁸⁰ By the turn of the century 62,000 people lived in the area between Embarcadero, Market, Eleventh, and Bryant.⁸¹

Like most of San Francisco, the SoMa was transformed by the 1906 earthquake. Heavy industry moved out of the area, relocating to either the Bayshore neighborhood near Hunters Point or to the East Bay. Light industry, warehousing, and wholesaling moved in. Families moved south to the Mission district, and as they left single family homes were remodeled into apartment buildings and residential hotels, designed for single, more transient residents. By World War I, the area had become a neighborhood of hotels, lodging houses, saloons, movie theaters, second hand stores, and cheap cafeterias.⁸² Two main strips, on Third Street and Howard Street, were lined with employment agencies and sidewalk blackboards advertising work opportunities.⁸³

It is not an exaggeration to say that the people, mostly men, who moved

⁷⁹ San Francisco Department of City Planning, "SoMa Rezoning Study," San Francisco: San Francisco Department of City Planning, March 1985, 3-4.

⁸⁰ Alvin Averbach, "San Francisco's South of Market District, 1850-1950: The Emergence of a Skid Row," *California Historical Quarterly*, 52:3 (1973), 200-201.

⁸¹ San Francisco Department of City Planning, "SoMa Rezoning Study," 4.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸³ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 58.

through the area in the first half of the twentieth century were the workers who built the infrastructure of the urban West. Alvin Averbach argues that the neighborhood's primary economic function was to harbor an industrial reserve army of laborers that could be called upon on short notice.⁸⁴ These workers provided a flexible, low-wage, and utterly disposable work force for the ambitious industrialists of the era who sought to develop California's infrastructure at a rapid pace. They hired men from the SoMa to build the highways and railroads, ships, and post-earthquake cityscape that would facilitate the transportation of commodities and people, and pave the way for western urbanization. These men were called upon to do dangerous, physically demanding work. They were employed until their bodies wore out, and then discarded. The SoMa became their home after they were no longer physically able to work. Hartman writes:

Capitalist development as it occurred in California and other western states used men up....Exposure to the elements in rural jobs, the hazards of mining, logging, and construction work, lack of medical attention, insufficient diet....They wore out early, with little provision by society for premature old age and premature retirement.⁸⁵

Up until WWII these transient laborers fit the profile of those popularly known as "hoboes": single men who were unattached to families and traveled to find temporary and casual work. When working in rural areas they did the physical labor involved in building mines, railroads, highways, and oil fields, and also followed the harvests of various crops such as grain, corn, and cotton. In cities, they were the unskilled laborers who helped build industrial plants and street railroads, pave streets, lay pipes,

⁸⁴Averbach, "San Francisco's South of Market District," 206.

⁸⁵Hartman, *City For Sale*, 59.

and construct new buildings.⁸⁶

These workers were highly precarious, since they had no job security and were the first fired during slump periods. When work was plentiful they would come to the city to sign up at employment agencies, which would then send them out to labor sites. These fluctuations were seasonal as well: employers tended to lay off portions of their unskilled workforce during the winter months, leading unemployed workers to travel back to neighborhoods like the SoMa to wait for work in the spring.⁸⁷ During the Great Depression these workers became unemployed in large numbers, and the SoMa became a real skid row where the city's homeless and unemployed gathered to drink and panhandle. The stretch of Howard Street between Third and Fourth Streets was referred to by some as the "slave market" because of the miserable wages and conditions being offered by the employment agencies that still remained on the block.⁸⁸

During World War II San Francisco soared to a booming war economy, and unemployment shrank with the sudden demand for workers in the shipyards and factories. A mobile population of seamen, soldiers, and sailors made the SoMa their home base. Residential hotels and boarding houses popped up to house them, and would remain in the postwar era. Between 1940 and 1950 the neighborhood's population increased by 37%, mostly due to an influx of men between the ages of 18

⁸⁶ Paul Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 134.

⁸⁷ Groth, *Living Downtown*, 135.

⁸⁸ Averbach, "San Francisco's South of Market District," 206.

and 24.⁸⁹ Indeed, single men were 72% of the population in 1950.⁹⁰ World War II also transformed the SoMa's racial composition, as African Americans and some Asian Americans and Latinos migrated to the city to work in war production.⁹¹ In 1950 the area's African American population was nine times larger than it had been before the war.⁹²

The racial and gender composition of the neighborhood was largely white and male, and would remain so up to the time of the anti-eviction movement in 1969. There were several reasons for this. First, the vast majority of transient casual laborers during the first half of the twentieth century were male. Paul Gorth writes that in the 1930s, at the peak of the "hobo" lifestyle, only one in ten migrant workers were women. Because of their responsibilities caring for parents, children, and other family members, women tended to be more tied to sedentary households than men, and faced more obstacles on the road in terms of sexual violence and gender discrimination.⁹³ The racial composition of the SoMa neighborhood was more a result of patterns of residential segregation, for non-white single men were certainly part of the casual labor force. As Gorth notes in 1880 a quarter of San Francisco's unskilled laborers were Chinese men, who were no longer being sent out to work on railroads or work in the fields. However, they were restricted to clustering in rooming houses

⁸⁹ Ibid., 215.

⁹⁰ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 59.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Averbach, "San Francisco's South of Market District," 215.

⁹³ Groth, *Living Downtown*, 138.

in Chinatown due to housing discrimination.⁹⁴ Similarly, up until World War II African American casual laborers experienced widespread discrimination in downtown hotels, and instead tended to live in cheap hotels in the Fillmore and Western Addition. In 1925, a Black carpenter complained to authorities that he could not find a lodging house in downtown San Francisco because cheap hotels had drawn the “color line.”⁹⁵

In the two decades after World War II and before redevelopment began decimating the neighborhood in the mid-60s, the SoMa continued to sustain a fragile but extensive network of institutions and services specifically designed to meet the needs of a poor, precariously employed single male population. Residential hotels continued to operate and became home to the influx of returning servicemen and merchant marines after the war’s end. Statistics suggest that the SoMa’s residential population was still growing: between 1950 and 1960 over 9,000 living units were created there.⁹⁶

The population remained low income, with higher than average rates of poverty and unemployment. In 1950 20% of residents were unemployed, and 29% were not counted as part of the labor force, a statistic that included seasonal workers, the retired, and the disabled. The neighborhood’s earnings were estimated at less than

⁹⁴ Ibid., 137. For a discussion of housing discrimination in San Francisco’s Chinatown, see Victor Nee, *Longtime Californ’: A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1973).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Averbach, “San Francisco’s South of Market District,” 215.

half of the city's median income.⁹⁷

Perhaps the most significant change in the neighborhood's character in the two decades after World War II came in the form of the increase in elderly, retired pensioners residing there. As the young men who built the infrastructure of California's cities and fought overseas aged, they came back to the SoMa to retire and live out the rest of their days. These men included former longshoremen, ILWU members living on their small pensions in cheap residential hotels. It seems likely that some of them were the casualties of mechanization in the maritime industry, those men affected by the M and M Agreement, who were laid off throughout the 1950s and 60s.

For men like these, the SoMa's infrastructure had to serve as a substitute for both the family support they lacked and the social services to which, as single men employed in casual, temporary labor, they were denied access. Indeed, the existence of an entire neighborhood designed for the living habits of single people sheds light on the way that patterns of economic development in the first half of the twentieth century shaped family structures for migrant workers, and on the failure of the welfare state to support poor people without families. In many ways these men, like agricultural and domestic workers, fell through the cracks of the New Deal redistributive state.

The transient nature of the casual labor market, especially during the Great Depression, was the largest contributing factor to the formation of such a sizeable

⁹⁷ Ibid., 217.

population of aging single men in postwar cities. As Stephanie Coontz has documented, marriage and fertility rates decreased during the Great Depression, when extreme economic insecurity led many young people to delay or give up on forming families altogether.⁹⁸ Contributing to this disruption was the exponential growth in migrant labor. A generation of young men who participated in the “hobo” way of life either forfeited marriage and parenthood permanently or left their existing families in order to find work. As Paul Gorth notes, employers sought out single men for casual work precisely because they were a cheaper, more flexible workforce: “The single, more atomized residents of cheap hotels could adjust more easily than family-tied workers to the whimsy of economic demand for a risky new business or a sudden big contract.”⁹⁹

By 1960 these men were elderly, and many of them were disabled due to work-related injuries. Although not technically excluded from public housing, in practice they could not afford the rental prices of apartments in public housing projects sized for families with multiple children. Nor did they have ties to family members with whom they could live; or if they did have such ties, they may have been reluctant to give up the freedoms they had cultivated throughout decades of independent living. Furthermore, as casual laborers most men did not have the record of consistent, full-time employment required to qualify for Unemployment Insurance. Like the nation’s largely non-white population of agricultural and domestic workers,

⁹⁸ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

⁹⁹ Gorth, *Living Downtown*, 163.

transient and part-time laborers had been excluded from the ranks of the eligible when the Social Security Act was written in 1935.¹⁰⁰

By the mid-1960s, when San Franciscans began debating the pros and cons of renewal and relocation, an aging population of poor men had made the neighborhood their home. The area that would be displaced by the Yerba Buena Center contained about 4,000 people. According to Redevelopment Agency surveys 75 percent of these people were over age 45, and 94 percent were men.¹⁰¹ The area had smaller households than any other in the city, with an average of 1.53 persons per household, a reflection of the high proportion of single residency units in the neighborhood.¹⁰² Within the area designated by census data as the “Central City”—a slightly larger designation that included both the SoMa and the neighboring Tenderloin district—29 percent of persons over 65 received Old Age Security (OAS), or Social Security, in 1970, suggesting that nearly a third of the area’s elderly people lived on small fixed incomes.¹⁰³ In 1970 nearly 50% of residents had an annual income of less than \$1,632, and therefore a monthly rental capacity of no more than

¹⁰⁰ Jill Quadagno, *The Transformation of Old Age Security: Class and Politics in the American Welfare State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy From Colonial Times to the Present* (Boston: South End Press, 1996); Mimi Abramovitz, *Under Attack, Fighting Back: Women and Welfare in the United States* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

¹⁰¹ Hartman, *Yerba Buena*.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Economic Opportunity Council District Population Statistics and Poverty Indicators from the 1970 Census and Other Sources.*

\$34.¹⁰⁴ Nearly 90 percent of residents were white.¹⁰⁵

Although developers and Yerba Buena Center supporters in 1965 were quick to characterize the SoMa as a slum, this brief history suggests a more complicated picture. As journalist Catherine Hoover noted in her 1979 introduction to *No Vacancy*, the area served a vital function for its resident population of poor, aging single men:

It was a semi-stable, low rent district of the kind which is becoming increasingly rare....Far from being the crumbling and derelict area that it was frequently made out to be, the South-of-Market possessed its own social and economic fabric, its own rich vitality which supported the people who lived there.¹⁰⁶

Some of the area's long-term residents attempted to describe to journalists what they liked about their home. William Colvin, a retired painting contractor who had lived at the Albany Hotel on Third Street for eight years, told the *Examiner*:

Most people don't understand, but let me tell you something. A man can enjoy freedom here. All of us have many friends... If you're ill, or hungry, your neighbors help... We have something that couldn't be replaced with all the money our federal government could put in here. We like it the way it is.¹⁰⁷

He described advantages specific to the geography of the area, including the mild weather and the flat streets, which made walking easier for the elderly and

¹⁰⁴ Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Findings and Determinations," Office of the Regional Administrator, Region VI – Reloc. No. Calif. R-59, August 25, 1970, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Hartman, *Yerba Buena*.

¹⁰⁶ Catherine Hoover in Nowinski, *No Vacancy*, vii.

¹⁰⁷ Will Stevens, "South of Market Turmoil: Rumors and Redevelopment," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 15, 1965.

disabled.¹⁰⁸

When interviewed by a photographer in 1979 as the relocation struggle was winding down, Pete Mendelsohn, a former seaman who became active in TOOR, recounted daily life in the neighborhood's residential hotels in the 1960s:

People spent their days sitting, dreaming, who knows what....They always lived in the same hotel, though, because you like to live with your buddies....Drinking, talking, gossiping, playing cards or dominoes, the people had a sense of the neighborhood as their home.¹⁰⁹

Mendelsohn was another example of a union man who had settled in the area after being forced into an early retirement. A waiter on the Matson Lines ships and ship's steward during the war, he had been a member of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union. After falling on board ship at the age of 43, he was permanently injured and forced to quit. He lived on a \$280 monthly disability check.¹¹⁰

For men like Colvin and Mendelsohn, urban renewal began undermining a way of life even before construction began on the Yerba Buena Center. By the late 1960s the character of downtown was changing as land prices rose, pushing many of the cheap local businesses out of the area. A reporter covering the Yerba Buena Center conflict in 1969 noted that residents had been finding it more and more difficult to live in the area because so many grocery stores and saloons were being torn down. The laundry where many men took their clothes had recently been closed and boarded up. He described the area as a neighborhood of "shuttered shops and

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Patrick Mendelsohn, "Afterword," in Nowinski, *No Vacancy*, 47.

¹¹⁰ Mendelsohn, "Afterword," 47.

vacant lots hemmed in by fences of woven wire and redwood slats.”¹¹¹

It is certainly ironic that organized labor played a supporting role in the destruction of this historic working-class neighborhood and way of life. The political alliances of the labor leadership took precedence over the needs of former members for a decent and affordable quality of life. Indeed, the retirees of the Soma were living proof of the fact that a life of hard work did not necessarily guarantee someone the ability to afford to live decently. Casualties of years of physical and economic exploitation, they now found themselves at the mercy of a political and economic establishment that did not seem to value their contributions. The labor movement’s abandonment of the men whose history and legacy it regularly evoked, who it claimed to represent, suggests just how deep the contradictions of blue-collar working-class survival in postwar San Francisco had become.

Yerba Buena Center

The Yerba Buena Center project, which would soon become a lightning rod for all of the controversies and contentions surrounding downtown redevelopment, began its long journey to construction in 1953, when the idea of a hotel and entertainment complex in the South of Market area was proposed by hotel executive Ben Swig. At Swig’s urging, the Board of Supervisors began exploring the possibility of using federal urban renewal funds for the project. For the rest of the decade, backers in City Hall and business leaders such as Swig and members of the Blyth-

¹¹¹John Jordan, “Harder to Live South of Market,” *San Francisco Progress*, November 19, 1969.

Zellerbach Committee consolidated political and financial support for the project, commissioning studies and building political alliances. The nature of the project began to take shape: they envisioned a major complex complete with modern convention facilities, shops, corporate headquarters buildings, hotels, and parking garage. In 1961 the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency took its first formal step toward securing the project by applying for a planning grant from the U.S. Housing and Home Finance Agency. The grant was approved, and in 1964 the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency officially announced its plan to build the Yerba Buena Center over 87 acres in the South of Market area. In June 1965 the agency received \$19.6 million from the Housing and Home Finance Agency for the project.¹¹²

Yerba Buena Center backers likely thought that at that point in 1965 the most difficult hurdles had been overcome, but they were mistaken. The project would quickly become bogged down in political conflicts, financing difficulties, and legal battles, and its construction would be delayed multiple times throughout the 1970s. The nature of the project changed a number of times, at one point expanding to include a sports arena, and ultimately shrinking in scale and taking on the title of Yerba Buena Gardens. The centerpiece of the original project, the convention and exhibition center, would not be completed until 1981, when it was named the

¹¹² Chester Hartman, a scholar and activist who later wrote the scholarly work *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco*, participated in the anti-relocation struggle and meticulously documented meetings, legal battles, and actions. He conducted in-depth research into San Francisco's redevelopment projects and collected these in a document published by Glide Church while the struggle was still ongoing. Chester Hartman, *Yerba Buena: Land Grab and Community Resistance in San Francisco* (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1974), 23.

Moscone Center in honor of the recently assassinated mayor George Moscone.¹¹³

After receiving federal financing in June 1965, the coalition behind the Yerba Buena Center began preparing the area for eventual construction. This preparation meant beginning the inevitably slow and contentious process of “slum clearance” as soon as possible. In July 1965 the Redevelopment Agency produced and distributed a pamphlet entitled *For Residents of Yerba Buena Center*. The pamphlet described the project in glowing terms and presented relocation as a lucky opportunity for residents. “Yerba Buena Center is an opportunity for people who are in poor housing to move into good housing and for San Francisco to build a dramatic commercial, industrial, and entertainment complex,” the text declared. “To get rid of unhealthy and unsafe living conditions, Yerba Buena Center will require tearing down of many substandard hotels and residences.”¹¹⁴

If the pamphlet served as a gentle warning, the Redevelopment Agency’s next steps increased the pressure on residents. In 1967 the agency began purchasing hotels and buildings in the area, demolishing as many as possible. In order to speed up the process the agency took over the management of residential hotels, deliberately neglecting health and safety standards in an effort to force tenants out. Mendelsohn recalled a campaign of deliberate harassment that could escalate into physical confrontations: “They started forcing us out, kicking us out at night and kicking doors

¹¹³ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 191.

¹¹⁴ San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, “For residents of Yerba Buena Center: Questions and Answers,” San Francisco: San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, July 15, 1965.

in.”¹¹⁵

Despite the increasingly harsh conditions in their neighborhood, many residents were wary of the agency’s promises about relocation. The Redevelopment Agency’s relocation plan, approved by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1966, provided for only 176 units of new housing to be built for displaced residents. In addition, the Redevelopment Agency had a less than outstanding track record when it came to relocating those displaced by redevelopment. A review of relocation outcomes in the Western Addition by the U.S. Comptroller General found that the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency’s own data was misleading: when examining agency files listed as “satisfactorily closed” the review found that nearly half had either moved to unsatisfactory housing or had been forced to accept major rent increases.¹¹⁶

SoMa residents also knew that the type of housing they needed was scarce in San Francisco. As single individuals with limited mobility and meager resources, they could only afford small furnished apartments, and they required easy access and proximity to stores and restaurants. A resolution opposing the demolition of low-rent residential hotels, passed by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission in January 1971, pointed out that a recent vacancy study by the City Planning Department found virtually no vacancies in the private market for under \$100 a month, and added that the lack of low-rent dwellings for single individuals had led the service organization Self-Help for the Aging to declare San Francisco a disaster area in housing for older

¹¹⁵ Mendelsohn, “Afterword,” *No Vacancy*, 48.

¹¹⁶ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 64.

people.¹¹⁷ Additionally, over 50 percent of area residents could afford to pay no more than \$34 in monthly rent.¹¹⁸ Indeed, as relocation began in 1969, residents learned that their former neighbors were paying much higher rents in their new apartments. The National Housing Law Project found that rent increases for those displaced between December 1969 and December 1972 averaged thirty-six dollars per month – in many cases more than double their previous rent.¹¹⁹

As a result of their anger about displacement and their fears about relocation, tenants began to organize. They began meeting at the Milner Hotel in July of 1969, and formed the organization Tenants and Owners in Opposition to Redevelopment (TOOR). They elected as their president 80-year-old retired ILWU member George Woolf. A longtime labor activist and former president of the Seattle-based Alaska Cannery Workers Union, an ILWU local, Woolf could boast of a long life of union involvement. He proudly recounted how his front teeth had been knocked out during the San Francisco General Strike of 1934. Although he was quite sick and had limited mobility, Woolf threw himself into tenant organizing. He spearheaded the monthly meetings at the Milner Hotel in the summer and fall of 1969, which were attended by between 50 and 60 elderly tenants and lawyers from Neighborhood Legal Assistance,

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Commission, “Resolution on the Planned Demolition of the Anna Lane Hotel,” January 28, 1971, Yerba Buena Center vertical file, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

¹¹⁸ “Findings and Determinations,” 8.

¹¹⁹ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 65.

a legal aid organization.¹²⁰

On November 5, 1969 Tenants and Owners in Opposition to Redevelopment (TOOR) filed a motion for a federal injunction against HUD and the Redevelopment Agency, alleging that they were being deprived of decent relocation housing. George Woolf spoke in court:

Where do they want us to go? The City has a vacancy rate of zero for low rent rooms, over 5,000 are on the waiting list for public housing, Chinatown has the second highest population density in the country, and half of the hotels checked by the Department of Public Works are substandard. Rents have risen all over the city and many of us with Social Security or pensions are left with almost nothing.¹²¹

TOOR's lawyer Sidney Wolinsky, director of litigation for Neighborhood Legal Assistance, further stated that the Yerba Buena plan "clearly shows the Redevelopment Agency's willingness to sacrifice the interests of San Francisco and its citizens to make a very few corporations millions of dollars richer."¹²²

On December 19, 1969 federal judge Stanley Weigl sided with the plaintiffs and issued a restraining order against the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, halting all relocation and demolition until an adequate relocation plan could be developed.¹²³ In April 1970 Weigl went a step further, issuing an injunction against Yerba Buena Center and threatening to cut off all federal funding if the

¹²⁰ Mendelsohn, "Afterword," *No Vacancy*, 48; Jordan, "Harder to Live South of Market," 1; Carol Kroot, "George Woolf, 1889 – 1972," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, July 5, 1972.

¹²¹ "South of Market People Try to Stop Redevelopment," *Sun Reporter*, November 15, 1969.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ "South of Market Plan Stopped," *Sun Reporter*, December 20, 1969.

Redevelopment Agency did not adequately revise its plan.¹²⁴

Tenants and Owners in Opposition to Redevelopment's goal was not to permanently block the construction of the Yerba Buena Center, an achievement the group deemed unrealistic. According to Chester Hartman, tenants focused on securing what they called "decent relocation." This meant, first and foremost, a relocation plan that would find them housing in the same general neighborhood, so they could maintain access to familiar networks and a sense of community. They also demanded affordable relocation rents, to be achieved in part through the construction of subsidized low-income housing. In the meantime tenants sought an end to harassment by Redevelopment Agency management in the residential hotels and an improvement in health and safety conditions in the hotels.¹²⁵

The battle in the courts dragged on. In August 1970 the Department of Housing and Urban Development submitted a finding that the Redevelopment Agency's relocation plan was feasible and affordable.¹²⁶ In November 1970 the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency submitted a revised relocation plan, which committed the agency to building or rehabilitating 1,500–1,800 units of low rent housing anywhere in the city by November 1973. As a result Judge Weigl lifted the injunction on November 9, and relocation and demolition began anew. Six months later a second wave of legal battles began. In June 1971 TOOR again filed a preliminary injunction, citing the Redevelopment Agency's lack of progress in

¹²⁴ Hartman, *Yerba Buena*, 24.

¹²⁵ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 71.

¹²⁶ "Findings and Determinations," 14.

building the promised low-income housing. In January 1972 new parties entered the fray: industrialist and conservationist Alvin Duskin, in coordination with TOOR, brought suit against Yerba Buena Center in state court for its failure to comply with the National Environmental Quality Act, and the Sierra Club filed a federal suit for the same reason.¹²⁷

Although the Ninth Circuit Court dismissed the Sierra Club suit on March 28, 1973, and Owners in Opposition to Redevelopment and Duskin continued to press their cases against Yerba Buena Center into 1973. Fearing more years of delays, Alioto convened settlement discussions with TOOR and the Redevelopment Agency in January 1973. An agreement was finally signed in May 1973, in which, in exchange for TOOR dropping its suit, the Redevelopment Agency committed to developing 400 low-rent housing units on four sites within the Yerba Buena project area, on top of the 1,500 units to which it had already committed. The construction of the units was to be overseen by a newly created nonprofit development corporation staffed by the tenants—Tenants and Owners Development Corporation (TODCO).¹²⁸

The Tenants and Owners Development Corporation succeeded in building the housing units and relocating some of the original SoMa tenants. The first construction was called Woolf House in honor of TOOR's founder, who had passed away in June 1972, in the midst of the tenant struggle. Construction began in January 1978 and the building, a nine-story structure with 112 units, opened in January 1978. As Pete

¹²⁷ Hartman, *Yerba Buena*, 24-25.

¹²⁸ Donald Cantor, "Yerba Buena Foes Offer Compromise," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 14, 1975.

Mendelsohn noted in his oral history, published as an afterword in Ira Nowalski's 1979 book of photographs of SoMa residents, the victory was bittersweet: "Not many people involved in the struggle are going to move into Woolf House—most are dead." There were some exceptions, however: "George Hasselbeck is 98 years old—he's going to move into Woolf House. Of course, he needs furniture."¹²⁹

Unions and Yerba Buena

Organized labor, which had remained silent about the Yerba Buena project when it was first announced in 1965, eventually rallied to the Yerba Buena project under the slogan of "jobs creation." From the project's initiation, backers had found the jobs issue to be an effective propaganda technique to promote the project to the public. They constantly referenced the number of jobs that would be created by the Yerba Buena Center, no matter how flimsy and exaggerated the calculations. The mantra of 30,000 jobs was repeated in much of the press, and became the alleged basis for the labor movement's support. However, the numbers could be deceptive, and in fact when disaggregated suggest that the propaganda was inflated. The numbers also suggest that the kind of jobs that Yerba Buena Center would create would provide minimal benefit to the city's blue-collar working class, the rank and file of organized labor—with the exception of the Building and Construction Trades Council and the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union.

As *Chronicle* reporter Dick Nolan pointed out in an April 14, 1975 piece, the

¹²⁹ Mendelsohn, "Afterword," in Nowinski, *No Vacancy*, 48.

vast majority of the alleged “30,000 jobs” would go to white-collar office workers, most of whom would be suburban commuters, not residents of San Francisco.¹³⁰

According to the calculations in the Labor Council’s own documents (based on possibly inflated estimates made by the Redevelopment Agency and the Del Monte Corporation), of a projected 25,000 jobs, 3,000 would be at the Del Monte Headquarters building, 2,000 at the Taylor Woodrow office building, and 8,700 would be spread among other office buildings. The projections list only 120 jobs created by the complex’s supposed centerpiece, the convention and exhibition hall, forty in the sports arena, and 140 in the parking garage.¹³¹

In 1973 an independent report by Arthur D. Little refuted the numbers being touted by the Redevelopment Agency and the Labor Council. The Little report estimated that only 3,600 permanent jobs would be created directly by the project, and 5,100 indirectly, many of which would, however, be located outside of San Francisco. The report estimated that only 400 jobs would be created in the project’s two main facilities, the exhibit hall and sports arena, and that over 90% of all employment in the YBC would be in the center’s office buildings. An estimated ninety percent of these office jobs would go to commuters.¹³²

Jobs added must also be weighed against jobs lost. In 1963 723 businesses and

¹³⁰ Dick Nolan, “Sending in the Muscle,” *San Francisco Examiner*, April 14, 1975.

¹³¹ “Estimated Employment Potential,” Yerba Buena Center folder, box 14, San Francisco Labor Council Papers, San Francisco Labor Archives, San Francisco State University.

¹³² Arthur D. Little and Company, *Yerba Buena Center Public Facilities and Private Development: Environmental Impact Report*, (San Francisco: Arthur D. Little and Company, May 1973).

7,600 jobs had been located on the proposed site of the Yerba Buena Center project. These jobs were mostly either traditional blue-collar jobs or small businesses. The majority was skilled and unskilled work in light manufacturing, printing, and warehousing—the kinds of jobs that David Jenkins had noted were leaving the city in large numbers. The average age of businesses in the area was twenty years. A 1972 Department of Housing and Urban Development study of business relocation in the area showed that the highest proportion of displaced businesses that ended up relocating outside the city were indeed in the manufacturing sector, and that 95 percent of all displaced mom-and-pop stores went out of business.¹³³

Thus it doesn't make sense to see the Labor Council's support for the Yerba Buena Center as purely an issue of job creation. With the exception of the locals affiliated with the Building and Construction Trades Council, no unions stood to significantly gain employment for its members from the project, and instead the project seemed primarily to advance the pattern of industrial flight that the Labor Council had fought to oppose. Rather, support for the Yerba Buena Center must be viewed as in large part a political calculation on the part of organized labor. Blue-collar unions initially opposed redevelopment because it accelerated the flight of industry from San Francisco; but once they saw the process as a done deal, they removed their opposition, in spite of the displacement issues being raised by residents. Jenkins recalled, "We fought the Yerba Buena project as long as we had a primary interest and that is we had a lot of union shops down there....But as we got

¹³³ Hartman, *Yerba Buena*, 178.

priced out and driven out of that area, the reason for the opposition disappeared....We weren't co-opted; we helped."¹³⁴

After all, opposition to the Yerba Buena project would be politically costly for organized labor. The support of the Alioto machine required the labor movement's support for redevelopment, which was the centerpiece of Alioto's mayoral tenure. Since organized labor, even its progressive wing, had made the political decision to hitch its wagon to City Hall, its hands were essentially tied on the matter. With the Building and Construction Trades Council in particular pressuring the Labor Council to back the project, it was probably only a matter of time before the Labor Council would do so.

In fact, the Labor Council took its time in declaring its support. Initially some members, including Secretary-Treasurer George Johns, expressed concern over the issue of relocation, which tenants had begun publicizing in 1965.¹³⁵ However, after tenants successfully filed for a federal injunction against the Yerba Buena Center, pressure mounted for the Council to join a united front working to push through the project. On September 1, 1970 the Labor Council's seventeen-member executive committee voted unanimously to endorse the project.¹³⁶ On September 15 the Building and Construction Trades Council and the Labor Council both adopted a resolution stating their intention to seek legal recourse to lift the injunction, citing their duty "on behalf of the interests of working men and women and citizens at large

¹³⁴ Jenkins, "The Union Movement," 238.

¹³⁵ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 32-33.

¹³⁶ "Labor Urges Immediate Start on Yerba Buena Project," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 17, 1970.

of the City and County of San Francisco.”¹³⁷ At the same time the Labor Council also submitted an *amicus curiae* brief in support of the defendants’ motion for an order dissolving the preliminary injunction. In his deposition president John Crowley read a lengthy statement discussing the reasons why the council felt confident in backing the project. First and foremost in this reasoning, of course, was the issue of job creation.

The brief stated:

The delay in the undertaking of the Yerba Buena Center Development is costing thousands of building trade jobs and thousands of continuing jobs, many of a service nature, providing employment to many unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled minority persons. A resumption of activity in the project would do much to relieve this problem, in both the present and the future.¹³⁸

The Council also asserted its confidence in the ability of the SFRA to manage relocation successfully. In a September 16, 1970 resolution it stated:

The U.S. Government has made its own independent study and found that the adequacies of relocation resources, pursuant to law, are more than amply demonstrated... over and above the rehousing requirements, the social, medical, psychological and economic needs were being faithfully attended to, prior to the preliminary injunction, by the service programs of the Redevelopment Agency for the persons resident in Yerba Buena Center.¹³⁹

Thus, key organizations within the labor movement threw in its lot with the growth regime, despite the fact that tenants had presented compelling evidence of the inadequacies of the existing relocation program.

¹³⁷ “Labor Council Resolution,” Yerba Buena Center folder, box 14, 1988/003, San Francisco Labor Council Papers, Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University.

¹³⁸ “Labor Council Resolution.”

¹³⁹ “Labor Council Resolution.”

These labor organizations continued to support the Yerba Buena project after the Redevelopment Agency and TOOR reached their May 1973 settlement. In 1975 the city's unions united to demand that Alvin Duskin withdraw his lawsuit, making headlines with a rally and march for Yerba Buena Center jobs. The Building and Construction Trades Council and the Redevelopment Agency organized an April 17 demonstration, in which 1,500 construction workers and other union members marched on the Alcoa building, headquarters of Yerba Buena Center opponent William Brinton.¹⁴⁰ David Jenkins recalled the crowd marching and yelling "Tear up your lawsuits. Let the people get to work in this city."¹⁴¹ The union members circled the block with picket signs stating "We Need Jobs Now" and "Build Yerba Buena Now." A four-man delegation led by BCTC president Joseph O'Sullivan delivered a letter to Brinton telling him to "get off our backs." Laborers' Union leader George Evankovich spoke at a rally outside the building, proclaiming that labor's rights are "trampled on when a handful of activists can shut down a project that has the approval of every city agency."¹⁴²

Conclusion

The rhetoric deployed at the demonstration shows how labor leaders and union members aggressively identified themselves as the true embodiments of the working class. In his speech Evankovich contrasted the presumably broad working-

¹⁴⁰ Jackson Rannells, "Yerba's Friends Gather," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 18, 1975.

¹⁴¹ Jenkins, "The Union Movement," 240.

¹⁴² "Yerba's Friends Gather."

class desire for jobs with a shadowy and marginal “handful of activists” pushing a special interest. It is significant that in the struggle over Yerba Buena jobs came to stand in for the needs of the working class as a whole, even though in reality the situation was far more complex. First, we know that the jobs created by the Yerba Buena Center would not substantially change the fate of the city’s blue-collar sectors, and indeed that the number of blue-collar jobs created would be far less than the official rhetoric. We also know that even those jobs were not generally available to precarious sectors of the city’s working class, including African American youth and poor single mothers. Additionally, the struggles of retired workers such as Woolf and Mendelsohn underscore the fact that working-class needs and interests cannot be reduced to the issue of jobs. The interests of tenant activists were also working-class interests: the need for affordable and decent housing, access to healthy food, community, recreation, and safe neighborhoods. Labor organizations such as the ILWU, the San Francisco Labor Council, and the Building and Construction Trades Council, through the rhetoric of jobs, was able to narrow the frame of working-class struggle in order to re-cast TOOR as a special interest group whose demands were not just marginal to, but in conflict with, those of “real” workers. Such rhetoric made it easier for these labor groups to hide from view the series of compromises and betrayals inherent in its support for the Yerba Buena Center deal.

The case of the ILWU and Yerba Buena also points to the ways in which patterns of postwar economic development heightened these divisions. As San Francisco’s city officials invested in new growth sectors, they sought a different kind

of city, one less reliant on manufacturing and the political power of blue-collar unions. As progressive unions like the ILWU lost ground politically, they gave in to political pressure and hitched their wagons to the growth regime. In doing so, however, they cemented the transformation of San Francisco into a city whose land values made working-class existence increasingly unaffordable. For blue-collar union members living in San Francisco's commuter suburbs, the effects of this transformation were minimal. But for the city's poorest, most marginal residents, they were nothing short of devastating.

Chapter Five:

Contesting Sexual Labor in the Post-Industrial City: Prostitution, Policing, and Sex

Worker Organizing in the Tenderloin

Introduction

“There is no arrest pattern more ritualized and superficial, nor any more apparently ineffectual.”¹ So noted the San Francisco Committee on Crime in its 1971 report on street sex worker arrests, commissioned by the mayor’s office. The committee went on to describe typical arrest practices and their close relationship to the cycles of local politics: “On a given night, police may bear off to the Hall of Justice as many as sixty girls, most of whom are back on the street the next night. In an election year political pressures drive the whole operation into high gear.”²

If, as so many observers asserted, arrests of sex workers were overwhelmingly ineffectual, why did the police department and politicians in the 1960s and 70s devote valuable time and resources to policing them? And why did prostitution arrests in San Francisco increase so dramatically throughout the 1960s, from 330 in 1960 to 3,221 in 1969?³ The answer is related to prostitution’s ambiguous position within the city’s postwar economic and spatial regimes. As the city’s economic base became increasingly dependent on investment in the tourism and finance sectors, a host of

¹ The San Francisco Committee on Crime, *A Report on Non-Victim Crime in San Francisco* (San Francisco: The Committee on Crime, 1971), 16.

² *Ibid.*

³ Researchers estimated that the number of prostitutes also rose throughout the decade, but that the increase in arrests was largely due to changes in policing. *Ibid.*

economic and political tensions played themselves out in the spaces of downtown. Among these was the role of visible street sex work in the new post-industrial economy. City officials could not entirely fail to police prostitution, because the same economic dynamics that ensured the vitality of the market for sexual services were also potentially threatened by its visibility. While sex work proliferated in the 1960s due to the growing customer base in the downtown tourist district, it simultaneously threatened to undermine the tourist industry when it became too visible. Downtown hotels tolerated prostitution occurring in and around their premises because their customers actively sought it out, but such practices could also create scandals if they became too visible.⁴ And because significant portions of the voting public opposed visible prostitution, politicians could get drawn in to policing campaigns. Hence policing practices tended to attempt to balance these opposing tendencies, relying on ineffectual individual arrests and periodic sweeps to boost arrest statistics and prevent sex workers from becoming what was seen as exceedingly visible in sensitive areas.

In other words, while arrests could not and were not designed to eliminate prostitution, they could, when undertaken strategically, help determine the places where prostitution was most likely to occur. They could also provide enough economic and legal consequences to keep the number of sex workers lower than it would have been otherwise. Thus, the city government relied upon its policing apparatus to manage the economic and political conflicts raised by street sex work, regulating both its location in the micro-geography of downtown neighborhoods, and

⁴ Helen Reynolds, *The Economics of Prostitution* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Press, 1986), 37.

the size of the visible sex worker population. Sex workers became the pawns in this regulatory regime, their risk of arrest and harassment indexed to the ever-fluctuating political calculations of politicians and police department officials.

This chapter begins by placing the regulation of sex work in San Francisco in the 1960s and 70s in historical context, showing how, since the 19th century, local government relied on legal and policing techniques to manage the position of sex work in changing economic-spatial regimes. I trace a shift from brothel-based sex work located near centers of industrial production to street- and hotel-based sex work located near the city's tourism and finance districts. The former predominated in the industrial city of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century; the latter predominated in the de-industrializing city of the 1960s. I describe how street prostitution came to be concentrated by 1960 in a downtown neighborhood called the Tenderloin, what had become by the postwar era the city's main vice district. I tie the consolidation of prostitution in the area to the history of crackdowns on prostitution in other neighborhoods in the first half of the twentieth century, the geographical effects of urban renewal and redevelopment processes in the 1950s, and the migration to San Francisco of homeless queer youth and women in the late 1960s. On a larger scale, I suggest that the shift to post-industrial land-use patterns in 1960s San Francisco required a massive upheaval and shuffling of people from one part of the city to another, as city officials and business leaders sought to re-configure urban space to better meet the needs of new economic growth sectors.

The second half of this chapter examines organized resistance to the policing of prostitution between 1966 and 1979. I focus on three main groups: first, Vanguard, the first known queer youth organization in the United States, made up largely of queer and transgender sex workers and street kids; second, COYOTE, or Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics, one of the earliest known sex workers' civil rights groups in the United States; and third, San Francisco Wages for Housework, a Marxist-feminist group that tied the criminalization of prostitution to women's subordination within the family. I place these groups within the context of emerging local and national social movements against gender and sexual oppression. I use the stories of these three groups to reframe the content of these larger social movements, emphasizing aspects that often go unexamined: their relationship to both labor markets shaped by racial and gender hierarchies and to changing post-industrial urban land use patterns. Our understanding of these movements is enriched when we shift the frame somewhat, foregrounding the role of sex work and access to urban space in the struggle for gender and sexual liberation.

This focus on gender and sexuality also shifts our understanding of post-industrial urban labor markets, showing how racial and gender hierarchies contributed to the creation of illegal sexual labor markets, which subjected workers to varying degrees of risk in the form of exposure to violence, arrest, and incarceration. Stated slightly differently, one might say that for a certain portion of the working class in the 1960s and 70s, poor people oppressed on the basis of gender and sexual identities, the sites where oppression was most acutely experienced emerged from the relationship

of sexual economies to the legal and penal systems. Thus city government's policing of land use patterns and of sexual labor markets also became a way of policing gender and sexuality. Criminalization of sex work became a technique in the broad social enforcement of gender and sexual norms and the subordination of women, queers, and gender- nonconforming people.

From Brothels to Tourist Hotels: The Role of State and Economy in Shaping Prostitution

In a city like San Francisco, long famous for its “permissive” attitude toward sexual experimentation, sexual commerce has played a significant role in the local economy since the nineteenth century. Thus, as sociologist Helen Reynolds has shown, state suppression of illegal sex work has tended to be less intensive than in some other cities, and a powerful array of forces—from business interests to politicians to entertainers—have always conspired to allow it to continue.⁵ The history of state intervention in San Francisco reveals cycles of tolerance and crackdown rather than consistent efforts to abolish prostitution. As Josh Sides has shown, crackdowns are typically correlated with specific economic, spatial, and political changes that cause local government and law enforcement to derive short-term benefit from highly visible arrest “sweeps” or medium-term benefit from the movement of prostitution from one geographical area of the city to another.⁶

⁵ Reynolds, *The Economics of Prostitution*, 37.

⁶ Josh Sides, “Excavating the Postwar Sex District in San Francisco,” *Journal of Urban History* 32 (March 2006), 359-60.

Prostitution in turn-of-the-century San Francisco took place within an industrial spatial regime, a model of urban land use that emphasized industrial production in the city's key waterfront and downtown areas. In a city organized around a large manufacturing and port zone surrounded by working-class residential neighborhoods, prostitution was concentrated in brothel houses located along the waterfront, especially in the Barbary Coast, North Beach, and Chinatown neighborhoods. These houses were located near the port, where large numbers of men working as stevedores, sailors, merchant seamen, and factory workers congregated. The San Francisco political establishment was relatively tolerant of these houses of prostitution because of the significant benefit they provided to the growing urban economy: not only did brothels pay taxes, but their presence also increased sales in nearby bars, saloons, restaurants, and entertainment venues.⁷

As Nan Boyd demonstrates, pressure to control prostitution in San Francisco increased in the first two decades of the twentieth century as the Progressive movement became influential nationally. Progressives active in municipal politics in cities like San Francisco, New York, and Chicago emphasized moral reform as part of their campaign to deal with poverty and public health issues in U.S. cities.⁸ In San Francisco the issue of moral reform became intertwined with economic and political imperatives, especially when the topic of sexual morality began to threaten business and political interests in the mid-teens. The brothel system met the beginning of its

⁷ Nan Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 40.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

end in 1914, when the upcoming Panama-Pacific International Exposition and its expected influx of “respectable” middle-class tourists to the city in 1915 sparked fears of a major vice-related scandal.⁹ As a result San Francisco finally began cracking down on its red light district.¹⁰ On February 14, 1917, the Barbary Coast was shut down permanently when police physically blockaded the neighborhood’s streets and emptied prostitution houses one by one.¹¹ Not surprisingly, neither the crackdown nor the new laws against houses of prostitution eliminated the practice altogether. However, they did help precipitate a shift in prostitution practices between 1914 and 1945 from the operation of brothel houses to street and escort prostitution.¹² The Barbary Coast shut down also shifted the center of prostitution away from the waterfront, southward into the downtown area.¹³

⁹ Larry Shumsky and Larry Springer, “San Francisco’s Zone of Prostitution,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 7: 1 (1981).

¹⁰ Ruth Rosen’s book *The Lost Sisterhood* chronicles this history, describing the leading role of the Progressive movement in orchestrating the closure of red light districts across the nation during the teens. Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

¹¹ Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, 69. The blockade and arrests are described by Herbert Asbury in *The Barbary Coast: An Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld* (New York: Knopf, 1933), 299-314.

¹² This shift was occurring in many American cities. Ruth Rosen comments: “The relative security of public brothels became increasingly replaced by the riskier, but less visible, act of streetwalking... Control of prostitution shifted from madams and prostitutes themselves to pimps and organized crime syndicates.” Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, xii.

¹³ Sides, “Excavating the Postwar Sex District,” 372. See also Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, 44, 50.

The state and local apparatus for policing of prostitution became more centralized in the 1930s, in the aftermath of the repeal of Prohibition.¹⁴ In 1933 the policing of prostitution in California was formally tied to the regulation of liquor licenses with the creation of the State Board of Equalization's Division of Liquor Control. The new division was responsible simultaneously for licensing and regulating the sale, manufacture, and purchase of alcohol in the state and for arresting, fining, and revoking the permits of property owners who allowed prostitution in their premises.¹⁵ The division remained comparatively tolerant of prostitution throughout most of the decade, until in 1939 the state Attorney General released a report on vice in San Francisco that caused public outcry and precipitated another major cleanup campaign. Police officials then kicked into action and over the course of the 1940s were responsible for shutting down over 130 houses of prostitution.¹⁶ Again, the legal emphasis on prostitution occurring inside of buildings such as bars, saloons, and theaters—as evidenced by the method of using property ownership to criminalize sex work—pushed more prostitutes onto the streets.

¹⁴ This apparatus also targeted homosexuals. See George Chauncey's discussion in George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 335-337.

¹⁵ Sides, "Excavating the Postwar Sex District," 360.

¹⁶ Despite the closures and crackdowns of the 1940s, prostitution by all accounts was going strong throughout the decade, particularly during the war years. As a major port of embarkation San Francisco saw the migration of women to the city to work as prostitutes for soldiers and sailors passing through the city. As in many port cities during wartime, venereal disease became a serious public health problem, and prostitutes were targeted by health officials for its spread. San Francisco Committee on Crime, *A Report on Non-Victim Crime*, 19.

As scholars such as Susan Stryker, John D’Emilio, and Nan Boyd have shown, the cultural and political conservatism of the 1950s linked political subversion to sexual “perversion” in the form of a sharp rise in public hostility and violence directed toward sexual and gender “deviants.”¹⁷ Throughout the U.S., government officials and law enforcement issued crackdowns on not only prostitution but also many forms of legal commercial sexual entertainment. The decade’s conservatism regarding gender and sexual norms allowed politicians to further their careers through public campaigns against deviance and immorality.¹⁸ In San Francisco this took the form of an anti-burlesque campaign in 1955, when Republican George Christopher was elected to the Board of Supervisors on an anti-vice platform and immediately began shutting down the theaters.¹⁹

Police targeting of sexual minorities and of sex workers became tightly intertwined throughout the 1950s, joined together under the umbrella of sexual perversion and “vice.” During the 1950s many local governments expanded their targeting of increasingly visible gay urban subcultures, usually persecuted through city ordinances against cross-dressing.²⁰ In San Francisco this took the form of frequent raids on bars where gay and transgender people were known to gather, as

¹⁷ Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, 133-137. Boyd identifies a spike in police harassment and arrests of queer people in the second half of the decade. See also Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), 52-3; and John D’Emilio, “The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America,” in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics and the University*, ed. John D’Emilio (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57-73.

¹⁸ Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, 133-137.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁰ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 8-9; D’Emilio, “The Homosexual Menace,” 57-73.

well as arrests on the street of people identified by the police as gay or transgender, using anti-cross dressing ordinance 650.5 as the basis for arrests.²¹ As Boyd has noted in discussing police targeting of lesbians in 1950s San Francisco:

Like prostitutes, the lesbians who left their homes at night to frequent bars and taverns...were often treated as outlaws. They were harassed, policed and prosecuted on the same terms as prostitutes, and they learned from prostitutes how to traverse the extralegal world of nighttime entertainments.²²

In San Francisco's poorer queer communities, it was not uncommon for individuals to be involved in the sexual labor market. In a 1998 interview, Suzan Cooke, a transgender resident of San Francisco and a leftist activist in the 1960s, noted that a majority of gay and transgender youth in the Tenderloin worked at least occasionally as sex workers.²³ Police sometimes used this to equate visible gender nonconformity with engagement in illegal forms of sexual exchange, assuming that those they arrested for cross-dressing were also guilty of prostitution.²⁴ Thus the policing of sexual labor markets and of gender and sexual norms took place simultaneously through the mechanism of criminalization.

Local law enforcement also regulated sex work and gender and sexual norms by subjecting both houses of prostitution and bars catering to gay patrons to extortion techniques. In 1960 a major scandal, nicknamed the "Gayola" scandal, exposed the extent of corruption within the police department in its dealings with gay

²¹ Suzan Cooke, interview by Susan Stryker, Hollywood, January 10, 1998, Oral History Archive, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco.

²² Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, 16.

²³ Cooke, interview. Susan Stryker makes the same point in Stryker, *Transgender History*, 67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

establishments. Gay bars along the waterfront began refusing to pay police kickbacks and several bar owners came forward publicly, confessing to having paid between \$150 to \$200 monthly to law enforcement officers and government officials in order to avoid harassment. The resistance by bar owners sparked one of the city's first public discussions of gay civil rights.²⁵ The Gayola scandal also showed how much prostitution and sexual minority status could overlap, as raids on gay bars were also used as efforts to crackdown on male and transgender prostitution. As the gay and transgender sex workers who began organizing in the mid 1960s noted, for them it was impossible to separate out their identities as sexual minorities from their status as sex workers. Their social marginalization necessitated their reliance on illegal work, and their work as prostitutes was made more precarious and dangerous due to their visible status as sexual minorities. When targeted by the police, it was often for both of these statuses simultaneously.

Even though the social movements of the 1960s put the conservatism of the 1950s on the defensive, in San Francisco crackdowns on prostitution did not decline but, as noted, instead increased in frequency and intensity throughout the decade. The primary reason for the rise in police targeting of prostitution was the growth of the tourist sector and, along with it, of urban redevelopment projects, on a much larger scale than the city had previously experienced.²⁶ In the 1950s and 1960s tourism and

²⁵ Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, 207-210.

²⁶ In the post-war era San Francisco's economic base shifted toward the FIRE sector and tourism. In 1963 the city estimated that over one million tourists had visited the city, a record-breaking number. City government encouraged the industry's growth in part by creating a hotel tax in 1961, using the resulting revenue to launch a

redevelopment centered on neighborhoods where street prostitution was highly visible, especially North Beach. The transformation of these neighborhoods to meet the requirements of a new spatial regime required in some cases the expulsion of prostitutes from specific areas and in others the careful regulation of prostitution practices that took place in the public eye. In both of these cases pro-development forces used policing to accomplish these desired changes.²⁷

However, policing practices were not the only reason why the geography of sex work shifted after World War II. Scholars of sex work have noted that the sale of sexual services is often tied to the concentration of large numbers of male workers in a geographical area.²⁸ Thus prostitution in San Francisco in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth century was concentrated along the waterfront, where the city's dockworkers, factory workers, and seamen worked. But as the city's economic base shifted after World War II, the center of sexual commerce shifted as well. The world of blue collar men congregating in bars and saloons near the port and waterfront factories had begun to disappear, and

nationwide tourism advertising campaign. In 1966 the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce noted that the city was one of the top four convention destinations in the nation. City government and business leaders became proponents of urban renewal in part in order to make downtown a more hospitable environment for these new sectors. Greater San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, *1964-1965 Economic Survey* (San Francisco: Greater San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, 1966), 31.

²⁷ Policing campaigns to shift the location of prostitution are discussed in Sides, "Excavating the Postwar Sex District"; Sides, *Erotic City*; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*.

²⁸ The most extreme examples historically are economies based on resource extraction, as noted by Susan Dewey in her survey of scholarship on sex work. Susan Dewey, "The Feminized Labor of Sex Work: Two Decades of Feminist Historical and Ethnographic Research," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 9: 2 (2012), 121.

by 1965 was being replaced by an emerging financial district just to the south, where white collar workers, many of them commuters from surrounding suburbs, were beginning to fill the newly renovated office buildings.²⁹

By the early 1960s, downtown was also becoming the location of most of the city's hotels and convention centers. Scholars of sex work have researched the connections between prostitution and tourism, noting that the introduction into urban spaces of large numbers of temporary visitors is linked to the vitality of markets for sexual services.³⁰ With the rise of San Francisco's tourist economy and its growing status as a popular convention destination, the city saw an increased influx of tourists, including many men traveling to conventions without their families. These men visited the newly redeveloped and sanitized waterfront and North Beach areas during the day, but at night retired to their hotels downtown, where they sometimes sought out sexual services. This growing tourist economy further re-oriented the center of sexual commerce away from the old waterfront and toward the downtown neighborhoods along Market Street. Thus in the century that had passed since the early days of San Francisco's Gold Rush-era brothels and saloons, the prototypical site of prostitution in the city had shifted from the waterfront brothel to the downtown

²⁹ Sides, "Excavating the Postwar Sex District," 372-4.

³⁰ Anthropologists and sociologists have been at the forefront of this research. Much scholarship has focused on sexual tourism in the Caribbean. See for instance Mark Padilla, *Caribbean Pleasure Industry: Tourism, Sexuality, and AIDS in the Dominican Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) and Amalia Cabezas, *Economies of Desire: Sex and Tourism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009). In terms of San Francisco's tourist economy, Helen Reynolds discusses its relationship to sex work in Reynolds, *Economics of Prostitution*, 35-37, 61-65.

tourist hotel, and the downtown street prostitute had become the most visible symbol of illegal sexual economies—and thus the focus of renewed police efforts.

By the 1960s, those who had not been pushed out of the downtown area altogether were becoming concentrated in one of its last remaining poor neighborhoods, the Tenderloin district. The Tenderloin had long served as a haven for the city's most disenfranchised residents, including people expelled from areas like the Barbary Coast in the teens. As Aleshia Crenshaw, a transgender resident of the Tenderloin in the late 1950s and early 1960s, put it in a 1997 interview:

The Tenderloin was peopled by—gays, certainly, but predominantly prostitutes, pimps, addicts, ex-cons. It was sort of the underbelly of society, the Tenderloin, it definitely was...when we say low-rent district—well, that's exactly what it was. But, it was also an area where you were safe to a degree because you were all outcasts.³¹

As Crenshaw went on to note, ongoing downtown redevelopment projects played a key role in the consolidation of the Tenderloin as the city's concentration point for street-based sex work. Urban renewal and redevelopment programs from the 50s and 60s, discussed in previous chapters, created constant exoduses of displaced people from various downtown neighborhoods as well as a general climate of upheaval and movement. These processes deeply marked all of San Francisco's downtown neighborhoods: the constant starts and stops of construction, the evictions and legal battles, and the rapid changes in the physical landscape of neighborhoods.³²

³¹ Aleshia Brevard Crenshaw, interview by Susan Stryker, Watsonville, California, August 2, 1997, 20, Oral History Archive, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco.

³² Federally funded urban renewal was first approved by the federal government in 1955. The first project to get underway was the redevelopment of the Western Addition "A-1" area, which began in 1958. Over the next decade urban renewal

The displacement caused by urban renewal and redevelopment projects led to an influx of the most marginal and vulnerable of these people into the Tenderloin. Residents displaced by redevelopment in the largely African American Fillmore and Western Addition neighborhoods tended to move to other African American neighborhoods in either Hunters Point or the East Bay, but some trickled in to the Tenderloin neighborhood.³³ Redevelopment in the South of Market neighborhood, in particular the construction of the Yerba Buena Center, pushed some of the South of Market's population of single elderly men, homeless or inhabitants of residential hotels, into the Tenderloin starting in 1967.³⁴

But the Tenderloin was not just a receiving point for those expelled by development processes occurring elsewhere. It was itself subject to the disruption of construction projects, in particular the construction of the new Bay Area Rapid Transit line along Market Street between 1967 and 1971.³⁵ A resident of the Tenderloin recalled the sense of upheaval that pervaded the area in 1967, commenting that "since the Market Street construction began all kinds of shuffling has been going on. There have been so many half starts and half-finished projects....I haven't seen

projects displaced thousands of people in the Fillmore, Golden Gateway, South of Market, and North Beach neighborhoods. See Daniel E. Crowe, *Prophets of Rage: The Black Freedom Struggle in San Francisco, 1945-1969* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 68-69. See also Chester Hartman, *City For Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2002.

³³ Crowe, *Prophets of Rage*, 70.

³⁴ Hartman, *City For Sale*, 34.

³⁵ Charles Lewis, interview by Paul Gabriel, February-August 1997, 13, Oral History Archive, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco.

really very many people rescued.”³⁶ Frequent interventions into the physical layout of the neighborhood interrupted daily work and living routines, breaking up the spatial organization of life. For instance, the Market Street construction forced street prostitution on that strip to move to a different location.³⁷ Development projects in the Tenderloin thus contributed to the precarious and unstable status of daily life there, further cementing the neighborhood’s position as an undesirable and tumultuous place to live.

This brief history of sex work practices and state regulation of sexual labor markets in San Francisco reveals several significant patterns. First, it shows how the legal technique of targeting houses of prostitution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century resulted in a long-term shift toward street sex work beginning in the teens. It also demonstrates the role of both police crackdowns and shifting economic forces in regulating the geographical location of prostitution, driving sex work from the industrial waterfront of the early twentieth century to poor areas on the fringes of the downtown tourist district by the 1960s. It highlights the ambiguous attitude of business and political elites to sex work since the late nineteenth century, and examines the ongoing tension between prevailing norms of sexual morality and the continuous robust demand for sexual services. Finally, this history traces the postwar development of a specific relationship between the policing of both sex work and non-normative gender and sexual identities, demonstrating that the criminalization of each of these fueled the further criminalization of the other.

³⁶ “Interview With a Fag Hag,” *Vanguard* 1: 9 (1967).

³⁷ Lewis, interview, 13.

Tenderloin Sex Workers and Sex Work in the 1960s and 70s

As discussed above, by the 1960s, the complex interaction between sexual labor markets, gender- and sexuality-based marginalization, and criminalization had become concentrated spatially within a strip of land called the Tenderloin. The emergence of a market for sexual services in this area was caused not only by the economic shifts of the postwar era discussed above, however. It was also precipitated by social transformations such as the development of a nationally-recognized urban youth counterculture movement and the growth of gay and transgender subcultures and institutions. In the 1960s these developments contributed to the influx of large numbers of youth, many of them poor and queer, actively seeking support networks to help them survive in an often hostile urban environment. The Tenderloin became the home base for the most marginalized of these individuals. In this section I will describe the causes of this concentration, the kinds of people that made the Tenderloin their home and place of work in the 1960s and 70s, and the dynamics of the neighborhood's sexual labor market, including its internal racial and class stratification.

The consolidation of the Tenderloin as a center for street prostitution was fueled by the migration, sometimes forced, of stigmatized groups from other parts of the city and from around the country. The crackdowns on prostitution and on gay public life in areas like North Beach forced those who engaged in illegal sexual

practices into the Tenderloin, as discussed previously.³⁸ At the same time the mass migration of young people across the country as part of the youth counterculture movement of the late 1960s brought significant numbers of teenagers, including runaways escaping family sexual abuse or homophobia, to San Francisco.³⁹ While some of these young people went straight to North Beach or the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, gay and transgender youth, as well as young women with few resources, often landed in the Tenderloin. Charles Lewis, a gay night minister who worked with youth in the late 1960s and 70s, recalled that in 1967 there was a sudden increase in letters from parents requesting assistance in finding their runaway children. He discussed the reasons why these young people came to San Francisco:

When a kid would come to town they came for all kinds of reasons. Sexual abuse at home, discovering that they were gay, and usually kids like that ended up in a specific area of the City where they were

³⁸Sides, "Excavating the Postwar Sex District," 372.

³⁹ Josh Sides, *Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Todd Ormsbee, *The Meaning of Gay: Interaction, Publicity, and Community among Homosexual Men in 1960s San Francisco* (Plymouth, U.K.: Lexington Books, 2010); Elizabeth A. Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Agee, *The Streets of San Francisco*; Jim Stewart, *Folsom Street Blues: A Memoir of 1970s SoMa and Leatherfolk in Gay San Francisco* (San Francisco: Palm Drive Publications, 2011); Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2013); Betty Luther Hillman, "The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in": Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20: 1 (2011), 153-181; Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *Gay by the Bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996); Martin Dennis Meeker, "Come Out West: Communication and the Gay and Lesbian Migration to San Francisco, 1940s-1960s," PhD diss, University of Southern California, 2000.

hustling...in the beginning immediately downtown in the Tenderloin.⁴⁰

As Lewis noted, almost all of these young people became involved in sex work or the drug trade, as these were some of the only options available to them in the neighborhood.⁴¹ A 1967 report issued by the San Francisco Police Department's Tenderloin-based Police-Community Relations program used interviews with residents and neighborhood service providers to estimate the income sources of residents. The report estimated that fifty percent of the neighborhood's male and female population "hustled" to earn a living and forty percent were dependent on the income of a "hustler."⁴² These sex workers were almost all members of groups who experienced discrimination on the basis of gender or sexuality: young women, gay men, and transgender women. Each of these groups tended to have slightly different reasons for ending up in the Tenderloin, sex work practices and locations, and relationships to local police.

Gay male youth came to the city to escape family abuse or workplace discrimination, settling in the Tenderloin if they lacked financial resources. The 1967 Police-Community Relations report provided "case studies" of typical residents, interviewed by the authors. They include a 21-year-old man who was released from military service because of his homosexuality and, after facing discrimination in the formal labor market because of his sexual orientation, ended up working as a sex worker on Market Street; a 24-year-old man who, after moving to the area, became

⁴⁰Lewis, interview, 54.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²*Vanguard* 1: 8 (1967), 1.

addicted to drugs and began selling them and hustling to support his habit; and a 19-year-old who starting hustling one day when rent was due and he found himself unemployed and broke.⁴³

The stories suggest a relationship between sexual labor markets, anti-gay discrimination, and class. As the editors of the queer street youth newspaper *Vanguard* commented in 1967:

The problem is basically one of survival. The Tenderloin offers an economic system which youth can enter into very easily....The people who become a part of this system usually have exhausted other alternatives. They are unable to find work: they lack education and job skills; they often have police records or undesirable service records.⁴⁴

The Tenderloin was a convenient entry point for these young people who had few other options, and its underground economy gave them a means of survival, even if it came with high risks.

The geography of gay prostitution was tied to the accelerating process of urban renewal in the downtown area. Up until 1967 male prostitutes tended to work on Market Street, on a strip between Mason and Seventh Streets called the Meat Rack. But this location was discarded when construction of the new BART train line began, and sex workers moved to Polk Street, which remained a hub throughout the 1970s.⁴⁵ Regina McQueen recalled Polk Street's heyday as the center of male street prostitution in the 1975:

You could walk down Polk Street and the whole street would be full of prostitutes. One side would be men standing out there posing...and on

⁴³ Report reprinted in *Vanguard* 1: 8 (1967), 1, 27.

⁴⁴ *Vanguard* 1: 9 (1967), 27.

⁴⁵ Lewis, interview, 13.

the other side of the street would be women dressed in evening gowns with feather boas and big hair and lots of make-up. And the next night, some of the boys would be over there on the other side of the street, in femme drag, and vice versa.⁴⁶

Polk Street in the 1970s was a well-known center of gay culture before many gay men began moving to the Castro.⁴⁷ Thus the recollections of Lewis and other Tenderloin inhabitants suggest a link between the disruptions caused by urban renewal and the geography of gay urban life, with the movement of street prostitutes serving as part of the impetus for a broader relocation of the city's gay subcultures.

While the Tenderloin was becoming a home base for young gay male runaways, important changes were also occurring in terms of the gender categories used by some of the neighborhood's residents. As Stryker has documented, in the second half of the 1960s an increasing number of these individuals began to undergo a shift in their self-identification and presentation, moving from identifying themselves as effeminate gay men to identify as transgender women.⁴⁸ In addition a new influx of people identifying as transgender moved to the area from other parts of the country. Both phenomena were tied to the increased availability of hormones and surgical procedures that allowed men to more effectively transition to living as women. In 1966 the medical professional Harry Benjamin, who had begun practicing in San Francisco, announced his professional opinion that Gender Identity Disorder

⁴⁶ Regina Elizabeth McQueen, interview by Susan Stryker, San Francisco, July 17, 1997, 7-8, Oral History Archive, GLBT History Center, San Francisco.

⁴⁷ Lewis, interview, 13. See also John D'Emilio, "Gay Politics and Community in San Francisco Since World War II," in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, Marin Baum Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr., eds. (New York: New American Library, 1989), 468.

⁴⁸ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 74.

be treated as a medical condition, arguing that those who suffered from it should receive access to hormone treatment and surgery.⁴⁹ Benjamin's Center for Special Problems in San Francisco was one of the first places in the country to provide low-cost counseling and medical treatment for transgender people.⁵⁰

As a result of these new opportunities, the Tenderloin became something of an enclave for poor transgender people seeking to transition.⁵¹ A transgender woman

⁴⁹Ibid., 73. See also Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Pat Califia, *Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism* (Berkeley: Cleis Press, 1997); Kate More and Stephen Whittle, eds., *Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin-de-Siecle* (New York: Continuum Press, 1999); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005); Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies In Doubt: An American History of Intersex* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007); Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2006); Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," in Kristina Straub and Julia Epstein, eds., *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1:3 (1994), 237-254; Susan Stryker, "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10: 2 (Spring, 2004), 212-215; Katrina Roen, "Transgender Theory and Embodiment: The Risk of Racial Marginalization," in *Journal of Gender Studies*, 10: 3, 253-263; Dwight B. Billings and Thomas Urban, "The Sociomedical Construction of Transsexualism: An Interpretation and Critique," *Social Problems* 29 (1981), 266-282; Members of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society, "MTF Transgender Activism in San Francisco's Tenderloin: Commentary and Interview with Elliot Blackstone," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4: 2 (1998), 349-372.

⁵⁰Stryker, *Transgender History*, 75-6.

⁵¹Suzan Cooke thought that the shift in self-identification began in the years between 1966 and 1968. She first noted a change when she was jailed in the "queen's tank" for violating a crossdressing ordinance in 1968: "I had insisted on being thrown into the queen's tank... and that's where I started really meeting the queens - who were just transitioning into being trannies, a lot them, right about this time. I guess the Center

interviewed in the Tenderloin queer youth newspaper *Vanguard* in 1967 related a common story of moving from New York to San Francisco in order to be able to transition:

I began working at a T.L. hotel to earn enough money for living expenses and to cover the cost of electrolysis and hormone treatments. Until I accepted the job there, “queen hotels” and living-in-drag were unknown to me...it certainly was easier for me to live there because I was accepted for whatever I was.⁵²

As this woman noted, low-cost residential hotels were at the center of the Tenderloin transgender community, and provided some degree of safety and protection for their residents.

This was necessary because, as Aleshia Crenshaw recalled, the street could be an extremely dangerous place for transgender people. She also remembered that access to doctors could reduce slightly the amount of harassment and physical violence one was likely to receive:

Perhaps because we were so illegal, everything was so underground that for the transgendered there was no place...until you were able to break through all that, and start dressing, and get a letter from your doctor saying that you were undergoing treatment, that you have this medical condition--so that if you are stopped, that at least they might apologize after beating us to a pulp. You must have a sense of what that time was like...this is all pre-Stonewall, so you were hiding from society....So we had our own subculture. And that was what the Tenderloin was.⁵³

Facing high levels of social marginalization, transgender people in the Tenderloin frequently relied on street prostitution as their primary means of survival,

for Special Problems had started handing out hormones, and the consciousness was there.” Cooke, interview, 19.

⁵²“Tenderloin Transexual,” *Vanguard* 1: 9 (1967), 1.

⁵³Crenshaw, interview, 18.

and as a way to save money for hormones and, eventually, surgery. According to Suzan Cooke “the major social support for most of the girls in the Tenderloin was prostitution...[and] in those days, if you were a tranny prostitute, you were not a call girl. You were a street-walker.”⁵⁴

As Stryker has documented, transgender youth and sex workers had a visible presence in the Tenderloin, with their own gathering spots and locations where commercial sexual exchanges were initiated. Stryker has written about the important history of resistance amongst this group of marginalized youth, including the uprising of transgender women at Compton’s Cafeteria, a central gathering spot, in August 1966, in response to the harassment of the establishment’s owners and local police.⁵⁵ The riot at Compton’s Cafeteria arose out of the specific precarious and stigmatized experience of transgender sex work and street life in the Tenderloin, an expression of frustration at the cumulative aggressions of local business owners, landlords, private citizens, tricks, and the police.⁵⁶ It preceded Stonewall and the modern gay liberation movement by several years, suggesting that transgender youth in San Francisco developed their own tactics for resisting oppression. It was out of this milieu that the queer and transgender youth group Vanguard—whose work will be discussed below—emerged.

⁵⁴Cooke, interview, 19.

⁵⁵Stryker, *Transgender History*, 63–70.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 65–70. Stryker in particular identified urban redevelopment, police violence, and a wave of crackdowns in the mid 60s associated with the escalating Vietnam War as factors contributing to collective discontent.

Here I use the term “cisgender” to refer to women who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth. The term is used within the field of gender studies to distinguish them from transgender individuals, who do not identify with the gender assigned at birth. For the purposes of this discussion the distinction is important because cisgender and transgender women tended to have very different experiences of life and work in the Tenderloin. I also use the term “cisgender women” instead of simply “women” because in this context, the latter construction would suggest that transgender women are not also “women.”⁵⁷

Cisgender women also worked as prostitutes in the Tenderloin and neighboring hotels. Like gay men and transgender women, their entry into the neighborhood’s sexual labor market was shaped by their position within gender hierarchies. The youngest of these women were teenagers escaping family sexual or physical abuse who became involved in prostitution, usually with a pimp, upon their arrival. Charles Lewis recalled his many encounters with young women through his Night Ministry work in the area in the early 1970s: “If you’re a young woman on the streets, you’re going to get caught up in prostitution with a pimp.”⁵⁸ He recounted a common experience:

She’d come here to the City when she was I think 15 and was on the street and a man said, hey look you’re young come on up to my place and you can stay there tonight...got up there and there were 3 or 4 other guys waiting and they gang raped her...for two or three nights. And after that, she knew to which pimp she belonged and he put her

⁵⁷See Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook, “Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: ‘Normals,’ Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality,” *Gender & Society* 23, no. 4 (August 2009), 440–464.

⁵⁸Lewis, interview, 66-67.

out on the street.⁵⁹

When women were arrested, they often had to be bailed out by their pimps, placing them into debt and making it that much more difficult to leave the relationship.⁶⁰

Like the woman described by Lewis, women working in and around the Tenderloin tended to be quite young. According to a 1977 position paper by the Women's Jail Study Group, a San Francisco feminist group working on prison reform, the average San Francisco street prostitute in 1976 was in her early twenties, had a twelfth grade education, few or no job skills, and was equally likely to be Black or white. In addition, most of the prostitutes interviewed had children, Black women more often than white.⁶¹ Thus many female sex workers were young mothers with few opportunities in the formal economy; it is not difficult to see why prostitution might have been preferable to the low-wage service work available to them.

However, despite some commonalities, not all of these women were involved in prostitution in the same ways, earned the same amounts of money, or faced the same kinds of risks. In fact, a strong hierarchy existed among women prostitutes in the Tenderloin and greater downtown area. This hierarchy was tied to the racial and class backgrounds of the women themselves.

The biggest differences were between those who worked on the streets and the call girls who either had books of customers or worked through escort services, going to appointments at area hotels. A white sex worker from a working-class background

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Women's Jail Study Group, "Position Paper," 1977, folder 960, COYOTE Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University (Cambridge, Mass.).

who had managed to secure higher paid work as an escort told an interviewer in 1979 that class differences caused conflicts between sex workers.⁶² Higher-paid call girls, she noted, often did not feel solidarity with those working on the street, instead seeking to distance themselves from the more stigmatized and targeted women: “The women we worked with who were only of the upper class type of work would make a point of saying ‘well there’s a difference between me and hookers on the street.’”⁶³

Women of color were usually consigned to the lower ranks of the hierarchy. As one sex worker recalled, “if the woman is Black she might as well give up because the courts will be waiting to screw her up. She might as well also forget working certain hotels and nightclubs because its owners just won’t permit her to do it.”⁶⁴ Dolores, a 23-year-old Latina sex worker interviewed in 1974, noted that the racial hierarchy was tied to geography, with white women working the more lucrative areas and women of color the poorer ones. She argued that the police reinforced these racial boundaries: “The police are always trying to keep Black and Latina whores from working a predominantly white district like North Beach or Downtown.”⁶⁵

The hierarchies within the arena of prostitution translated to very different earning potentials. A sex worker activist in 1977 listed the prices of dates in different San Francisco neighborhoods, each corresponding to a different “class” of prostitute

⁶² Anonymous, interview by Priscilla Alexander, manuscript of interview, San Francisco, 1979, folder 37, COYOTE Papers.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Quoted in William T. Martinez and J. Rafael Centeno, manuscript of interview conducted, May 10, 1974, for student paper called “Sexuality and Its Watchdogs,” COYOTE Papers, Folder 944, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

and customer. At the top of posh Nob Hill, high-paid call girls received fifty to one hundred dollars per date. Above Geary Street, the dividing line between the rundown center of the Tenderloin and the tourist-friendly shopping district, dates cost twenty to thirty-five dollars. Below Geary Street, in the heart of the Tenderloin, sex workers usually solicited openly on street corners, and averaged ten dollars per customer. She estimated that many women had between five and fifteen dates per night.⁶⁶

Women from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy found the amount of money they could earn through sex work compelling, and argued that prostitution had strong advantages over other kinds of work available to them. As historians of women and work have shown, in the 1960s and 1970s most women still had few options in the formal labor market for skilled, well-paid work. The more lucrative government jobs in feminized sectors such as teaching and social work were available for the most part only to white women with higher education degrees.⁶⁷ For working-class women, in particular working-class women of color, sex work made financial sense, despite the risks it entailed in terms of exposure to arrest, incarceration, disease, and violence. As one sex worker activist noted in 1977, she can “at best expect to make about \$100/week in a traditional semi-skilled clerical job. The same woman, as a

⁶⁶ Margo St. James, letter, March 15, 1977, folder 944, COYOTE Papers.

⁶⁷ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 300-305; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 94-120; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Enobong Branch, *Opportunity Denied: Limiting Black Women to Devalued Work* (Rutgers, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

streetwalker, could conservatively expect to net \$100/night.”⁶⁸ Women at the bottom of the sex work hierarchy, those who walked the streets of the Tenderloin, also often found prostitution preferable to the other options available to them. Dolores, the 23-year-old Latina, had been working as a prostitute since the age of seventeen. She stated, “even if I would have graduated from school, I still wouldn’t have wanted to get a straight job. Would you, if the only ones open were nickel and dime jobs?”⁶⁹ Thus, gender hierarchies in the formal labor market contributed to women’s entrance into the illegal sector, where their criminal status further stigmatized them and made it more difficult to overcome those hierarchies.

In sum, the migration to the city of young women and queer and transgender youth in the 1960s, spurred on the consolidation of the Tenderloin as the center of San Francisco’s street prostitution market. The poorest of these, and often the most visibly gender-nonconforming, settled in the Tenderloin neighborhood, which had also become the spillover point for those displaced by the SoMa and Western Addition redevelopment projects, which were so central to the new post-industrial spatial re-organization. By 1968 the Tenderloin served as a kind of alternative community, a place where socially marginalized people developed support networks with few material resources.

For most of the young people living and working in the Tenderloin, sex work was a choice, but a choice undertaken in the context of severely limited options. As

⁶⁸ Rita Risser, “Prostitution: The Law and Law Enforcement,” draft report, June 5, 1974, folder 955, COYOTE Papers.

⁶⁹ Dolores, interview by William T. Martinez and J. Rafael Centeno, manuscript of interview, San Francisco, May 10, 1974, folder 944, COYOTE Papers.

the experiences described above demonstrate, women, queer, and transgender people in the Tenderloin had few educational and monetary resources and faced gender, sexual, and racial discrimination in the formal economy. These forms of discrimination existed in illegal sexual labor markets too; race, class background, and gender presentation all shaped an individual's position within the city's landscape of sex work. The statements of sex workers also suggest that police actively reinforced these dynamics, mapping racial and class hierarchies onto their policing of sex work and using these categories to determine the physical location of individual sex workers in the geography of the city.

Policing Sex Work: The Police Department Vice Squad and Arrest Techniques

As established, city officials and the business and civic leaders interested in managing the dynamics of street-based sex work largely relied on criminalization and policing in order to do so. Throughout the 1960s, the San Francisco Police Department—specifically its vice unit, the Bureau of Special Services—was tasked with regulating the location and the scale of street- and hotel- based sex work through its ability to harass and arrest sex workers.⁷⁰ The specific arrest techniques used by vice officers played a key role in establishing the actual dynamics of sex work on the streets as they changed from day to day and week to week. Helen Reynolds, in her 1986 comparative study of policing methods in large U.S. cities from World War II to the mid-80s, notes that while officers cannot stop prostitution from occurring, they

⁷⁰ COYOTE, typed notes, "Meeting With Vice Squad," October 26, 1976, folder 38, COYOTE Papers.

can direct the behavior of sex workers in concrete ways: “The prostitutes become players of a cat and mouse game, in which the presence of the officer will keep them off the streets and the absence of the officer will allow them to conduct their business as usual.”⁷¹ In the Tenderloin in the 1960s and 70s, officers did just that, using arrests or the threat of arrests to control the market for sexual services in the area.

To arrest prostitutes, law enforcement officers relied on a handful of laws and statutes from the California Penal Code, most of which were created in the 1960s. Prior to 1961 California police had been able to rely upon broadly defined vagrancy statutes to arrest street prostitutes. However, when status offenses such as vagrancy were deemed unconstitutional in 1961 lawmakers were forced to look for other mechanisms to criminalize prostitution. The solution arrived at in 1961 was a revision of Penal Code Section 647, which addressed the crime of disorderly conduct. Lawmakers revised Section 647b to define disorderly conduct as occurring when anyone “solicits or engages in any act of prostitution.”⁷² Note that the language equally criminalizes both the sex worker and the client, although in practice police targeted only the sex worker in the majority of cases.

However, proving solicitation was not always easy for officers. As the San Francisco Committee on Crime noted in 1971, “the soliciting prostitute is a very difficult rabbit to catch.”⁷³ As a result members of the vice squad also relied upon a handful of other offenses when they wanted to make an arrest. Some of the most

⁷¹ Reynolds, *Economics of Prostitution*, 56.

⁷² Gloria R. Megino, “Prostitution and California Law,” paper for the Senate Committee on Judiciary, February, 1977, 10-11, folder 946, COYOTE papers.

⁷³ San Francisco Committee on Crime, *Report on Non-Victim Crime*, 20.

common were loitering or jaywalking. Prostitutes working in hotels and bars could be arrested for trespassing.⁷⁴ Officers also commonly used Section 647c of the Penal Code, which specified the crime of “willfully and maliciously” obstructing public places, including sidewalks.⁷⁵ Laws against prostitution were designed to punish repeat offenders in particular. Prostitution was the only offense in the California Penal Code for which prior convictions were admissible evidence in court, and for which “general repute” was considered admissible evidence.⁷⁶

Prostitutes working on the streets and in the hotels in and around the Tenderloin had to contend with three main arrest scenarios: ordinary beat cops on night patrol who were able to catch them engaging in solicitation, periodic sweeps, and entrapment, which involved the use of undercover officers to produce a solicitation crime either on the street, in a bar, or in a hotel.

A police document collected by a sex worker rights group in 1975 describes the protocol for beat officers making arrests during their nightly patrols. The document paints a picture of what people working on the streets might have experienced during an arrest. The text states that officers should wait until they have observed evidence of solicitation before making an arrest. They should then interview the customer to document the exact language of the solicitation, at which point the customer should be dismissed. Any paraphernalia used for prostitution purposes, such

⁷⁴ National Task Force on Prostitution, “Prostitutes’ Legal Rights,” in *National Task Force on Prostitution News*, September/October 1979, 1, COYOTE Papers.

⁷⁵ San Francisco Police Department, document, “General Order from Office of the Chief of Police,” April 19, 1976, folder 445, COYOTE Papers.

⁷⁶ Megino, “Prostitution and California Law,” 7.

as prophylactics, lubricants, hotel keys, and rent receipts, should be seized. If the prostitute was in a car registered under his or her own name, the car should be towed with a hold placed on it for the Bureau of Special Services.⁷⁷ It is significant that official police protocol instructed officers to arrest only prostitutes and not customers, although both were potentially guilty of breaking the law. Although not surprising given patterns of prostitution arrests nationwide, such biases support the assertions made by sex worker activists that prosecution of customers was considered too politically volatile and too threatening to economic interests to become general law enforcement policy.

A variation on this routine form of arrest was the sweep, a usually highly publicized form of crackdown often tied to political cycles or public scandals. Sweeps were periodically undertaken by law enforcement, sometimes under the direction of politicians, in an effort to gain publicity at an opportune moment, spike arrest numbers, or clear the streets during an important event, such as a major political convention or tourist event. As the Committee on Crime noted, the effect of sweeps was notoriously temporary: “Within forty eight hours the woman is usually back on the street, further indebted to her pimp.”⁷⁸

Sweeps were typically publicized in major newspapers such as the *Chronicle*, which generally portrayed them positively as “get tough” efforts on the part of the San Francisco Police Department. A sweep on October 14, 1966, in which one

⁷⁷San Francisco Police Department, document, “Vice Violations,” folder 445, COYOTE Papers.

⁷⁸San Francisco Committee on Crime, *Report on Non-Victim Crime*, 21-22.

hundred suspected prostitutes were arrested, was reported on the front page of the *Chronicle*.⁷⁹ An article published in the *Chronicle* on April 17, 1971 focused on the clever police work of the Bureau of Special Services. Titled “Classical Touch in Vice Sweep,” it noted that the bureau used the code name “Mozart” in its sweep of the Tenderloin.⁸⁰ As was common in sweeps, sex workers were booked not on soliciting charges—which were harder to obtain—but on charges of obstructing sidewalks. The *Chronicle* reported that seventy-five suspected prostitutes and five drag queens were arrested.⁸¹ The data confirms the accounts provided by drag queens, gay, and transgender residents of the Tenderloin, who suggested that prostitution arrests were often inseparable from arrests for sexual and gender “deviance.” The article noted that the men arrested were charged on an additional count of wearing women’s apparel.⁸²

The use of undercover officers could be part of a sweep or part of routine vice squad arrest techniques. Because entrapment was technically illegal, officers attempted to avoid directly initiating verbal solicitation; they were thus able to lure sex workers into committing a crime without opening themselves up to charges themselves. Outcall escort worker Alisa Simon recalled her experience with entrapment:

They wait until you’re completely undressed, call in another cop and bust you then....Like thousands of other women arrested every month

⁷⁹“100 Girls Seized in Tenderloin Raids,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 14, 1966.

⁸⁰“Classical Touch in Vice Sweep,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 17, 1971.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

on prostitution charges, I was then taken to City Prison...strip searched, and held on the 647b charge until I was arraigned or could make bail.⁸³

Such scenarios were one of sex workers' biggest fears. Simon confessed, "Every time you go out on a call to a hotel, you never know whether there's a cop or a john waiting for you behind the door."⁸⁴ She added that sex workers' anxiety was compounded by the fact that many vice officers moonlit as hotel security guards.⁸⁵

The existing data help us guess at the frequency of such arrests and the individuals who were being targeted. The data show that the number of arrests being made was small for a city of San Francisco's size, but that it could spike dramatically. As mentioned earlier, the number of arrests for prostitution rose steeply throughout the 1960s: in 1960 police made only 330 arrests in the entire year, while in 1969 the number had risen to 3,221. While it is also true that the number of prostitutes rose throughout the decade, researchers at the time agreed that the increases were largely tied to changing arrest practices.⁸⁶ In the mid 1970s the number of arrests had decreased. In 1976 an average of two hundred people were arrested monthly—2,400 for the year—on charges of prostitution and related activities. Statistics were similar for 1974 and 1975. Data from 1976 suggests that the vast majority of those arrested were female sex workers: 76.5 percent were females arrested for prostitution, 6.5 percent were males arrested for prostitution, 8 percent were males arrested as

⁸³ Alisa Simon, transcript of statement at public meeting, March 1982, folder 445, COYOTE Papers.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ San Francisco Committee on Crime, *Report on Non-Victim Crime*, 16.

customers, and 6.5 percent were males arrested for pimping. Approximately fifteen prostitutes were arrested for every customer.⁸⁷

Data on convictions and prison sentences also provide information about what some of these arrested individuals may have experienced after going through the legal system. Of those convicted in 1975, the average time served was fifty-one days.⁸⁸ Lengths of sentences were related to whether an alleged prostitute had been convicted before. There was a mandatory sentence of forty-five days for a second conviction on 647b charges and of ninety days for a third conviction.⁸⁹ The mean age of those serving time was twenty-five years, and ages ranged from eighteen to fifty one. Although two thirds of women arrested on prostitution charges were white, 48 percent of those convicted and serving time were Black, 44 percent were white, five percent had Spanish surnames, and three percent described themselves as “other.”⁹⁰

This examination of police arrest practices supports the argument that the purpose of such work was not to eliminate prostitution but to control its location and visibility, and to prevent the total number of prostitutes from becoming too large. The police department did not devote enough officers to prostitution or make enough regular arrests to stop sex workers from going out on the streets. However, its efforts—primarily in the form of sweeps and entrapment—made enough of an impact to deeply affect the lives of sex workers, increasing the risks and consequences of their chosen

⁸⁷COYOTE, fact sheet, “Facts on Prostitution in San Francisco,” folder 445, COYOTE Papers.

⁸⁸Marilyn Neckes, “Prostitution Statistics—Women Incarcerated in the S.F. County Jail in 1975,” folder 445, COYOTE Papers.

⁸⁹COYOTE, “Facts on Prostitution in San Francisco.”

⁹⁰Neckes, “Prostitution Statistics.”

work. As sex worker and activist Alisa Simon noted, sex workers always lived in fear of their next arrest. This fear played a role in the decision of some sex workers to fight back against police targeting.

Queer and Transgender Organizing Against Police Violence: The Case of Vanguard

San Francisco has a long history as a place where sexual minorities have migrated in order to develop their own communities and subcultures, including the postwar concentration of queer and transgender youth in the Tenderloin. Thus it is not surprising that the city saw some of the country's first and most militant queer and transgender liberation struggles of the 60s era. This organizing took place amongst poor youth, years before radical gay and feminist liberation struggles erupted into public consciousness. The first known queer youth organization in U.S. history was called, aptly, Vanguard. Largely made up of teen and young adult queer and transgender sex workers, Vanguard was founded seven years before COYOTE, in 1966.⁹¹ As mentioned, Vanguard members socialized at Compton's Cafeteria and were part of the struggle that emerged around the restaurant, culminating in the riot of August 1966.⁹²

Susan Stryker has situated Vanguard in a lineage of militant queer and transgender resistance and tying its politics to the effects of redevelopment on the Tenderloin neighborhood. More broadly Stryker analyzed the transgender liberation

⁹¹ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 70.

⁹² *Ibid.*

movement of which Vanguard was a part and which it, in some ways, prefigured. My discussion of the group, and in particular my close reading of its newsletter, also called *Vanguard*, expands upon Stryker's work to emphasize the aspects of Vanguard's writing and activism that are specific to the economic and spatial regimes being consolidated by city leaders throughout the 1960s. The *Vanguard* newsletter, published between 1966 and 1970, provides an important description of queer and transgender youth trying to survive in the context of a post-industrial economy characterized by rampant gender and sexual discrimination. In its pages, the involvement of queer street youth in precarious sexual labor markets emerges as a response to exclusion from the formal sector and to broader social marginalization. *Vanguard's* authors and activists also situate their marginalization spatially, focusing on the Tenderloin neighborhood as an urban geography produced through processes of social and economic displacement—a holding area for the city's most undesirable residents. Finally, in their political writing *Vanguard* authors and activists focus on policing and the criminalization of both sex work and gender and sexual nonconformity. The group presents policing as one of the mechanisms used by the city's elites to enforce a spatial regime premised on the need to keep poor people and sexual minorities out of sight.

Vanguard was founded in the summer of 1966 by a group of street youths who worked and lived around the Meat Rack on Mason and Market Streets. They included president Jean-Paul Marat and four other teenagers named Mark Forrester, Joel

Roberts, Keith Oliver, and Adrian Ravarour.⁹³ All of the known members of Vanguard were white gay men and boys.⁹⁴ These young men remembered life on the street in the Tenderloin, and the desperate need they felt to organize their community. Adrian recollected, “People were beaten down by their environment, by being called names, by being told they were worthless, by families [who] threw them out. I saw Vanguard as an opportunity where people could stand their ground.”⁹⁵ Roberts recalled the drug overdoses, abuse, and suicide he saw on a regular basis, and the growing need he felt to help those around him empower themselves:

For nineteen cents you’d have a hamburger, but you weren’t allowed to eat there, and the manager would yell at you, saying ‘Faggot, eat your hamburger outside.’ You’ve lost everything, you’ve lost your family, you may have lost your boyfriend, cause he OD’d. You may have lost your freedom, being busted for petty crimes. Any you can’t even eat a damn hamburger?⁹⁶

Marat described himself as a drug addict, who kicked his habit in order to be a more

⁹³ In response to concerns expressed to me by Mr. Ravarour about possibly misleading implications about his background and role, I quote from personal correspondence with him: “Ravarour, who was a 22 year old staff member at Intersection Center for Religion and the Arts and former Mormon priest, indicates that he founded Vanguard many months earlier than cited acknowledging Joel Williams as the person who asked him as a priest and Intersection staff to help the Tenderloin LGBT youth; in response Ravarour started Vanguard at Glide Church in 1965 to empower the youth to demonstrate to gain equal rights. Phyllis Lyon sponsored the early Vanguard meetings. By summer 1966, Glide was the full sponsor of Vanguard with Reverend Mamiya as its Adviser; and Marat, Roberts, and Forrester became active and also assisted Vanguard to apply for funding. Since Ravarour had monthly income he was never a hustler or living on the street; and, Ravarour affirms that the transgender members were a powerful segment who after disassociating from Marat in 1967 went on with other original Vanguard members to form the Gay and Lesbian Center.” I thank Mr. Ravarour for this clarification and additional information.

⁹⁴ Vanguard Revisited, 9-11.

⁹⁵ Interview by Joey Plaster, 2011, in *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

effective organizer for Vanguard. He had moved to California thinking it would be a “promised land” for gay people, but found it impossible to get a job. He fell into the drug scene, and was using drugs regularly when he became a member of Vanguard. After being elected president of the group, he realized their work was more important than “my Crystal and the small amount of money I was making pushing,” so he decided to get sober.⁹⁷

In July 1966 the local gay newspaper *Cruise News* announced the formation of the group, which declared itself dedicated to the empowerment of the Tenderloin’s “hair fairies, lost kids, hustlers, young adults without family ties.”⁹⁸ According to the announcement the only requirement for membership was that a person be a “kid on the street.” Vanguard was explicitly not a group for middle-class or middle-aged gay people. As founder Joel Roberts said: “We believe that we can take care of a large portion of our problems without the interference of the Federal government, head shrinkers or older people, most of whom do not at all understand the problems of the kids.”⁹⁹ That same July Joel and Adrian approached nearby Glide Methodist Church, which had a reputation for supporting gay rights, or what was then often called the “homophile movement,” and received permission from youth minister Ed Hansen to hold their first meeting in the church’s community room that month.¹⁰⁰

The perspectives and practices of the Vanguard group emerge through the

⁹⁷ Jean-Paul Marat, “Drugs in the Tenderloin,” manuscript, 1967, Don Lucas Papers, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco.

⁹⁸ “Young Rejects Form Own Organization,” *Cruise News and World Report* 2: 7, July 1966.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Vanguard Revisited, 9-10.

group's writing in its newsletter of the same name. Published between 1966 and 1970, the newsletter was circulated amongst youth in the Tenderloin, and especially along the Meat Rack. It contained a combination of political position pieces, first person narratives about life in the Tenderloin, artwork, poetry, and editorial statements written by the group's members.¹⁰¹

In comparison with COYOTE and other women's sex worker organizations, Vanguard was much less focused on the single issue of prostitution. For Vanguard, resistance to the criminalization of sex work and police targeting of sex workers was woven in with resistance to harassment based on gender expression and sexual identity. Vanguard's writing and actions refer to a web of stigmatized identities and statuses that were virtually impossible to separate from one another: homosexuality, non-normative gender expression, involvement in illegal sex work, poverty, youth, homelessness. After all, these identities and practices were hardly viewed as distinct by the police: as discussed earlier, poor queer and transgender people in the Tenderloin were often assumed by police to be sex workers and drug addicts, and when arrested for solicitation were often also charged for cross-dressing.

Given this web of factors contributing to extreme social marginalization, contributors to *Vanguard* advocated developing unity on the street. In an article written in October 1966, local gay activist Ray Broshears wrote about the need to fight back together against homophobic attacks. He described a recent violent encounter he had witnessed on the streets of the Tenderloin:

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

A new-found art has come upon the San Francisco scene, that is, The Art of Standing By and Watching Someone Get The Shit Beat Out of Them....San Francisco's Tenderloin has now adopted this art, to wit: a brutal beating of two people on Market Street. What has become of us when we stand idly by and watch someone be beaten senseless by two or three people and do absolutely nothing to stop it?...Not until the young residents of the area learn to pull together and jump in to stop this crap, will there be any sort of order in the chaos that now exists here.¹⁰²

He went on to link homophobic violence to class stratification in San Francisco, gesturing toward the ways in which class was mapped onto the geography of the city: "We must stand together against the cowards and bullies of the middle and upper-class areas of our city who come to our area and get their rocks off by: BEATING THE SHIT OUT OF QUEERS!"¹⁰³

Vanguard placed high priority on fighting police harassment and violence. The group used its newsletter to share information about specific incidents of police misconduct and to give readers a means of reporting their own encounters with both law enforcement and business owners who called the police on queer and transgender youth. An article published in February 1967 urged readers to contact the newspaper directly or to contact Citizens' Alert, an activist group that monitored police misconduct: "Anyone who has been directly victimized or discriminated against by Compton's, the Plush Doggie or any other business please report the incident...to one of the editors."¹⁰⁴ The article referred to the Citizens' Alert project, formed in 1965, which collected complaints and attempted to pressure the police department to

¹⁰² Ray Broshears, "A New Found Art," *Vanguard* 1: 2 (October 1966), 7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Untitled, *Vanguard* 1: 4 (February 1967), 8.

penalize the officers involved. According to some participants, the project was less than successful and in fact demonstrated the inefficacy of using the police department's own infrastructure to reform its officers' conduct. Charles Lewis recalled:

What we found out is that after 2 years...we had reported, I don't know, 50 or 100 cases. Of those 80 percent were immediately dismissed. The other 18 cases were investigated and no guilt was found. Of the 2 that were left only one was ever prosecuted to any degree and he was probably reprimanded and that was the end of it. What we found out is that although Citizens Alert was a great idea, we didn't have any power.¹⁰⁵

Vanguard attempted to reform police practices in other ways as well, including through a short-lived effort to work with the Tenderloin's Police-Community Relations Board. Vanguard members set their sights on changing the composition of the Police-Community Relations Board, the body that made decisions regarding interactions between district officers and neighborhood groups and institutions. They began their effort by attending a public Police-Community Relations meeting held in the Tenderloin on March 14, 1967. According to an article in its newsletter, the Vanguard contingent hoped to have a liberal priest named Friar Bruno appointed to the board instead of the more conservative appointee selected by the Chief of Police.¹⁰⁶ The author claimed, "Mr. Popham, the chairman appointed by the Chief, is a puppet of the Establishment and dogmatically prejudiced."¹⁰⁷

Initially cautiously optimistic, Vanguard members were disappointed when

¹⁰⁵Lewis, interview, 24.

¹⁰⁶Untitled, *Vanguard* 1: 5 (March 1967).

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

police Captain Charles Barca refused to accept their input and upheld the appointment of Popham as Chairman of the Police-Community Relations Committee in the Tenderloin.¹⁰⁸ The authors of the newsletter article were disappointed, but they did report gleefully on the audience reaction:

What followed has been classified as “pandemonium,” “bitch-fight procedure” and “pure unadulterated shit....We rendered the meeting useless, by our noise level....If we are slobs, queers, drunks, drags, transsexuals and dope freaks first and human beings...last, there is no need for Police Community Relations.¹⁰⁹

After being told, “If you don’t like it, leave” by a sergeant in attendance, Vanguard members left in disgust.¹¹⁰

In addition to its efforts to reform the police institution, Vanguard also occasionally organized actions, intended to publicize political issues relevant to the lives of Tenderloin youth. The October 1966 event was called a “Sweep In.”

Vanguard described its intentions in a press release:

Tonight a “clean sweep” will be made on Market St., not by the POLICE, but by the street people who are often the object of police harassment. The drug addicts, pillheads, teenage hustlers, lesbians, and homosexuals who make San Francisco’s “MEAT RACK” their home are tired of living in the midst of the filth thrown out onto the sidewalks and into the streets by nearby businessmen.¹¹¹

An estimated forty to fifty young people from the Tenderloin marched in the street at around 10 p.m., holding large push brooms and sweeping Market Street between

¹⁰⁸“Police Community Relations Meeting,” *Vanguard* 1: 6 (1967).

¹⁰⁹“Police Community Relations Meeting.”

¹¹⁰ “Not A Meeting,” *Vanguard* 1: 6 (1967).

¹¹¹ “Sweep In,” *Vanguard* 1: 2 (October 1966), 4-5.

Powell and Turk Streets.¹¹² The press release calls attention to the class tensions simmering between Tenderloin residents and businessmen in the neighboring financial district. The text inverts dominant conceptions of street youth as the sources of the area's "filth," instead identifying businessmen as the unwelcome visitors dirtying the neighborhood with trash and waste.

Vanguard's heyday took place in 1966 and 1967, when the Tenderloin was the center of the city's queer street youth subculture. The geography of struggle began shifting in 1967, when the famous migration of young people to Haight-Ashbury began. Many queer youth moved to the Haight, integrating themselves into the hippie scene and developing their own squats and nightlife. Some street prostitution shifted from the Tenderloin to the Haight while other queer and transgender youth began working on Polk Street when construction of the BART line along Market Street in 1967 effectively shut down the older Meat Rack.¹¹³ Joel Roberts and Adrian Ravarour, interviewed in 2011, attributed the dissolution of Vanguard in 1967 to personality conflicts and leadership struggles, but added that Marat and Mark Forrester continued with street youth when they were appointed aids to the administrator of the War on Poverty-funded Central City target area. In 1967 the office funded the an urban mobile health and a drop-in center for street youth called Hospitality House.¹¹⁴ Despite the demise of Vanguard and the diffusion of the

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹¹³ Lewis, interview, 13-14, 33. Lewis recalled: "About one third of them went to the Haight Ashbury and the other two-thirds distributed themselves up and down the coast."

¹¹⁴ Vanguard Revisited, 12.

Tenderloin scene, Keith Oliver continued to publish the *Vanguard* newsletter until 1969 out of a community center in the Haight, reporting on the daily struggles of queer and transgender youth, police brutality, and, increasingly, national and international political issues such as the Vietnam War and the Black Power movement.¹¹⁵

Those least able to leave the Tenderloin were transgender women and drag queens, particularly older ones, who relied on the neighborhood's dwindling stock of cheap residential hotels. They remained in the neighborhood into the 1970s, and *Vanguard*'s legacy of militancy continued to resonate with them. On September 7, 1973 Raymond Broshears, the gay activist and minister who had written for *Vanguard* newsletter in 1966, helped organize a demonstration to protest housing discrimination against these aging queer and transgender hotel residents. As real estate values continued to rise in the Tenderloin and elderly residents of the SoMa displaced by the Yerba Buena project moved into the neighborhood, "undesirable" tenants such as queer people and sex workers began to be pushed out. A dozen drag queens and their supporters picketed the Hotel Hyland on Taylor Street to protest their eviction when the hotel's lease had changed hands on August 1. The pretext for their eviction had been the claim by landlords and beat cops that they brought home tricks, again demonstrating how homophobia and transphobia were closely intertwined with the criminalization of sex work.¹¹⁶ Though these particular residents

¹¹⁵ *Vanguard* revisited, 12. See also Stryker, *Transgender History*, 72.

¹¹⁶ "Drag Queens Protest Tenderloin Housing Pinch," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 7, 1973, 4.

did lose their homes, their activism contributed to the growing Tenderloin tenant movement that, in 1979, successfully won a halt on hotel conversions and rent control laws.¹¹⁷ Thus Vanguard's early promotion of a culture of pride and solidarity amongst the Tenderloin's most stigmatized residents had long-lasting effects.

Vanguard's early contributions to the city's soon-to-be-famous gay and transgender liberation movement still stand out as unique efforts to tie queer and transgender oppression to class and labor issues, linking prostitution to gender and sexual discrimination in the formal sector. In its writings and political activities the group advanced an analysis of the role of criminalization and policing in enforcing a particular geographical organization of the city, an urban spatial order in which sexual minorities were positioned on the fringes of the financial and tourism districts. This spatial organization effectively minimized the visibility of poorer sexual minorities to tourists and professionals but still made them available to perform sexual services for those located in nearby hotels and office buildings. Finally, the group modeled community solidarity in its efforts to develop collective neighborhood responses to violence and harassment—practices that would become critical to the successes of the gay liberation movement just a few years later.

Feminist Organizing for Decriminalization: The Case of COYOTE

¹¹⁷ Randy Shaw, "Tenant Power in San Francisco," in James Brook, Chris Carlsson, and Nancy J. Peters, eds., *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), 292.

As many scholars have noted, the feminist movements of the 1970s were sharply divided on issues of sexual exploitation and criminalization, in particular as related to prostitution and pornography. While the 1970s “second wave” is often associated with feminists who supported the criminalization of prostitution such as Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, scholars and activists have also called attention to prominent alternative feminisms of the time, including the emergence of organizing by sex workers.¹¹⁸ The two groups examined here, Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE) and Wages for Housework, fall into this second tradition. Though politically quite different from one another, both groups organized against the criminalization of sex work, identifying policing and criminalization as key methods

¹¹⁸ Alice Echols discusses these conflicts in Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). See also Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” in Gayle Rubin, *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Raleigh-Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and Jane Gerhard’s discussion of the “feminist sex wars” in Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 187-192. For more discussion of differing strains of feminist thought on sexuality and sex work during the second wave, see Stephanie Gilmore, *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000); Wini Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005); Kathleen A. Laughlin and Jacqueline L. Castledine, *Breaking the Wave: Women, Their Organizations, and Feminism, 1945-1985* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Jennifer Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Laurie Shrage, *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery, and Abortion* (New York: Routledge, 1994);

by which the state regulated gender and sexual norms and enforced women's subordination. They noted the impact of criminalization on gender discrimination in labor markets, arguing that the existence of high-risk illegal sexual labor markets not only exposed working-class women to violence and arrest, but also negatively impacted their status in the formal labor market. Both groups emphasized the racial and gendered aspects of urban working-class life and labor, using a feminist lens to expand existing notions of class to include forms of feminized labor, including sexual and emotional labor.

The 1970s saw the rise of women's sex worker organizing in the United States and Europe. Sex workers started pushing their labor into the public eye and demanding better working conditions, influenced by a number of other movements and social trends: second wave feminism, the welfare rights movement, civil rights and Black power organizing against police brutality, and public sector unionization efforts. Prostitutes in particular formed groups fighting for the decriminalization of their sexual labor. In the mid-70s dozens of groups sprouted up in cities across the United States: PONY in New York, DOLPHIN in Hawaii, PUMA in Massachusetts, CUPIDS in Detroit, KITTY in Kansas City, CAT in Los Angeles, and HIRE in Atlanta, to name just a few. Groups appeared in Europe as well. In 1975 prostitutes in Lyon, France occupied a church in response to the murder of prostitute women and

police complicity with the crimes. In London the English Collective of Prostitutes formed in 1975 and also occupied a church, demanding an end to police violence.¹¹⁹

The first known sex worker rights group of this era, COYOTE, was founded in San Francisco on May 13, 1973, and its politics and rhetoric came to influence many of these groups. According to COYOTE's founder, Margo St. James, a former sex worker and participant in Bay Area counterculture circles, the group was formed on Mother's Day under the name of Whores, Housewives, and Others, or WHO.¹²⁰ Looking for funding to expand the group's operations, St. James secured a \$5,000 grant from the liberal social justice-oriented Glide Methodist Church in San Francisco. St. James recalled Glide asking the group to come up with a "respectable" sounding name that could be used when soliciting funds from church donors. The name COYOTE was chosen because the group identified with the animal: they argued that coyotes in the wild, like prostitutes, are maligned and treated badly by men. Only six months later did the founders affix an acronym to the moniker: Call

¹¹⁹ Gail Pheterson, "Preface," in Gail Pheterson, ed., *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1989), 5. See also Gail Pheterson, *The Prostitution Prism* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996); Gregory Gall, *An Agency of Their Own: Sex Worker Union Organizing* (New York: John Hunt Publishing, 2012); Wendy Chapkis, *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1997); Carol Leigh, *Unrepentant Whore: The Collected Work of Scarlet Harlot* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2004); Valerie Jenness, *Making it Work: The Prostitutes' Rights Movement in Perspective* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993); Melinda Chateauvert, *Sex Workers Unite: A History of the Movement from Stonewall to Slutwalk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013); Holly Beth Pottle, "Sex Workers' Rights Movement: Obstacles and Resiliency," M.A. thesis, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, 2006; Alexandra Leah Lutnick, "The Saint James Infirmary: A Sex Worker Social Movement," M.A. thesis, San Francisco State University, 2004.

¹²⁰ Margo St. James, "Margo St. James: Whore and Madonna," manuscript, folder 38, COYOTE Papers. See also typed statement on COYOTE letterhead, folder 26, COYOTE Papers.

Off Your Old Tired Ethics. Thus started the trend of local groups elsewhere using the names of animals as acronyms for the organization.¹²¹

Margo St. James was the brainchild behind COYOTE and had a strong influence upon the group's political and practical trajectory. An eccentric San Francisco personality active in San Francisco's nightlife, counterculture, and "free love" circles, St. James was known for her brash personality and attention-getting antics. A white woman who was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, she married young and got divorced at the age of twenty.¹²² She moved to San Francisco in the 1950s and began working as a "b-girl" in afterhours clubs, hired by bar owners to lure patrons into purchasing drinks.¹²³ She worked as a prostitute off and on throughout the 1960s, and was once arrested and convicted on prostitution charges. After leaving San Francisco for seven years in the late 1960s to start a housecleaning business in the Northwest, she returned to the Bay Area and decided to begin organizing to decriminalize prostitution.¹²⁴

Although active in 1960s counterculture circles and an outspoken advocate of sexual liberalism, St. James was never a political radical and in fact at one point

¹²¹ COYOTE, typed statement on COYOTE letterhead, folder 26, COYOTE Papers.

¹²² St. James, "Margo St. James," 7.

¹²³ For an in-depth discussion of the "b-girl" phenomenon in San Francisco, see Andrea Lowgren, "City Limits: Reputation and the Sexual Cartography of Women's Mobility in Mid-Twentieth-Century San Francisco," PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 2007. See also Amanda H. Littauer, "The B-Girl Evil: Bureaucracy, Sexuality, and the Menace of Barroom Vice in Postwar California," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12:2 (April 2003), 171-204; Josh Sides, *Erotic City*.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

attempted to run for local office on a Republican ticket.¹²⁵ A contradictory figure, she is perhaps best described as a libertarian who opposed the policing of sexual morality, but who believed in the free market and the opportunities available to women through legal employment as sex workers.

St. James' philosophy influenced that of COYOTE. The organization's mission throughout its existence was focused on achieving the decriminalization of prostitution in San Francisco. The group distinguished between the goal of decriminalization and that of legalization, or active government regulation of prostitution. In COYOTE's words:

Decriminalization of prostitution...[means] to remove prostitution from the criminal code and from government control....COYOTE is opposed to legalization because it would still involve the government and enable it to license and regulate what a woman does with her body.¹²⁶

The group argued that legalization would only create more obstacles and place more restrictions upon sex workers. The brothel system in Nevada was an example of the negative effects of legalization: according to COYOTE it had created an invasive system of state surveillance, monitoring, and medical, economic, and psychological control over prostitutes.¹²⁷

In line with St. James' libertarian philosophy, COYOTE sometimes spoke of prostitution as a "legitimate" business operation and prostitutes as independent

¹²⁵COYOTE, press release, September 28, 1978, folder 256, COYOTE Papers. The press release includes a quote from St. James: "My mother is a Republican... I consider myself conservative fiscally and environmentally, but no right-winger."

¹²⁶COYOTE, "Decriminalization," June 1975, folder 26, COYOTE Papers.

¹²⁷COYOTE, "Background," [n.d.], folder 26, COYOTE Papers.

entrepreneurs. Thus its brand of pro-decriminalization politics could be uncritical of the dynamics of exploitation present in legal market relations. The group seemed to adhere to a notice of free choice through the market, arguing that sex workers were denied their right to freely enter into contractual relations with customers and to compete in the marketplace due to the state's enforcement of outdated conceptions of sexual morality.¹²⁸ COYOTE sought to remove what the group saw as conservative cultural prejudices inhibiting the advancements of sex workers' economic interests. In the words of one observer: "The business of prostitution as proposed by COYOTE would run a competitive capitalist model, with the seller free to market her wares at the going price."¹²⁹

Though this libertarian perspective generally prevented the organization from veering too closely toward leftist or radical politics, COYOTE did embrace some of the rhetoric and politics emerging from contemporary radical feminist movements. COYOTE members referred to politicians and business leaders across the political spectrum as members of a "boys club."¹³⁰ COYOTE documents also linked the treatment of prostitutes to the structural subordination of women. An article in the June and July 1975 issue of the group's newsletter *Coyote Growls*, for instance, argues that

¹²⁸ See discussion, including quotations from members of COYOTE, in Guy Louis Rocha, "The Emergence of Militant Prostitution in America: COYOTE, A 'Loose' Woman's Organization" M.A. thesis, San Diego State University, May 1975, 3, folder 956, COYOTE Papers.

¹²⁹ Amy A. Rossborough, "A Look At Prostitution," research paper, May 4, 1979, 14, folder 956, COYOTE Papers.

¹³⁰ Margo St. James, COYOTE press release, September 28, 1978, folder 256, COYOTE Papers.

Incarceration of the prostitute is an object lesson for ALL women. Keeping her behavior illegal is absolutely necessary for the subjugation of women....A woman is put in jail if she capitalizes on the Sexsystem, directly excommunicated if she attempts to take control of her own body, but her image is used to sell everything for man's profit.¹³¹

The statement emphasizes the role of policing and criminalization in enforcing women's subordination generally, thus drawing a link between the experiences of prostitutes and those of women as a broad social group.

Whatever its ideological and political contradictions, COYOTE did important work to support sex workers dealing with the often overwhelming consequences of arrest, conviction, fines, and harassment, as well as the general effects of involvement in illegal and highly stigmatized work. The organization pursued several different avenues in its activism between 1973 and 1979: organizing educational programs for sex workers, raising funds to provide emergency resources, working for legal reforms through petitioning legislators and filing lawsuits, monitoring vice squad behavior and providing avenues for sex workers to report mistreatment, working to reform arrest and court procedures, and using direct action and protest methods to challenge policing tactics.

In terms of educational and emergency support work, COYOTE members counseled sex workers on their legal rights and showed them how to fill out release forms and other legal paperwork.¹³² Members held classes on budgeting and investing and used funds from social service agencies to run job training programs for women

¹³¹ Margo St. James, "Editorial: The War on Women," *Coyote Growls: The Newspaper of A Loose Women's Organization* 1: 3, June/July 1975, 1.

¹³² COYOTE, press release, not dated, folder 254, COYOTE Papers.

seeking to leave prostitution.¹³³ In 1975 the organization created a “hooker hotline” prostitutes could call for advice on legal issues as well as for emotional support. COYOTE used the proceeds from its popular Hookers’ Balls, held annually from 1974 to 1979, to help women just out of jail find emergency housing and battered prostitutes find therapeutic and economic support. The balls, which were attended by local celebrities and politicians, hosted thousands of partygoers, peaking at an estimated 20,000 guests in 1978.¹³⁴

The group’s ultimate goal remained decriminalization. To this end, in July 1974 COYOTE filed a class-action lawsuit seeking “declaratory and injunctive relief from a wasteful and illegal expenditure of taxpayers’ funds.”¹³⁵ Using the logic that prosecuting prostitution had been proven ineffectual, as well as the argument that prostitution was a victimless crime, in its brief COYOTE argued that the millions spent annually on law enforcement and court proceedings constituted a waste of taxpayer’s money. The lawsuit claimed that six constitutional amendments and four California constitutional provisions were being violated by the criminalization of prostitution.¹³⁶ Though ultimately unsuccessful, the lawsuit created significant publicity around the issue of decriminalization.¹³⁷

¹³³ Margo St. James, written statement on COYOTE letterhead, folder 254, COYOTE Papers.

¹³⁴ COYOTE, press release, not dated, folder 254, COYOTE Papers.

¹³⁵ Rocha, “The Emergence of Militant Prostitution in America,” 10.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁷ Valerie Jenness, “From Sex as Sin to Sex as Work: COYOTE and the Reorganization of Prostitution as a Social Problem,” *Social Problems* 37: 3 (August 1990), 403-420.

As part of its effort to combat vice squad targeting of sex workers on the streets, in June 1975 COYOTE began monitoring vice officers on patrol in the Tenderloin. They reported on their efforts in their newsletter *Coyote Growls*. An anonymous author recounted what she saw during her shift:

I parked...by the flower stand on the southeast corner of the busiest intersection in town (for certain things)...[the undercover] held a newspaper which he “read” at various intervals (in the dark!)...He was Dapper Dan in a dark blue suit (cops tend to wear blue or brown—exception: narcs).¹³⁸

She went on to describe several encounters between women on the street and the undercover officers, and to demonstrate how her presence affected their behavior:

One small, lovely Black girl stepped off the curb and realized she was in a minefield....By completely avoiding any recognition of the Vice’s existence she was able to angle down the street without appearing to be in the hurry she was....He couldn’t run after her in my presence. I snapped a shot. He ducked back.¹³⁹

COYOTE also at times relied on the by-then traditional civil rights tactics of picketing and holding public demonstrations as a means of exposing vice squad practices. On April 4, 1977, members of COYOTE, along with members of other women’s organizations, gathered to protest the beating of a sex worker and a taxi driver by undercover vice squad officers at the Hilton Hotel. A young woman named Janet Philips, aged twenty-three, had been arrested outside the hotel on March 25 during a classic entrapment set-up. She received facial fractures during a beating in the holding cell of the Hilton basement by her arresting officer, Craig Piro. David Taboe, the taxi driver, was arrested when he ran to Philips’ defense during her arrest,

¹³⁸ Galloping Horse, “Notes on A Street Corner,” *Coyote Growls*, June/July 1975, 5.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

thinking she was being mugged. He was punched and kicked unconscious in the same holding cell.¹⁴⁰

COYOTE also targeted downtown tourist hotels, which were often complicit in the illegal entrapment of prostitutes within their premises. On October 22, 1973 the group picketed four major hotels, including the Regency Hyatt Hotel, where entrapment had recently occurred.¹⁴¹ The following day members picketed the Stanford Court, Bellevue, and Hilton hotels, carrying signs with slogans such as “No More Cops In My Bed.”¹⁴² A COYOTE flyer from September announced the picketing campaign as a response to a recent wave of entrapment cases, including an incident on September 24 when police invited twelve alleged call girls to a downtown hotel and arrested them on charges of soliciting.¹⁴³ The flyer continued: “Some of San Francisco’s finest hotels cooperate with the police in entrapment of otherwise innocent people on serious sexual charges....They take pleasure in aiding this illegal practice, involving their staff, making vigilantes out of bell hops.”¹⁴⁴ The action highlighted the position of tourist hotels as businesses that simultaneously profited from customers who used their hotel rooms for paid sexual encounters and from keeping sex workers relatively isolated and fearful, and thus discreet. Hotels like the Hilton, Hyatt, and Bellevue had holding cells built into their basements specifically for the purpose of working with law enforcement officers to arrest and harass, and

¹⁴⁰ “Women Protest an Arrest,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 4, 1977.

¹⁴¹ COYOTE, press release, 3, folder 254, COYOTE Papers.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ COYOTE, flyer, “Stop Police Entrapment,” folder 254, COYOTE Papers.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

sometimes physically assault, sex workers.¹⁴⁵ The link between a patriarchal double standard and the economic need to protect the anonymity and safety of the johns is made clear by the failure of these hotels to seek the arrest of their largely male customers.

Although COYOTE continued its activism into the 1980s, after the organization's office burned down in a fire in August 1978 the group largely merged into the National Task Force on Prostitution, which was co-founded by St. James and Priscilla Alexander in 1979. The National Task Force did similar work as COYOTE but was more focused on coordinating decriminalization efforts between cities in an effort to build a national movement of sex workers. However the National Task Force continued to engage in some local organizing, monitoring police activity and providing resources for sex workers facing criminal charges. In 1984 the National Task Force on Prostitution held its first national convention in San Francisco, coinciding with the Democratic National Convention. In 1985 Margo St. James helped to found the International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights (ICPR), based in Amsterdam, of which the National Task Force on Prostitution became a member. The International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights sponsored the World Whores' Congress in Amsterdam in 1985, and St. James moved to Europe in 1986 to work with the organization more closely. Priscilla Alexander and Gloria Lockett took over the leadership of the National Task Force on Prostitution in San Francisco.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ "Women Protest an Arrest."

¹⁴⁶ "Coyote (Organization) Records, 1962-1989: A Finding Aid," Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe

COYOTE can perhaps best be thought of as an example of class-conscious liberal feminism, highly critical of pro-criminalization tendencies within the feminist movement. Though not critical of exploitation through the free market, the group did point out the role of criminalization and policing in enforcing racial and gender subordination, and in keeping working-class women poor and socially isolated. COYOTE also emphasized the way that policing was used by business and political elites as a tool to enforce the economic and spatial regime they had effectively mapped onto downtown, with certain neighborhoods designated for tourism and finance, others for tourist hotels, and poor people, including street sex workers, pushed to the fringes of this zone.

A Marxist-Feminist Organization Against Criminalization: The Case of San Francisco Wages for Housework

Although COYOTE was by far the most prominent and largest feminist group in San Francisco working on the issue of decriminalization during the 1970s, a second feminist group emerged in 1975 to participate in the growing sex worker movement. This group, San Francisco Wages for Housework, differed from COYOTE in its political framework and its brand of feminist analysis, but shared COYOTE's commitment to ending the involvement of the legal and penal systems in the lives of sex workers. San Francisco Wages for Housework was actually a chapter in a larger

College, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., May 1996,
<http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~sch00278>, accessed January 18, 2014.

international organization called Wages for Housework, a Marxist feminist group with chapters in New York, Los Angeles, London, Toronto, and cities across Italy. The organization was founded in the summer of 1972 in Padua, Italy by Italian Marxist feminists who had participated in Italy's leftist social movements of the 1960s. Some of these women, in response to sexism within the left and the conservatism of Italian society, had begun developing autonomous women's organizations that still functioned under the umbrella of the Italian radical left. Members of the new women's groups developed a Marxist feminist theoretical framework that focused on the role of women's unpaid household labor in sustaining capitalist economic and social relations. They took up the slogan of "wages for housework" as part of a major campaign to win money from the state for women's work in the home, and to have housewives recognized socially as workers.¹⁴⁷

In the U.S. women such as the Marxist and anti-racist activist Selma James organized a New York chapter in 1972, which became involved in the growing U.S. welfare rights movement. An autonomous chapter within Wages for Housework called Black Women for Wages for Housework worked along with the New York chapter on various campaigns between 1975 and 1977 but focused specifically on the

¹⁴⁷ Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 5-10. See also Selma James, *Sex, Race, and Class: The Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings, 1952 – 2011* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012); and Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 113-151.

needs and demands of urban African American women.¹⁴⁸

The San Francisco chapter of Wages for Housework was founded on October 20, 1976, along with a new chapter in Los Angeles called the Los Angeles Committee for Wages for Housework. The initial public announcement of both groups' founding explained their feminist analysis of housework and women's exploitation under capitalism:

We want the wage because we think that the reason women are so powerless is because all the work that we do in the home is unwaged. It is not even recognized as work....Even if one of us can get a non-traditional job outside the home, we can't escape our other job in the home....It has become obvious to us that our 24 hour work day isn't just benefiting our loved ones but it is putting a lot of profits in the pockets of big corporations by remaining wageless work.¹⁴⁹

For Wages for Housework, prostitution was not a "free choice" in the way articulated by COYOTE, but neither was it an example of a unique violation of women's civil rights, in the way described by pro-criminalization feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon.¹⁵⁰ The group's arguments for decriminalization emphasized not the right of prostitutes to compete in the marketplace, but rather the direct negative effects of criminalization on prostitutes themselves. For them, prostitution was a choice made by women with relatively few good options available to them; in comparison with the unpaid work of housewives, the meager pay of service work, or the subsistence level

¹⁴⁸ Black Women for Wages for Housework, "Money for Prostitutes is Money for Black Women," in booklet *Keeping Up the Fight for Decriminalization: Hookers and Housewives Come Together*, 1977, folder 541, COYOTE Papers.

¹⁴⁹ San Francisco Wages for Housework, letter, October 20, 1976, folder 540, COYOTE Papers.

¹⁵⁰ Catherine MacKinnon, "Prostitution and Civil Rights," *Michigan Journal of Gender & Law* 1 (1993), 13-31.

subsidies of state welfare, sex work was not an irrational choice. Unlike COYOTE, Wages for Housework saw the only real solution to women's exploitation in the establishment of socialism; in the meantime, however, the group sought to free sex workers from the significant added burden of arrests, prison sentences, and social marginalization by winning an end to state persecution.¹⁵¹

Although Wages for Housework chapters focused primarily on the issue of women's unpaid labor in the home, they also took up the issue of prostitution and in a number of instances fought for decriminalization. Women involved in the London chapter, for instance, worked with the English Collective of Prostitutes, a group founded in 1975 that did work similar to that of COYOTE and also staged direct actions to publicize the effects of policing on sex workers. In November 1982, for instance, the group occupied the Church of the Holy Cross in King's Cross, London, for twelve days to publicize the effects of criminalization on sex workers.¹⁵²

San Francisco Wages for Housework became involved in the decriminalization movement in 1977, when the group organized a campaign to stop a renewed wave of crackdowns on street prostitution. In response to recent sweeps and an announcement by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors of their intention to raise the criminal penalties for prostitution, the chapter wrote a February 15 statement to the Board issuing a number of demands. They demanded the abolition of all laws

¹⁵¹ San Francisco Wages for Housework, "An Attack on Prostitutes is An Attack On All Women," in booklet, *Keeping Up the Fight for Decriminalization: Hookers and Housewives Come Together*.

¹⁵² Gail Pheterson, "Preface," in Pheterson, ed., *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores*, 6.

against prostitution, amnesty for all prostitutes, and the removal of all criminal records relating to prostitution, arguing that the laws were designed to punish not johns but only prostitutes themselves:

The work of prostitutes is a crucial service for the visiting businessmen and tourists who bring money into San Francisco. The Supervisors have no intention of abolishing an important source of income for the city. The laws against prostitution are designed, instead, to prevent prostitute women from organizing for higher wages and better working conditions...The laws against prostitution are designed to cut off prostitute women from other women.¹⁵³

Along with the statement to the Board of Supervisors, in February Wages for Housework circulated a petition signed by other San Francisco organizations, including COYOTE, the Haight-Ashbury Women's Health Clinic, the San Francisco State University Women's Center, and the Women's Prison Study Group.¹⁵⁴

The statements themselves provide examples of the group's particular brand of Marxist feminist analysis, demonstrating how the members linked sex work to the overarching structure of capitalist patriarchy. For instance, the documents repeatedly attempt to show the similarities between prostitution and other waged work: "All work is prostitution and we are all prostitutes. We are forced to sell our bodies—room and board or for cash, in marriage, on the street, in typing pools or in factories."¹⁵⁵ A February 15 document written by Black Women for Wages for Housework, published with the San Francisco chapter's statement, ties the sex

¹⁵³ San Francisco Wages for Housework and the Los Angeles Wages for Housework Committee, "Statement to the Board of Supervisors," February 15, 1977, folder 541, COYOTE Papers.

¹⁵⁴ San Francisco Wages for Housework, "An Attack on Prostitutes Is An Attack on All Women."

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

workers' rights movement to the issue of welfare rights, pointing out that both struggles represent efforts to win financial independence from husbands and boyfriends and to get more money in the hands of women themselves:

Just as Black women who get welfare—which is the first wage women have won in this country for the work we do in our homes—are resisting the welfare cuts and demanding more money...we are refusing to settle for the sweatshop just because the Man tells us it's a "respectable" job: "respectable" or not, we demand cash money.¹⁵⁶

The emphasis on money was critical. A central tenet of the Wages for Housework campaign held that money of their own would allow women more freedom to define the terms of their sexual and intimate relationships and to challenge gender divisions of labor within the family.¹⁵⁷

As part of its campaign against the new wave of crackdowns, San Francisco Wages for Housework declared an international day of action on May 9, 1977 to protest the harassment of prostitutes in San Francisco and around the world. Events were scheduled in San Francisco, New York, London, and Los Angeles.¹⁵⁸ In San Francisco the group organized a publicity stunt in the form of a mock trial on the steps of City Hall. The trial was described as "Women v. the Board of Supervisors, Police Chief Gain, Governor Brown, President Carter, General Motors and John Does 1-50."¹⁵⁹ The charge was "pimping off of prostitutes and off of all the work women

¹⁵⁶ Black Women for Wages for Housework, "Money for Prostitutes is Money for Black Women."

¹⁵⁷ James, *The Perspective of Winning*.

¹⁵⁸ San Francisco Wages for Housework, typed letter, March 19, 1977, folder 541, COYOTE Papers.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

do.”¹⁶⁰ A woman from the Los Angeles chapter of Wages for Housework acted as prosecutor, arguing that government and big business have “robbed us, raped us, and beaten us to force us off the street and back into the home to work for free—with the force of law behind them.”¹⁶¹ She went on to provide a succinct analysis of the economics of prostitution in San Francisco, pointing out that the city benefits economically from prostitution, which attracts tourists and brings business to local bars and the liquor industry. Local government benefits directly, she claimed, by collecting fines from women convicted of prostitution, and police benefit by collecting lucrative pay-offs. The judge, of course, found the defendants guilty, and then delivered the sentence: a lifetime of unpaid housework.¹⁶²

Although the San Francisco Wages for Housework chapter did not last very long—it stopped organizing events in 1983—it provides an important example of an organization that combined feminist and Marxist analysis and used its critique of capitalist patriarchy to advocate for sex workers. Wages for Housework differed from COYOTE in its analysis of capitalism and of wage labor in particular. While COYOTE saw wage labor as a contract into which workers entered freely, Wages for Housework argued that a society in which the majority were forced to sell their labor in exchange for access to money to buy necessary goods and services so that a minority could reap profits was fundamentally exploitative. In this sense, for them wage labor was not entirely unrelated to prostitution, as both were based on the

¹⁶⁰ “Mock Trial of Business and Government: Sentence: Lifetime of Housework,” *Oakland Tribune*, May 10, 1977.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

exchange of labor for money under conditions of material necessity. Thus Wages for Housework did not believe, like COYOTE, that decriminalization would free sex workers from exploitation.

A comparison of Wages for Housework and COYOTE shows that, despite their political and ideological differences, both groups came to similar conclusions about the negative effect of criminalization on the lives of women selling their sexual labor. In particular, both groups attacked what they saw as the hypocrisy of local government, law enforcement, and business interests, all of which benefited financially from the sex trade yet continued to target sex workers. Both groups embraced a feminist analysis, linking women's sale of sexual labor to their performance of unwaged emotional and sexual labor within the structure of the family. And both groups emphasized the economics of prostitution, demonstrating that the project of sex worker organizing was indeed a form of working class struggle. The two groups pointed to the role of discrimination in the formal labor market in shaping working class women's choices, and showed how illegal sex work often seemed like a better option. They also showed how criminalization of sex work placed additional burdens on the lives of working class women and tended to concentrate struggles around the issue of policing. The police became the visible face of their struggle against local government efforts to control the illegal sex trade, and also made explicit the role of government in enforcing the interests of business investors.

Conclusion

This chapter examined political responses to the emergence of new economic and spatial regimes in post-industrial San Francisco. San Francisco's shift to post-industrial land use patterns in the 1950s and 1960s involved a major re-organization of urban space and changes in the dynamics of sexual labor, including its physical location in a new urban geography centered on downtown tourism and finance districts. I analyzed the effect of these regimes on some of the city's most marginal residents, working-class sexual and gender minorities involved in sexual labor markets, and their development of political strategies to challenge the negative aspects of these new regimes.

I have also traced the causes of prostitution's ambiguous position in a post-industrial economy, in particular its complicated relationship to San Francisco's growing tourism sector. Simultaneously profitable and a threat to profitability, as well as a potential political liability, prostitution posed a challenge to the city's political and business elites. This chapter described the methods used by these city leaders to manage the contradictions presented by booming postwar sexual labor markets. Government officials and business leaders relied upon the technique of criminalization as a way of minimizing these contradictions. The police department used beat patrols, sweeps, and undercover work to allow prostitution to occur but to regulate its size, visibility, and location. This regulation had serious consequences for sex workers themselves, who found themselves subject to sporadic waves of arrest and harassment. City leaders also used criminalization to shape the geographical

location of street sex work, relying on police harassment and arrests to push street prostitution out of tourist neighborhoods and into the holding tank of the Tenderloin, located on the fringes of the tourist hotel district.

Vanguard, COYOTE, and San Francisco Wages for Housework all emerged from this context of post-industrial economic and spatial re-organization. These three anti-criminalization sex-worker organizations were part of the broader emergence of local feminist, gay, and transgender social movements against gender and sexual oppression. At the same time, the work that these three groups undertook illuminates aspects of these social movements that tend to be overlooked: their relationship to the re-organization of urban space and the resulting new dynamics of contestation between marginalized working-class groups and local government, in this case represented primarily by the police department's Bureau of Special Services vice unit. Additionally, these case studies demonstrate the centrality of labor issues to local struggles for gender and sexual liberation, as sex work and the effects of its criminalization became one of the primary points of contestation in the struggles of queer and transgender street youth and working-class women living in the Tenderloin.

Finally, an examination of the lives of Tenderloin sex workers suggests the degree to which the criminalization of sex work, the regulation of urban space, and the policing of gender and sexuality were intertwined. As the writers of *Vanguard* and the activists of COYOTE and Wages for Housework all noted, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, criminalization was a technique used for enforcing gender and sexual norms and materially enacting the subordination of women, transgender, and queer

people. In the case of queer and transgender people, whose identities were criminalized through cross-dressing laws, it was often impossible to separate out sexual minority status from sex worker status. Social marginalization increased their need to rely on illegal sex work, and their work as prostitutes heightened their social marginalization. Police officers frequently failed to distinguish between the two, arresting visibly gender non-conforming people as prostitutes, and vice versa.

Conclusion

At the heart of this study lies the concept of precariousness. It is the thread holding together the narratives of a range of protagonists, from unemployed African American youth to single mothers on welfare to retired industrial workers. Although the concept has some conceptual limitations, precariousness offers a frame for understanding the experiences of working-class people who lived in deindustrializing cities like San Francisco during the 1960s and 1970s, a frame that centers the experience of unemployment and of casual and criminalized forms of labor within the narrative of postwar labor history. The concept of precariousness also allows us to understand two decades of urban uprisings and social movements as responses on the part of urban poor people to the increasing insecurity of daily life and labor in a de-industrializing city. For African Americans the changes of the postwar era represented a decline in economic fortunes, a step backward from the advances made by their parents and grandparents during World War II. For most poor urban dwellers the postwar era represented a time when social reproduction became increasingly strained as urban existence grew more unaffordable and changing land use patterns required the aggressive policing of poor people in public space. I have thus suggested that the concept of precariousness allows us to grasp the multiple variables at play in the urban working-class experience, and consequently to develop a more expansive, holistic interpretation of working-class struggles during the period—struggles that placed the issue of labor front and center, to be sure, but wove it together with other issues such as housing, policing, cost of living, and displacement.

In exploring the five case studies that make up this work, we uncovered several threads of continuity, themes that shed light on the role of precarious labor in San Francisco's social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. First, the issue of precarious labor emerged as a key concern in the city's Black freedom, feminist, gay, and transgender social movements. Racial, gender, and sexual oppression frequently took the form of economic marginalization, and thus unemployed youth, poor single mothers, and sex workers fought simultaneously against various forms of oppression and economic precariousness. This fact provides a bridge between the often distinct histories of identity-based social movements and labor and working-class history.

In the context of the Black freedom movement, the struggles waged by the Coalition United Against Poverty, CORE, SNCC, the Western Addition Area Board, the city's many tenant unions and welfare rights groups, and the Black Panther Party demonstrate that the struggle against racism always included working-class struggles, and in particular struggles over access to labor. Because racism pushed so many of San Francisco's African Americans out of the ranks of the unionized working class and into a state of perpetual economic precariousness, the collective push back against racism on the part of the poor Black population was also a push to dismantle the racial stratification of the working class. African Americans sought to harness state redistributive mechanisms in the form of anti-poverty programs, the Housing Authority, and the Welfare Department in order to accumulate the resources, in terms of jobs, training, or cash, to break down racial hierarchies and move into the realm of the economically secure working class.

In the context of sex worker organizing, the teenage members of Vanguard and the women of COYOTE and Wages for Housework argued that sexual and gender oppression affected their ability to find work in the formal economy. Patriarchal and heteronormative dynamics within families and communities pushed young women and sexual and gender non-conforming people to leave home at a young age, with few resources or skills to help them gain access to skilled labor. The combination of oppression within the family and discrimination in the labor market pushed these young people into criminalized forms of labor, in particular sex work. Thus the efforts of queer street youth and female prostitutes to end gender and sexual oppression often centered on the criminalization of sexual labor, which subjected them to heightened levels of precariousness in the form of violence, arrest, and social marginalization. Again, we see that identity-based social movements were also labor struggles, and that labor struggles were also struggles against gender, sexual, and racial oppression.

A second theme of this study focused on the fraught relationship between working-class activists and the welfare state, a relationship that was a frequent source of contention within the movements and organizations examined here. Because poor urban dwellers often lacked the resources to enter the formal sector of the economy, they simultaneously fought for jobs by targeting employment and union discrimination, and fought for resources to be redistributed downward through the mechanisms of the welfare state. Many of the protagonists of this study viewed state redistributive mechanisms as possible avenues for accelerating the breaking down of

racial and gender hierarchies within the working class, and as means of helping the poorest members of society meet the costs of reproduction directly when jobs were unavailable.

At the same time, activists often had at best an ambivalent relationship toward the welfare state. Groups like the Coalition United Against Poverty, CORE, and the United Freedom Movement believed they could harness War on Poverty resources to empower working-class Black people as long as they were able to democratize the decision making process within the anti-poverty program. However, they were also very aware that the War on Poverty had the potential to function as a tokenizing charity operation that would neither transform the economic conditions of inner city dwellers nor strengthen the Black freedom movement. The records of the California Federation of the Poor, the Poor People's March on Sacramento, and the speeches of tenant and welfare rights leaders suggest more than a little hostility toward the War on Poverty and other institutions of the welfare state, principally the Housing Authority and the Welfare Department. These activists asked the question: who is co-opting whom in the effort to democratize and transform the welfare state into a vehicle for poor people's aspirations? Are we successfully using the state's resources to strengthen our movements, or are we allowing state institutions to gain control over and diffuse our movements? While most of the protagonists of this study continued to work at least partially within the confines of the redistributive state, they also increasingly called for organizational and political autonomy from the state.

The Black Panthers took the strongest stand against the welfare state and efforts at economic reform. The organization's analysis of capitalism led it to conclude that the needs of urban Black people could never be met within a capitalist framework, and that as long as capitalism survived racism would also thrive. The Panthers emphasized the need for community autonomy, and rather than reforming the welfare state they sought to replace some of its functions, through the creation of breakfast programs and liberation schools. At the same time, the Panthers could at times use confrontational tactics to achieve measures that were not so different from those of more moderate civil rights groups like CORE. The "Jobs or Gasoline" action, in which Panther members participated and which the group discussed in its newspaper, is an example of such efforts: while the young men involved used the threat of a riot to get their demands met, the demands themselves were quite modest, consisting merely of youth employment through the Hunters Point anti-poverty program. Similarly, the Panthers' short lived "community control of policing" campaign, while couched in the language of autonomy and control, was at its heart an effort to reform existing police institutions—a very different position from the organization's original claim that only armed community patrols could protect Black people from the police, who were fundamentally armed agents of a white supremacist state.

A third finding of this study suggests that for precarious urban dwellers, struggles could not easily be divided into "single issues." Because poor San Franciscans were hovering so close to a crisis of social reproduction, the issue of jobs

was always closely tied to the need to have enough money to pay rent, purchase food and clothing, and avoid arrest and police harassment. The relationship between the need to work and the need for affordable housing and other basic necessities was made very clear when single mothers demanded either work or welfare as compensation for their childrearing. When the retired laborers of the SoMa asked city officials for affordable relocation, they also asked for state support in the form of subsidized low-income housing, rather than for jobs. At the same time, the issue of displacement by redevelopment was also a labor issue, since it was the existence of job stratification and labor market hierarchies that had relegated SoMa residents to a life of precarious casual labor, and thus to inhabit a portion of the city designed to meet the needs of precisely this labor force. It was when the spatial organization of the city, which had been produced by the labor demands of the early twentieth century industrial city, came into conflict with the new spatial demands of the post-industrial city, that the SoMa's retired laborers were pushed into a battle against displacement.

This study also examined the context of policing in San Francisco in the 1960s and 1970s, concluding that policing practices changed to meet the enforcement needs of a post-industrial urban economy. The city's post-industrial spatial regime simultaneously produced visible precariousness and was threatened by the manifestations of this precariousness in public space. Unemployed or precariously employed people were often visibly idle: young people sitting on street corners or walking around in groups, sex workers soliciting near downtown hotels. These uses

of public space, themselves the product of a system of racialized and gendered economic stratification, were in conflict with the needs of city officials to produce urban space that looked clean, attractive, and safe to middle-class commuters and tourists. The San Francisco Police Department, through its Tactical Squad and its Vice Squad, became increasingly concerned with geographical containment, with keeping the social groups whose uses of space might clash with white middle-class sensibilities out of downtown zones being targeted for urban renewal.

Finally, this study examined the ways in which the struggles of precarious workers exposed existing hierarchies within the working class. In a number of the cases explored here in depth, working-class groups, usually white, with access to stable, unionized employment directly opposed the demands of precarious workers. The struggle of Tenants and Owners in Opposition to Redevelopment (TOOR), for instance, highlighted conflicts of interest between the leadership and rank and file of San Francisco's blue collar unions and a population of retired casual laborers living in one of the city's poorest neighborhoods. The postwar model of economic development in San Francisco heightened the conflict between these two sectors of the working class, as unions and their membership backed redevelopment in order to secure as much access to jobs as was possible, and in order to cultivate friendly working relationships with the city's leading politicians. Of course, these union members were not typically those who bore the brunt of urban renewal, since many of them lived outside the city altogether. Neither were the protagonists of this study the chief beneficiaries of redevelopment jobs: as unemployed youth of color, single

mothers on welfare, and elderly and disabled retired laborers, they were not granted access to the ranks of the unionized working class in the first place. In the case of the city's civil rights and Black Power movements, mostly white rank-and-file police officers failed to identify with the efforts of Black San Franciscans to find economic security, perceiving these efforts as an attack on the social and economic position they had achieved in part due to the advantages of whiteness. Thus, this study concludes that we cannot refer to a unified or homogenous working class in our discussion of urban labor struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, and in fact we must be carefully attentive to the ways in which race became a site through which stratification within the working class was simultaneously defended and attacked.

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